

COLUMNISTS

U.S. strike against Iraq needs to be justified

I'm wondering if it's possible to be patriotic and still raise questions about United States foreign policy. Like most Americans, I am firmly committed to the ideals of our country. I love democracy and our wonderful, inspiring history. More personally, I am the grandchild of immigrants who emigrated here at great cost to themselves and my ancestral family. Because of their daring, I have enjoyed one of the best lifestyles ever lived on this planet.

Moreover, my father fought in World War II. My nephew is a cadet at West Point, and I've visited that most inspiring place many times. Since last September 11, I've experienced a depth of feeling about our country that I would never have expected. Because of my training in moral theology and just-war theory, I have analyzed the murderous attacks against us without finding even the slightest justification on the part of those who perpetrated that enormous crime.

At the same time, I must tell you that I find myself questioning the current rhetoric that seems to be leading us into a strike against Iraq. I confess to feeling that I need much more evidence that a preemptive strike by our country against Iraq can be justified from the perspective of Catholic moral theology. Furthermore, in addition to weighing the morality of the question, I cannot find justification regarding the issue of strategy either. Does a preemptive, or first, strike against Iraq help to end terrorism, or does it perpetuate it?



the moral life

By PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

In terms of the morality of the question, I resort to age-old considerations regarding the conduct of war. There is a long history of rejecting some behaviors as warranting a first strike in warfare. Among these are boastful rantings of political leaders, provocations and insults, the military preparations of an arms race. These kinds of political behaviors do not of themselves impose injury, they do not violate treaties or agreements, they do not automatically indicate the intent to wage war. Thus, they have been rejected as reasons to initiate a preemptive strike.

In fact, historically, a first strike can only be undertaken against a nation that shows clear evidence of an intent to injure. That means that there must be evidence of a preparation plan that shows a clear and present, immediate danger. That means that there has to be an obvious situation in which it is obvious that waiting, or taking means other than fighting, will magnify the risk to those our country needs to protect.

This means that a nation cannot en-

gage in a first strike because of previous signs of warmongering or previous attack. Instead, current and obvious signs of imminent danger are necessary. Actual preparations for attack must be underway, not just vague threats or unidentified activities in the direction of harm. The present danger must be intensifying in intolerable ways. I have to tell you that, in spite of my outrage about what happened last year, and in spite of my acknowledgement that our nation is great and has the obligation to protect us, I do not see that the burden of proof on these matters has been met.

In addition to the moral questions before us, I am stuck on questions of strategy as well. For instance, I return often to questions about why there is so much hatred directed against the United States. Is it really that those who oppose us "hate freedom"? How on earth could anyone "hate freedom"?

My suspicion is that terrorism is rooted in historical actions that have given rise to emotions that fuel fanatical hatred, which eventually gives rise to the intention to kill innocent people. My fear is that actions undertaken by the United States and its allies have fueled the murderous intent of those who attacked us last year on September 11. My fear is that by undertaking military action against Iraq, we will ignore the political realities before us that are far more important.

In this regard I ask, isn't the view of our country by Arab people colored by European colonialism of the 19th centu-

ry that kept so many people on the globe from enjoying freedom and prosperity? Isn't the Arab view of us infused by our support for Israel and its treatment of the Palestinians? Isn't the resentment of our country fueled by a sense of religious purity in Saudi Arabia that perceives that the purity of Islam's holy places has been violated by us in a way that is offensive to the welfare of the Iraqi people?

My point here is not to defend these deep emotions or their perception of the world. My point is to raise the issue of whether an invasion of Iraq will be in keeping with our moral tradition or in violation of it, and whether such an invasion will help us defeat terrorism or unwittingly perpetuate it. I am increasingly persuaded that the war against terrorism will not end through some "unconditional surrender" of the kind that ended World War II. I think we risk enormous harm to ourselves and to the entire Western world if we do not acknowledge that there are complex political and historical realities that will only be exacerbated by military action. These same realities demand that we, citizens of the wealthiest and strongest nation on earth, attend to the conditions that feed others' hatred of us. If our only response is "we're good and they're bad and we'll defeat them through military action," I think we are doomed - morally and strategically.

Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry.

Kids' Chronicle

Answers from page 16:
1. d, 2. f, 3. e,
4. b, 5. a, 6. e

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