

When is War Justified?

History makes clear that people routinely get into wars. Wars are always in progress at points around the world. Even during the peaceful intervals nations improve their arsenals so they will not be defeated when war breaks out again.

The tendency to periodically do battle seems deeply engrained in the natural cycle of human group behavior.

This is not to imply that people like war. Most people claim to hate war. Yet they support tough leaders who call for military buildups and project an image of strength to all potential foes. And when their leaders call for war or make ultimatums that can easily lead to war, as if by instinct, most of the people rally behind them.

This paper attempts to analyze why nations so often go to war, and it provides guidelines to help in evaluating whether war is the best response in different circumstances that often lead to war. And, to a lesser extent, where we determine that some type of action is justified, it attempts to assess the various options in order to best meet the war objective with a minimum of casualties and the greatest likelihood of a lasting peaceful resolution.

For every incident that can lead to war, a unique set of circumstances determines whether military action is the best option. Wars often spring from a complex history of events that the opposing sides interpret in different ways. With the case for war thus clouded, the call for war is often based more on emotion than logic. But, while the clamor for war often fades almost as fast as a temper tantrum, the wars can drag on for years. If the battle fronts are far away, people lose interest and soon start asking, “Why are we still there?”

The guidelines below can help nations that feel threatened or angry avoid starting wars they may later regret.

When War Is Justified

To claim that war is never justified implies that attacked nations have no right to defend themselves, slaves and oppressed people have no right to rebel, and victims of genocide have only the right to run and hide.

An enemy attack can make war nearly unavoidable. In Europe, after Hitler launched attacks on Poland and France, other nations had reason enough to believe that they would be next. Pearl Harbor drove the United States into a war it had not planned with Japan, and the attack on 9-11 drove us into a war with the Taliban – another war we now plan to quit without achieving our objectives. As Rory Stewart reasoned after his walk across Afghanistan, “We have no moral obligation to do what we cannot do.”¹

Lost wars can bring disastrous consequences. In the Old Testament, the Israelites were told to slaughter the men of neighboring tribes and take the women as concubines. In other cases from antiquity, losers were taken as slaves or offered up as sacrifices to the victor’s gods. Even now, those who lose in battle sometimes face genocide.

In most modern wars, the winners don’t slaughter the losers once they gain control. A failed defense will more likely lead to foreign occupation or induction into an empire, such as the Soviet

¹ Rory’s 2002 walk across Afghanistan served as the basis for his popular book, *The Places in Between*. He has since served as a policy advisor.

Union or Hitler's Third Reich. Most great empires grew due to the conquest of lesser armed people.

Since unprotected assets entice invasions, even peace-loving nations maintain some level of military preparedness; and if a nation feels threatened by larger, more powerful nations, it may join an alliance with other worried nations.

Today, most nations support a “defense” establishment, and when two nations engage in war, both sides call upon their people to defend their nations.

We call self-defense both a right and a duty, so the need to fend off unprovoked attacks justifies having a military force and using it with discretion. But claiming the defense does not always justify war, and being attacked does not always justify an unrestrained retaliation. A rush into war may bypass other options that make better sense.

Claims of self-defense do not always fit. For example, does a right to defense exist where:

- A battle results from one's own actions? For example, can a nation claim the defense if it provokes an attack by blockading another nation's ports and cutting off its vital supplies?
- A tyrant claims a right to defense? For example, is a dictator justified in crushing insurrections if he allows no democratic option for leadership change?
- A nation has been sponsoring the enemy's side in a foreign conflict? For example, was it logical to claim that North Viet Nam had made an unprovoked attack on the US in the Tonkin Gulf when the US had been sponsoring the division of Viet Nam, training and arming an enemy force, and killing those who resisted?²

Often both sides claim the defense. Consider the cases of insurrections below where the attacker challenges the defender's right to hold power.

- Another group has defeated your group and taken over your historical homeland. Is military resistance justified? For example, was the overthrow of colonialism justified?
- Does any statute of limitations apply? Would Native Americans be justified in attacking the U.S.? Most lands occupied today belonged to a different group of people at some point in history and were taken by conquest or invasion and assimilation.
- Are Palestinians justified when they launch rockets into Israel, which now occupies much of the land where Palestinians live or did live? Can Israel justify its current occupation on the basis that it must defend against those rockets?

The hazards of maintaining a strong defense

A nation may feel exposed without a powerful military, but keeping a sitting military in peace time can lead to problems. Consider these examples:

² President Johnson asked the US Congress to pass the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964 after North Viet Nam was said to have fired on the USS Maddox. The idea that this was an unprovoked attack implies that the US was not already fighting the Viet Nam resistance at its own discretion. Without declaring war, the resolution expanded US war powers. Johnson later cited the resolution as legal authority for his rapid military escalation in Viet Nam. Johnson claimed that North Viet Nam had invaded South Viet Nam. This article will later explain why that claim distorts the facts from the perspective of most Vietnamese people.

- One nation’s military expansion can alarm other nations, causing dangerous levels of military escalation throughout the region. A vicious cycle of “matching” military buildups continued throughout the Cold War, making the world a more dangerous place.
- Many nations face juntas, where military leaders acquire enough power to overthrow their bosses. In some cases one junta falls to another, and unarmed civilian leaders stand little chance of ever gaining control.
- US President Eisenhower, a former General, feared that contractors were stoking up war paranoia in order to sell more military hardware. His 1961 farewell speech warned the nation to guard against undue influence by the military-industrial complex. People still cite that warning today.

Maintaining a strong military is very costly, and it reduces the money available to other sectors of the economy. Consider these two examples:

- During the 1980s the Soviet Union had such a large military that President Reagan often talked about needing to catch up – “close the window of vulnerability” as he put it. But the Soviet quest for military strength contributed to its demise. The relative poverty of Soviet citizens compared to other Europeans, due in part to the sacrifices made to support the military, caused widespread disenchantment that led to the Soviet fall.
- Costa Rica boasts having more teachers than soldiers, which is not true for most of its neighbors. It has also become more prosperous and stable than those neighbors, due in part to its investment in education and its restraints on military spending.

While having a weak military poses the risk of defeat in case of an attack, having a strong military does not always remove that risk. Despite having the most powerful military the world has ever known, the U.S. and its allies could not prevent several attacks by Al Qaida, and they still remain fearful of more attacks. This fear of vulnerability can lead to very costly mistakes.

Warning Signs that War May Not Be Justified

Since the choice to fight a war almost always results in many casualties and economic setbacks, cool and rational minds should cautiously review the case for going to war. Voters and decision makers should consider several guidelines when deciding whether a case for war is truly justified.

Guideline 1: Who is being attacked?

It is obvious why nations fight to resist an attack, but why do nations so frequently resort to attacking, killing, and damaging other nations that have not attacked them?

Such attacks are often unjustifiable.

Since the Second World War, the US has gone to war on the average of once every two years. US-sponsored covert CIA activities resulted in more than a dozen military conflicts and several government overthrows. In most of these cases, neither the US nor any of its allies had been attacked, nor did they expect to be attacked by those with whom the US did battle.³ Why then did the US, often with allied support, invest so heavily in fighting battles around the world?

³ The Afghan Taliban is accused of providing sanctuary for Al Qaeda. We also sponsor military actions in several other nations where Al Qaeda operates. We try to win the hearts and minds of the local people, yet one U.S. preacher burning the Quran brings thousands of chanting demonstrators onto the streets in Afghanistan, revealing our actual progress in winning their hearts and minds.

Some would say that the US and its allies won the Cold War due to the combined affect of fighting such battles. To understand this viewpoint, let us review the events that prompted the Cold War.

Two circumstances led the Western nations to fear the Soviet Union. The first and most stunning event occurred as the Soviet Union drove the Nazi invaders out of Eastern Europe. Instead of liberating the victim nations, Stalin required them to join the Soviet Union. Many came to believe that the Soviet Union was intent on achieving world domination by military means.

As the “iron curtain” spread across Europe dividing the “free” nations from the Soviet satellite nations, a second concern unnerved the Western nations. Revolutions were breaking out around the world, and in many cases the Soviet Union was either aiding or encouraging those revolutions to further spread its own realm of influence.

Several revolutions began with third-world people trying to rid themselves of European colonial rulers. Most of the colonial rulers were US NATO partners. While the US did not advocate colonialism, it considered any group that accepted Soviet aid as an ally of its foremost enemy. The world had become a giant chess game, where the US and its allies fought dozens of battles in far-off places to block any gains by “leftists” who accepted deals with the Soviets.

The Soviet Union was so well armed that it could destroy the world if we directly attacked it. Key people in the US government believed that covert military actions were the best means of preventing the spread of communism where communists, socialists, or any group that accepted Soviet aid had either come to power or were seeking to do so. In several cases the U.S. targeted democratically elected leaders who advocated socialist agendas or failed to provide convincing declarations in opposition to communism.

In his 2007 book *Legacy of Ashes*,⁴ Tim Weiner furnishes details concerning a long list of governments targeted for overthrow either directly by the CIA or by groups within those countries with CIA support. Several other authors wrote similar accounts. Since covert actions were planned and executed under a tight cloak of secrecy, neither Congress nor the American people had any input. There was no opportunity to ask questions or otherwise challenge the wisdom of attacking these nations or groups, which in almost every case had no intention of attacking the US or its allies.

Guideline 2: Is the call to war a knee-jerk response?

People often over-react in times of fear or anger, but there is no justification for killing people in war without first proving beyond a reasonable doubt that that war is logical and justified.

After 9-11, President Bush’s approval rating soared to nearly 90%. He then proposed to invade Iraq. Many of the same people who later came to question that decision supported it at that time. Did the passions aroused by 9-11 cause western leaders to rush into war without sufficiently examining all of the facts? Many avoidable wars begin in that way, and many containable wars have expanded beyond control due to hasty decisions that were made when passions ran high.

In the early years of the Cold War, the Soviet Union built an enormous stockpile of atomic bombs and other military equipment. They claimed they needed a credible deterrent to prevent the US and its allies from daring to attack them, which is what several prominent US generals and politicians had publicly advocated doing after Stalin’s conquest of Eastern Europe. Of course,

⁴ Weiner, Tim , *Legacy of Ashes*, Penguin Press, London UK, 2007, or Wise, David *The Invisible Government*, Random House, 1964

this Soviet buildup made the US feel even more threatened, so it also stockpiled bombs and other military equipment. Each side feared and distrusted the other side, and as the arsenals grew, so did the volume of fear and distrust.

Occasionally, the two sides would negotiate agreements to place some restraints on the mutual buildup of arsenals. For example, the US and Soviets agreed not to orbit nuclear weapons in space. The Soviets also agreed to remove recently installed missiles from Cuba in exchange for US concessions. Toward the end of the Cold War, the two nations signed the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty to make stepped reductions in their nuclear stockpiles.⁵ But despite the success of these and other negotiations, the general trend throughout most of the Cold War was for both sides to invest huge sums building more and scarier weapons and to communicate mainly by fighting proxy wars and by hurling accusations and insults at one another.

Peace was rarely mentioned in political campaigns during the Cold War. Why talk peace with an enemy if you believe nothing that its leaders might say? US politicians who called for talks with the Soviets were denounced as naïve or “soft on communism,” so proposals for reducing tensions were rarely offered or explored. If either side did propose any type of peace overture during the Cold War, hawks on the opposing side often credited that concession to their own tough stance. Claiming that military pressure had forced the offer or concession, they would advocate increasing the level of threat. Since the hawks believed that their enemy respected only strength, they never imagined any goodwill outreach resulting from good intentions.

For forty years the Cold War went on costing billions of dollars and causing enormous suffering in conflict sites around the world. On several occasions, every rational person on both sides of the conflict had reason to fear the outbreak of nuclear holocaust.

After Stalin’s death, without offering to free Eastern Europe, Khrushchev publicly denounced his predecessor’s excesses and made clear that Soviet leadership had significantly changed. Given that change, did we miss opportunities to reduce Cold War tensions and end the conflict sooner? Did good offers die without consideration due to distrust and an unwillingness to talk problems out? Summit meetings never became warm and trusting idea exchanges. An unending string of world-wide conflicts nourished a continuing atmosphere of mutual distrust.

The following factors made peace initiatives difficult to advance:

1. Both sides fearing and distrusting the other side’s intentions
2. Difficulty achieving consensus for advancing initiatives
3. Cloaking controversial clandestine military actions in secrecy so they could not be debated or opposed – but thereby adding to the enemy’s distrust
4. Difficulty reconciling the desire to win conflicts with the desire to reduce tensions
5. Promoting support for war as a patriotic duty
6. Burying information that could reduce public support for the war
7. Exaggerating the enemy’s wickedness, often using worst-case incidents as evidence to characterize the mindset of all enemy leaders
8. Defense contractors stoking people’s fears in order to market their products or obtain contracts
9. Candidates stoking people’s fears in order to hurt their political rivals

⁵ The cold war ended before all the steps were completed. Progress then stalled, and neither side has pushed to continue the process.

10. Candidates fearing to do or say anything that political rivals could use as evidence that they were “soft on communism” or did not support the troops
11. People in key positions fearing to be branded as stooges whose ideas might give aid or comfort to the enemy
12. Leaders on both sides failing to meet with and talk to each other concerning problems and differences

These fear-born attitudes and behaviors are not unique to the Cold War. They contribute to the outbreak of war and they make existing wars more difficult to end. Consider as well that in most countries, including the US, a single head of state has the power to start a war, and once that war has begun, opposition groups in other branches of government may lack the power to halt it.

Guideline 3: Do most other nations accept the rationale for war?

If a nation goes to war without the agreement and support of most other nations, instead of people in those nations appreciating that nation’s efforts and sacrifices, they will more likely distrust that nation or even side with its enemies.

In healthy democracies the rule of law provides a peaceful route to power. Many nations have no peaceful route to power. The strongest and most ruthless leaders battle their way to the top. People like Joseph Stalin, Saddam Hussein, Pol Pot, and Idi Amin got to the top by killing their opponents. After winning an election, Adolf Hitler used his new position to overwhelm the rule of law and usurp a level of control that writers of the German constitution had never intended. Once a brutal and aggressive leader takes control of a nation, neighboring nations have reason for concern.

Though people say they hate war, they often see war as nearly unavoidable. So long as people with Hitler-type thinking continue acquiring power, the forces of good must continue to arm themselves and make ultimatums in order to ensure a successful resistance. While our leaders may not always make wise decisions in matters of war, we see ourselves as the forces of good and we see those who scare us as the forces of evil. We must have the biggest stick and stand ready to use it because that is the only message the forces of evil will clearly understand.

However, outside of the Western nations the US and its allies are not always viewed as the forces of good. Iran and Iraqi demonstrators have referred to the US as the “great Satan,” and many Muslims view western culture as corrupting to their values.

Even within nations that the US considers its friends and allies many people distrust the US. When the Pew Global Attitudes Project interviewed 17,000 people in fifteen nations between March 31 and May 14 of 2006⁶, it found that the reputation of the US has suffered due largely to its prosecution of the war on terror. The percentage of people feeling “good will” towards the US was measured at 23% in Spain and 12% in Turkey. In Indonesia, a major recipient of US tsunami aid, only 30% had a favorable opinion of the US. In 10 of the 14 participating countries outside the US, a majority believed that the US war on Iraq had made their world a more dangerous place.

Nations often ignore world opinion when they strike down a rebellion or wage an attack. When the UN asked Sudan to halt its genocidal attacks on Darfur, Sudan dismissed the call by labeling the war an “internal matter.” Nations, including Israel and the US, often dismiss UN calls to back

⁶ <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=256>

off in a conflict by complaining that the world body is biased against them. World opinion can be mistaken, but when a nation dismisses world opinion out of hand, it loses one of the safeguards that can help it avoid needless wars.

The U.S. sometimes calls itself the “leader of the free world.” In this leadership role, the U.S. often condemns the behaviors of those it views as rogue states, and it calls for actions against them. With mostly noble intentions, the U.S. tries to curb the abuses of tyrants, identify the axis of evil, stop genocides, and halt the spread of nuclear arms. It sometimes acts on its own, but it usually tries to pull together an alliance, such as NATO, the UN, or a “coalition of the willing.”

Other nations also dislike tyrants, genocide, and the spread of nuclear arms, but they often resist playing follow the leader. The US has assumed the role of leader because it is large and has the strongest military. But having nominated itself as world leader, the US often loses when it calls for a vote.

No one nation should assume responsibility for policing the world. Un-consulted nations will more likely resent the failure to win their support than appreciate the costs and sacrifices that nation makes. What’s more, policing the world is expensive. If we want help in dealing with our enemies, we must respect the opinions of those who could offer support.

Now that the Soviet Union no longer generates fears that lead to world-wide conflicts, the war on terror has taken its place. Once again the US and its allies are sponsoring wars in far-away places, and once again the US has attacked a nation that had neither attacked the US nor planned to attack it – a war that its sponsors labeled a “pre-emptive war.”

The earlier Desert Storm war ended with UN weapons inspectors searching Iraq for hidden WMDs (Weapons of Mass Destruction). Before the inspectors had finished their mission, Saddam Hussein’s government began blocking their access to many locations. Thus frustrated, the inspectors left Iraq without completing their mission and suspicious that Saddam must still be hiding significant caches of weapons.

After several years of distrusting Saddam, the Bush and Blair administrations asked the United Nations to sponsor a second war on Iraq to find and destroy the remaining WMDs. Threat of another war prompted Saddam to invite the inspectors back into Iraq and to allow them free access to all locations without requiring advance notice of where they planned to look.

Once the UN inspectors returned to their jobs, it seemed to most UN members that the war’s objectives had already been won. In the final weeks before the war, UN weapons inspectors were pleading on the evening news, “If you really know for certain that Saddam has WMDs, please share your intelligence with us so we can find those weapons and destroy them.” What’s more, seeing that President Bush did not trust the UN, Saddam was offering a US-led alternative in the search for WMDs⁷ based on the same conditions offered to the UN. That offer never made the front page, perhaps because it was so quickly dismissed without any hint of serious consideration. When the Bush and Blair administrations recruited a non-UN “coalition of the willing” to invade Iraq, many UN members viewed this act as rushing into a needless war, as I did.

After some early successes, the war stopped going according to plan. Many Iraqis took up arms against the “occupiers.” Crime and then sectarian violence began to make Iraq a very dangerous place. By mid 2006, four years into the war, an estimated 151,000 Iraqis had died, and many more had been seriously injured. Tens of thousands more have died since then. About 2.3 million Iraqis sought refuge in other nations, and an equal number of people were displaced within Iraq.

⁷ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Iraq/Story/0,2763,1079769,00.html>

By that point, many US and British citizens came to accept the world view that their leaders had rushed them into another undeclared war that was not only mismanaged, but also unnecessary.

International Law and War Crimes

(Excerpted from article by Michael Ratner)

War crimes are violations by a country, its civilians, or its military personnel of the international laws of war. The laws are contained in treaties e.g., the Geneva Convention of 1949 on Prisoners of War that the U.S. has signed. They are reflected in international laws defined in the Charter of the United Nations and the Nuremberg Charter (which is part of a treaty called the Kellogg-Briand pact). After World War II, Nazis and Japanese were hanged for war crime violations under these treaties.

War crimes include the following if they are done intentionally, recklessly or knowingly.

- **Crimes Against Peace.** These include the planning, preparation, initiation, or participation in a common plan with other nations in a war of aggression or a war in violation of international treaties, agreements or assurances. A nation cannot legally settle any dispute by war unless it first tries in good faith to seek a negotiated settlement – with the help of the UN or a neutral nation, if necessary.
- **Crimes Against Humanity;** These include crimes against civilians and soldiers which violate established rules as to the means and manner by which war is to be conducted once begun. These include the following prohibitions: killing of civilians, attacks on non-military targets, indiscriminate bombing, the use of certain types of weapons, killing of defenseless soldiers, and ill treatment of POWs.

Applicable rules include: Article 2131 and Article 2141 of the UN Charter. The later requires that force shall not be used in any manner that is inconsistent with the purposes of the UN and Article 33, which requires that before force can be used parties to a dispute must first have exhausted all hope of finding a solution by negotiation, inquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies, or other peaceful means.

Taken together we have two basic rules: a nation cannot plan and make war, and if a dispute arises, the nations must exhaust every means of settlement. Even then, only the UN can authorize war. Pages of evidence that the U.S. has violated these laws during several recent wars are presented in Michael Ratner's paper ⁸.

Wars to Halt Genocide

Somewhere in the world a genocide or atrocity is almost always in progress.

At the time of this writing, militias are raping and killing large numbers of civilians in the Congo. Before that, millions were massacred in Darfur, Uganda, Rwanda and Cambodia, and half of Mali was overtaken by dangerous extremists. Smaller genocides don't even make the news.

Most nations reject appeals to intervene in these conflicts. However, NATO did halt the Bosnia massacres after years of Western audiences watching them on TV, and the U.S. tried to restore order in Mogadishu, although it quickly retreated after several US soldiers returned in body bags. Normally, nations with power enough to stop such killings will do so only if the conflict threatens

⁸ <http://deoxy.org/wc/wc-ilaw.htm>

their national interests. We can probably morally justify wars that save lives, but they are not an easy sell.

The Nazi holocaust is the most famous genocide in modern history, but it was just one of many known genocides. Hundreds of genocides had occurred before the holocaust, and since then, similar large-scale massacres took place in Bosnia, Cambodia, Rwanda, and Darfur, and they continue today in Uganda, the Congo and other places. Stopping genocide may require invading another country to fight a brutal militia. Considering the risks and ethical dilemmas involved, who should be responsible for halting genocides in other nations?

Guideline 4: Have the costs of war been disguised or over-simplified?

It is never justifiable to exaggerate the case for war. But times of anger and fear can distort one's perspective, so when war advocates make their pitch, the buyer must beware.

To reduce domestic resistance to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, our leaders promoted several ideas that later proved false:

- Since we are fighting to help the people, they will welcome and support us. With this rose-colored forecast, the allies did not anticipate the resistance that awaited them.⁹
- Our weapons have surgical precision. We will get the bad guys without risk to our troops and with few civilian casualties. However, by bombing ground targets from the air, the allies killed or injured many civilians, a fact which our enemies successfully use in recruitment.
- Both our intelligence sources and our military planners are professionals of the highest caliber. Trust us. We know what we are doing. Most people did trust the intelligence sources. In the case of Iraq, few people anticipated that the soldiers never would find significant caches of WMDs, and the strength of the insurgency surprised most of our military planners.

The following strategies helped to promote a positive image of the wars:

- The display of corpses and caskets was censored from the evening news.
- Reporters were embedded with the troops and reported from that perspective.

⁹ After replacing a nation's government, the winner may describe the new government as being better, not just for themselves, but also for the conquered people. That logic sells better at home than in the conquered nation. After felling Saddam, the allies sponsored an election. This made good press for the allies, but many Iraqis viewed their new leaders as puppets of an occupying force, and they fought harder against the newly elected government than they did when their nation was first invaded. Stalin seemed to believe that communism would make life better for Eastern Europeans, but Eastern Europeans always hated Soviet occupation. And while 19th-century colonial administrators talked about "the white man's burden" of having to "civilize" their colonies, most of the natives in those colonies dreamed of ridding the foreign devils.

Sometimes war is sold as a favor to the invaded nation. People should thank the soldiers for risking their lives to liberate them from the tyrant we so despise. The US offers evidence that its surge in Iraq has reduced the factional violence there. But do the Iraqis want the coalition forces in their country providing that protection? When they negotiated the status of forces agreement at the end of 2008, what they said they most wanted was a timeline for withdrawal. Many demanded immediate withdrawal.

- The Federal budget showed no cost for the wars, and since our forces included only volunteer recruits backed up by contract support workers, war advocates requested only gratitude from other citizens. Of course, the wars were not without cost. US taxpayers will be paying for them for many years to come.

During war, one group targets another. In modern warfare, an army can take few casualties itself while delivering great damage to an enemy by the use of aerial or drone bombing. Bombing or napalming a village borders on genocide if civilians get massacred in the attack.¹⁰

If you live in an area where bombing occurs, the bomber becomes the enemy by endangering you and your loved ones. The question is: Do bombs win wars or just create more enemies?

As new settlers with European ancestry spread across the Americas, most of the natives wound up dead, and survivors were driven from lands their families had lived on for thousands of years. Cherokee Indians had tried to integrate with the settlers in Kentucky and Tennessee, but the Jackson administration forced them to leave. It all happened many years ago. The passage of time has turned the carnage into an abstraction. No one living today is responsible. But the presidents in power during that genocide are often rated today as some of America's greatest leaders.

Buyer's Remorse

Nations enter most wars with public opinion strongly in favor of war. But if the war takes a bad turn or drags on too long, people start asking the questions they should have asked before the war began. But disenchantment with one war has little deterrent affect when it comes to entering a new war. Just one generation after losing WWI the German people elected Adolf Hitler.

To the US and its allies, war weariness derives mainly from counting the numbers of our soldiers killed and injured and the cost of war expenses. To nations, such as Iraq and Viet Nam, where we have fought our longest wars, the numbers and percentages of people killed and injured and the amount of destruction to their homeland exceed our awareness. Most Americans cannot appreciate the scale of carnage and destruction because they have never experienced anything like it themselves.

War weariness occurred after several years of unsuccessful fighting in Viet Nam; yet shortly after that war ended, new wars took its place. We entered Libya while demonstrations were occurring in Iraq and Afghanistan demanding that the "invaders" (the US and our allies) leave their countries, and since the war in Libya, which is now a dangerous place for us to visit, we have sponsored drone attacks in several other nations.

War weariness should not be confused with war wariness. War wariness, occurs when national leaders quell the human tendency to rush into war before considering and testing other options.

Guideline 5: Are there Alternatives?

War cannot be justified where less hazardous solutions are dismissed without reason.

¹⁰ President Bush drew a fine line when he accused Saddam Hussein of killing his own people during the Kurdish rebellion. Shock and awe bombing killed many Iraqi civilians, although it did not intentionally target them. While boasting that smart bombs had reduced "collateral damage," he called Saddam's gassing of Kurdish rebel strongholds as "genocide."

Most people support without question their nation's role in fighting victorious wars. For example, you might ask a U.S. citizen, "Had you been president, would you have fought the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, or the First World War?" Few people ever question whether such wars were truly necessary or worth the many casualties they produced.

Why do Americans look favorably upon both the Revolutionary war, where the rebels won and divided their nation, and the Civil War, where the rebels lost and failed to divide their nation? When the winners write the history books, they tend to justify whatever outcome resulted, and all of the suffering and missed opportunities to avoid the war get buried in time.

In the case of civil wars, elections can be the best alternative. Internal divisions can be settled by plebiscite without bloodshed, as occurred when Czechoslovakia voted to break into two separate nations. Why not let the people decide? If most of the people in a geographic area wish to manage their own affairs and are willing to accept their share of the nation's debt, why not let them do so? Isn't breaking up with mutual respect better than killing those who ask for divorce?

In the case of foreign wars, an election can also be the best alternative. In Viet Nam, for example, General Ho Chi Minh became a national hero by leading the war that drove out the French colonialists. The Europeans divided Viet Nam in hopes of preventing Ho from maintaining control in the southern half of the country, but they scheduled an election so that the Vietnamese people could decide the matter themselves. After visiting Viet Nam to determine how that election would go, Eisenhower's brother, Milton, told the President that Ho Chi Minh would win with an overwhelming margin if he were allowed to run. That election was cancelled.¹¹ During the following two decades of fighting, the estimated death toll in South Vietnam was over 3 million and in North Vietnam over 30,000.¹² But the allies focused only on their own losses, which came to less than 2% of the Vietnamese total.

Today we have an enemy that looks for ways to attack us on our own soil. We have responded by forming alliances to root out Al Qaida wherever it appears. But, although we have killed most of the original 9/11 conspirators, Al Qaida may have more sympathizers today than it did on 9/11. We have tried to win the hearts and minds of people, many of whom know nothing about 9/11, by entering their villages with guns and asking through interpreters for them to join our fight against people who live in their villages. In the broader war on terror, rather than just making martyrs of Al Qaida leaders, we might accomplish more by sponsoring credible and interesting shows on the popular Middle East, Afghan, and Pakistani media to reveal the down side of terror and reduce its appeal among those who might be tempted to join the martyrs' brigade. Al Jazeera and its competitors could become our greatest allies in neutralizing the appeal of radical forces. And as sponsors with deep pockets, we might also win the hearts and minds of those who own the media.

Hazardous Alliances

Alliances can expand smaller wars and cause other nations to view your nation as an enemy.

The First World War began as a local conflict, but it quickly expanded due to alliances that other nations had made with one side or the other, not knowing where those alliances would lead. In effect, the alliances converted a local war into a global war involving nations that held no passionate grievances toward one another.

Peace-time alliances often seem like innocuous expressions of mutual friendship that foster good will between nations. But alliances should always specify the conditions under which the nations

¹¹ <http://www.vietvet.org/jeffviet.htm>, or http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/American_Empire/Johnson_Vietnam_LFE.html

¹² Wikipedia quoting from http://www.rjsmith.com/kia_tbl.html

would join forces in combat. Open-ended military commitments pose too much risk.

A nation that allies itself with one side in a conflict makes itself the other side's foe. What's more, others may view your nation as a sponsor of whatever your ally does. For example:

- Karzai government officials demand countless audacious bribes from Afghan citizens. Since the Western allies fight to keep that government in power, many Afghans blame the allies for their daily frustrations and thus find common ground with our enemies.
- Israeli Zionists erect settlements on land that has traditionally belonged to Palestinians, and then they claim the land for Israel. In support of these settlements, Israel has segmented the west bank with giant walls, requiring Palestinians residents to stop at numerous check-points when they travel. Since the U.S. provides military and financial support to Israel and blocks UN resolutions offered to help the Palestinians, many West Bank citizens not only hate Israel, but also the U.S. What's more, other Middle East nations consider the U.S. culpable for Palestinian grievances. This places the U.S in a bad position to assume leadership for resolving any problem in the Middle East.

While a nation should avoid going it alone in opposition to world opinion, it should also avoid alliances that can lead to an unintended expanded war or summon them to fight in support of a dubious cause.

Can nations avoid war and survive?

Some nations have avoided war for decades, even when wars raged around them.

Sweden has almost totally avoided war since its last significant war in 1814.¹³ The allies sometimes criticize Sweden for not having joined their stand against Hitler, but if people can forgive the Germans for causing the war, they can certainly forgive several countries that avoided taking sides. Perhaps Sweden is an extreme case, since it has avoided all wars, and not just wars that clearly should be avoided. But Sweden is one of several examples which prove that people can quell the instincts that drive them into war. If every nation followed Sweden's example, all wars would end and the world would be a happier place.

Few Swedes are conscientious objectors. Sweden will fight if attacked, and considering its tiny population, it maintains a strong defense. Europe rates the Swedish air force as one of its best. Sweden keeps only about 50,000 troops on active duty, but it claims it can mobilize ten times that number in a matter of days. That would be about 8% of Sweden's total population. But while the Swedish people maintain a strong defense, they don't recruit soldiers by glorifying war. They have learned how to protect themselves without promoting war. That lesson comes from somewhere within the developmental process that forms the Swedish mind set.

It doesn't take 200 years to develop a war-wary culture. Shortly after losing as an aggressor in the Second World War, Japan became one of the world's foremost advocates for peace. This clearly demonstrates that an aggressive mind set can be quickly reversed. We should study some of these examples to learn how people manage to foster avoidance of unnecessary wars while remaining strong enough to deter attackers.¹⁴

Other nations manage to avoid unnecessary wars for decades at a time. If we study their examples, we can learn to do it too. Just as Americans have accepted the teaching of conflict resolution as a means for reducing student fighting, they might call for teaching non-violent

¹³ Switzerland's last war, the Sunderbund War in 1847, led to a new Swiss constitution in 1848.

¹⁴ I found no evidence that school curriculums promote war wariness in nations that manage to stay out of wars, but I expect that they do. Books have been written on curriculums for the promotion of peace.

conflict resolution as an option to explore in international conflicts. Schools rarely start such initiatives on their own. We must encourage them to do it.

Candidate Image

Voters are drawn to power and strength. Restraint is viewed as weakness.

People vote for candidates like Arnold Schwarzenegger, “the Terminator.” To create a strong image, John Kerry, John Kennedy, and John Mc Cain highlighted their combat experience with pictures of their younger selves in uniform. Some candidates wear uniforms during campaign appearances. Voters want a leader who can face down all enemies, and if that preference does nothing to halt an endless cycle of wars, winning those wars seems more important than avoiding them.

In the movies Swartzeneggar dispenses justice with the pull of a trigger. In real-life domestic disputes, such actions would land a person in jail.

But international conflicts are different. Many world leaders view saber rattling and ultimatums as the best way to deal with troublesome foreigners. And if war breaks out, they blame the enemy who forces war upon peace-loving people – even though, in many cases, that enemy had neither attacked nor planned to attack. Restraint is viewed as weakness; winning is what matters.

Since voters prefer tough guys, mainstream candidates rarely call themselves peace candidates or peace activists. Only Dennis Kucinich called himself a “peace candidate.” Most people view him as a fringe candidate who had no chance of winning.¹⁵ They view peace activists as naïve people who advocate impractical solutions to the never-ending problem of nations going to war. Peace activists form groups, hold meetings, sponsor websites, and promote a variety of proposals and agendas, but the wars go on undiminished. It is difficult to identify many successes that peace groups have achieved. Some Americans view the ideas of peace activists as hostile to the nation’s objectives, offensive to the troops, and supportive of the enemy.

America’s current frustrations with the Iraq and Afghan war may have helped to moderate such views. While being “right on the war,” as he called it, did not win Kucinich a place in the mainstream. Barack Obama did get elected, then re-elected, despite offering to hold discussions with non-friendly nations such as Iran – a position that his Democrat rivals quickly branded “naïve.” By ordering the killing of Bin Laden and continuously expanding the use of drone warfare to a growing list of locations, Obama has avoided the perception of having a dovish military policy.

Avoiding war can require more courage than going to war

A leader who can resolve conflicts without resorting to war should receive more kudos than someone who dispenses with or fails at diplomacy. We should view as heroes those who steer away from needless wars.

The Commander-in-chief does not lead the troops into battle. In many cases the Commander-in-chief has experienced battle only in the movies, and his children have also avoided combat. Yet the Commander-in-chief still gets credit for courage when he takes his nation into war.

¹⁵ Kucinich has proposed to counter-balance the Defense Department with a Department of Peace (DoP). One of its functions would be to review the alternatives when a president calls for war. The problem with this is that Presidents fill cabinet positions with people who think like they do. If a president wants to go to war despite a UN vote not to do so, his people in the DoP would probably only encourage him. The idea could work if the DoP had powers equal to that of the Supreme Court, and the president did not get to choose its top staff.

People usually rally behind their war-time leaders, and historians usually speak well of those who successfully lead their nations through a war. Leaders who settle disputes by skillful diplomacy lose the claim to fame that comes from being a war-time leader.

What a travesty that is! War becomes the only option when an enemy allows no better choice; but usually war is one of several options.

Many nations do avoid war, although that fact receives almost no publicity. When cool-headed leaders feel threatened or provoked, they manage their anger and think through the options. After considering the costs of war, they select other options. Leaders who consider war a failure of diplomacy do not instinctively go to war in situations where others would do so. But since avoided wars don't happen, they seldom make the headlines and those responsible for avoiding them get little credit.

Even after an attack, a rush to war may overlook better solutions. India could have attacked Pakistan after the Mumbai bombing. Plenty of India's citizens were angry enough to support that response. But India's leaders kept cool heads and presented their case to Pakistan's elected government, which also felt threatened by the terrorist groups. Since then, Pakistan's military has taken the casualties as it has worked to root out the terrorists. That solution is better for both nations and the Western nations because the terrorists, who don't seem to care whether India and Pakistan go to war, are finally meeting resistance from the Pakistan military.

A call for change

During the Iraq war, polls show that most US voters believed that their country was on the wrong course. This judgment seems to apply to the Bush Administration's conduct in both the war on terror and the decision to invade Iraq. That, of course, does not mean that the U.S. people have united behind any particular alternative. But many Americans may dislike seeing their nation act in defiance of UN and world opinion. Obama made clear that the US would not take primary responsibility for the war in Libya, and that may hint of progress. Perhaps the world will not steer a course toward disaster now that the U.S. has asked other nations to share the leadership role. The US needs to view its role in the world more as a team player and less as its captain. It needs to show more respect for the opinions of other responsible nations.

Smaller nations do not expect to get their way on many issues. If genocide in Sudan or the threat of nuclear proliferation in Iran offends or worries a small European nation, it can sponsor or back a UN initiative. But if that initiative either does not pass or it fails to solve the problem, they must accept the fact that the world is not perfect.

If its constitution allows, the U.S. should pass new laws to restrict a president from acting on his own authority to start a military action against any nation that has neither attacked nor facilitated an attack on the US or its allies. The United Nations should also promote similar initiatives.

Unfortunately, when a rush to war occurs, the U.S. Congress often discards its own authority. Congress promptly granted expanded war powers to the President during both the war with Iraq and the war in Viet Nam. The US Constitution's "division of powers" means little when Congress quickly gives up its powers or the president dismisses the need for congressional approval.

Choosing the Most Appropriate Action

When we conclude that enemy actions require a response, we should choose a response that will most likely provide a lasting safeguard with minimum casualties. The following chart lists different options, indicates when and where they have been used, and compares their advantages and disadvantages:

| Type of war | When Used | Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|---|---|--|
| Bombing of cities using missiles or bombers | WWII, Viet Nam. Nuclear subs target cities as part of the Mutually Assured Destruction retaliation strategy | Makes enemy feel overwhelmed. Japan surrendered after nuclear bombing of two cities. Germany also gave up after bombing of several important cities. MADD strategy may have deterred total war with USSR. | Kills masses of noncombatants indiscriminately. All-out war could bring massive killing and destruction to all involved. Does not work against groups (e.g. Al Qaida) that live among non-enemies. |
| Ground war using foot soldiers | WWII, Viet Nam, Iraq, Korea, Afghanistan | Allows for policing conquered people. Can reduce killing of noncombatants. | High risk of casualties to your own forces. The behaviors of occupation armies can provoke revenge initiatives. |
| Bombing military targets by missile or bomber | WWII, Viet Nam, Iraq | Kills combatants with minimal risk to our own soldiers. Destroyed Desert Storm Iraqi armies before they could confront ours. | Can result in civilian casualties if enemy remains in populated areas. |
| Bombing military targets via drones and smart bombs | Afghanistan, Yemen Pakistan, Somalia, and others | Allows observing specific people and targeting them with minimal risk to civilians or our own soldiers. Credited for killing Al Qaida top leaders in nations with which we are not at war. | Can still result in civilian casualties if enemy lives in populated areas. Raises antagonism against us in areas under attack. Currently lacks legal oversight. |
| CIA covert actions (secret assassinations) | Multiple Cold War examples. Used recently in Iran | Targets specific leaders without hurting masses of people. Often done via proxies. Avoids all-out wars | Now mostly illegal. Lacks legal oversight due to secrecy. Can stir strong resentment and retaliation if targeted leaders are popular. |
| Embargoes and blockades | Iran, Cuba, North Korea | Avoids war and direct killing | Usually not given world-wide support and often fails to work |
| Propaganda wars | Radio-free Europe and others. Could work in Pakistan, middle east, north Africa | Attempts to reduce appeal of joining or supporting enemy combat activities. Could counter the recruitment of terrorists in neutral nations. | Long-term campaign with little short-term effect. Requires quality media that people will tune into. Can be blocked in hostile nations |

Fighting Al Qaeda

Al Qaeda has made multiple attacks against Western democracies in the U.S. and Europe. The original organization operated from bases in failed or chaotically administered Muslim nations. We may have killed most of the founding members and centers of Al Qaeda, but several groups inspired by Al Qaeda continue recruiting and training new members. While today's Al Qaeda groups have not recently succeeded in major attacks within the US or Europe, they continue plotting attacks and they pose a continuing threat to Westerners living in or visiting Muslim nations. They have also taken control over districts within weak Muslim nations and imposed Sharia law on the local people. Al Qaeda remains an enemy that we should not ignore.

Al Qaeda groups generally do not control the nations where they reside, and many of those nations wish to either co-exist with Al Qaeda or drive them out (using mostly their own armies, but sometimes aided by Western nations). While Al Qaeda does not invest huge sums in its military infrastructure, the U.S. and its allies spend hundreds of billions of dollars on wars and other defenses against Al Qaeda. And in the process of fighting Al Qaeda in places like Pakistan and Yemen, we may be creating more enemies than we kill.

When the U.S. went to war in Iraq, a small insurgent group called Ansar al Islam was the only known Al Qaeda affiliate in Iraq. It resided near the northern border near Iran which was, in part, protected from the Iraqi army by the U.S. no-fly zone. On the ground, Kurdish militias kept it in check. Today, a group called Al Qaeda in Iraq has allied itself with the Sunni militias in several

locations within Iraq. In effect, Al Qaeda has gained strength in Iraq due to our defeat of the Iraqi military.

Al Qaeda recruits new members among Muslims who oppose the spread of Western culture and resent us fighting our war in their neighborhoods. Groups like the Afghani and Pakistani Taliban seem particularly susceptible to this appeal. The presence of US and NATO personnel in those nations generates enough resentment to bolster enemy recruitment drives. As we prepare to leave Afghanistan, record numbers of Pakistanis now view us as their greatest enemy, and many neutral Afghans seem glad to see us go. As we continue investing in this fight, we need to verify that the methods we use are the most effective options available. Considering the billions of dollars we spend and the lives we lose in combatting Muslim extremists, we need to know what will work best to safeguard our citizens, reduce the costs and casualties we bear, and achieve the greatest likelihood of long-term peace.

Summary

For every incident that can lead to war, a unique set of circumstances determine whether a military action is justified. Consider the guidelines below to help in deciding when a military action is appropriate.

Some level of military response is usually justified when:

- Your nation is attacked
- Irrefutable evidence exists that a hostile nation has prepared for and planned an attack.

A military response is sometimes justified when:

- The UN has called for a military action to stop an atrocity
- A hostile nation provides aid and support to terrorists who attack your nation
- A hostile nation spurns diplomacy and cuts off your vital supplies
- An ally is attacked

But military actions or combat aid are usually not justified when:

- Your nation is the attacker
- There is no proof that a hostile nation actually plans to attack
- Non-military options for resolving the issues were brushed aside
- World opinion calls for a non-military option
- Your nation wishes to unseat or deny power to a popular or elected government
- You are asked to support an ally, e.g. Israel, who defies UN resolutions
- A substantial majority of people from a region within a nation demand to negotiate for either a divorce or greater autonomy
- An urgent call for attack follows an incident, but there is not enough time for reflection and debate to determine the wisest course

Today the U.S. spends more on its military than is spent by the next thirteen largest spending nations combined.¹⁶ Al Qaeda, our foremost current enemy, remains strong after twenty years of doing battle with the U.S. and its allies while spending only a tiny fraction of what we spend. Most Muslim people do not want Al Qaeda to run their affairs, and almost all Muslim

¹⁶ http://www.pgpf.org/Chart-Archive/0053_defense-comparison.aspx

governments view Al Qaeda as a potential threat. Yet in places like Pakistan, people express more hostility toward the U.S. and its drone war than they express toward Al Qaeda. We cannot ignore Al Qaeda, but if we ignore the concerns of Muslim people in our fight against Al Qaeda, we may alienate those who have most reason keep Al Qaeda at bay.

Today the threat of a nuclear Iran concerns Americans perhaps even more than the threat of Al Qaeda. The President has committed our nation to ensuring that Iran will not succeed in building a nuclear bomb, and he must also know that war is the only sure way to back that commitment. As we prepare to leave Afghanistan, we have little to show for our longest war and even less to show for our recent wars in Iraq and Viet Nam. If ever we had reason to give more thought before plunging into battle, we should do so now.