

The Alternative

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Dear Reader,

Current events provide an irresistible mix of ethical and religious questions. It has been repeatedly said that Sept. 11 changed everything. The statement is an obvious exaggeration but that day has indeed forced a change of perspective for everyone in the United States. What is still unclear is whether that change will be for better or for worse. If the change is in the direction of a community of nations and international law, then the United States will have to put its military and economic power at the service of community and law. To do that we will need a vigorous ethical debate in the United States that so far has not occurred.

IS AN ETHIC OF NON-VIOLENCE POSSIBLE?

By Gabriel Moran

The question asked in the title of this essay is a genuine one. That is, I think that people of intelligence and good will may disagree about the answer. However, some of the disagreement might be eliminated by clarifying what the question is through asking what the terms ethic(s) and non-violence mean.

Ethics is a common term today; it is easy to forget how recent is its rise to prominence. A distinction that would be helpful is between ethics and morality. The two terms are often used interchangeably. That fact is not surprising in that Cicero coined the Latin term moral to translate Aristotle's ethic. During the two thousand years since then, the two terms have had differing histories and acquired different connotations. In English, Amoral was the far more common term until 1900. Even up to 1960, the word ethics was somewhat uncommon. It was restricted to specialized settings, such as philosophy departments, professional codes and Protestant seminaries.

In recent decades ethics seems to have won the contest with Amoral. Whereas in the nineteenth century every U.S. college had a course in moral philosophy, today's university has ethics courses. Ethics is also a hot topic among hospital committees, government panels and business consultants. Ethics connotes reflection, intentionality and decision making. Amorality suffers from being identified with external conformity to rules and a generally stodgy image, often connected to sexual controls. But for a full picture of the right/wrong, good/bad, we need to include external behavior, habitual conformity

and unintended effects. Thus, we need morality as well as ethics.

If one were to employ a distinction between ethics as thoughtful choice and morality as external practice, I would argue that an ethic of violence is possible but a morality of non-violence is not. It is a good and admirable thing if people are determined to avoid violence in their actions. While they may often succeed, they should also be prepared to experience failure in varying degrees. It is important to know this tragic aspect of human existence. Otherwise, when someone's actions produce unintended violence, he is or she may jettison the effort to avoid violence, much like an alcoholic or a cigarette smoker who succumbs after the first failure.

The difference between a possible ethic of non-violence and an unreachable morality of non-violence points up the need for apology. Confession of failure is an integral part of the moral life. Although ethics books usually have nothing to say about apology, civilized life is impossible without it. In the last decade, public apologies seem to have become fashionable. But the statement "If I offended anyone, I am sorry," is a phony apology. An apology is someone saying: "I am sorry I offended you. I do not understand how I could have done that. I need to work at changing my speech or other behavior. I ask your forgiveness."

If non-violence is held out as an ideal, one has to distinguish between violence and the exercise of power that may include force. Violence connotes an irrational, out-of-control force whose effect is destructive. Human life is impossible without an exercise of force against the physical environment and sometimes against other human beings. What constitutes violence is often debatable. The clearing of land for a human settlement involves killing numerous bugs and beetles. The violence that can be said to be part of the process can be mitigated by considering the settlement's impact on its ecological setting.

The word violence might be restricted to human actions against other animals (human and nonhuman) that can suffer. But if this is done, humans have to be aware that their actions can cause untold damage to the ecological fabric of life. Humans have to be careful in their attempts to improve the world. Humans being ignorant of how the world works, our best intentions often go awry. In trying to improve one part of the world, we are oblivious of the mess we are creating in another geographical or temporal part of the world. .

The moral task is to avoid adding violence to the world and when possible to establish an order that reduces violence. But the results are always going to be imperfect and never wholly predictable. Caught in their own ignorance and clumsiness, human beings act in ways that are a mixture of good and bad. An ethical intention to avoid violence is good but insufficient. One must consider a

range of imperfect choices and understand the long range results of every action.

The use of force against other human beings is the most problematic area. One can first distinguish between force used to fight a disease within the human body and force used to restrain a person who - voluntarily or not - is a source of violent activity. In the first case, modern medicine uses such tactics as surgery and anti-biotics. If someone with no knowledge of surgery walked into an operating theater, he or she would certainly think that slicing open the chest with a scalpel is a violent act. In its context, it is a controlled act whose intended result is better health. Of course, surgery needs strict safeguards lest the surgeon forget that cutting out diseased tissue is a terrible invasion which is only justified by the pressing need to restore the patient's health.

The use of antibiotics is an almost perfect model for the human entanglement in violence while trying to subdue an attacker. When the human body is invaded by a killer virus, the body mounts its own defense in the form of antibodies. If the body is losing the battle, a hired assassin is brought in (anti-biotic = killer). Like most hired assassins it may kill the target but cause collateral damage. Even if successful at killing the present killer, the long term effect may be development of a more resistant virus. The humans may be winning battles but losing the war. (In this context the United States's feeding antibiotics to healthy livestock to produce more milk and beef could be producing an unimaginable problem for the future). The future of health care depends on therapies that stimulate the body's own healing powers, reducing to a minimum the invasive procedures of surgery and antibiotics.

In the second case, it is the human being itself that needs restraint. At the individual level, the rules and restraints are generally clear. At least the most blatant examples of killing, maiming and torturing are proscribed in any group that survives for any length of time. The conflicts between groups - in modern times between nation states - become frighteningly complex and conflicts seem regularly to lead to violence.

Within civilized communities a policing force has always been necessary to restrain people who do criminal acts. (Before Boston established a police force in 1830 it was said that every citizen was part of the police). The police do not have a licence to be violent. Their job is to restrain the violence which is already present in the human group by using the least force necessary to restrain the violent actor. Augustine said a Christian should be willing to die rather than defend oneself by killing another. However, Augustine thought that the Christian has a duty to come to the aid of a vulnerable person who is being attacked. I find his principle difficult to disagree with. It certainly seems that a would-be rapist of a little girl should be repelled with any degree of force necessary.

Augustine's principle lies at the root of what is called the theory of just war. But there is a world of difference between a police officer using force to restrain a suspected murderer and nations sending tens of thousands of their young people to slaughter each other on a battlefield or a nation's air force dropping two thousand pound bombs in populated areas. One of the indelible images from World War I is the Christmas truce arranged by the British and English soldiers who were in trenches only a few hundred yards apart. The soldiers agreed to throw snowballs for the day. The high commands were horrified because the soldiers were undermining the insane logic of war.

Discussions of violence at the international level are locked into an opposition that admits of no debate and therefore no progress. The two sides are called just war theory and pacifism. The first assumes that war can be justified. All the energy goes into proving that this war is just and that our side is fighting in an ethically proper manner. The second doctrine, pacifism, has no takers in the government. Like most words that end in -ism it expresses an ideal to be reached, couched in a language of abstractions. Pacifists profess to be against war. Nearly everyone agrees that peace is preferable to war but both terms are misleading. The choice for any group is to find ways to resist violence with a minimum of force. These days, if not always in the past, that principle would exclude war. But these days, if not always in the future, force is needed to restrain violent individuals and groups. To be opposed to violence is a good thing; to recognize that being a citizen of a nation state involves one in violence is a necessary thing. Instead of despair, this admission can inspire one to reduce the level of violence within one's country and between nations.

The United States recently lost a golden opportunity to change the language of war versus peace. The big bully in the schoolyard had just taken a sucker punch. Amazingly, most of the others in the yard felt some sympathy for the big guy's pain (along with some suppressed glee). All eyes were on the big guy to see if he would strike out violently in all directions. Or, without having to remind anyone of his physical might, would the big guy realize that if even he was not safe in the schoolyard, then the schoolyard needed new rules, different authority and ways to mediate conflicts.

The United States could have done much worse after Sept. 11. It showed remarkable restraint for a few weeks. But the United States's invocation of the language of war was an ethical disaster. It undermined the possibility of an ethical response to violence. The debate lasted less than a week and since then the country has been locked into the government trying to run a just war and a very few pacifist voices opposed to war. The term Awar is transparently inappropriate but there is practically no opposition to the term. The government can invoke the term any times it is convenient while easily disregarding what war entails when that is convenient.

The military technology that the United States has developed can actually lessen violence. However, technology taken as the answer to any of life's problems inevitably increases violence. Military hardware allows the United States to use a credible threat of force which, if properly used, could lessen the actual use of force including violence. (An earlier show of force in the Balkans would have made the immoral bombing of Belgrade unnecessary). Countries try to get nuclear weapons so that they can threaten force. But nuclear weapons are at the opposite end from a credible and precise use of force. For today's necessary police actions at the international level, night goggles are far more important than nuclear bombs.

The United States cannot serve as the world's policeman for very long. The question is whether it will use that time to develop international authority embodied in such organizations as the United Nations and the World Court. Or will the United States simply run out its time, acting as if international authority is a competitor instead of its being what could be the mission of the United States.

A WISE USE OF FORCE

By Benjamin Schwartz

Despite its sometimes esoteric logic, the United States's strategy of preponderance is seductive. In the abstract it makes sense that the United States should seek to amass as much power as possible. In this way the rationale behind U.S. strategy is analogous to that of a firm in an oligopolistic market, which drives its rivals out of business rather than risk its profits in a competitive environment. Theoretically, if a state can establish - and maintain - itself as the only great power in an international system, it will enjoy something close to absolute security. But as history amply shows, when one state acquires too much power, others invariably feel that it will aggrandize at their expense.

More than two hundred years ago, Edmund Burke warned his countrymen: Among precautions against ambition it may not be amiss to take one precaution against our own.... I dread our being too much dreaded.... We may say that we shall not abuse this astonishing and hitherto unheard-of power. But every nation will think we shall abuse it.... Sooner or later, this state of things must produce a combination against us which may end in our ruin. @

Like some optimistic Britons in the late eighteenth century, many American strategists today assert that the United States is a benevolent hegemon, immunized from a backlash against its preponderance by what they call its soft power - that is, by the attractiveness of its liberal-democratic ideology and its open syncretic culture. Washington believes that others don't fear U.S. geo-

political pre-eminence because they know the United States will use its power to promote the good of the international system rather than its own selfish aims.

But states must always be concerned with a predominant power's capabilities rather than its intentions and throughout the last decade other states have been profoundly anxious about the imbalance of power in the United States's favor. Arguing that the term *Asuperpower* is inadequate to convey the true extent of U.S. economic and military preeminence, the French Foreign minister Hubert Vedrine called the United States a *Ahyperpower*.@ Even the Dutch Prime Minister declared that the European Union should make itself *Aa counterweight* to the United States.@

A strategy of preponderance is burdensome and profoundly risky. It is therefore time for U.S. policymakers to adopt a very different grand strategy: one that might be called offshore balancing. Rather than fear multipolarity, this strategy embraces it. It recognizes that instability - caused by the rise and fall of great powers, great power rivalries, and messy regional conflicts - is a geopolitical fact of life. Offshore balancing accepts that the United States cannot prevent the rise of new great powers, either within the present U.S. sphere (the European Union, Germany, Japan) or outside it (China, a resurgent Russia). Instead of exhausting its resources and drawing criticism or worse by keeping these entities weak, the United States would allow them to develop their militaries to provide for their national and regional security. Among themselves, these states would maintain power balances, check the rise of overly ambitious global and regional powers and stabilize Europe, Asia and the Persian Gulf. It would naturally be in their interests to do so.

In fostering a multipolar world - in which the foreign and national-security policies of the emerging great powers will be largely devoted to their rivalries with one another and to quelling and containing regional instability - an offshore balancing strategy is self-serving. But it also exercises restraint and shows geopolitical respect. By abandoning the preponderance strategy's extravagant objectives, the United States can minimize the risk of open confrontation with the new great powers.

Although jockeying for advantage is a fact of life for great powers, coexistence, and even cooperation between and among them, is not unusual. Offshore balancing seeks to promote the United States's relative power and security, but it also aims to maximize the opportunity of the United States to be on decent terms with the other great powers. The United States must start treating such powers like fellow adults. This would mean accepting them as peers and acknowledging the legitimacy of their national interests.

STUMBLING INTO BATTLE

By Michael Howard

When in the immediate aftermath of the attack on the World Trade Center the U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell declared that the America was at war, he made a very natural but terrible and irreversible error. To declare war on terrorists - or more illiterately, on terrorism - is at once to accord them a status and dignity that they seek but do not deserve. It confers on them a kind of legitimacy. Do they qualify as belligerents? If so, should they not receive the protection of the laws of war? This was something that Irish terrorists always demanded and was quite properly refused.

But to use, or rather misuse, the term war is not simply a matter of legality or pedantic semantics. It has deeper and more dangerous consequences. To declare that one is at war is to create a war psychosis that may be totally counter-productive for the objective we seek. It will arouse an immediate expectation, and demand, for spectacular military action against some easily identifiable adversary, preferably a hostile state; action leading to decisive results.

The use of force is no longer seen as the last resort, to be avoided if humanly possible, but as the first, and the sooner it is used the better. The newspapers demand immediate stories of derring-do, filling their pages with pictures of weapons, ingenious graphics, and contributions from service officers long, and probably deservedly, retired. Any suggestion that the best strategy is not to use military force at all but more subtle if less heroic means of destroying the adversary is dismissed as appeasement by politicians whose knowledge of history is about on a par with their skill at political management.

Figures on the right, seeing themselves cheated of what the Germans used to call a short, jolly war in Afghanistan, demand one against a more accessible adversary, Iraq; which is rather like the drunk who lost his watch in a dark alley but looked for it under a lamppost because there was more light there. As for their counterparts on the left, the very word war brings them out on the streets to protest as a matter of principle. The qualities needed in a serious campaign against terrorists - secrecy, intelligence, political sagacity, quiet ruthlessness, covert actions that remain covert, above all infinite patience - are all forgotten or overridden in a media-stoked frenzy for immediate results, and in nagging complaints if they are not achieved.

Could it have been avoided? Certainly, and rather than what Mr. Bush so unfortunately termed a crusade against evildoers - that is, a military campaign conducted by an alliance dominated by the United States - many people would have preferred a police operation conducted under the auspices of the United Nations on behalf of the international community as a whole against a criminal

conspiracy, whose members should be hunted down and brought before an international court, where they would receive a fair trial and, if found guilty, awarded an appropriate sentence. In an ideal world that is what would have happened.

A struggle against terrorism, as we have discovered over the past century, is unlike a war against drugs or a war against crime in one vital respect. It is fundamentally a battle for hearts and minds and it is worth remembering that this phrase was first coined in the context of the most successful such campaign that the British Armed Forces have ever fought - the Malayan Emergency in the 1950s. Without hearts and minds one cannot obtain intelligence, and without intelligence terrorists can never be defeated.

There is not much of a constituency for drug traffickers, and in a campaign against them a government can be reasonably certain that the mass of the public will be on their side. But as we all know, one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. Terrorists can be successfully destroyed only if public opinion, both at home and abroad, supports the authorities in regarding them as criminals rather than as heroes. In the intricate game of skill played between terrorists and the authorities, the terrorists have already won an important battle if they can provoke the authorities into using overt armed force against them. They will then be in a win-win situation. Either they will escape to fight another day or they will be defeated and celebrated as martyrs. In the process of fighting them a lot of innocent civilians will certainly be hurt, which will further erode the moral authority of the government.

The analogy with the Cold War is valuable. Not only did it go on for a long time; it had to be kept cold. There was a constant danger that it would be inadvertently toppled into a hot nuclear war. The danger of nuclear war, at least on a global scale, has now ebbed, if only for the moment, but it has been replaced by another, and one no less alarming; the likelihood of an ongoing and continuous confrontation of cultures that will not only divide the world but shatter the internal cohesion of our increasingly multicultural societies.

In retrospect, it is quite astonishing how little we have understood, or empathized with, the huge crisis that has faced that vast and populous section of the world stretching from the Maghreb through the Middle East and Central Asia into South and Southeast Asia and beyond to the Philippines; overpopulated, underdeveloped, being dragged headlong by the West into the postmodern age before they have come to terms with modernity.