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MILITARY FORCE

Safe Space for Common Ground

Whether one sees war as a reality of living in a fallen world, a necessary evil, or simply wrong, all can agree that war has devastating consequences.

Overcoming Evil with Military Force?

BY J. DARYL BYLER

Is the use of military force ever appropriate? Is it part of God’s plan for restraining evil in the world?

In this “safe space dialogue” issue, Emmett Lehman and Eric Siebert both acknowledge that threats to national security are real and must be addressed. But they offer different approaches.

While Emmet does not suggest that Christians should go to war, he sees the use of military force as appropriate for governments. He writes: “It is clear, to me at least, that God’s ordination of civil authority includes the use of lethal force.”

Eric, on the other hand, does not believe that God “ever encourages or approves of a government’s use of military force.” He maintains that threats should be addressed through dialogue, mediation and nonviolent interventions.

This discussion about military force—within Anabaptist circles and beyond—boils down to whether one believes the nonviolent ethic of Jesus applies only to the church, or whether it is also the New Testament standard toward which God intends the nations to move.

Whether one sees war as a reality of living in a fallen world, a necessary evil, or simply wrong, all can agree that war has devastating consequences.

We asked two Iraqis to reflect on how they have experienced the U.S. use of military force in their country. Dr. Naba Al Barrak and Dana Hassan agree that military force has brought about changes in Iraq, but many of the changes have been negative (p. 2).

Also in this issue, Martin Shupack writes about an increasingly hostile U.S. Cuba policy (p. 3); David Whettstone describes international conscientious objection movements (p. 4); and Lora Steiner recounts the use of Agent Orange in Vietnam (p. 5).

The Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective (1995) says “there is no simple explanation for the practice of war in the Old Testament” (Article 22). But it suggests that the trajectory of Scripture is toward that day when nations will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. On that day nations will no longer study the ways of war (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3).

By our example, our imagination, our prayers and our advocacy, may we help hasten that day. ■

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BY J. DARYL BYLER

It's one thing to debate at arm's length. It's quite another to experience firsthand the military occupation of one's country.

The View from the Ground

It's one thing to debate at arm's length the pros and cons of using military force. It's quite another to experience firsthand the military occupation of one's country.

The United States and coalition forces invaded Iraq on March 20, 2003. While coalition forces toppled the government of Saddam Hussein in less than a month, the aftermath of the war and a stubborn insurgency have caused immense suffering for ordinary Iraqis.

In a recent report whose findings have been contested by the United States and the United Kingdom, the U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva states: "Malnutrition rates in (Iraqi) children under five have almost doubled since the U.S.-led intervention."

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working in Iraq tell MCC that, two years after the war, the percent of Iraqis with safe drinking water is unchanged from before the war and the continuing lack of electricity contributes to instability. Estimates of Iraqi civilian casualties from the war range from 17,000 to more than 100,000.

The *Washington Memo* recently asked two Iraqis to reflect on the presence of U.S. troops in their country.

Dana Hassan works in the northern Kurdish area as Program Coordinator for Rehabilitation, Education and Community Health (REACH). Dr. Naba Al Barrak is Professor of Science at Baghdad University and directs an Iraqi NGO called New Horizons for Women. Both attended the Summer

Peacebuilding Institute at Eastern Mennonite University in the summer of 2004.

Their responses point to the ambiguities of using military power.

On the positive side, Dana says the U.S. presence has prevented civil war so far, has assisted Iraqi security forces in fighting the insurgents, and has helped facilitate the distribution of humanitarian aid. But Dana also says U.S. troops have contributed to Iraqi civilian casualties and inflated local market prices. He also mentions the damaging U.S. abuse of Iraqi prisoners.

Naba offers an even bleaker perspective. "For me and many other Iraqis there are no positive changes contributed by the U.S. military," she says. "They misled Iraq and caused a huge mess for our institutions."

Naba says the focus of the U.S. military action has been to "keep America safe." The presence of troops has caused "security deterioration and an increase in the crime rate," she says. She points to the lack of basic necessities for daily life. "Can you imagine yourself without heating in winter or without air conditioning in the very hot summer?" she asks. "Can you imagine your child going to bed at 6:00 p.m. because there is no electricity and you don't know what to do? Can you go to work in the morning and not know if you'll return home alive or not?"

Was military force necessary to bring about regime change in Iraq? "Yes," says Naba, "but most Iraqis know who created Saddam Hussein!" Dana says that the U.S. military did not come to Iraq for the purpose of bringing about political, social and economic changes. But he acknowledges that military power may have been necessary to bring about regime change.

How have you personally experienced the presence of U.S. military in Iraq? we asked.

"The soldiers are a long way from understanding the sensitive cultural issues," says Dana. "I haven't driven my car since April 2003," says Naba, "because of the trouble their vehicles and tanks cause in the streets." ■

WASHINGTON MEMO is written by Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office Staff. It interprets national legislation and policy, seeking to reflect biblical concerns for justice and peace as represented in the work and statements of MCC U.S. and Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches. All biblical quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

Staff: J. Daryl Byler (Director), Bethany Spicher (Managing Editor), Martin Shupack, Lora Steiner, David Whettstone.

To contact the MCC U.S. Washington Office, please see our address on the back page. See our weekly commentary at www.thirdway.com and visit our web site at www.mcc.org/us/washington.

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Unrelenting Hostility: U.S. Cuba Policy

The U.S. government has stepped up efforts, as it says, to “hasten the end of the Cuban dictatorship.” President George W. Bush’s new wave of hostility toward Fidel Castro is consistent with his vision of asserting U.S. diplomatic, economic and military power to aggressively promote U.S.-friendly democracies, free markets and free trade throughout the world. The new policies also seem driven by the desire to please powerful anti-Castro elements in the Cuban-American community. Elements of the new Cuba policy include:

- Major increases in funding for dissident groups in Cuba and anti-Castro organizations in the United States;
- Greater efforts to propagate pro-U.S./anti-Castro information in Cuba, especially via radio and television;
- Reduced financial resources to the Cuban government, primarily by further restricting American travel to Cuba and limiting Cuban-American donations to their relatives in Cuba;
- New efforts to persuade other countries to adopt stronger anti-Castro positions.

New travel restrictions include, among others, limiting visits to family members in Cuba to once every three years, with no exceptions for family emergencies; lowering the limit on how much money Cuban Americans can spend during these visits, as well as the amount of money and gifts they can take or send their relatives; eliminating cultural exchanges and severely limiting educational travel. The Bush administration has also implemented policies making it more difficult for U.S. farmers to sell their products to Cuba.

The 45-year-old embargo has strengthened rather than undermined Fidel Castro’s rule, giving him an enemy to mobilize against. And it has harmed ordinary Cubans. The embargo has reduced national income, made food more expensive and limited access to medicines. It has prevented people-to-people contact that could have a democratizing effect on Cuba and an educational impact on people in the United States.

Unlike the president, congressional Republicans and Democrats are working together to loosen the embargo. A bi-partisan majority in Congress has voted in past years to end travel restrictions, only to see these provisions removed from the legislation by congressional leaders supporting the administration’s position.

But momentum keeps building for a new approach. This could be the year in which the will of the congressional majority on Cuba is finally respected. Contacting our legislators can make the difference. ■

BY MARTIN SHUPACK

The 45-year-old embargo on Cuba has strengthened rather than undermined Fidel Castro’s rule, giving him an enemy to mobilize against. And it has harmed ordinary Cubans.

CAPITAL QUOTES

“One way or another, we’re going to pay for the costs of war.”

—Rep. Jerry Lewis (R-CA), chairman of the House Appropriations Committee.

“From tax cuts to Medicare, the White House gets what the White House really wants. It never really wanted the ‘poor people stuff.’”

—David Kuo, former deputy director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.

“I don’t think God is going to ask us how he created the earth, but he will ask us what we did with what he created.”

—Rich Cizik, vice president of governmental affairs for the National Association of Evangelicals.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Moving Help Wanted

In March, the MCC U.S. board approved the purchase of a larger property for the Washington Office that will be shared with other Anabaptist groups. We welcome your contributions toward this project which will strengthen the Anabaptist witness on Capitol Hill. So far, \$725,000 of the \$1.25 million goal has been received in cash and pledges. Make checks payable to “MCC” and send to P.O. Box 500, Akron, PA 17501. List “Washington Building” in the memo line.

Congregational Advocacy Winner

Community Mennonite Church (Harrisonburg, Va.) won the Washington Office’s annual Congregational Advocacy Award for their support of the Bridges Not Walls Campaign. The church sent 225 letters and 25 drawings to legislators, asking them to urge Israeli leaders to build bridges for peace, not walls that divide.

Conscience and Alternatives

BY DAVID M. WHETTSTONE

International perspectives on conscientious objection (CO) remind us that we have a common struggle with many men and women around the world. They object to governments' use of force and violence to extend authority over citizens, and to sometimes ultimately kill others. Objectors' convictions may represent a confluence of moral or ethical reasoning, understandings of law and policies, or a simple and strong determination to live out one's faith. Whatever the reason, the desire and spirit for peace is spreading throughout the earth.

“Objection to militarism goes beyond the decision to take up arms or not. Conscientious objection becomes a criticism of a society that makes money off of death and aggravates social, economic and political differences, thus creating more conflicts that will later be resolved through violence.

—MARICELY PARADA, JUSTAPAZ

Many claim that an international basis for CO rights can be derived from the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 18; 1948) and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 18; 1966). Subsequent resolutions from the U.N. Commission on Human Rights have affirmed conscientious objection and encouraged member states to accommodate this right. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Article 10; 2000) has done the same.

Yet, the courage of COs in many places moves conviction beyond the limitations of state policy and judgements.

There is a growing Refusenik tradition in Israel. Soldiers, men and women, and youth are refusing military participation, some along CO grounds. Here are excerpts of a letter Tel Aviv high schoolers sent to officials:

“We the undersigned, Israeli girls and boys, believing in the values of democracy . . . refuse to take part in the occupation and repression. . . . Every human being has the right to life, equality, dignity and freedom. We are bound by our conscience. . . . The occupation has corrupted Israel, turning it into a militaristic, racist, chauvinistic and violent society. . . . We wish to con-

tribute to society in an alternative way, which does not involve harming other human beings. . . . We believe that there is another way.”

Paul J. Kaldjian is a member of Emanuel Fellowship in St. Paul, Minn. and a board member of the Refuser Solidarity Network. He believes that U.S. Mennonites should be particularly concerned about COs and their work in Israel-Palestine since U.S. government dollars and support are involved in issues of oppression.

Since 1945, leadership by the Mennonite Church in Colombia has led to the growth of conscientious objection. They have encouraged broader CO acceptance, particularly by the country's constitution. Youth who have been part of the Program for Training Peacemakers, supported by Justapaz and by the Mennonite Biblical Seminary of Colombia, have sought to live “out the gospel and nonviolent values, facilitating a servant attitude toward the community as an alternative to military ‘service’.” However, COs still face trouble. Maricely Parada, who works with Justapaz, a ministry dedicated to peacemaking and conflict transformation, writes: “Colombia still obliges young citizens to define the military status as an indispensable step towards citizenship” (A Call for Solidarity with Colombian Mennonites, *MCC Peace Office Newsletter*, Vol. 30, No. 2).

In Germany, some suggest that CO alternative service is the virtual social service infrastructure of the country. In the United States, the alternative service of the Civilian Public Service—efforts of Mennonites and Quakers that enhanced medical and mental health services—is still remembered. These and many more examples support the fruit of peace and social well-being. Perhaps we can remember the struggle and efforts of men and women throughout the world as they sow the seeds of peace. ■

For more international CO information, visit War Resisters International, www.wri-irg.org

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR JOINT LOBBY DAY

May 15 is International Conscientious Objectors' Day. Join the MCC Washington Office, the Center on Conscience and War and the National Campaign for a Peace Tax Fund for a joint lobby day, May 16, in Washington, D.C. Visit www.nisbco.org for details.

Toxic History

In March, U.S. federal court judge Jack Weinstein dismissed a lawsuit filed by nearly 30 Vietnamese plaintiffs. The Vietnamese were seeking compensation for the effects of Agent Orange, an herbicide used by the United States during the Vietnam War.

From 1961 to 1972, the United States sprayed more than 20 million gallons of Agent Orange across southern Vietnam, destroying the plant life which hid and fed the Vietcong. The substance, which was sprayed by planes, helicopters, trucks and sometimes even by hand, contained dioxin, one of the most toxic substances that exists. The dioxin stayed in the ground and entered the food chain, and even today elevated levels of dioxin persist in animals and fish. Most of the land which had been sprayed recovered, but as recently as 1990, there were still two-and-a-half million barren acres of land, according to the Fund for Reconciliation and Development. Women who live in the sprayed regions still have high rates of miscarriages and birth defects. One study in Vietnam's Central Highlands found high levels of dioxins in breast milk, sometimes *dozens of times higher* than the levels allowed for by World Health Organization standards.

Agent Orange, named after the color of the barrels which contained it, was also sprayed in Laos and Cambodia. Exposure to Agent Orange has been linked to nerve disorders, diabetes and certain types of cancer, including respiratory cancers and leukemia. Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange are eligible for treatment and disability compensation for all these illnesses; children born with spina bifida to such veterans are also eligible for benefits from the United States Department of Veteran Affairs.

In 1984, U.S. veterans who said their health had been affected by exposure to Agent Orange sued several chemical companies who had manufactured the substance. The companies settled out of court, paying nearly \$180 million. At the time, it was the largest out-of-court settlement ever reached. The case that the Vietnamese brought to the New York court included some of the same companies—Dow Chemical and Monsanto among them—and was, in fact, heard by the very same judge.

But Weinstein dismissed the case just two weeks after it reached his court, saying, "There is no basis for any of the claims of plaintiffs under the domestic law of any nation or state or under any form of international law." He said the plaintiffs could not prove that Agent Orange had caused their illnesses. The Department of Justice backed the ruling, saying that any other ruling could adversely affect the president's ability to wage war.

Many Vietnamese were furious with the verdict. "It sounds hollow coming from a nation that has appointed itself the global 'human rights' and 'justice' watchdog," said one editorial in the *Viet Nam News*. The plaintiffs plan on appealing their case, but in the meantime, they are insisting that the United States begin to accept some responsibility for its actions.

Suggesting that the United States government has double standards is a controversial thing in this country, but to the Vietnamese, it is terribly and painfully clear. Acknowledging that both the veterans who sprayed Agent Orange and the Vietnamese who were sprayed deserve justice would go a long way toward lessening the resentment that Vietnamese feel toward the United States and creating positive incentives for both governments to work together. ■

BY LORA STEINER

Acknowledging that both the veterans who sprayed Agent Orange and the Vietnamese who were sprayed deserve justice would go a long way toward lessening the resentment that Vietnamese feel toward the United States.

FAREWELL TO MARTY

After ten years as Legislative Associate at the Washington Office, Marty Shupack is moving downstairs to join Church World Service as their Associate Director for Public Policy. We will miss Marty's many contributions, and hope that he will still join us for staff lunches!

The Appropriate Role of Military Force

in Maintaining Order and Responding to Perceived Threats to National Security

Washington Memo: *In their role of “maintaining order,” what use of military power, if any, do you believe is appropriate for governing authorities? What should be the conditions for using military power? What are the alternative possibilities for dealing with perceived threats to national security?*

Emmett: Rather than ask, “What use of military power, if any, do you believe is appropriate,” the applicable question is, “How long can a nation of civilized and moral people stand by, wash their hands and turn the other cheek, and do no more than implead a dictator to stop the massacre of thousands?”

It is quite a heavy burden for those in positions of authority to make a value judgment based on the morality of the act itself—its natural, logical and probable consequences both foreseen and potential—as well as the moral consequences of taking no action.

All options must be considered with integrity, using facts, reason and logic. The consequences of being wrong seem rather severe.

Eric: While I believe God desires governments to “act justly and provide order,” I do *not* believe God ever encourages or approves of a government’s use of military force to do so. In my estimation, it is never appropriate for governing authorities to use military power.

Rather than using military power, perceived threats to national security should be addressed through international dialogue, conflict mediation and creative nonviolent interventions. Threats to national security can be reduced as nations work to address the legitimate grievances others have against them. By promoting just economic policies, voluntarily disarming, refusing to participate in weapons trading, and avoiding double standards, the global community will become more stable. Additionally, threats to national security will decrease as human security increases. When all people have clean drinking water, enough food to

eat, access to quality healthcare and education, and meaningful labor, nations will be far more secure and the world will be a safer and more peaceful place.

WM: *What is the basis for your viewpoint?*

Eric: My beliefs are rooted in my understanding that God is nonviolent and calls us to behave likewise (Matthew 5:44–45; Luke 6:35). In Jesus, who provides the clearest and fullest picture of God’s character (Hebrews 1:3), we see clearly that God rejects the use of violence. God’s response to evil in the world is not “shock and awe” but suffering love.

The use of military power involves domination, violence and killing. Since I believe these behaviors to be contrary to the will of God, I do not believe governments are ever justified in their use of military force. I believe God is always disappointed when people individually or collectively resort to lethal force, regardless of how “noble” the cause may seem.

I also believe it is inappropriate for governments to use military force because of the devastating consequences it has for the men and women who use it. Human beings were not designed to kill. Taking the life of another person not only destroys someone created in God’s image, it distorts the humanity of the one doing the killing.

Military power is also inappropriate, in my estimation, because it doesn’t work. The military option is only a quick fix at best. It never provides a positive long-term solution and cannot guarantee the kind of security governments so desperately seek.

Emmett: Unless one believes that governments should adopt pacifistic principles, which I most certainly do not, Mennonite advice to government is not significantly distinguishable from that of other Christian commentators.

It is clear, to me at least, that God’s ordination of civil authority includes the use of lethal force. The word *machaira*, translated as “the sword” in Romans 13, was not only a sword used in battle, but also a sword

“In Jesus, who provides the clearest and fullest picture of God’s character, we see clearly that God rejects the use of violence. God’s response to evil in the world is not ‘shock and awe’ but suffering love.”

—ERIC SIEBERT

used in executions, as when Herod killed James, the brother of John, recorded in Acts 12: 1, 2.

While believers who are committed to the teachings of Jesus Christ and the ethic of the New Testament have therefore appropriated for themselves certain behavioral constraints, such is not the case for nonbelievers. Given that man has a propensity toward evil because of his Adamic nature, God ordained civil authority to control such.

Nonresistance and loving our enemies are not purposed to induce social consequences, but rather is an effort to approximate complete moral perfection in Jesus Christ, to aspire to spiritual purity. Jesus did not teach that the enemy ought to be loved so that he will cease to be an enemy. Nor did He ask us to go a second mile so that those who required us to go the first would recant and grant freedom. It is not the sociological results, but the transcendence of Christ's love in us that dictates our behavior. Any claims to redemptive social consequences of a life of submission to personal injustice and inordinate demands are an unsought but welcomed consequence.

WM: *What uncertainties and moral ambiguities do you have about your stated beliefs?*

Eric: I recognize many Christians disagree with my position. For some, this is due to a different understanding of God's activity in the world, an understanding rooted in their interpretation of certain passages of Scripture. I need to remain open to the possibility that my interpretation of Scripture and my understanding of God's nonviolent character and work in the world may be incorrect and in need of revision.

Additionally, I am concerned that by arguing against the use of military force in any situation, I might seem uncaring or apathetic toward the plight of those who suffer. How can I truly love others, some might ask, if I am not willing to come to their rescue with force if necessary?

Finally, in stating my opinions so strongly, I would not want to be (mis)understood to be saying that you can't be a Christian and be in the military. I recognize there are many Christians in the armed forces. Although many Christians believe that serving in this capacity is *fully* compatible with their Christian faith, I fundamentally disagree. Still, I respect their beliefs and invite further dialogue with them.

Emmett: Without sounding arrogant I hope, I really don't harbor uncertainties and ambiguities about my beliefs. Such come into play with the application process of interpreting facts and deriving conclusions therefrom.

WM: *Do you believe President Bush's use of military force in Iraq was appropriate?*

Emmett: For me, one who was not and is not privy to the relevant and necessary data on which the Iraqi decision was based, to judge ex-post facto the correctness of the decision would manifest the epitome of arrogance and smack of political malice. Indeed we laymen are still without the requisite information even to second-guess the decision.

Stipulating that Saddam's genocide was killing some 4,000 innocents per week including women and children, and stipulating that the United States had the capability of stopping the carnage, it would have been immoral not to act. How many thousands must die before we act?

This moral component was so compelling that there was no need even to give consideration to opponents' dual darlings, WMDs and "threats to our security," each a straw man, but effectively demagogued by opponents and an obeisant and pejorative press.

Eric: Given my convictions about the use of military power, I obviously do not believe President Bush's use of military force was appropriate. Even if I believed governing authorities should use such force in certain situations, I would arrive at the same conclusion in this instance. America's

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Eric Siebert is Assistant Professor of Old Testament at Messiah College where he also directs the Sider Institute for Anabaptist, Pietist and Wesleyan Studies. He and his wife Elisa live in Grantham, Pa. and attend the Grantham Church, a Brethren in Christ congregation.

"Nonresistance and loving our enemies are not purposed to induce social consequences, but rather is an effort to approximate complete moral perfection in Jesus Christ, to aspire to spiritual purity."

—EMMETT LEHMAN

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The Appropriate Role of Military Force

(continued)

preemptive strike on Iraq was an act of aggression in violation of international law. Moreover, the President’s unprovoked attack on the Iraqi people is impossible to legitimate on the basis of just war criteria.

WM: *What do you believe will be the long-term outcome of having used military force?*

Eric: It is difficult to foresee the long-term effects of the use of military force in Iraq. While one might hope some form of stable democratic government will take root, a number of negative consequences seem easier to predict. First, I believe the anti-American sentiment the invasion of Iraq has generated in the Middle East will continue to express itself in acts of terrorism against Americans into the foreseeable future. Second, given America’s virtually unilateral decision to go to war, this country will struggle with a loss of trust and credibility within the international commu-

nity for a considerable time. Finally, the massive degradation of Iraq’s infrastructure and the enormous human death toll will create conditions of poverty for many Iraqis which will be difficult to recover from for a long time hence.

Emmett: Don Eberly, a local friend of mine who spent four months in Iraq immediately after Saddam’s fall recently wrote, “The liberation of Iraq and the planting of a democracy in the heart of the Middle East is probably the most consequential undertaking of this generation.”

“As if to make a point,” recently wrote Charles Krauthammer of *The Washington Post*, “it was not the suicide bombers, but the voters they killed at the polls who were buried as martyrs.” As I write, there is convincing evidence that not only Iraq, but the whole Mideast area is being impacted positively by the recent tumultuous events. ■