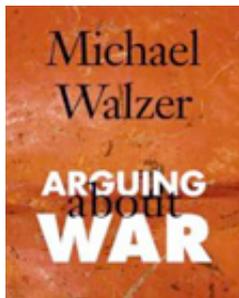




## Arguing About War (2006)

Michael Walzer , Joanne J. Myers

February 28, 2006



Arguing About War

- [Introduction](#)
- [Remarks](#)
- [Questions and Answers](#)

### Introduction

**JOANNE MYERS:** Good evening. I'm Joanne Myers, Director of Public Affairs Programs, and on behalf of the Carnegie Council I would like to thank you all for joining us.

Today it is my great pleasure to welcome once again Professor Walzer to our lecture series. He will be discussing his book [Arguing About War](#). Professor Walzer is the author, editor, or co-editor of over a dozen books. He is currently the UPS Foundation Professor of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University and Co-Editor of [Dissent](#) Magazine.

For centuries, theologians, heads of state, and military strategists have debated both the rules governing a nation's entrance into war and the parameters for what constitutes just conduct during the actual hostilities; so it should come as no surprise to anyone that for almost three years our country is still divided and arguing about whether the war in Iraq was morally justifiably or politically wise.

For many, the conceptual framework for arguing about the ethics of warfare was profoundly shaped by Professor Walzer's influential text on the morality of war. [Just and Unjust Wars](#) was first published in 1977, the same year that [Jimmy Carter](#) took office, and it was an intellectual response to the war in Vietnam. Its achievement was to jumpstart a revival of the tradition of Just War theory as a moral standard for assessing the use of military force in modern time. However, with the rapid pace of political change, Professor Walzer now notes that contemporary wars have caused him to recognize the need for an expansion of his Just War theory and to also address the concept of justice after the war has ended.

Today, as violence and instability in Iraq extend into a fourth year, there is a new sense of urgency to establish clear ethical principles on matters of chief-making, military occupation, and political reconstruction. Towards this end, Professor Walzer has collected previously published pieces that dramatize and discuss these ethical dilemmas of military intervention and can be found in this book.

As he makes clear, finding our way through the maze of moral and ethical arguments raised by the war in Iraq has never been more challenging. It is a challenge that requires not only someone with the moral authority to guide us, but a person who is able to lay out complex ethical principles in a manner that we can all understand. I am confident that Professor Walzer will clarify our thinking not only about the cost of the response to aggression but also regarding the moral significance of specific wartime and postwar decisions.

It is with this in mind that I invite you to join me in welcoming a towering presence in the world of moral philosophy our guest, the preeminent political theorist Michael Walzer. Thank you for joining us.

### Remarks

**MICHAEL WALZER:** I spoke in this room about this book when it came out in hardcover and discussed the enterprise of Just War theory and some of the criticisms of that enterprise that had been made in the period during and since the first Gulf War. I'm going to do something different this time. The book has now come out in paperback— that's why we're here again—and I am not going to repeat what I did before. I have a

new talk, which will be the preface for a new edition of *Just and Unjust War* next month in France and then later this year here in the States. The talk is called "Regime Change and Just War."

Last year marked the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II and the beginning of regime change and democratization in Germany. The Allies confirmed their commitment to democratization [in Potsdam in July of 1945](#), where the British provided an admirable example—some of you will remember this, as I do—of what democracy means.

Elections were held in the U.K. while the conference was going on. [Winston Churchill](#), the great wartime leader of his country, was defeated and immediately replaced at the meetings—[Stalin](#) must have been astonished—by [Clement Attlee](#), the leader of the Labour Party. This was a classic democratic moment. The ability of the opposition to challenge and possibly defeat a powerful leader is surely the crucial test of a democratic constitution.

Now, the political reconstruction of Germany was an effort, in the West at least, to enable the German people to enact moments like that. It's important to notice that what was planned was a restoration of democracy, not a creation *ex nihilo*. The [Weimar Republic](#) lay only twelve years in the past, and old political parties like the [Christian Democrats](#) and [the Social Democrats](#) were quickly reconstituted.

For that reason, and for other reasons too, the German case is not a good precedent, as is sometimes claimed, for what the United States has recently been trying to do in Iraq. Still, it was a restoration by force, the consequence of military victory and military occupation, and so it raises the question that I want to address today: When and whether forcible democratization can be justified—or, in the language of contemporary debates, is regime change a just cause of war?

Now, in the case of Nazism, regime change was the consequence, not the cause, of the war fought by the Allies. It wasn't the aim of the wars declared in 1939 by Poland, France, and Britain to transform the German state. Rather, these were paradigmatic just wars. Their cause was resistance to armed aggression. According to the Just War paradigm, resistance to aggression stops with the military defeat of the aggressor; after that there is a negotiated peace, and in the course of the negotiations the victims of aggression and their allies may legitimately look for material reparations and political guarantees against future attack.

But regime change is not part of the paradigm. It is a feature of Just War theory in its classic formulations that aggression is regarded as the criminal policy of a government, not the policy of a criminal government, let alone a criminal system of government. Individual leaders may be brought to trial after the war. The governmental system is not at issue.

But if we understand aggression as an act that follows from the very character of the regime, which is how we came to understand Nazi war-making, then regime change will seem a necessary feature of the postwar settlement. Of course, it wasn't only the aggressive wars fought by the Nazi regime, but also the genocidal policies it pursued, that justified the demand first for unconditional surrender and then for political reconstruction. A negotiated peace with [Hitler](#) or his associates was not a morally imaginable outcome of the Second World War, as it might have been with [the Kaiser](#) in the First World War had his regime not been overthrown from within. The Nazis had to go, whether or not their German opponents were capable of seeing them out.

There's a general argument here, which applies most clearly in cases of humanitarian intervention. When a government is engaged in the mass murder of its own people or some subgroup of its own people, then any foreign state or coalition of states that sends an army across the border to stop the killing is also going to have to replace the government, or at least to begin the process of replacing it. It isn't only aggressiveness, then, but also murderousness that makes a political regime a legitimate candidate for forcible transformation.

Still, the primary cause of humanitarian intervention is to stop the killing. Regime change follows then that purpose. An authoritarian regime that is capable of mass murder but not engaged in mass murder is not liable to military attack and political reconstruction.

Imagine that there had been, as there surely should have been, an African or a European or a United Nations intervention in [Rwanda in 1994](#). The initial purpose of the military action would have been to stop the massacre of Tutsi men and women and their Hutu sympathizers, but in order to do that and to protect the survivors it would have been necessary to overthrow the Hutu power regime, and whoever was responsible for that overthrow would also have taken on, willy-nilly, some degree of responsibility for the creation of an alternative government. It would have been wise to share that responsibility with local political

forces and with international agencies, but there would have been no just way of shedding it entirely.

And once the intervening forces are engaged in the work of political reconstruction, there are very good reasons why they should have democracy, or at least open the way for the practice of democracy. The reasons have to do with the legitimacy of democratically based regimes, regimes which are established through a literal and ongoing self-determination, and also with their relative benevolence. Genuine democracies have not engaged in the mass murder of their own citizens, even if their record abroad is not as satisfactory.

But what if there are other traditions of legitimacy in the invaded country, involving for example a dominant role for religious leaders? What if there is a strong traditionalist opposition to the legal equality that democracy requires, most crucially and commonly opposition to the equality of women? I can imagine cases where democratization might have to be a gradual process or where democratic principles might have to be compromised in one way or another, though I would not be ready, in fact, to compromise on legal equality.

Consider the other case of post-World War II regime change, the American occupation of Japan. The constitution imposed by the occupation authorities, and written by Americans mostly, provided that all laws governing gender relations "shall be enacted from the standpoint of individual dignity and the essential equality of the sexes." Sixty years later, there is pressure from the right to repeal this article of the Japanese constitution, in defense, it is claimed, of traditional Japanese values.

The American woman who wrote that sentence has gone back to Japan. She is now in her eighties, which means she was in her twenties when she wrote the Japanese constitution, or a piece of it. She has gone back to Japan to defend her work.

One might say that the fact that repeal is possible vindicates the American imposition. The Japanese now have to argue about the structure of gender relations in their society, and they will get whatever structure a majority of them are prepared to support. And so an imposed democracy is defensible in this sense, that it is more open-ended than any other regime change would be.

So we have what we might think of as the World War II occasions for justified regime change and we have the unrealized Rwandan occasion. Is there—was there—an Iraqi occasion?

Note that in [the first Gulf War of 1991](#) the United States and its allies fought in strict accordance with the classic Just War paradigm. They stopped fighting once the invasion of Kuwait had been decisively defeated; they did not march on Baghdad; they did not aim at the overthrow and replacement of the Baathist regime; nor did they do anything to make it possible for the Iraqi people to turn [Saddam Hussein](#) out of office.

On the contrary, having called for rebellions against Saddam's rule, they failed to come to the aid, or only a short time later to the rescue, of the rebels. Though U.S. propaganda compared Saddam to Hitler, the allies did not act on that comparison.

They did seek constraints on the future behavior of the Baathist regime, and these constraints were predicated on a fairly grim view of the regime. Still, what we might think of as the constitutional character of the Iraqi state—whether it was autocratic or democratic, secular or religious—this was judged irrelevant to the decisions about war and peace made by the American-led coalition.

By 2003, the position of the United States and its allies—a smaller number of allies now—had changed dramatically. To be sure, [the second Bush Administration](#) gave a variety of reasons for its decision to go to war—another day, another reason—but all the reasons suggested the need this time to march on Baghdad and replace the Baathist regime.

The most important reason was the danger that Iraq possessed, or in the near future would be capable of producing, weapons of mass destruction. But the fact that France, say, possessed weapons of mass destruction was never imagined, not even by the Bush Administration, as an occasion for war.

It was the character of its regime that made Iraq dangerous. The U.S. government claimed that Saddam's was an inherently aggressive and an inherently murderous regime. Just as it had committed aggression in the past, so it had massacred its own people in the past; and American leaders insisted that the past was prologue—what had happened before would happen again, unless the regime was replaced.

So Iraq was not similar to the German or Japanese or the hypothetical Rwandan case. The war was not a response to aggression or a humanitarian intervention. Its cause was not, as in 1991, an actual Iraqi attack

on a neighboring state, or even an imminent threat of attack, nor was it an actual ongoing massacre.

The cause was regime change directly, which means that the U.S. government was arguing for a significant expansion of the doctrine of *jus ad bellum*. The existence of an aggressive and murderous regime, it claimed, was a legitimate occasion for war, even if the regime was not actually engaged in aggression or mass murder.

In more familiar terms, this was an argument for preventive war. But the reason for the preventive attack was not the standard perception of a dangerous shift in the balance of power that would soon leave us helpless against them. It was a radically new perception of an evil regime.

Now, no one who has experienced or reflected on the politics of the 20th century can doubt that there are in fact evil regimes. Nor can there be any doubt that we need to design a political military response to such regimes that recognizes their true character. Even so, I do not believe that regime change by itself can be a just cause of war. When we act in the world, and especially when we act militarily, we must respond to the evil that men do, and not to the evil that they are capable of doing or have done in the past.

Aggression and massacre are legitimate causes of war, and we must learn what we have not yet learned: to respond to each of these in a timely and forceful way. But the existence of regimes capable of aggression and massacre requires a different response.

The harsh containment system imposed on Iraq after the first Gulf War was an experiment in responding differently. Containment had three elements:

- The first was an embargo intended to prevent the importation of arms, which also affected supplies of food and medicine—it should have been possible to design a smarter set of sanctions.
- The second element was an inspection system, organized by the UN, to block the domestic development of weapons of mass destruction.
- The third element was the establishment of no-fly zones in the northern and southern parts of the country so that Iraq's air power could not be used against its own people.

The containment system was, as we now know, highly effective. At least it was effective in this sense: it prevented both weapons development and mass murder, and so it made the war of 2003 unnecessary. But in another sense it was a failure; it did not prevent the war.

The primary reason for the failure was, obviously, the ideologically driven policy of the Bush Administration, which from the beginning favored regime change and war over containment. But there is another reason, less obvious, which needs to be stressed: the states that opposed the war on the grounds that containment was working were not themselves making it work. They were not participants of, or even supporters of, the containment system.

The containment of Saddam's Iraq began as a multilateral enterprise, but in the end it was the Americans who were doing almost all the work. Had there been many states, or even just a few more states, enforcing the embargo, insisting on inspections, and flying planes over northern and southern Iraq, the unilateral abrogation of the containment system by the U.S. government would not have been possible, or at least it would have been much more difficult than it was. Had containment been an international project, as it should have been, American power might also have been contained within it.

There is a simple lesson here about the meaning of collective security: if measures short of war are to work against evil or dangerous regimes, they have to be the common work of a group of nations. They require multilateral commitment. Collective security has to be a collective project.

It won't be successful if the costs of security are assigned to one state while all the others pursue business as usual. The state bearing the costs cannot be counted on to bear them indefinitely. Adventurous politicians will be tempted by the idea of a quick and radical alternative to containment, and regime change is the obvious alternative.

Now, I've described the elements of the containment system as "measures short of war." In fact, they all involve the use of force, which is why states eager for business as usual refuse to participate. According to international law, embargoes, stopping ships on the high seas, and the enforcement of no-fly zones, bombing

radar and antiaircraft installations—these are all acts of war, but it is common sense to recognize that they are very different from actual warfare. Compare Iraq before and after March 2003.

And certainly, containment is much easier to justify than a full-scale attack would be. The arguments against preventive war don't apply, it seems to me, to the preventive use of force short of war, since "short of war" means without war's unpredictable and often catastrophic consequences. Forceful containment can be justified by a reasonable perception of the dangers posed by a regime like Saddam Hussein's.

But containment doesn't—or in the Iraqi case didn't—bring the regime down. So why is it preferable to, let's say, a short war that produces a new regime? Well, that's a hard question, even after the war has turned out not to be short.

But I believe that patience would have been a better policy in 2003. Since containment rendered Saddam's regime harmless, it did in fact weaken it, because regimes of that sort cannot endure being harmless.

So the Iraqi case invites us to think about the use of force short of war. The containment regime of 1991 through 2003, which the UN endorsed and the United States enforced, is only one possible example. Despite the French argument at the UN in 2002 and 2003 that the use of force must always come as a last resort, force short of war obviously comes before war itself.

So the argument about *jus ad bellum* needs to be extended to *jus ad vim*—that is, we need a theory of just and unjust uses of force. This shouldn't be an overly tolerant or permissive theory, but it will certainly be more permissive than the theory of just and unjust war.

The immediate question for me today is whether the permissions reach regime change and democratization. As I've already suggested, this is closely connected to questions about prevention. Preventive war is not justifiable, either in standard Just War theory or in international law. But what we might think of as preventive force can be justified when we are dealing with a brutal regime that has acted aggressively or murderously in the past and gives us reason to think that it might do so again. In such cases, we aim at containment but hope for regime change, and we can legitimately design the containment policy to advance this further purpose whenever that's possible, which means that we can use force in limited ways for the sake of producing a new—and if new, then also democratic—regime.

The no-fly zone is an excellent example, I am thinking of the no-fly zone in the north of Iraq, because that was a kind of humanitarian intervention, since it stopped a massacre of Kurds in the north after the massacre of Shiites in the south. It also produced a kind of regime change—namely, Kurdish autonomy. So that's an example which I can't develop here, and perhaps we might talk about it.

But there are limits on the occasions when force short of war can be used, and also on the ways in which it can be used, limits that correspond to *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*—that is, justice in the conduct of war.

I've already discussed the occasions which have to do with the threat of aggression or massacre. But what state or set of states is morally bound to recognize this threat and organize a containment system? Collective security depends on collective recognition. Right now, however, the capacity of international agencies and regional associations to respond to threats of aggression and massacre is probably even less developed than their capacity to respond to actual aggression and massacre. So we have to acknowledge the possible legitimacy of unilateral action in both cases. But unilateralism doesn't work very well when you are responding to threats of aggression and massacre, because force short of war, especially when it involves trade sanctions or a weapons embargo, requires the cooperation of many nations if it is to be effective.

I've said this already, but it bears repeating. The avoidance of war and massacre requires a committed collective ready to use force. It is, sadly, true that Europe today does not display that commitment, nor do Europe and the United States together, and the United States alone has seemed more ready these past several years to go to war than to use force in restrained and politic ways, and the consequence of having gone to war probably means that we don't have the capacity to use force in restrained and politic ways.

When force short of war is used, it should be limited in the same way that the conduct of war is limited, so as to shield civilians. This is especially important in the case of economic blockades, where the civilian population is inevitably at risk, even if the government and not the population is the target of the blockade.

The policy that [Colin Powell](#) called "smart sanctions"—they were meant to be morally as well as politically smart— is supposed to reduce the risk to civilians. It should certainly be used on the next legitimate occasion, and there will be legitimate occasions. There is no justification for a blockade that effectively

deprives civilians of food and medicine.

But what should we do if a barbarous government deliberately increases the privation of its own citizens in order to discredit the blockade, as Saddam did in the 1990s? The UN responded with its [Oil for Food program](#), and I suppose something might be learned from that effort, if only about how to do it better. Some such response is clearly necessary, even if the hunger and disease attributed to the blockade are in fact the work of the targeted government, further evidence that the targeting is justified.

Force short of war does not permit forcible democratization. The German and Japanese examples are not relevant here. Nor is Iraq, as it is at this moment, with forcible democratization proceeding not very effectively.

I've defended an alternative way of proceeding, which was wrongly rejected in 2003 but will certainly come up again. Containment opens a different path to democracy, where the actual work of democratization must be done by local political agents taking advantage of the international condemnation, ostracism, and constraint of the brutal regime.

But this suggests one further step in the regime change argument. War can lead directly to political reconstruction. The use of force short of war can do this indirectly. But there is another form of direct action which involves what we might call "politics short of force:" non-coercive politics, the work of nongovernmental organizations, like [Human Rights Watch](#) and [Amnesty International](#), which also aim—I think this is important—at regime change.

The most important work of groups like these is to foster the kind of civil society that democracy requires, the associational world of interest groups, labor unions, professional societies, social movements, and political parties. By opposing repression and censorship, they open space for organizations independent of the state, and their people on the ground train local men and women in the organizational skills that enable political action. These organizations and these men and women are at least potential contributors to a democratic political process.

But in the case of really brutal and dangerous governments, their actual contribution may wait upon a more coercive political intervention. Politics short of force may be depend on force short of war. In fact, we should support and sponsor this interaction because these two together can help us avoid war itself.

Allied policy at the end of World War II reminds us that regime change can be justified in the aftermath of a just war. I've argued that a more indirect approach to regime change can also be justified before and instead of a just war. Indeed, the success of this approach would render war unnecessary, and therefore unjust. And if we commit ourselves to that direction, if we commit ourselves to the forceful containment of brutal regimes, we may find that we can reach justice without the terrible destructiveness of war.

Thank you.

**JOANNE MYERS:** Thank you very much, Professor Walzer. I'd like to open the floor to questions.

### Questions and Answers

**QUESTION:** I'm a former British diplomat. I was responsible for Iraq at the British Mission to the UN from 1998 to 2002, where I dealt with the issues of sanctions, weapons of mass destruction, no-fly zones, and all the rest of it. This was my bread-and-butter work. I resigned from the British government in protest at the war, and in particular at the British government's and the U.S. government's deception that preceded the war. They lied about the weapons of mass destruction. That's the truth.

But I'm quite troubled by your analysis for a number of reasons. I think, first of all, I would say that I welcome the fact that you are talking about force short of war, because I think this is a huge area in international relations that hasn't been given enough attention. But there are two quite serious flaws in your analysis when it comes to looking at the Iraq case, if I may say so.

The first one is your analysis of sanctions. You seem to suggest that it was Saddam who caused all the humanitarian suffering under sanctions, and it was therefore his fault and not the fault of sanctions themselves. I vigorously defended sanctions in the UN Security Council. I wrote many of the resolutions on sanctions. I oversaw the Oil for Food program. The British government designed the Oil for Food program, not the UN as you suggested.

It is my profound belief, after reviewing the evidence over many years, that sanctions themselves cause

serious humanitarian suffering. Regardless of the actions of Saddam Hussein— he may not have cooperated as he should have done with the Oil for Food program— the sanctions themselves did a great deal to destroy Iraq's economy, civil society, the basis for welfare. It wasn't just a question of stopping food or medicine. The sanctions never stopped food or medicine—that's a myth that they did—but they nevertheless caused immense humanitarian suffering.

I am left, listening to your analysis, questioning whether an Iraqi killed by U.S. bombs in the invasion of 2003 would feel any less happy or that his moral situation was any the clearer than one of the several hundred thousand who perhaps died under the effects of sanctions in the period preceding the war.

Secondly, in your analysis of containment, you seem to suggest that we should accept the U.S. and British governments' public position before the war: that containment had failed, that the other countries—the Europeans, as you generalize—had failed to participate in containment. This was not actually the case. We in the British government and the U.S. government believed profoundly that containment had succeeded. This was our private view, right up until the time that I finished working at the Mission. Until mid-2002, when the story changed, we would have bilateral discussions at the State Department between the U.S. and British teams who covered Iraq, which would begin with a general assessment of the effectiveness of the containment strategy, where our conclusion was always that containment was indeed effective. Iraq was not rearming in any serious way, and did not pose any serious threat to its neighbors, let alone to us or our allies.

Therefore, I think in talking about your analysis of the Iraq case, one has to be very careful in talking about the empirical evidence in front of us. There is a tremendous tendency to generalize about what we think happened—that sanctions failed, that it was all the fault of those countries who didn't participate in the containment and sanctions properly, that therefore there was a case for war, even if there were alternatives that should have been pursued beforehand. I think many of these premises bear a good deal more detailed discussion and examination than perhaps they are sometimes given.

Nonetheless, I would conclude a perhaps rather wordy intervention, for which I apologize, by saying that I think your ethical analysis of these issues is immensely timely and important. Thank you.

**MICHAEL WALZER:** I don't think you've listened very carefully, because I said explicitly that the sanction system had succeeded. That was the main point of my argument. My whole talk was a defense of the use of force short of war, and the example of successful use of force short of war was the containment system.

**QUESTION:** I really enjoyed your presentation and your moral stance. I have two questions.

The first is about the efforts at the United Nations currently to develop criteria for use of force, et cetera. The [UN High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change](#) has identified some criteria and how to use force. I would like to hear if you have any views on that.

My second question is more as a devil's advocate. I personally don't believe that, but I would think that there would be people in this country particularly who would say, "What about 9/11? Was that not a declaration of war on the United States, and would it not have been seen as justification for war?"

**MICHAEL WALZER:** Yes, I think that 9/11 was a kind of declaration of war by a nonstate organization, and I do think that the war in Afghanistan was a justified response. I don't think that the war in Iraq was a response in any sense. I suspect, as we all do I think, that the decision to go to war in Iraq, or the desire to go to war in Iraq, preexisted 9/11.

I think it is very important to try to work out criteria for the use of force short of war, and it would be a very good sign for the future of the international legal order if the UN could not only come up with some criteria but then could enact them—that is, could successfully use force short of war in places like Rwanda in 1994 or [Darfur](#) today. The UN has a long record of failure in these kinds of cases and it needs— we need—to be able to tell a success story if we are to try to work our way toward a better international order.

**QUESTION:** In the 1930s, the Nazi regime did provide enough reasons for the Western Allies to actually take military action; for example, the occupation of the Rhineland. But setting those aside for theoretical purposes, assuming that Hitler had never done anything like the occupation of the Rhineland or the annexation of Austria, would it have been appropriate or within the Just War theory for the Western Allies to engage in war with Adolph Hitler and his Nazi regime, even though there was not necessarily an immediate threat of aggression or at that point in the 1930s any genocide?

**MICHAEL WALZER:** I think the answer has to be no. There might have been a justification for the use of force short of war. I think, in fact, that the use of force short of war in the 1930s would probably have either brought down the Nazi regime or forced some kind of internal transformation of it. In fact, it's quite possible that serious rearmament on the part of France and Britain in the mid-to-late-1930s would have avoided the war. But if the Nazis had done nothing, then an actual military attack would not have been justified.

**QUESTION:** I'm from Human Rights Watch. Thanks for the plug. I wondered if we could talk a little bit about Yugoslavia, which you didn't mention in your talk, and maybe examine a little bit the way multilateral containment strategies can themselves become obstacles to doing the right thing, and measures taken short of war become bureaucratic entities, blue-helmeted peacekeepers on the ground become a reason not to intervene.

When you talked about whether or not regimes are in and of themselves so horrible that atrocities cannot be stopped without changing them, an image of [Dick Holbrooke](#) and [Slobodan Milosevic](#) flashed in my mind. With all due respect to Dick Holbrooke, there was a collective decision to continue to deal with the regime and to contain it, which in retrospect looks mistaken. What should have happened in that case in your view?

**MICHAEL WALZER:** I thought at the time that there should be—and I thought there would be—a European military intervention in Yugoslavia. I was absolutely certain, and I told all my friends it was going to happen and that it would be very, very good for the United States to be left out of this process, for there to be a successful military intervention coming from a partner.

I think the world would look very different today had the Europeans acted decisively then, because the United States needs a partner who can say "Yes" and "No" to the United States, and we don't have that kind of partner. Europe could have made itself into that kind of partner had it acted independently.

I was sure they would. I was sure that Gaullism would triumph in France and there would be French leadership for it. But I was wrong.

I think there should have been a military intervention early on. What we saw in the way of terroristic use of force—the use of rape as an instrument of terror, the camps, and the killings—I think justified full-scale military intervention early on, and had it happened early on it would have been—could have been—on a relatively small scale, I think.

That's also true in Rwanda, by the way. The UN commander in Rwanda had 5,000 troops and told the Secretary General very early on, "I can stop this." But soon it became impossible for 5,000 troops to stop it. So yes, I think the world would look better had there been a decisive intervention then.

**QUESTION:** I'm from International Peace Academy. In the current situation in Darfur, what would justify an intervention there? And would a regime change, given that we have evidence of the support of the current Sudanese government in what has happened in Darfur, be justified?

**MICHAEL WALZER:** I have strong views on that, but I also have prudential anxieties about my strong views. Yes, I think, simply, the moral perception should be that this is a criminal government in the Sudan and that what is going on in Darfur cannot be—should not be—tolerated by the international community.

On the other hand, another Western intervention in a Muslim country is unimaginable at this point. It is another example of what the United States in Iraq has done to the possibility of a better global order.

There has to be some effort to mobilize African states—[the Arab League](#) seems determined to support the Sudan—but to mobilize African states and to provide them with the logistical and financial support necessary for there to be an intervention that isn't a Western intervention. Maybe Darfur should simply be flooded with unarmed blue helmets. Maybe, because of what is going on in the rest of the Arab and Muslim world, this is a time to try a massive nonmilitary intervention. Of course, if you sent in unarmed blue helmets as witnesses, as observers, in large numbers, you would have to be prepared to defend them. But, at least initially, they would be simply unarmed. I don't know. Maybe that's not possible in that part of the world.

**PREVIOUS QUESTIONER:** Could I just get back to my question for one second, because I think that is precisely the kind of weak multilateral action that got us in so much trouble in Yugoslavia. What I was trying to suggest is that these demi-measures become cumbersome, bureaucratized; there are lots of conferences, everyone talks, blah, blah, blah.

We've all agreed that Darfur is hideous. It's a genocide, according to the U.S. government. We've used every

word we can to describe it, but there is no action. The measures short of war that you've described sound great. In practice, we have seen that they become an excuse not actually to act. The idea of thousands of blue helmets without weapons in Darfur fills me with dismay. We need thousands of blue helmets in Darfur with weapons.

**MICHAEL WALZER:** I agree. I just don't know who can do it at this point.

**QUESTION:** In looking at the overall ethical framework you are trying to put together, I am troubled by what, I guess for lack of a better work, is a huge libertarian leaning—that's a misuse of the word—but the essence is that no action in my mind is an action.

A lot of the reasons why people marched with signs saying "Bush is the greatest terrorist in the world"—and I'm no supporter of Bush—is because the world seems to not judge regimes which are failed or acting badly on a regular basis as acting badly. And so the notion of what is just always falls on the actor, as whether is the action just or unjust, without noting that almost every African state and large segments of Latin America are failed states which have failed their people for hundreds of years. Yet we don't actively judge.

We see every single day in the paper the Nigerian disaster. Well, Libya has been in revolution for hundreds of years and people being repressed in China—there are so many people in the world to whom on an every single daily basis bad things are happening. Yet the most important question is, "Is America acting badly?" That seems to be the most important point. The status quo is bad in many cases, but that seems to be overlooked today, day in and day out.

**MICHAEL WALZER:** My assumption was that the status quo is bad in many, many places, and I was trying to describe a strategy for dealing with that.

As Iraq suggests, going to war is not likely to be the best strategy, so we need other ways of dealing with these regimes. I am afraid that we can only deal with them when they get to be even worse than their normal badness—that is to say when there are real threats of mass murder or ethnic cleansing or enslavement or aggression.

But the normal brutality of governments in much of the world waits upon the revolutionary work of the people who live in those countries, as in Western Europe, where there was no West to intervene in pre-Revolutionary France; the French had to do it. And there was no West to intervene in Charles I's England; the English had to do it.

We have to acknowledge that there are moments that, in the old phrase from the 19th century law books, "shock the conscience of humankind," and then we have to act. But in other cases I think there's not much that anyone can do.

Maybe NGOs can do a lot. I'm told that if you study the political overturns in Serbia, Georgia, and the Ukraine, you see a number of nongovernmental organizations playing a significant role. And you see some of the same people—you see Serbian militants turning up and advising the Georgian or the Ukrainian dissidents.

That's the way revolutions have to work. The U.S. Army or the army of the European Union can't do it.

**QUESTION:** Let's project forward three years, when Iran is nuclear armed and committed to the destruction of Israel. What role and what justification would Israel have to respond preemptively with its own nuclear warfare, morally, ethically, and for survival?

**MICHAEL WALZER:** Well, given what the leaders of the Iranian government are saying, I think an Israeli military effort to use forces short of war to destroy the nuclear facilities would be justified. But I also suspect that it's impossible, and that the Iranians have learned from Iraq in 1981. The facilities are dispersed and fortified and underground. It would take not only an air attack this time, but commandos on the ground. It would be a big operation. I don't think Israel can do it. I'm not sure the United States can do it, given Iraq.

That means that what we are looking at down the road is, as you said—I hope it's more than three years—the Iranian government will have nuclear weapons and Israel will have submarines in the Persian Gulf with nuclear weapons on hair-trigger alert. That's a crazy situation. All the arguments that we made back in the 1970s about the dangers of nuclear deterrence are going to be present and we will have to make them again.

But it is also possible that there will be internal pressures on the Iranian regime, which doesn't seem terribly

popular among the Iranians, and there will be changes that will make that part of the world less dangerous. But it looks to me very, very threatening. I don't see at this point a military option—certainly not for Israel, and probably not for Israel and the United States together.

**QUESTION:** I'm from the Canadian UN Association. Michael, where does this UN principle of responsibility to protect come into your thinking? As you know, the Commission Panel, organized by the Canadians, made a very thorough, very careful study of the criteria under which various phased actions short of war should be initiated. This principle has been accepted in the UN Summit just now. We could say, "Well, it's a lot of talk." But isn't it, at least in theory, a very important event?

**MICHAEL WALZER:** Yes, I think the international recognition of a duty to protect is an important move, although I have some doubt that this duty is taken very seriously by very many of the Member States in the United Nations.

We've always assumed, since [Thomas Hobbes](#) told us that the whole point of a state is to defend the lives of the citizens, that the duty to protect is a state duty and every state is obligated to the defense of the physical survival and the well-being of its own citizens. But now we see, increasingly, that many states fail to fulfill that duty. In fact, many states become active agents of the destruction of the well-being and the physical survival of their own citizens. That requires a response from outside the state. That is the new duty to protect, which isn't a state duty but an international duty.

I am a committed internationalist. I believe that there are duties of that kind. But we don't at this moment have agents to carry out those duties. For that reason, I have been a defender of unilateralism in humanitarian intervention—that is, I believe that when the Vietnamese army crossed into Cambodia and shut down the killing fields and overthrew the Khmer Rouge government it was acting justly, even if it had its own geopolitical reasons for doing that.

Right now, the state—a state or a coalition of states—is the only agency that we have that can act effectively in these situations. We should be working toward the creation of a UN capable of acting effectively in those situations. But it is a big mistake, it seems to me, to pretend that that kind of UN exists and to deny the right of the actual agents to act, because they are the only agents we have.

**JOANNE MYERS:** In difficult times, it is very important to have moral compass to guide us and today I would like to thank you for being ours.

Copyright © 2011 Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs