

# Don't just do something, stand there and reflect

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James Turner Johnson

MORALITY AND CONTEMPORARY WARFARE

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Kurt Taylor Gaubatz

ELECTIONS AND WAR

The electoral incentive in the democratic politics of war and peace

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ment, and Washington waited expectantly for war. But the rebellion did not spread, and the rebels fled to the hills when Jakarta launched air-strikes. Washington, however, refused to give up. At this point, as Conboy and Morrison put it, "the rebels were about to get an air force. The idea had been first suggested by no less than Eisenhower himself."

Civil Air Transport (CAT), the agency's airline which had been supplying the French at Dien Bien Phu and other ventures, was brought in to do the job. From here, the fizzling rebellion goes from bad to worse. Early on May 18, 1958, Allen L. Pope, flying a CIA B-26 bomber which had just released three bombs, was shot down by an Indonesian pilot. And, against every rule in the spy book, Pope was carrying "his CAT identity card, his military separation file, and a copy of his secret orders for temporary duty on the Indonesian operation". Back in Washington that Sunday afternoon, Allen Dulles was told a pilot was missing. He called his brother and, according to the authors, immediately said: "We're pulling the plug".

This bizarre end to the CIA's dirty little war left the Dulleses unscathed. They announced a policy reversal; henceforward they would work with the anti-Communist elements in the Indonesian Army and no longer with separatists. (Seven years later, their wish for an anti-Communist Indonesia came true when General Suharto rode to power on the back of an aborted coup.) The CIA top brass who ran the PRRI operation were all promoted. And even Allen Pope, after two years in jail under a death sentence, was set free by Sukarno who told him: "Hide yourself. Get lost, and we'll forget the whole thing."

But West Sumatra suffered. "West Sumatra itself was like an occupied territory", Kahin writes in *Rebellion to Integration*, picking up the story of the taming of dissent. Just as the Dutch ruined the idea of federalism, so the CIA's involvement in the failed PRRI insurrection helped transform any dissent against the centre into treason. This trend only intensified after 1965 when Suharto took power and oversaw a killing spree of Communists and accused Communists that left at least 500,000 people dead. The New Order was born of this violence, and for the next thirty-two years Suharto and the military, the self-proclaimed saviours of the nation, muzzled, jailed or killed all dissent in the name of protecting the unitary State and territorial integrity.

Suharto's gangster capitalist regime collapsed in the great Asian economic crisis, but the past intrudes on the present, as Gus Dur and the rest of the country attempt recovery. Those GAM rebels in Aceh's jungle have given up on the idea of Indonesia, mostly because the Army has treated Aceh as an occupied place and the region's riches have been plundered by Jakarta. For them, Indonesia only means Javanese dominance, guaranteed by soldiers.

This is what needs to be reimagined. It is possible, but it is hard to see a solution unless Gus Dur's new government can hold the military accountable and let go of the *idée fixe* of the unitary State. Hatta's dissident strand of decentralized, democratic nationalism needs to win this time around.

This is not a battle for CNN and the UN, but it would help if outsiders didn't confuse supporting a democratic government with supporting a military engaged in a dirty little war. Indonesia's army is not the guarantor of national unity, as many Indonesians know; only the creation of democratic institutions can do that. It is hard to feel at home unless one has a voice. None of this may convince those young GAM rebels that there is any room for them in Indonesia, but adding to the body count certainly won't either.

In 1983, the Catholic bishops of the United States issued a controversial pastoral letter on the morality of warfare: a decade later, they issued a second. The first dealt almost exclusively with nuclear weapons and super-power conflict. The bishops could not condone inflicting a nuclear bombardment on any enemy, but nor did they wish to abandon the benefits of deterrence, and so they concluded that it was tolerable to possess these terrible weapons but not to use them (described at the time as "nuclear celibacy"). A decade later, the intense urgency had been drawn from the nuclear debate by the end of the Cold War, and the issue of the moment was intervention in foreign quarrels. The "presumption against war" in the 1983 statement was now played down. Instead, the "right to indifference" was denied when populations were "succumbing to the attacks of an unjust aggressor". Whereas a strategy that kept the peace through preparations for mass destruction strained the traditional "just war" framework and threatened it with irrelevance, wars rationalized by reference to the pursuit of basic human values and conducted with regard for the safety of non-combatants seemed to fit snugly.

Indeed, as exemplified by the recent Kosovo war, the discourse surrounding all Western military activities these days has a high moral content. Questions of justice and proportionality in warfare have come to the fore. It is *realpolitik* and the pursuit of the national interest, whatever the cost to others, that now appears outdated. If governments wish to use force, they must demonstrate that a greater good will result than if they stayed passive, taking into account the inevitable human and material costs of war.

In his latest book, James Turner Johnson, one of the great American exponents of the just-war approach, demonstrates its value by applying it with sustained rigour to the conflicts of the past decade, starting with the 1991 Gulf war. He is basically in sympathy with the interventionist impulse, in that he accepts that Western military operations were conducted during the 1990s largely with just ends in mind. In the Gulf in 1991, the Iraqi challenge took the form of classic aggression, while the presence of oil created a real interest for the West in denying Saddam Hussein victory.

Despite the efforts of critics to demonstrate some grand geopolitical conspiracy behind later interventions in the Balkans, Africa and East Asia, however, it is hard to discern any vital national interests at stake for Western countries other than the development of an international order that conforms approximately to liberal values. This, of course, is enough to make them suspect to those who do not share these values.

An important development has been the assertion of individual or minority rights as against those of the State, so undermining the principle of non-interference in internal affairs, long considered one of the mainstays of international order. To quote the bishops again, this principle must not "constitute a screen behind which torture and murder may be carried out". The reluctance to concede this point has been the main reason why Russia and China have shown increasing hostility to Western interventions, especially in the Balkans, and so denied them the legitimacy of UN resolutions. One of the many merits of Johnson's book is that it cuts through the muddle surrounding this issue, which was more than evident during the Kos-

ovo war. As he rightly notes, the political determination of Security Council support does not make this a reliable means of assessing the morality or even legality of a war.

His focus on the moral purposes and the quality of the eventual peace also allows him to be clear about the importance of prosecuting war criminals, even if this complicates the diplomatic task of resolving conflicts. Those attitudes and motivations that lead to atrocities in war must be addressed, if they are not to continue to "poison efforts" to establish peace.

Because this book was completed before the Kosovo war, Johnson does not discuss the main moral issue raised by NATO's strategy, which

and the quality of civilian life. The outcome of the Kosovo war, while far preferable to a Serb victory, retains an unsatisfactory feel to it, in part because of the methods adopted by NATO.

Rationales for war framed in moral terms must be robust against equally moral critiques, but a more compelling restraint might be common prudence. The one-sided nature of contemporary interventions provides a new twist to the standard debate about how to weigh an honourable intention against the risk of harm or indeed of utter calamity. Kurt Gaubatz illustrates his analysis of democratic decision-making by reference to the famous argument between Alcibiades and Nicias, as described by Thucydides, over whether Athens should go to war against Syracuse. Nicias' argument, later vindicated, was that this was a high-risk venture. There is one similarity with contemporary debates, in that the Athenians were in a position to choose war rather than simply respond to another's aggression. In another respect, it was different from the most recent wars waged by Western states, as the balance of power was at stake. When the material stakes are not that high either way, persuading an electorate to choose war is likely to depend on the quality of rationales geared to more idealistic ends. In the case of Kosovo, there is no evidence that the American people found the bombing of Serbia particularly uncomfortable, but it is also clear that President Clinton doubted their tolerance of even a few casualties for this particular cause. As with charitable giving, there are limits to the burdens gladly accepted in the conduct of altruistic wars.

Gaubatz is interested in the relationship between electoral cycles and decisions on war. He goes through the motions, as is now expected of American political scientists, of seeing whether there is any correlation between proximity to democratic elections and decisions to go to war. He finds, not surprisingly, that there is a degree of caution in the period leading up to elections. A more significant finding, which comes out of a number of case studies, is his recognition of the importance of elite attitudes in shaping wider public opinion and also in maintaining the legitimacy of anti-war views against the clamour of public opinion when led by a belligerent press. His basic conclusion, somewhat inevitable when ranging over the past two centuries for his case studies, is that there is no simple relationship between democratic public opinion and war. It can demand action or encourage appeasement, and much depends on the strategic interaction with the potential enemy.

Although his analysis is in no sense as profound as that of Johnson, which exudes wisdom, it none the less carries an important message in confirming through a different route what has become the main finding of studies of the influence of the media and the wider public opinion. To the extent that political leaders have a clear sense of their own policy, they are less likely to be buffeted by clamours to "do something" in the face of images of humanitarian tragedy, or for that matter warnings emanating from focus groups to avoid risk at all costs. To the extent that they modify their positions in an attempt to accommodate contradictory views, the result is likely to be a confused policy which is unsatisfactory in all respects.

This underlines the importance of Johnson's call for "sustained ethical reflection and debate on the nature and role of military force as an instrument of national policy and international order". It is not good enough, he insists, for the moral debate to begin and end with outrage at illustrations of the inherent destructiveness of war. This destructiveness must be placed in "a frame that also acknowledges the values that war may protect and the worse evils it may avert".



Ethnic Albanian women at a refugee camp in Kukes, May 1999

was its reliance on air power to the exclusion of land power. A ground attack carried the risk of severe casualties, but would also have addressed directly the sources of the humanitarian disaster caused by Serbian strategy. Whatever might have been said about the military nature of the targets struck, in practice the air raids had their most influential effects through the impact on Serbia's economic infrastructure