Of Wars, Maps, and Ideals

Barney Hadden

I AM A CHILD OF THE SIXTIES. I mean this in a more literal sense than is generally understood: I was a child during the 1960s. One result is that I have a distinctive view of the anti-war movement and the rest of the counterculture that dominated media presentations about youth during the latter part of that decade. I looked at the protesting students, the hippies, yippies, and longhairs with the sort of hero worship that is seen in young boys with teenaged brothers. I had no older brothers. The student protestors I saw on television, the baby-boomers, were my substitute. For me, opposition to war seemed mature and intelligent.

Where boomers were raised to see war as heroic—as it was in the life stories of their parents and John Wayne films—my generation inherited the legacy of a dirty, unpopular war. Where they had George Patton and Audie Murphy, we had William Westmoreland and, worse, William Calley. The events of Vietnam lacked the epic scale, the heroic action, and the moral rectitude of "the big one," and it is no wonder that I am somewhat embarrassed to admit publicly—especially to my contemporaries—that I support the current conflict in Iraq.[1]

Still, I come to the position honestly. I am under no compunction, religious or otherwise, to be a pacifist. In fact, because I was raised a Lat-

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1. My feelings about the war in late October 2003—as I read of a series of suicide attacks on American occupation forces, agents of reconstruction, and ministers of relief—are ambivalent in the extreme. One friend wrote to me that the variances from the truth in the rhetoric of the administration have convinced him that its representatives are either incompetent and undeserving of continuing in office past the election, or duplicitous and deserving of removal from office. I

ter-day Saint and still largely think of myself as one, I cannot see pacifism as always and unfailingly moral. My own ethic would suggest that pacifism is the first path, useful in dealing with others when they have their own commitment to a morality that views life as valuable and people as important. Not everyone who offends us does so purposefully, and many would be willing to return good for good if we are willing, initially, to turn the other cheek to an injustice.

Others are not willing to deal justly. At the level of the community, those who purposely harm others are punished. Customarily, they are excluded from social interaction and made to give up those benefits they received from acts of injustice. Critics of human justice systems decry the fact that the law can only punish but never restore to victims what was lost; religious people often look forward to a godly justice when righteousness is rewarded. Still, most view that final restoration as a place where, as the Book of Mormon puts it, everything restored will be to a "proper order" (Alma 41:4). In other words, not only will goodness be met with good, but evil will have evil returned to it. The end involves both the rewarding of the just and the punishment of the unjust; God is capable of punishing those who do wrong without himself being evil. Thus, the possibility exists that punishment of the unjust is just, even godly, behavior.

The blending of Old and New Testament laws that make up the Mormon view of God and God's will are at variance with religious views that understand the "Spirit of Christ" as universally a peaceful influence. Mormons view Jesus and Jehovah as one. Though this belief does not seem to put them at variance with Trinitarian Christians, it gives LDS theologians no easy distinction between an angry God in the Old Testament and a loving one in the New. A reading of the New Testament itself reveals that Christ was not altogether incapable of violence. The same Christ who commanded Peter to put up his sword (Matt. 26:52) also instructed his disciples to sell their clothes to obtain weapons (Luke 22:36). Mormon theology is as peculiar as its people, including both the desire for

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think the argument is a good one. On the other hand, in for a dime, in for a dollar. There appears to be no easy way out of the current conflict, and the best outcomes involve long-term action to rebuild the nation in the image of the Western democracies.

permanent and millennial peace and the periodic raising of an army for Israel, whether that host is led by Joshua, Moroni, or Joseph Smith.

I would say, finally, that LDS theology embraces a God with far more humanity than the God that other flavors of Christianity worship. Instead of a God of spirit, different in makeup from his creations, Mormons worship a God of body and spirit. This may simply be another way of saying that the LDS God is both divine and human, showing that we do not consider the two mutually exclusive. We put an emphasis on the notion that Christ was tempted in all points as we are (Heb. 14:15). At least historically, Mormons saw their God as a sexual being, something which other Christian denominations eschew, sometimes so completely as to regard celibacy as a characteristic of the holiest of men and women. I think at this level, we can see why LDS believers are comfortable with an Old Testament God who can be passionate in every way: loving, but also vengeful and angry.

The God of Christianity was much more influenced by the Platonic ideals of rationality and reflection than Mormonism's, and that makes Elohim a bit more like the raging, middle-class father of the living room than the untouchable regent of the heavenly court.

It should be clear that my stance on the war is mine, not the official position of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints nor any subset of LDS believers. I know many members who adamantly opposed the current conflict, just as I know Mormons who are absolute pacifists. And just as, for example, individual Quakers have determined in good conscience that they needed to engage in wars past, at least one Mormon I know was a conscientious objector during the Vietnam era.

THE POSSIBILITY OF A SANCTIFYING WAR

Although I see war as always and inevitably horrible, I believe that some evils are greater. The old creed of New Hampshirites, "Live free or die; death is not the worst of evils," resonates for me. It may just be that I was acculturated through public school history courses to accept Patrick Henry's call for "liberty . . . or death," and to believe that conflicts like the American Civil War resulted in a more just and free world. That is, war, as terrible a force as it always is, sometimes is worth the toll it takes if it makes life better. Abraham Lincoln said, at his second inaugural,

> Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the

> wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn by the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."[2]

This declaration, abutted against that line from the Mormon hymn, "Sacrifice brings forth the blessings of Heaven"[3] causes me to view some (by no means all) war as sacrificial and, as that word's origins would indicate, holy.

I recognize that the term "holy war" has, in recent years, become one of the most frightening in the modern lexicon, but I want to invest that term with a newness that we can't easily find today. War is holy when it is a means of making the world more just, very much the way the Holy Ghost is regarded by Mormons as both a justifier and a sanctifier of the human being. The term "holy war" is too often a call for violence without thought, but I mean to suggest that what is needed is a pondering of the possibilities inherent in violent action. If action is likely to relieve more suffering than it causes, to enrich many more lives than it takes, it is a course that must be considered in our united attempt to make the world more like the one God intends.

But war is done so badly most of the time. The purveyors of war seek to acquire lands and treasures, to inflict harm on others, to get even for past injustice. Even when war is undertaken for the noblest causes and with the best of intentions, it results in unforeseen horrors: the deaths of noncombatants, the destruction of much that is valuable and beautiful, the ride of accompanying apocalyptic cavaliers.

The landmark event for those in our time who seek an *apologia* for armed conflict is World War II and the resistance to European fascism and Japanese imperialism. The argument is tiresomely familiar and subject to some revision in light of all we know about the failings of the Allies to live up to high-minded ideals. I grant that America and Britain—to say nothing of the Stalinist regime, which was as evil as the Nazis and perhaps worse for its callous disregard for the lives of its own citizens—displayed

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2. I memorized this statement at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington DC, in the summer of 2003.

3. William W. Phelps, "Praise to the Man," *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), no. 27.

their own racial injustices, built their own concentration camps, held rallies for nationalistic rah-rah, and repressed dissent.

Nevertheless, no hectoring about the deficiencies of the Allies will dissuade me that the Nazis were infinitely worse. Neither could I believe that anything but armed resistance—total war—would have halted the advance of repression in Europe or Asia. The regimes of which we speak had an unprecedented capacity for taking innocent life; they combined what Hugh Nibley called the "Mahan principle"—that man may take life and get gain—with industrial techniques of mass production.[4] Mass destruction. And while the war resulted in the deaths of millions, both uniformed personnel and civilians, I cannot see those deaths as comparable to the slaughter in the death camps. Individual actions of soldiers during the war can (indeed, must) be evaluated as unique moral or immoral actions, answerable to conscience and to God. But the combatant who fired in war in order to end the Nazi regime had a righteous cause of action which the death camp guard could not claim. And even though many youthful soldiers died in the horrors of the war, their deaths were not the same as those who were herded into showers and gassed. At least the soldier has the ability to construct a meaning for his sacrifice.

THE STATE OF THE DEBATE

Thus, I begin with the axiom that some war is just and, therefore, justifiable. On the other hand, I recognize that war is unpredictable, so that, whatever justification is offered, it may not be that war achieves its desired end or does so without its awfulness overwhelming the potential good it could do. Much more frightening to me is the possibility that a disingenuous government will fight for what it desires while hiding that end under the camouflage of noble purpose. After all, as a child of the sixties, I naturally have Watergate as a formative impression of the workings of government. I distrust the information I get because the source has so often been dishonest in the past. And the tendency of the American government to lie seems proportional only to its own assessment of its ability to get away with dishonesty. Governments enjoying widespread support and fighting against enemies widely reviled lie with reassuring consistency.

Given these assumptions, how did I become persuaded by *this* gov-

4. Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, vol. 9 in *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 225.

ernment that *this* war is just? To a small extent, I was convinced by the arguments of the Bush administration. Some of those urgings were more persuasive than others. But the government's case was strong compared to the one offered by those who rebutted it. I was convinced to a much larger degree by the poverty of arguments offered by those opposed to the war.

Proverbial wisdom holds that generals continually fight the last war rather than the current one. This viewpoint holds that the lessons of the last war are always learned, but few anticipate or immediately recognize the shifts that the introduction of new weapons and tactics has caused. My favorite example comes from my training in medieval history: at Agincourt, Henry V led an outnumbered force to victory over better-armed and -supplied French troops who controlled the engagement. His victory was largely aided by the French belief that archers with longbows were not capable of engaging knights on horseback. After all, such longbowmen were commoners, and knights were gentlemen. This was a belief that, nearly a hundred years earlier, had earned the French similar defeats at Crécy and Poitiers when smaller English forces, sometimes on the brink of annihilation and far from resupply, managed to rout well-equipped French armies and, at least at Poitiers, captured King John and his son James. The eventual ransom of French officials cost millions of pounds, a sum so astronomical that in today's terms it staggers the imagination. And all because of a misplaced belief in invulnerability.

What is true in war is, evidently, equally true in intellectual engagement. So often during the days leading up to the current war in Iraq, I was struck by the anti-war movement's use of slogans and strategies from the past, almost as though they longed for the days when their rhetoric accurately answered the arguments of the "establishment." I am sure that, like the French nobles, they are convinced of the rightness of what they do and believe that they are so obviously better than those they oppose that the shield of their betterness will protect them from the arrows of their opponents. For me, however, the old arguments that worked during the Vietnam era, and even during the first Gulf War, were largely nonresponsive to the justifications for war that were current in late 2002.

THE SITUATION IN IRAQ

Here is what I believed in the days before the war began: first, Saddam Hussein was bad. He may not have been the worst of the national despots on the scene in December 2002, but he was odious, nonetheless.

He terrorized his people, killed capriciously, attempted to conquer the territory of often peaceful neighbors, and enjoyed acquiring and using weapons that the world regards as improper even in war. Second, Saddam had, in the past, held and stockpiled chemicals and biological agents used in making weapons, as well as some enriched fissionable materials. He used these in fighting a war against Iran and in suppressing threats to his power within his nation. Third, Iraq was unlikely to withstand the American military, but it would attack nations and peoples that it perceived as too weak to put up much of a fight. Fourth, in the past, Saddam had shown his continuing interest in acquiring by conquest the lands of his neighboring nations. Finally, I believed that Saddam would support terrorism if he ever thought it was in his interest to do so.

One more pertinent point: I believed that a state of war between the U.S.-led coalition had existed since the first Gulf War and that it had never been ended by formal treaty. Thus, I looked at the cease-fire agreement that ended open hostilities in the early 1990s as conditional, based on the adherence of both sides to the terms of the agreement.

Here is what I did not believe: I never found persuasive the idea that Iraq was involved in the 9/11 attacks. I just didn't see the connection. Even if I had swallowed the highly publicized intelligence reports that an Iraqi official met with an Al Qaeda official, I don't think that 9/11 would have been high on the agenda. I also never believed the argument that Iraq was an immediate threat to the United States.

However, saying that I did not believe these things is not tantamount to believing that administration claims about these matters were lies. I think intelligence reports are sometimes faulty. I know people who are involved in their production and am familiar with the difficulty intelligence agencies have in making sense of the data they evaluate. I expect intelligence to be imperfect. It simply did not matter to me that U.S. citizens and territories had not been violated in the past and were unlikely to be disturbed in the future. The United States and its people were a concern of mine, but not the only one.

Even without these justifications that were important to others, I saw the potential war in Iraq as a just cause if it would remove the tyrant and liberate the people of Iraq. I thought it would also benefit the world by reducing the numbers of weapons in the hands of a person likely to use them. Historically, the liberal bias has been my own: I think repression of individual liberty is an evil and "eternal hostility against every form of tyr-

anny over the mind of man"—to use Jefferson's venerable phrase—is a part of the American birthright.

THE WEIGHT OF PERSUASION

As I was weighing the rationale for war, I heard these arguments from the left: First, there were lots of slogans like "No blood for oil." While I never specifically heard "One, two, three, four, / What in the hell are we fighting for?" I did see a number of aging hippies in San Francisco protesting, sometimes violently, in support of international pacifism. These arguments were unpersuasive to me. I can't say that the first war in the Gulf was free of avarice for oil and even for alliance with Arab states in the Gulf, but I could say that the United States was getting along fine without Iraqi oil. The United States has not been, in recent years, involved in armed conflict as a means of gaining territory or of looting nations. While I don't always agree with the intrigues by which we have toppled freely elected governments who refuse to support American goals, I could not see the Iraq war as primarily motivated by our desire to steal Iraqi resources or replace the evil Saddam with an equally evil dictator who was friendly to the United States.

A second argument advanced previous to the war was the familiar history of our previous support for Saddam and other dictators throughout the world. The argument was never made explicitly, but it seemed to be that, since we have previously supported despots, it would be hypocritical of us to now oppose one militarily. My opinion was and is that we are not condemned to repeat the stupidities of the past. The fact that we gave aid to Hussein's regime does not mean that we are forbidden to do the right thing now.

In the days leading up to war, several made the persuasive point that Saddam was hardly the worst despot in the world. Why were we troubling ourselves with Iraq while ignoring North Korea, China, or Zimbabwe? I wrestled with this argument the longest, and it still seems to me the strongest, but eventually I rejected it. Iraq was different from the other nations most often cited. War with China might be morally justified: The regime there is horribly repressive, and it has annexed peaceful neighbors. But the United States could not conquer that nation, so war against the People's Republic would not improve the world. North Korea is despotic and undeniably possesses weapons far worse than those believed to have existed in Iraq, but the border of North Korea is closer to

Seoul—the third most populous city in the world—than I am to the job to which I commute several times a week. It is probable that the North could launch a nuclear warhead into that metropolitan area with a catapult. War there would not improve the world. As for Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe may be destructive to his own nation and unconcerned about his people's welfare, but he is not an international criminal nor does he seem set to violate the integrity of other nations' borders. Yet.

But Saddam Hussein offered a combination of internal and external menace together with an inability to mount real resistance to American attack. The military planners believed (and they were largely accurate about this prediction) that they could move against Iraq without the kinds of civilian deaths and injuries that result from the inaccuracies of older ordnance. Saddam probably didn't have many means of launching nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons against targets in nearby allied nations; and most population centers (read: Jerusalem and Tel Aviv) were far enough away that they were not at significant risk. It seemed that few American or British soldiers would die. Though this sounds cavalier, and I regard both the civilian and military deaths of the war as horrible tragedies to families, friends, and communities, those tragedies are offset, in my mind, by the betterment of political considerations in Iraq. This is why, in the end, I found the arguments for war more compelling than the arguments against it.

LOOKING BACK

In the end, I thought the war was just and might result in a better future for the citizens of Iraq, a safer future for their neighbors, and a better regard for America in the world. Some of these hopes have been borne out as the war was prosecuted. Some have not. Some of my assumptions about the justice of the war seem to have been correct; others, false. Nevertheless, I am not embarrassed to have embraced this war. It was not my natural inclination, but I continue to believe that it was the right thing to do based on the evidence and argument made in the days prior to military involvement.

One final argument that is always made before war is undertaken is that, no matter what we think is going to happen, war has a habit of defying expectations. Things go wrong. Perhaps this is the strongest reason to hold on to peace for as long as possible, to embrace it tightly. This is the reason why war is held justly as a scourge of nations and why I, as a believer

in a loving God, can never feel celebratory regarding war. If we take up the sword, as I feel we must from time to time, it seems that we have a responsibility to fight in a manner that becomes us as citizens of a free society and believers in certain ideals. If we believe that humanity is the express image of God, we can hardly undertake to destroy other people except in order to save more people. We must rely on the most fundamentally ambiguous charge in scripture: "It is better that one man should die, than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief" (1 Ne. 4:13). And we should remember that while this was the rationale for killing the drunken, avaricious, and cruel Laban, it was also the justification given for killing the Lamb of God (John 11:50). We never fully know what impact our actions will have or whether our understanding is congruent with the shapes of reality. We make the best decisions we can and pray that our actions will be understood in light of the charity we feel in our hearts. I believe that, in the end, it is what exists there that will be the true measure of the righteousness of our actions.

When I was six or seven years old, my mother brought home from one of her garage-sale expeditions a large, red-covered atlas. The book was old—older even than my parents—and full of the past. It smelled like damp basements and threatened to disintegrate every time I turned a page. Because it had been published prior to the Great Depression and the Second World War, the world it delineated was very different from the one I saw on the globe at school. Nations had seemingly vanished, becoming part of new configurations.

Europe in the atlas contained many countries that no longer existed in the world of my childhood. In Africa and Asia, many country names indicated that they somehow belonged to the European powers, another thing that was not true in the late 1960s. Nations were color coded to show those allegiances. The great British Empire was most prominent—colored a gorgeous pink in all its far-flung outposts: Canada, Tanganyika, India, South Africa, Australia.

The maps were sumptuous and fascinating, and I thought of them the other day when I passed a map in the social sciences building on campus, a map of the world printed in 1997. The atlas had been my first visual clue that the impact of war and politics changes the political realities of the world.

Of course, the world will always be configured for me, to some extent, as it was when I was a child or as it was when I sat in junior high geog-

raphy class. In 1976 it was different than it is now, than it is on the map I looked at that day last week. In those days of my youth, tanks faced each other on the border of a divided Germany. Cambodia was in the grip of the Khmer Rouge. I remember the initials of that time: FRG, DDR, NATO, CCCP. It was a world of polarities, of good guys and bad guys, because I was young and idealistic. It also seemed to me a very dangerous place in which to grow up.

I learned the nations of the world then by coloring in blank maps with colored pencils. They are all different now. Rhodesia is Zimbabwe. Kampuchea is Cambodia. Yugoslavia is a tenth its former size, surrounded by nations I could have seen in that fusty atlas I read as a boy: Serbia, Croatia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Macedonia. Germany is one nation. Europe is confederating into something that may one day look very much like the United States of America. A political prisoner who worked from a jail cell from the time I was one year old until I finished graduate school was elected president of the nation that imprisoned him, then retired voluntarily and peacefully in an act at least as heroic as the rest of his life had been.

The world of 2003 is incomprehensibly changed from the one I knew, mostly for the better.

The bad guys of my youth are gone. That's not to say there is no longer evil in the world. Plenty of that remains. But the evils we most feared in my childhood—the organized evil of totalitarian superpowers bent on world domination—have retired from the scene. What's left are people who do evil on a smaller scale but who haven't the energy to expand their spheres of control, just as the comic figure Kim Il-Jung struts ridiculously before cameras, hoping to aggrandize himself while his starving people have neither televisions nor electricity by which to view his antics.

Evil is disorganized, but sometimes for that it is all the more brutal. Suicide terrorists kill people who, unsuspecting, attend a Passover ceremony in a local hotel or peel carrots in the kitchen of an elegant restaurant overlooking a great city or take their baby into the day-care center in the building where they work. Anonymous killers shoot others as they load the SUV with purchases from Home Depot. Postal workers learn that, in addition to braving rain and snow and gloom of night, they must also brave spores that cause them to sicken and take to their beds. And then they die, and that is considered by someone, somewhere, a victory for righteousness.

For me, the worst part of growing up was coming to know that the good guys aren't always good. In the past, the nation I idealized (and wish I still could) was expansionistic and imperialistic. It subjugated people so that bananas or coffee or gasoline could be sold for a few pennies less per unit.

On the map in the social science building, the United States is outlined in green. Green is the color of youthful inexperience—the "salad days," as Shakespeare called his own adolescence. LDS tradition, encapsulated in temple ritual, makes green the color of change and repentance. Green is what humans have to cover their sin, symbolic of the opportunity to make the future both different and better. I want to believe that the nation moves now to make the world better. It moves borders or fights governments in order to liberate people, rather than to control commodities. Believing certainly doesn't make it so any more than wishing. But always believing the worst doesn't prevent evil any more effectively.

I supported the war because I believed (and still hope) that it will do good, not for the people of the United States, but for the people of Iraq. My own life hardly needs improvement. I have enough freedom, enough work, enough self-expression, enough society, enough family. The only thing that would seemingly improve my life is increased personal wealth. That, in itself, shows me that I lack for nothing. But elsewhere people cannot speak and cannot worship, cannot eat or read after dark, cannot sleep unmolested by forces of fear and brutality. What this war has asked of America is not too much. It is, rather, far too little.