

Statement: DN404

A NATION RESPONDS TO TERRORISM AND WAR

By James A. Borland

Synopsis

America has rightly responded to the September 11 terrorist attack by replying with prayer, a solemn assembly, and force. According to the seven principles that constitute a just war — proper authority, real injury, proportionality, just means of fighting, good chance of victory, failed negotiations, and right motive — America is justified in using force. The enemy is the product of failed social, political, and economic conditions found in most Arab states. To make matters worse, it is perceived that the United States supports Israel, a democratic and prosperous country yet a hated enemy of the Arab world. Effective response to terrorism, therefore, will require careful use of military, political, and cultural strategies.

Few events will be vividly and graphically etched into the minds of Americans as were those that occurred on 11 September 2001. The unbelief, helplessness, and horror felt in reaction to the Oklahoma City bombing or the tragic shootings in Littleton, Colorado, were multiplied exponentially on this unforgettable day; indeed, in stunned silence, the entire world shared the anguish America experienced. Who could believe the raw brutality and barbarism, even when seen before one's very eyes?

Around 9:00 A.M. on that Tuesday morning, my computer screen showed New York City's World Trade Center Tower One engulfed in flames with heavy black smoke lofted above. The unbelievable caption was simply that an airliner had struck New York's premier building. Moments later, however, when the second Trade Tower was likewise hit, few could doubt that terrorism had struck our sacred shores. The horror was confirmed and magnified when news came of a third and then a fourth crash. The Pentagon had been attacked, but perhaps the Capitol building had been spared because of the bravery of passengers on a flight that fell short of its intended target.

IMMEDIATE RESPONSES

Under the dawning awareness that foreign terrorists meticulously orchestrated those horrific events in a rising crescendo, America began to respond. Only the immediate actions of the New York police, fire, and rescue crews, the bold and courageous actions of the heroic passengers on United Airlines Flight 93, and the swift orders grounding all U.S. air traffic prevented this tragedy from being compounded even further. It could have been much worse.

Our government quickly acted to safeguard our nation's leaders — the president, vice-president, cabinet, and congressional representatives. The military was immediately placed on high alert. Fighter planes patrolled the skies and escorted the president to a secure location. The F.B.I. began to collect evidence and follow leads left by the criminal perpetrators.

Classes were cancelled at primary and secondary schools, colleges, and universities. Civic and community events were suspended. Sporting events were postponed and flags flew at half-mast.

Tears flowed freely from eyes while lips uttered prayers in many languages. America wept in unbelief. As if from a vicious wound, America felt a sharp pain. America mourned.

Many Americans immediately called upon God. While classes were suspended, assemblies and prayer meetings were hurriedly called throughout the nation. By 2:00 P.M. that afternoon, thousands of students and faculty at one Christian university were joined by a host of state and civic leaders to beseech God for His aid and comfort in the midst of such horrendous loss. This image was mirrored in cities and towns from sea to shining sea. The world watched in silent contemplation as TV news anchors covered the numbing story around the clock.

The American people had sustained an unbelievable loss, but their government's response was calculated and measured. The U.S. Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, held a news conference that very afternoon, not in some secure remote location, but inside the walls of the partially demolished Pentagon building itself. President Bush flew back to Washington, D.C., before the sun set. He exited the presidential helicopter on the beautiful White House lawn, then walked deliberately and solemnly across the grounds to his residence, unaccompanied by guards or military escort. A short time later, in unforgettable tones he spoke words of comfort, resolve, and determination to the American people and the watching world.

PRAYER

The Bible commands Christians to pray for their leaders. Paul used four terms for prayer when he urged believers to pray "for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way" (1 Tim. 2:2, ESV). Since the terrible attacks, Christians noticeably practiced this command with more urgency and regularity. Hardly a prayer goes by now in church and other public forums that does not include supplication for the president, his advisors, and other national leaders. This is as it should be, since these persons are "ordained of God" and are God's ministers (see Rom. 13:1, 4).¹ They need protection and wisdom because their decisions may affect world events for decades and perhaps even beyond.

Prayers also sprang up on billboards, in newspaper ads, in windows of stores and homes, on television, and on bumper stickers. Everywhere we turn we are reminded to pray. "God Bless America" is a prayer. The prayer on another bumper sticker reads, "God Save America."

In Lynchburg, Virginia, an announcement in the Sunday paper began, "The Mayor of Lynchburg and a number of community leaders will lead the community in prayer for our fellow Americans and our country."² This "Community-Wide Vigil" took place in the city's minor league baseball stadium.

THE SOLEMN ASSEMBLY

Around 800 B.C. the Israelites found themselves in terrible straits. Locusts had invaded and destroyed their land. While they faced immediate famine, the prophet Joel counseled, "Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry unto the Lord" (Joel 1:14). Similarly, President Bush called for a solemn assembly to be held three days after the brutal attack. In Washington, D.C.'s National Cathedral, America's top governmental, military, and religious leaders met to pray, to mourn for the dead, and to beseech God for His wisdom to meet the crisis.

It was correct to respond in this way. Propriety demands that we acknowledge God and ask for His divine aid in meeting the challenge of a hidden and barbaric foreign conspiracy. It was heartening to see our national leaders humble themselves as they besought God's mercy and implored His divine assistance in the task ahead. Together they sang Martin Luther's A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.

A mighty fortress is our God, A bulwark never failing;
Our helper He, amid the flood Of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe Doth seek to work us woe; His craft and pow'r are great,
And, armed with cruel hate, On earth is not His equal.
Did we in our own strength confide, Our striving would be losing,
Were not the right Man on our side, The Man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He; Lord Sabaoth His name,
From age to age the same, And He must win the battle.

Another song selected by the president was Battle Hymn of the Republic by Julia Ward Howe. Several of the stanzas read:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord,
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword —
His truth is marching on.
He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never sound retreat
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat;
O be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet! —
Our God is marching on.
In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me;
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.

Similar services were held in many places of worship across the nation. Suddenly, patriotic songs invoking the name of God were sung throughout the land. The refrain of Irving Berlin's God Bless America rang out, along with America the Beautiful. The latter mentions God in each of the four refrains, and says in part, "America! America! God shed His grace on thee...God mend thine ev'ry flaw...May God thy gold refine...God shed His grace on thee."

Another song that found new life was Samuel Francis Smith's "My Country, 'Tis of Thee." The final refrain is a prayer: "Our fathers' God, to Thee, Author of liberty, To Thee we sing: Long may our land be bright With freedom's holy light; Protect us by Thy might, Great God, our King!"

The solemn assembly focuses national attention on the seriousness of a national disaster. It is not merely an act of political expediency, but a public admission that our times are in God's hands. A century after Joel's day, King Hezekiah faced another threat to national survival — the attack and devastation brought by the invasion of the Assyrian king, Sennacherib. Accompanied by the prophet Isaiah, the king "went up unto the house of the Lord, and spread it [Sennacherib's letter demanding surrender] before the Lord" (Isa. 37:14). His prayer was for God's deliverance ("save us"), and his motive was "that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord, even thou only" (20). God heard and answered their prayers.

OTHER NATIONAL RESPONSES

Besides search and rescue, prayer and mourning, and the solemn assembly, what other responses are appropriate for America to take toward the aggressive acts of terrorism and war that were thrust upon the nation on such a calm, beautiful September morning? The president soon appointed Governor Thomas Ridge of Pennsylvania to head a newly created cabinet-level post as

head of the National Homeland Security Agency. Congress also acted swiftly by passing an enormous \$40 billion appropriation to help clean up the aftermath of the terrorist strikes, rebuild, and fight terrorism itself. Another \$15 billion bill was passed to subsidize the extensive airline losses suffered during the suspension of all air traffic — losses continue while people's fears gradually lessen, allowing them to resume flying.

A JUST WAR OR JUST WAR?

After World War I, President Wilson led an effort to “make the world safe for democracy.” The vehicle was to be the League of Nations and the World Court, but those organizations were ineffective in preventing the rise of Hitler, Mussolini, and Tojo. Roland Bainton observed that when World War II began, many Christians who had formerly embraced pacifism and rejected the idea of a crusade for freedom now found that “the only position remaining in historic Christian thought is the ethic of the just war,” although they doubted that a just war was possible with the strenuous nature of modern warfare.³ He notes that the liberal Christian Century magazine struggled with the concept and grudgingly concluded, “This was not a just war; it was just war. We were in the war, and none of us could get out.”⁴

At the conclusion of World War II, another effort to save the world from war was made with the formation of the United Nations.⁵ In fact, the U.N. Building displays these words: “And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isa. 2:4). A verse taken out of its context is only a pretext, however. The first part of that verse reads, “And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people.” Until Christ the Messiah sits upon the throne of His glory and rebukes and judges the nations, there will be no permanent peace. The United Nations has not been as successful as hoped, but it focuses world attention on nations that violate a world consensus on what constitutes the proper use of deadly force between nations.

The concept that war should be fought only for a just cause has been argued for more than 2,000 years, since the time of Cicero (106–43 B.C.). In his day, states used war to expand territory and gain wealth. Cicero proposed that there must be “a righteous ground for going to war” along with other conditions.⁶ Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Grotius, and other Christian thinkers furthered and refined these arguments.⁷

Bernard Ramm notes, “If all of these documents are sifted through and summed up, a just war must meet the following criteria,”⁸ which he lists as seven principles.⁹ I will briefly examine and relate these principles to the events of September 11.

Proper Authority. Just War Theory (JWT) holds that only a proper authority may declare war. This principle is intended primarily to prevent rogue insurrections. The attack on the United States cannot claim this sanction. It was the cowardly act of an international band of hoodlums. The U.S. Congress, in accord with this dictum, voted to grant the president full power to search out and destroy the perpetrators, their coconspirators, and those who aided and abetted them by giving them comfort, protection, and support.

Real Injury. A second JWT principle is that in order to justify going to war, there must be a genuine injury. Most would say that three World Trade Towers (One, Two, and Seven), along with four Boeing aircraft, a chunk of the Pentagon, and about 3,000 priceless innocent lives from over 80 countries taken in an unprovoked sneak attack would qualify as a real injury. “Remember the Maine,” “Remember Pearl Harbor,” and “September 11,” all signify treacheries that cannot be forgotten. What would not qualify as real injury might be invective speech, character assassination, the burning of the American flag, or the burning of a president in effigy.

Proportionality. A third principle is that the harm to be caused by a war must not go beyond the original injury. In other words, if someone puts out my eye, I am not allowed to kill him. If my neighbor's child trashes my car, I am not to respond by burning down his house. If the United States kills more people, especially innocent civilians, than the number of those who lost their lives on September 11, then by definition, these actions would not qualify as a just war.

In practice, this factor is difficult to assess. For example, Saddam Hussein often shielded war targets with civilians. That would compound the problems. Moreover, without impartial witnesses, who is to say whose bomb killed whom? The purpose of this point is to prevent vengeance from getting out of hand — and it easily can. Three days after the attack, Cal Thomas said, “If this is war, as President Bush has said, let's start acting like it and tell America's enemies that if they are so intent on seeing their God, we'll help them get there. As for us, we intend to die of natural causes.” Again, “We know the enemy. We know where they live. Let's go get them before they get any more of us....”¹⁰ Such rhetoric might be viewed as calling for indiscriminate retaliation.

Michael J. Gold of Houston, Texas, did not mention proportionality in his letter to the editor, when he wrote, “The only way to stop this kind of violence is war. We have tried tolerance for the past 50 years....We have turned the other cheek...in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Tanzania. We have compromised, appeased and tolerated....Now is the time for war, and no more moral compromise.”¹¹ By way of contrast, and perhaps hinting at a possible lack of proportionality, Karima Bushnell of Minneapolis said, “The Afghan people are the first victims, not the supporters, of the Taliban. If we bomb Afghanistan, the hundreds of thousands of starving orphans and war widows are much more likely to die than the relatively well-fed and mobile terrorists.”¹²

The United States first sought by diplomatic means to avert war. When the infamous Al Qaeda leader was not surrendered, the Afghan government were warned of an attack. Even before the bombs fell on Sunday, 7 October, perhaps hundreds of thousands fled Afghanistan to nearby Pakistan. Many may not have reached a safe haven. Not only is proportionality hard to figure, but also the factors frequently used to measure it become skewed in the process or overlooked in pursuit of the larger goal.

Just Means of Fighting. The fourth principle of JWT is that the fighting must use honorable means. How about an H-bomb or two? A little poison in the water system? Anyone for anthrax? How about some nerve gas? War involves defeating the enemy, but a just war uses just means. This can involve crippling the enemy's ground, sea, and air forces but not intentionally killing innocent civilians in order to defeat the foe.

Good Chance of Victory. According to JWT, a country should not prosecute a war unless there is a good chance of winning without greatly endangering the lives of its own people. Even Jesus counseled in a parable that a king should tally his chances before engaging his forces (Luke 14:31–32). Hopefully, a nation has some friends it can count on for help and protection. When NATO recently invoked Article 5 of its charter, those nations declared that the attack on the United States was an attack on all of them and that the forces of all would be used to defeat the enemy. Friendly aircraft from NATO now patrol the eastern seaboard of the United States in an effort to protect America from further hostile attacks.

Failed Negotiations. The U.N. Charter, Article 33 states that disputing nations “shall first of all, seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement,

resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their own choice.” President Bush sought through diplomatic means to bring the terrorists to justice. Fareed Zakaria also notes, “Every Islamic country in the world has condemned the attacks of Sept. 11.”¹³ Secretaries of State and Defense were sent throughout the world in an effort to secure justice by peaceful means. The Taliban leaders considered the issue in deliberative council. Pakistan’s president visited the Afghan leaders and urged them to heed the warnings. Michael McKenzie comments, “Nonviolent means of persuasion should always be attempted for a reasonable amount of time before resorting to war.”¹⁴ It was nearly four weeks before the United States launched a counterattack on the enemy’s hideouts, terrorist training camps, and related targets. Was this reasonable? My guess is that nine out of ten Americans thought it was.

Right Motive. The seventh point that Ramm gleaned from JWT documents is that a war must be fought with a right motive. Is spreading one’s religion a correct motive? Are revenge and retaliation proper causes for war? Is a nation justified to strike another preemptively or to prevent another from attacking it first? Many observers would say Israel was justified in June of 1967, when it used a quick strike to prevent its “neighbors” from carrying out their unhidden plans to attack and destroy the Jewish state.

Arthur Holmes encapsulates this point in the dictum: “All aggression is condemned; only defensive war is legitimate.”¹⁵ Are the United States and its NATO allies now engaged in a defensive war? It is easy to argue in the affirmative. To defend oneself sometimes means disabling the attacker. That is what a shot of mace or a knee to the groin is intended to do. One must neutralize the enemy’s capacity to kill, maim, and destroy. This may take years, but it is necessary if one is to preserve and defend an honorable way of life.

Franklin Roosevelt spoke of four freedoms in his famous address to Congress on 6 January 1941, when he proposed the lend-lease program — freedom of speech and of religion, and freedom from want and from fear. Without defending ourselves against the onslaught of terrorism, not only we, but also all civilized peoples, will be in jeopardy of losing these four freedoms.

FINISHING THE JOB

War is a nasty business. Holmes, a proponent of the just war view, frankly notes that “no war is ever fully just.”¹⁶ That is simply because all human endeavors are tainted with sin. Sometimes, however, war is a necessity. Norman Geisler has stated that “it is a greater evil not to resist an evil aggressor than to fight against him.” He continues, “This is reminiscent of the famous line: ‘All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.’ If good men will not resist evil men, then evil men will prevail in the world.”¹⁷

One of the most insightful discussions I have read regarding the present problem with Islamic terrorism recently appeared in a series of articles by Fareed Zakaria in a special edition of Newsweek. Listen to a few of his observations: “Bin Laden and his fellow fanatics are products of failed societies that breed their anger.”¹⁸ The 17 Islamic countries that comprise the Arab world in North Africa and the Persian Gulf region “have largely failed to come to grips with modernity in economics, politics and social structure.”¹⁹ The larger Islamic states such as Indonesia, Turkey, Pakistan, Egypt, and Bangladesh have been somewhat more successful in culturally acclimating themselves to the modern world; but repression, lack of basic freedoms, failed economic and socialistic systems, and governments that exist at the people’s expense cry out for change. These frightful conditions, often exacerbated by poverty, illiteracy, high unemployment even for the well-educated, and lack of hope make conditions ripe for the exploitation of people by Islamic fundamentalists.²⁰

Additionally, the feelings of inferiority and failure are compounded by the shining success of a tiny nation within the midst of this large Arab sea — Israel. A democracy and a free society with a high standard of living, Israel becomes a basis for comparison that produces bitterness in her neighbors; and whom does America seem to favor? U.S. foreign policy supports Israel even when the American intention is to be impartial and fair. To the Arab this is galling.

To make matters worse, the governments of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and a few other Arab states are “now exposed as tired, corrupt kleptocracies, deeply unpopular and thoroughly illegitimate. One has to add that many of them are close American allies.”²¹ In the Gulf War, President Bush, the elder, was careful to frame America’s involvement in terms of a just war — and indeed it was. As Zakaria explains, however, “Most Americans think that Arabs should be grateful for our role in the gulf war, for we saved Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Most Arabs think that we saved the Kuwaiti and Saudi royal families. Big difference.”²² Zakaria suggests a three-pronged strategy to bring this dilemma to a successful conclusion:

Military Strategy. The military war against terrorism is only one aspect of a balanced strategy and has been discussed above. Zakaria quips, “The goal is simple: the total destruction of Al Qaeda.”²³ President George W. Bush assures us that America will not fail.

Political Strategy. The political goal is both broader and more difficult. It involves coalition building, consensus making, and working with political structures that have legitimacy in the Arab mind, such as the United Nations. While U.S. support for Israel’s right to exist must never waver, the Gordian knot is to help Israel solve the problem of its military rule over three million Arabs against their will while maintaining secure borders. For decades American presidents have worked on this issue — only rarely with any lasting success. Constructive dialogue must continue until both sides find a workable and peaceful solution.

Cultural Strategy. Arab states must be convinced that moderation is in their best interests and that they must

make the case to their people that Islam is compatible with modern society, that it does allow women to work, that it encourages education and that it has welcomed people of other faiths and creeds....We can fund moderate Muslim groups and scholars and broadcast fresh thinking across the Arab world, all aimed at breaking the power of the fundamentalists...beyond that we have to press the nations of the Arab world...where the virus of fundamentalism has spread — to reform, open up and gain legitimacy.²⁴

The vitality and the longevity of a modern Arab state depends on these types of changes as well. Unless they engage these issues in a viable way that lifts their people to greater levels of freedom and prosperity, the Western world may have to clean up larger and larger messes.

In conclusion, the United States has rightly responded to terrorism and war with prayer, the solemn assembly, and an effort to bring the perpetrators to justice. It remains to be seen whether the elements of a just war will be found in these labors. The key concepts of proper authority, real injury, good chance of victory, failed negotiations, and right motive seem to be in place. Christians should address, however, the issues of proportionality and a just means of fighting — both in our prayers to God, and in our communications with our national leaders.

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- 1 -Unless noted, all Bible quotations are from the King James Version.
- 2 -The News and Advance, 16 September 2001, sect. A.
- 3 -Roland H. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes toward War and Peace: A Historical Survey and Critical Re-evaluation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960), 221.
- 4 -Ibid., 222.
- 5 -The United Nations Charter begins, “WE THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war....” Article 1 begins, “The Purposes of the United Nations are: 1. To maintain international peace and security....”
- 6 -Cicero, *De Officiis*, I, 38.
- 7 -For larger works, see Bainton, as above; Robert G. Clouse, ed., *War: Four Christian Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981); Arthur F. Holmes, ed., *War and Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975); and Jean-Michel Hornus, *It Is Not Lawful for Me to Fight: Early Christian Attitudes toward War, Violence, and the State*, trans. Alan Kreider and Oliver Coburn, rev. ed. (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1980). The latter work has copious notes from primary sources.
- 8 -Bernard L. Ramm, *The Right, the Good and the Happy* (Waco: Word, 1971), 142. See also Arthur F. Holmes’s summary of just war sources in “Just War Criteria,” *Baker’s Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 359–60.
- 9 -See an earlier article that capsulated the just war into five elements. Michael McKenzie, “Onward Christian Soldiers?” *Christian Research Journal*, Fall 1996, 11–17.
- 10 -Cal Thomas, “Return the Attack; Ask Questions Later,” *The News and Advance*, 14 September 2001, sect. A.
- 11 -Michael J. Gold, Letter to the Editor, *Newsweek*, 15 October 2001, 16.
- 12 -Karima Bushnell, Letter to the Editor, *Newsweek*, 15 October 2001, 15.
- 13 -Fareed Zakaria, “Why Do They Hate Us?” *Newsweek*, 15 October 2001, 24.
- 14 -McKenzie, 14–15.
- 15 -Arthur F. Holmes, “The Just War,” *War: Four Christian Views*, 120.
- 16 -Holmes, “Just War Criteria,” 359.
- 17 -Norman L. Geisler, *Ethics: Alternatives and Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 163.
- 18 -Zakaria, 22.
- 19 -Ibid., 37.
- 20 -Ibid., 32–35. This section is titled, “Enter Religion.”
- 21 -Ibid., 29.
- 22 -Ibid., 28.
- 23 -Ibid., 37.
- 24 -Ibid., 38, 40.