THE TOOLS OF ARES: THE MORALITY OF THE USE OF NEW WEAPONS TECHNOLOGIES – AN ASSESSMENT OF THE NEUTRON BOMB CASE OF 1978 AND THE USE OF DRONE WARFARE TECHNOLOGY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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*Abstract*: The emergence of new weapons technologies usually result in great political, military and moral/ethical controversies and debates. This was the case in 1978 when the Carter Administration considered whether to authorize the production and deployment of Lance missiles armed with neutron bomb warheads. It was also the case when in 2009, the Obama Administration began to rely upon and use Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) or Drones in a campaign against al-Qaeda leadership and targets. President Carter decided to defer and cancel the production of neutron bombs. President Obama, though recently tightening up the procedures in which drone strikes are authorized, continues to approve their use. Primarily for moral reasons, Carter ended this new technology. From a differing perspective, for moral reasons has not ended the use of drones, either. What are the differences and similarities between Carter and Obama’s moral framework in making decisions about the production, deployment and application of new controversial weapons programs?

*Introduction*

The development and use of new weapons technologies usually generates fierce moral and ethical debates about their purposes and destructiveness, let alone whether they should ever be used. For example, in 1139, Pope Innocent II condemned using crossbows in war. Why? He described them as “hated by god.” Even an untrained soldier, be they peasant or tradesmen, could employ them with deadly effect against knights dressed in battle armor. The Pope perceived this weapon innovation as posing a direct threat to the stability of the social class structure of the medieval age (Lin, 2010). Resistance to the introduction of new weapons technologies, be they the English longbow, muskets and rifles, machine guns, submarines, poison gases, chemical and biological weapons, aerial bombardment of targets and the dropping of atomic bombs upon Japanese cities in1945, and the subsequent dangers of mutually assured destruction of entire countries and societies during the Cold War, can be counted upon to deplore the immorality and evil of new weapons like these. Especially during the 20th century and continuing into the 21st century, according to Peter Singer, “We live in a world of rapidly advancing, revolutionary technologies that are not just reshaping our world and wars, but also creating a host of ethical questions that must be dealt with.” In short, “We live in a world of killer applications” (Singer, 2010, p. 1).

In this paper, two cases of how American presidents have wrestled with the political, moral and ethical dimensions of newly emerging weapons technologies will be explored. During the first case, President Jimmy Carter was confronted with the issue of whether to authorize the development and deployment of a potentially game changer of a weapon, i.e., enhanced radiation weapons (ERWs) or more popularly known, neutron bombs. In theory, if neutron bombs were placed in Western Europe, a significant tactical advantage favoring the Soviet Union and their Warsaw Pact forces would be eliminated. During any war in Europe, they would invade with a huge superiority of armored tanks, vehicles and infantry divisions. NATO forces, in order to counter this, would in all likelihood have to use tactical nuclear weapons in order to repel an invasion force like this. The dilemma? European cities and regions would be devastated in the aftermath. Massive civilian casualties would also ensue.

Proponents of the neutron bomb argued that their weapon would not result in vast destruction of buildings and lives. By being able to kill Soviet military personnel with bursts of enhanced radiation, NATO could neutralize the threat of enemy armored columns and infantry, not be forced to use older and less precise tactical atomic weapons, avoid the risk of nuclear escalation involving the bombing of whole cities, military targets and command and control. By being a “cleaner” and more precise nuclear weapon, it could be used without resulting in all out nuclear war

While Carter initially approved funding for the production of the neutron bomb, in the long run, in spite of heavy opposition from hawks within his administration, ridicule from the press and congressional critics, he decided in April 1978 to “defer” production and deployment of the neutron bomb. For all intents and purposes, the neutron bomb program in the United States was dead. In the opinion of many, this episode was the perfect example of a president who was weak, indecisive and lacking political skills. President Carter in public justified his decision by noting that it was too expensive to produce and that in the end, with NATO allies being reluctant to accept the deployment of neutron bombs within their own territories, there was little point in proceeding. This begs a key historical question. Did he cancel the ERW program for budgetary reasons or frustration with NATO alliance politics? Or, as will be suggested in this paper, did he kill the program because of his own moral and ethical revulsion about contributing to the nuclear arms race and producing a weapon that “killed people but spared buildings.”? Did a new weapon like the neutron bomb make nuclear war fighting less risky and therefore more usable?

In the second case, newly inaugurated in 2009, President Obama inherited the prosecution of two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the war against al-Qaeda and Bin Laden terrorist cells and franchises. He faced a key problem; how could the US destroy the terrorist leadership and infrastructure without the extensive use of foot soldiers, or “boots on the ground.” Before long, and with some enthusiasm, Obama decided to wipe out terrorists by the extensive use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drones, to seek out, attack, decimate and kill leaders and fighters of al-Qaeda. Indeed, in evaluating the success of the drone program, Obama reportedly told some aides, “Turns out I’m really good at killing people” Obama said quietly “Didn’t know that was gonna be a strong suit of mine.” (Halperin & Heilemann, 2013, p. 55). In a series of public speeches and interviews, the president has steadfastly defended his reliance upon this new weapon, politically, militarily and even morally. In spite of the fact, that drone strikes have also resulted in the deaths of innocent civilians in Pakistan, Yemen, Afghanistan, Libya and other areas, and the death of American citizens who joined al-Qaeda and became part of the terrorist cause, President Obama has not disowned this weapon.

This paper will primarily examine the moral and ethical question of how two presidents, known for the strength of their own moral and ethical convictions, came to make decisions about the use of new weapons technologies in such differing fashions. To Jimmy Carter, the neutron bomb would be a bridge too far for him to morally approve. It would contradict his commitment to arms control and eliminating the threat of nuclear war. To Barrack Obama, he would justify their employment by embracing the moral tenets of just war theory. Obama believed that it was critical that they be fully utilized against an evil and ruthless enemy.

**First Case Study – The Carter Administration and the Neutron Bomb**

*Origins and Development of the Neutron Bomb*

Like Edward Teller, who is known as the father of the hydrogen bomb, Samuel T. Cohen is rightly described as the scientist who invented the neutron bomb. Until his death in 2010, he was a fierce and unapologetic defender of ERWs. Beginning in the summer of 1958, Cohen was convinced that if the uranium casing of a hydrogen bomb were removed, the neutrons released would travel great distances, penetrating even well shielded structures such as tanks with lethal doses of radiation, killing anyone inside and nearby. As Cohen argued, the neutron bomb, “…has been described as a weapon that primarily destroys human beings rather than physical objects” with “bursts of radiation and minimal blast and heat.” In short, “…a weapon that promises greater military effectiveness, fewer civilian casualties, and less property damage.”(Cohen, 1978, p. 76-77). Not only were there obvious military and political advantages associated with neutron bombs, there was also a clear moral case to be made for deploying them. In one of his last interviews before his death, Cohen strongly maintained,

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| “It’s the most sane and moral weapon ever devised…It’s the only nuclear weapon in history that makes sense in waging war. When the war is over, the world is still intact.” (McFadden, 2010) | by |
| Advocates for neutron bombs were impressed with the idea that a small initial blast and limited fallout was ideal for use in densely populated areas within Central Europe. However, from the beginning, there was political and military opposition to the idea. Opponents stressed that the neutron bomb made the idea of using nuclear weapons in war more conceivable. By limiting casualties to combatants and limiting damage to property, it could make it more usable and likely to be employed. The taboo against the use any nuclear weapons might be removed. The risks of nuclear escalation, at first, overruled the perceived military battlefield advantages of neutron bombs. In 1961, the Kennedy Administration rejected the idea of integrating the use of ERWs within US force structures. It concluded that its deployment could threaten the moratorium on nuclear testing just agreed to by the United States and the Soviet Union.  However, after the Soviets broke the moratorium, testing of neutron bombs was allowed. In 1962, the first neutron devices were successfully tested. Then, beginning in 1977, the Carter administration began to seriously consider whether to authorize the full production and deployment of ERWs. Proponents with the administration argued that in order to modernize the US nuclear deterrent and war fighting capabilities, it would be necessary to put neutron warheads on new Lance missiles and nuclear artillery designed to defend Western Europe. However, the road to deployment of ERWs would be a rocky one, with significant opposition, greatly complicating President Carter’s decision-making about the use of neutron weapons. | |
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*The Political & Strategic Context of the Neutron Bomb Controversy 1977-1978*

By the time Jimmy Carter came to office in 1977, a great deal of thinking and action about whether to produce and deploy this type of weapon had already taken place during the Ford Administration. This was an era when strategic doctrine stressed the theory of “flexible response” instead of the inflexibilities of mutual assured destruction (MAD). And, serious consideration about preparing for limited nuclear war had taken place within the Ford Administration. As Defense Secretary James Schlesinger put it, “What we are seeking once again is the ability to conduct constrained nuclear warfare, so that if deterrence were to fail…the use of nuclear weapons would not result in [an] orgy of destruction.” (Auger, 1996, p. 22). With support from the Congress, Schlesinger in May 1975 issued a report about the desirability of modernizing theater nuclear forces; he also mentioned the need to develop a new ERW warhead for the proposed Lance missile systems. In November 1976, President Ford signed off and authorized the production of ERWs.

However, with the new Carter Administration, Jimmy Carter was determined to reduce the role of using the threat of nuclear weapons in order to defend the US. In his inaugural address, his administration would actively seek to reduce the dangers of nuclear war,

“The world is still engaged in a massive armaments race designed to ensure continuing equivalent strength among potential adversaries. We pledge perseverance and wisdom in our efforts to limit the world's armaments to those necessary for each nation's own domestic safety. And we will move this year a step toward our ultimate goal--the elimination of all nuclear weapons from this Earth. We urge all other people to join us, for success can mean life instead of death” (Jimmy Carter, 1977).

Carter’s intentions were quite genuine. However, it would soon face a storm from decisions made earlier by the Ford Administration about funding ERWs. With only a few months on the job, the administration was suddenly faced with a full scale controversy, namely the desirability and morality of this new weapon.

Given a heads up, Walter Pincus of the *Washington Post* on June 6, 1977 broke the story that the Carter Administration was considering the production of a neutron weapon that killed people, not property (Pincus, 1977). Within the Energy Research & Development Administration (ERDA) budget, funding for it had been approved “Neutron Gate “was in full swing. A flurry of mostly negative articles and media commentaries ensued. Most high officials in the administration had never even heard of the neutron bomb. An NSC staff member recalled that the “political center” of the administration was “quite literally unaware of the weapon, even though it was in the Administration’s own budget **“** Carter himself said that he was not aware of this funding and impending project before the Pincus article was published.

For the next 11 months, the Carter Administration was shaken by both advocates and critics of ERWS from the media, the Congress, NATO alliance members, and vociferous opposition from the Soviet Union. The record does suggest that within the administration it was not clear among key officials about what steps to take. At times, the Federal Republic of Germany appeared to support deployment of ERWs upon German soil; at other times, there was real opposition, e.g., one West German politician calling neutron bombs “symbols of moral perversity.” NATO planners debated with the US about whether ERWs were needed. Then there would be momentum in favor of deployment, with reversals in position taking place in response to negative public opinion within their own countries. However, key US officials in charge of pushing for neutron bombs seemed to think that their efforts were in step with the presidents wishes. On March 8 the Dutch Parliament voted 100-40 against deployment of neutron bombs. Then, in a rapid series of decisions, Carter finally made clear his misgivings about the whole project. On March 19, 1978 the president surprised Secretary of State Vance, National Security Advisor Brzezinski, and Defense Secretary Brown. They had all assumed the road to deployment was had been favored by Carter. The president then rejected a detailed memorandum written by them that outlined the next steps for deployment of ERWs within NATO. The next day, Carter announced cancellation of an upcoming NATO meeting in which the US would announce to its allies that it would produce and deploy neutron bombs. In early April, the New York Times announced that Carter was now against deployment.. On April 7, 1977, President Carter formally announced that his decision was to “defer” production of neutron bombs in order to further the spirit of arms controls initiatives like SALT II andMBFR (Burt, 1977). Though technically only deferred, for all intents and purposes, Carter had cancelled the neutron bomb project by the US.

This decision resulted in a firestorm of harsh criticism leveled against President Carter by the media, politicians and NATO alliance partners. He was described as weak, incapable of making or sticking to tough decisions, confused about his own policies, adrift and directionless, lacking control over his own bureaucracy, and guilty of poor communication with his aides. The key question was why Carter made the decision he made? Was it for political and strategic reasons? Or, as will be argued, was it the fact that ultimately he could not proceed by approving the production of a new weapons that killed people but not damaged building? In his eyes, it was an immoral weapon. That in fact a decision in favor of ERWs would have gravely weakened his moral determination to help rid the world of the dangers of nuclear war?

*Carter’s Decision-Making – Political and Moral/Ethical Dimensions*

Soon after the Pincus article was published, the Carter Administration went into damage control. On June 24, 1977 Press Secretary Jody Powell said that the president would make a decision on whether to produce the neutron bomb, “sometime this fall. [The President] has abhorrence of nuclear weapons, period…as well as of other types of weapons. But if it [a nuclear weapon] has to be used…there will be many fewer civilian casualties [with the neutron bomb] than with the standard types of [tactical nuclear] weapons (Aquino, 1982).

July 12, 1977, President Carter convened a national press conference. Reporters asked Carter several times about this new weapon and whether it contradicted his earlier pledge to eliminate the dangers of nuclear weapons. Asked what is the rationale for a weapon like this which seemed to prioritize property over the preservation of human life, Carter, after repeating that no final decision production had been made, talked about the pros and cons of neutron bombs. “I might point out to you, too, that an M-16 rifle destroys human life and not buildings and property. This is not a new concept in war when the destruction of enemy forces is the prime objective. So, I don’t think that the neutron bomb is more wicked or immoral than the present nuclear weapons we have and the Soviets have as well. The argument against the neutron bomb is that because it is ‘clean’ that there might be more temptation to use it. “ This was not his view “I have a fear that once nuclear weapons are used, that there is a good likelihood that the nuclear war will escalate rapidly into the exchange of very heavy weapons between the warring countries” (Public Papers of the President – Carter, 1977) With subsequent statements, though, the issue of morality and this weapon would become more explicit.

On Aug. 15, the Department of Defense issued a report in favor of ERW weapons modernization. The arsenal of aging tactical nuclear weapons needed to be replaced with a better weapon with which to defeat Soviet armored divisions. – At a weekly meeting with Vance, Brzezinski and Brown, there was talk about how to bring the allies on board and support deployment of neutron bombs. According to Brzezinski, the president was reluctant to engage with the issue. “The president did not wish the world to think of him as an ogre, and we agreed that we will press the Europeans to have more interest in having the bomb and therefore more willingness to absorb some of the political flak or use European disinterest as a basis for a negative decision” (Brzezinski, 1983, p. 302). According to Strong, “This was the core of Carter’s position on the neutron bomb. He did not like the new warheads, and he did not want to be associated in their creation.”(Strong 2000, p. 133) If given a reason, he would prefer to cancel it.

Public opinion at this time was generally supportive of the production and deployment of the neutron bomb. On Aug 22, Harris Poll asked 2,510 Americans for their views. 44 to 37% favored production of the weapon (Harris Poll, 1977).

On March 18, 1978 Vance, Brzezinski and Brown, sent President Carter a memo outlining their views about what steps to take in finally resolving the ERWs issue, and indicating their support for a decision by him to produce the bomb. After announcing that the administration favored the weapon, the US would press for negotiations with the Soviets and offer to halt production of neutron bombs if they in turn willing to forego their production and deployment of SS-20 missiles that would be targeted against NATO. If these negotiations failed, the alliance as a whole would endorse their deployment. There would be no explicit statement, though, by the alliance about where these weapons would actually be deployed (Strong, 2000, p. 139).

Carter was on a brief vacation in St. Simons, Georgia, when he read this memo. He was not pleased. On the memo, Carter checked “no” on proceeding. He then ordered cancellation of making the announcement at an upcoming NATO meeting. “My cautionary words to them (foreign policy advisers) since last summer have pretty well been ignored, and I was aggravated. (Carter, 1982, p. 227). An aide commented, “The bureaucracy had proceeded on his inclination to produce the neutron bomb with less concern about the conditions he wanted met.” Vance, Brzezinski, Brown and others had fully expected him to approve their recommendations regarding the neutron bomb.

“He (Carter) was concerned about his image and did not want to be viewed as a big weapons man. His feeling was that in the past 30 years the President of the US had to take a great deal of political heat on important military decisions and this time he did not want to take it alone” Carter commented, “I should have made sure I knew where we were going on this” Poor communication between himself and his aides. Furthermore, Carter noted, “United States dependence on nuclear power should be kept to a minimum” “Carter was torn between his moral convictions and political pragmatism In the opinion of his aides, this was a new Carter. (Strong, 2000, p. 139). He had been perceived as relishing making the tough decisions, not indulging in second guessing himself and appearing unsure of himself.

On March 20, the President met with Vance, Brzezinski, Brown and Hamilton Jordan. The atmosphere was tense and discussion conducted “in fairly combative fashion.” Vance recalled the president saying, “We don’t need it---they are the ones who need it…and so why should I go forward and take all the onus for having produced this infamous weapon, if they’re not prepared to take their fair share of the opprobrium that going to be heaped on all of us.” (Auger, 1996, p. 84). He wanted direct assurances that at least the Germans would agree beforehand to deploy the weapon on their own territory. Indeed, on March 23, British Prime Minister Callahan told Carter that he would feel the “greatest relief” if the whole thing was cancelled.(Auger,1996, p. 85). In rapid fire series of decisions, Carter acted. On March 27, he told his principle aides he had decided to cancel the neutron bomb project and for them to begin to prepare NATO alliance partners of his decision.

Brzezinski recalled, “I don’t think that I have ever seen the president quite as troubled and pained by any other decision item. At one point, he said, ‘I wish I had never heard of this weapon”(Brezinski, 1983, p. 304). Brzezinski was very critical of the president’s decision. It was, “the worst presidential decision of the first fourteen months” His negative reaction was promptly leaked to the press (Brezinski, 1983, p. 305). According to another administration source, there was going to be a UN special session on disarmament scheduled for May. “Carter may have had a hard time thinking of himself up there talking about disarmament and being the president who had ordered production of a new type of nuclear weapon”

On April 7, as promised, Carter publically announced his decision. “I have decided to defer the production of weapons with enhanced radiation effects” (PPP Carter, 1978). Carter issued further instructions to his staff after his deferral announcement “There would be no recriminations, in statement on or off the record, against the US NATO allies “ (Brzezinski, 1983, p. 306).

Needless to say, as earlier described, Carter’s decision was savaged by critics. But was this fair? Could one argue that Carter position was in fact reasonable – that he would approve production and deployment only if his express concerns about gaining strong alliance consent were first met? In March 1978, he was anything but indecisive and weak. “He was strong-willed, even bullheaded, in insisting that is original instructions be faithfully and fully carried out’s. (Strong, 2000, pg. 145-146). Though morally ambivalent about the neutron bomb, and expressing real dislike for what they represented, he might have approved production if the Europeans had been more supportive, Instead they waffled. Carter would not go it alone and approve production. He knew too that his administration was not speaking with one voice about the issue.

Vance and Brzezinski later admitted they sensed Carter’s ambivalence .Brzezinski in particular had misjudged the extent of Carter’s doubts about the neutron bomb and insistence that his earlier instructions be followed to the letter. “In retrospect, it is obvious to me that Vance, Brown and I misread the President’s intentions.” In 1995, Brzezinski during an interview repeated that Carter had an “aversion” with dealing with the neutron bomb issue, unusual for a president who relished making tough unpopular choices. “That aversion, rooted in Carters deeply felt desire to reduce nuclear dangers rather than add to them, may have been so powerful that it distracted him from the kind of detailed monitoring he normally gave to important issues. The president’s resistance to ERWS was, in part, a reflection of his moral reservations about neutron warheads and his genuine desire to be associated with reductions in the dangers of nuclear war and the costs of the arms race.(Strong, 2000, pg. 147-148).

Carter later tried to explain his thinking. During a May 5, 1978 town hall meeting in Spokane, Washington, the President said,

“As you may know, a decision to go ahead with the design of the neutron bomb was made before I became president… I didn’t know about it until it was published in the newspaper. And at that time I began to assess whether or not we needed to go ahead to produce the neutron bomb. Another factor to make is that if the Soviets did invade, then the lives that would be saved by a weapon with a very narrow destructive area would be West German, Belgians, those who live-in Holland….I never had a single European country who told me that if we produced the neutron weapon that they were willing to deploy it. If the Soviets build up and threaten NATO and300, 000 American soldiers. It could still be considered as an option” (Spokane Washington, May 5, 1978).

Jack Robertson, in a later interview recalled “But a source of ours close to Carter’s personal administrative work tells me that it was at base Carters own personal dislike for nuclear weapons in general and the ‘inhuman’ connotations of this one in particular. He just doesn’t like it, and so he would rather it not exist. It is to a great extent as simple as that” (Aquino, 1982, p. 55). Furthermore, “for Carter, the way the decision was made was as important as the decision itself. He had to himself that he was making the right decision whatever it was” (Wasserman, 1983, p. 55).

Years later, Jimmy Carter, during an oral history recording, was asked to talk about the neutron bomb controversy by presidential historian, Richard Neustadt. His responses are worth presenting in full:

“JC And I was down somewhere in Georgia and all of a sudden got either a daily report from Cy or a weekly report from Zbig and realized how far we had gone at the military level in committing ourselves to the neutron weapon without any commitment at all from a single European country that they would deploy or accept it. And that’s when I went back to Washington and raised the roof.

JC Let me say this. In order to answer your question definitively, I would like to research all the memoranda that came to me from Brzezinski, Brown, or Vance on the neutron weapon way back. I think the culpable person is I because what I decided at the time was a departure, to repeat myself, from previous policy. My judgment is that Brown and Vance and Brzezinski were assuming at that point that in the showdown I would go ahead and build a neutron weapon, expecting the Europeans to deploy it, which is what Reagan I think has mistakenly finally done.

We were talking about two or three billion dollars and we were talking about an enormous investment in tritium and a complete redesign of some of our tactical nuclear weapons. We were talking about an enormous amount of money. I think that if there is a prime culpability, it would be my own in not making it clearer to Brown and Vance early, I’m not going to do this anymore. I think that both Brown and Vance, and I would include Brzezinski, were very sensitive to my desires and my policy. Even at this moment, I cannot think of a time when Brown ever circumvented what he thought I wanted. There were a couple of times when Vance did, which I mentioned in the book. For instance, once when he went to Europe, to Russia, after we had already concluded the SALT II talks and so forth. But I think that the culpability in this case among my own staff is with me.

JC That’s correct. There was a justification for it in that habitually, historically might be a better word, the NATO alliance had worked on a premise that the military leaders would decide on a new weapon or a new strategy. The United States would take the public onus for their proposal and would, in effect, go ahead with enough momentum so that some of the weaker European countries could do it ostensibly with reluctance, but under pressure from the United States. I thought that was ill-advised. I think that, to be perfectly honest to my associates there, I hadn’t expressed my concern or my change in policy well enough or clear enough to them. I didn’t want the United States to develop a weapon and then force it on the Europeans. I thought that time had passed. This happened to be the first test case when it did come up.

RN. Well, of course the gossip around Washington was that you had changed your mind.

This being a sensitive issue for the ex-president, Carter replied, “Yes, it wasn’t the gossip. This was what Helmut Schmidt (FRG Chancellor) was preaching to anyone who would listen, that we had misled him and so forth” (Interview with Jimmy Carter, Miller Center, Oral History Project, Date?)

Other principals of the administration have been asked by interviewers to explain Carter’s decision-making. Questioned in another interview about why Carter had decided to cancel the the neutron bomb, Brzezinski again stressed the moral nature behind the decision to cancel the project.

“ZB: The President decided to cancel the neutron bomb, I think for two reasons, though one was emphasized. First, there wasn't sufficient support in Europe for it, and there was a great deal of reluctance in Europe to it. But secondly, I think the President personally found it morally abhorrent”(Interview with Brzezinksi, 1999).

During another interview, Leslie Gelb, Assistant Secretary of State and Director of the Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs during the Carter Administration, was baffled by the president’s decision.

“LG: President Carter's decision to abandon the neutron bomb still is a mystery to me, and I was directly and intimately involved in this issue. Here was a case where I felt we should deploy the weapon, and the main reason I was in favor of deploying it was that the Soviets said we couldn't, and they had put us in a position really in Europe where, unless the Soviets agreed to a US-NATO military deployment, we couldn't do it. Effectively they were gaining a veto over all US military deployments in Europe, and that was an unacceptable situation. So I favored the deployment of the neutron bomb on those grounds principally. deployment of these neutron weapons.

INT: But later you did. What was the reason?

LG: Well, I'm not sure I understand to this day. In part, I think - and President Carter is the one to answer I don't know exactly what was in his mind - but in part I think he felt the Europeans had gotten off too easily, they hadn't accepted enough responsibility for the deployment of the neutron bomb, and all the political weight of this would fall on us. It may also be that he didn't want to deploy, you know, a new nuclear weapon in Europe. I'm not sure, but it certainly came as a surprise to all of us who had been working on it.

INT: Did he feel there would be a certain political flak from the bomb that will kill people, but no destroy property?

LG: Well, that may have affected him - I really don't know. I never heard him say that as the reason. The reason we were working with at the time was that the Europeans had to accept more responsibility for this. But, you know, whichever way, it came as a shock both to our European allies and to us in the US Government as well. And on top of the reputation for ineptitude in dealing with the Soviets that resulted from our being in Moscow in March and giving them this deep-cuts proposal - on top of that failure, it was another failure to lead the alliance, and it again was a crushing blow to our ability to operate effectively.(Interview with Gelb, 1999)

During the same series of interviews by the National Security Archive, Carter was also asked about his arms control policy. The subject of neutron weapons and NATO politics came up:

JC: I thought it was necessary. I issued directives, for instance, not only considering nuclear weapons but also sophisticated so-called...

JC: Well, we didn't have much of an altercation between me and European leaders, including Helmut Schmidt, concerning Pershing missiles, but we did have an altercation concerning the neutron weapon. The neutron weapon was something about which we had the technology. It was designed not to destroy buildings and tanks, but destroy human beings by the penetrating force of the nuclear waste products from the explosion. It was an anti-personnel weapon. Earlier, before I becamePresident, a commitment had been made that the United States would proceed with the development of this missile; but when we got down to the point of expending large sums of money in developing the neutron weapon, it became obvious to me that no leader in Europe was willing to agree to deploy these weapons on their territory. And despite my efforts to get Helmut Schmidt and Jim Callaghan in Great Britain to do so, they would never agree. **I had serious qualms about this missile anyway, since it was inherently anti-personnel and not anti-tank or anti-building, so I cancelled the project (emphasis mine),** and there was some altercation between me and the German chancellor about the way that I did this. (Interview with Carter, 1999)

Then and now, Jimmy Carter has been pretty consistent in describing his version of events – anger with recalcitrant allies; disappointment with top advisors not following his instructions about how to consult with alliance partners; concerned about the high costs of the project. Yet, one can also find hints that when faced with prospect of approving a new weapons system one that might make him look like an ogre, morally he could not cross that bridge. In January 2010 the Middle Powers Initiative, a coalition of eight international civil society organizations working for a world free of nuclear weapons, held a consultation at the Carter Center in Atlanta on the May 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. Carter expressed some deeply held beliefs about nuclear weapons and his own Christian conscience:

“President Carter, thank you so much. I was struck when you said in your remarks that you were prepared to launch a counterattack against the Soviet Union.  Knowing you as a deeply moral individual – this is a personal question – I wonder how you could in your own mind take your moral, religious, spiritual values and contemplate retaliation with nuclear weapons with all the results and consequences that this would have.

**President Carter**: The most difficult issue I’ve ever had to face as a human being is what to do if a nuclear threat materialized when we were in the midst of the Cold War. I prayed constantly that I would not be faced with this decision. I didn’t see the rationality—it is difficult for me to talk about it. I couldn’t sit acquiescently and let the Soviet Union destroy my country without a response when we had the capability to do so.

I had been a submarine officer and military professional. I was ready to take action that would take human life to protect the integrity of my country. At the same time, I did everything I could to avoid it. I bent over backwards to understand the partially paranoid concerns of the Soviet leaders. I would sit sometimes in my White House office—I had a large globe there and I would deliberately turn the globe to Moscow and I would imagine myself as Brezhnev.  I would imagine what things might cause me to resort to nuclear use and what might cause me to avoid it. We began to work with the Soviet Union in many ways, including on human rights.

I can’t say in good conscience now that my decision to respond would have been the correct one. It would have cost millions of American lives if we were subject to attack and it would have cost millions of Russian lives if we attacked. I cannot answer your question adequately. It is incompatible with my basic Christian beliefs to do that. What Jesus Christ would have done, I don’t know. When I took the oath of office of President, before God, I took the oath to defend my country.  I felt that was the way I could prevent further destruction of my country. The fact that the Russians believed I would respond was the essence of the mutual deterrence.  If I made any sort of public insinuation that the Russians could attack us with nuclear weapons without being the recipient of a response—that would have been unacceptable, unimaginable for me to do.” (Carter, 2010).

Much has been said and written about the so-called disasters of the Carter administration. He has been described as weak, indecisive, and a poor manager, or so committed to micromanaging, that he wasted time focusing on the schedule for the White House tennis courts, but dithered about making truly big decisions. This portrayal is not fair. Carter did make strong and tough decisions, often against the advice of others and in the face of hostile public opinion. In spite of fierce political resistance, he managed to get the Senate to approve the Panama Canal Treaty. He accomplished the near impossible task of encouraging Israel and Egypt to sign the Camp David Peace Treaty. Responding to the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, he initiated reprisals such as the grain embargo against the Soviet Union and the boycott of the Moscow Summer Olympics. He at least tried to rescue American hostages in Iran. In fact, he also had no qualms about cancelling other popular weapons systems such as the B-1 bomber. By the end of his term, he started a significant buildup in American military force structure. . As a committed Christian, there appeared to be a real conflict between his duty to respond and destroy the enemies of the US and his duty to cherish life. In short, the best explanation for him cancelling neutron bombs is at once simple, but profound. He felt, as Brzezinski concluded, real “moral qualms” about approving a new weapons technology that “killed people” but spared buildings. He did not want to be perceived as demanding the production and deployment of what some had called an “evil weapon.” Carter wanted to be a nuclear peacemaker, not a nuclear war fighter.

**Second Case Study**– **The Obama Administration and the Use of Drones (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles) in War**

*Development of Drone Warfare Technology*

Drones or Unmanned Aerials Vehicles (UAVs) are the latest version of an emerging weapons technology that has been developing and being employed for several decades now. From the use of cruise missiles and other precision guided munitions, there have steady advancements being made in the sophistication and lethality of this type of weapon. What is a key purpose of UAV? To find and kill enemy personnel and strike their assets as much as possible without sacrificing American lives or having to use numbers of ground troops. There are three main types of UAVs, the RQ-1, MQ-1 and upgraded MQ-9 Reaper. They are very high tech weapons platforms they are guided and controlled by operators many miles away from where they are eventually used. Predators perform major functions – reconnaissance, intelligence gathering, and combat – the killing of designated “targets” and hitting terrorist infrastructures. They are deadly and effective in battle “The only thing better than having a robotic airplane assist forces in making decisions about how to fight a battle is to have a robotic airplane actually fight the battle for you” (Valdes, Date ?)**.** Loaded with missiles and guided by precise targeting systems, they rarely miss, and as they hover in the skies for hour’s unseen from the ground, they rarely miss their targets.

The US military is heavily committed to the development, production and use of UAVs. It is estimated that by 2015, the Pentagon will require the services of over 2,000 drone pilots to maintain control over its drone fleet around the glove, 24/7, 365 days a year. Over 7,000 drones are available for use –each drone costs $5 million for a single Predator, to nearly $15 million for a single Reaper. Department of Defense (DOD) budget estimates for FY 2012 allocate nearly $5 billion for UAV research and development, procurement, with other “classified” monies also available for use. (ProCon, 2014).

UAVs seem like the perfect weapon. “Drone strikes are a far cry from the atomic vaporizing of whole cities, but the horror of war doesn’t seem to diminish when t is reduced in scale. If anything, the act of willfully pinpointing a human being and summarily executing from afar distills war to a single ghastly act…We find ourselves tangled in legal and moral knots over the drone”(Bowden, 2013).

*The political and strategic context of the drone warfare controversy*

After 9/11, the Bush Administration authorized the use of armed UAVs The first known Predator strike was authorized on Feb. 4, 2002 against a group thought to include al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. In a harbinger of things to come, all were later judged to be innocent civilians. The use of drones sharply increased between 2002 and 2013, with a high escalation of strikes during the Obama Administration. Targets were hit in countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen, Libya and others. It has been estimated that 3,500 al-Qaeda type militants had been struck and taken out by drones; it has also been estimated that over 300 accidental deaths of civilians took place, or to use the euphemism, “collateral damage.” In fact, civilian deaths have accounted for 8-17% of fatalities resulting from the use of drones. 100% accuracy is a myth. Nevertheless, until Obama’s second term, UAVs were described in positive terms, militarily, politically, and in public opinion surveys though not perfect, they were killing far less civilians than if traditional weapons were being used. Instead of putting boots on the ground in pursuit of terrorists, they were highly effective and much less costly overall to use. And, public opinion backed their employment. On July 18, 2013, a Pew Research Poll showed that 61% of Americans supported drone strikes overseas. Another poll by Gallup on March 20, 2013 reported that 65% of those polled supported drones being used against suspected terrorist targets (ProCon, 2014).

However, more and more arguments were being made criticizing the unrestricted use of drones by the US. Journalist, Eugene Robinson, normally a staunch ally of the President, has recently criticized Obama for presiding over an immoral enterprise, “US drone attacks in Afghanistan, Pakistan and other countries may be militarily effective, but they are killing innocent civilians in a way that is obscene and immoral. I’m afraid that ignoring this ugly fact makes Americans complicit in murder). (Robinson, 2013) As Pamela Falk observed in 2013, “Remotely-controlled unmanned aerial vehicles –or drones have already transformed the nature of war, and the debate on the moral, legal and tactical issues that drones present has increased” (Falk, 2013).

*Obama’s Decision-Making: Political and Moral/Ethical Dimensions*.

Outside of public announcements, speeches, interviews there is not much in the literature that describes in detail, the President’s inner thinking about the use of drones. However, there is enough to suggest that Obama has adopted a political and distinct moral framework in which he relies upon to justify the use of drone strikes. Because of the paucity of primary sources, more text than usual of the president’s actual words will be entered without significant paraphrasing. As will be suggested, his reliance upon drones is not just because, pragmatist that he is, they work and are highly effective. His support of drones is quite thoughtful and, in his mind, ethically the right policy to implement.

On May 29, 2012, the *New York Times* published a thorough and detailed analysis about how the Obama Administration was conducting its drone war. It reveals a president and commander in chief exercising great personal responsibility and oversight of the drone strike operation. “

“Mr. Obama is the liberal law professor who campaigned against the Iraq war and torture, and then insisted on approving every new name on an expanding “kill list,” poring over terrorist suspects’ biographies on what one official calls the macabre “baseball cards” of an unconventional war. When a rare opportunity for a [drone](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/u/unmanned_aerial_vehicles/index.html?inline=nyt-classifier) strike at a top terrorist arises — but his family is with him — it is the president who has reserved to himself the final moral calculation.”

According to Thomas Donilon, Obama’s National Security Advisor, and close friend:

He is determined that he will make these decisions about how far and wide these operations will go. His view is that he’s responsible for the position of the United States in the world. He added, “He’s determined to keep the tether pretty short.

Aides describe Obama as a “paradoxical leader” who can “approve lethal action without hand-wringing” In regards to his authorization to take out alwlki in Yemen, it was , “….a decision that Mr. Obama told colleagues was an “easy one”

This is not to suggest that the President was indifferent to the possibility of killing innocent civilians. He wanted militants, not civilians, to be hit:

“Just days after taking office, the president got word that the first strike under his administration had killed a number of innocent Pakistanis. “The president was very sharp on the thing, and said, ‘I want to know how this happened,’ “ a top White House adviser recounted.

In response to his concern, the C.I.A. downsized its munitions for more pinpoint strikes. In addition, the president tightened standards, aides say: If the agency did not have a “near certainty” that a strike would result in zero civilian deaths, Mr. Obama wanted to decide personally whether to go ahead.

The president’s directive reinforced the need for caution, counterterrorism officials said, but did not significantly change the program. In part, that is because “the protection of innocent life was always a critical consideration,” said Michael V. Hayden, the last C.I.A. director under President [George W. Bush](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/b/george_w_bush/index.html?inline=nyt-per)”

The article reveals that the President used key insights from Just War Theory to guide and justify his actions:

“Aides say Mr. Obama has several reasons for becoming so immersed in lethal counterterrorism operations. A student of writings on war by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, he believes that he should take moral responsibility for such actions. And he knows that bad strikes can tarnish America’s image and derail diplomacy.

“He realizes this isn’t science, this is judgments made off of, most of the time, human intelligence,” said Mr. Daley, the former chief of staff. “The president accepts as a fact that a certain amount of screw-ups are going to happen, and to him, that calls for a more judicious process.”

But the control he exercises also appears to reflect Mr. Obama’s striking self-confidence: he believes, according to several people who have worked closely with him, that his own judgment should be brought to bear on strikes.

Asked what surprised him most about Mr. Obama, Mr. Donilon, the national security adviser, answered immediately: “He’s a president who is quite comfortable with the use of force on behalf of the United States.”

Obama was determined to avoid committing the fallacy of the false alternative. He would not, like the Bush Administration, pose a “false choice between our safety and our ideals.” The President realized war was a messy affair. “His actions show that pursuing an enemy unbound by rules has required moral, legal and practical trade-offs that his speeches did not envision.” (Becker, 2012).

In July 2012, while flying on Air Force One, President Obama conducted an on-camera interview with CNN’s reporter, Jessica Yellin. Reflecting the spirit of just war thinking, Obama told Yellin that he followed five rules when authorizing US drone attacks. In his own words:

“**1**   ’It has to be a target that is authorized by our laws.’

**2** ’It has to be a threat that is serious and not speculative.’

**3**   ’It has to be a situation in which we can’t capture the individual before they move forward on some sort of operational plot against the United States.’

**4**‘We’ve got to make sure that in whatever operations we conduct, we are very careful about avoiding civilian casualties.’

**5**‘That while there is a legal justification for us to try and stop [American citizens] from carrying out plots… they are subject to the protections of the constitution and due process.

Asked by Yellin whether there were deep issues of justice that he dealt with, Obama responded:

“Absolutely. Look, I think that – A president who doesn’t struggle with issues of war and peace and fighting terrorism, and the difficulties of dealing with an opponent who has no rules, that’s something that you have to struggle with. Because if you don’t it’s very easy to slip into a situation in which you end up bending rules, thinking that the ends always justify the means. And that’s not been our tradition, that’s not who we are as a country.

Our most powerful tool over the long term to reduce the terrorist threat is to live up to our values and to be able to shape public opinion not just here but around the world, that senseless violence is not a way to resolve political differences.

And so it’s very important for the president and the entire culture of our national security team to continually ask questions about ‘Are we doing the right thing? Are we abiding by the rule of law? Are we abiding by due process?’ And then set up structures and institutional checks so that you avoid any kind of slippery slope into a place where we’re not being true to who we are.” (Woods, 2012).

More insights about Obama’s thinking about the use of drones were expressed during his May 23, 2013 speech at National Defense University (Remarks, 2013). The subject was the Obama Administration’s drone policy and counterterrorism actions. In his speech, the President made clear that ground operations such as took place in killing Osama bin Laden with a covert Navy Seal team had to be the exception, not the rule:

“To put it another way, our operation in Pakistan against Osama bin Laden cannot be the norm.  The risks in that case were immense.  The likelihood of capture, although that was our preference, was remote given the certainty that our folks would confront resistance.  The fact that we did not find ourselves confronted with civilian casualties, or embroiled in an extended firefight, was a testament to the meticulous planning and professionalism of our Special Forces, but it also depended on some luck.  And it was supported by massive infrastructure in Afghanistan. …

So it is in this context that the United States has taken lethal, targeted action against al Qaeda and its associated forces, including with remotely piloted aircraft commonly referred to as drones.

As was true in previous armed conflicts, this new technology raises profound questions — about who is targeted, and why; about civilian casualties, and the risk of creating new enemies; about the legality of such strikes under U.S. and international law; about accountability and morality.  So let me address these questions.

To begin with, our actions are effective.  Don’t take my word for it.  In the intelligence gathered at bin Laden’s compound, we found that he wrote, “We could lose the reserves to enemy’s air strikes.  We cannot fight air strikes with explosives.”  Other communications from al Qaeda operatives confirm this as well.  Dozens of highly skilled al Qaeda commanders, trainers, bomb makers and operatives have been taken off the battlefield.  Plots have been disrupted that would have targeted international aviation, U.S. transit systems, European cities and our troops in Afghanistan.  Simply put, these strikes have saved lives.

Obama strongly declared that the use of drones were “legal” both under domestic and international law. “We are at war with an organization that right now would kill as many Americans as they could if we did not stop them first.  **So this is a just war — a war waged proportionally, in last resort, and in self-defense** (Remarks, 2009). In this speech he also announced that the program would be scaled back and less likely to inflict civilian casualties.

In general, Obama’s public comments about his rationale for authorizing the use of drones are rare and few between. However, perhaps the best description of his thinking and views about the subject of war and peace can be found within his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize. in 2009. Some of his comments are very relevant to the questions at hand:

“We are at war, and I am responsible for the deployment of thousands of young Americans to battle in a distant land. Some will kill. Some will be killed. And so I come here with an acute sense of the cost of armed conflict - filled with difficult questions about the relationship between war and peace, and our effort to replace one with the other.

These questions are not new. War, in one form or another, appeared with the first man. At the dawn of history, its morality was not questioned; it was simply a fact, like drought or disease - the manner in which tribes and then civilizations sought power and settled their differences.

Over time, as codes of law sought to control violence within groups, so did philosophers, clerics, and statesmen seek to regulate the destructive power of war. **The concept of a "just war" emerged, suggesting that war is justified only when it meets certain preconditions: if it is waged as a last resort or in self-defense; if the forced used is proportional, and if, whenever possible, civilians are spared from violence. (Emphasis mine)**

We must begin by acknowledging the hard truth that we will not eradicate violent conflict in our lifetimes. There will be times when nations - acting individually or in concert - will find the use of force not only necessary but morally justified.

I make this statement mindful of what Martin Luther King said in this same ceremony years ago - "Violence never brings permanent peace. It solves no social problem: it merely creates new and more complicated ones." As someone who stands here as a direct consequence of Dr. King's life's work, I am living testimony to the moral force of non-violence. I know there is nothing weak -nothing passive - nothing naïve - in the creed and lives of Gandhi and King.

But as a head of state sworn to protect and defend my nation, I cannot be guided by their examples alone. I face the world as it is, and cannot stand idle in the face of threats to the American people. For make no mistake: evil does exist in the world. A non-violent movement could not have halted Hitler's armies. Negotiations cannot convince al Qaeda's leaders to lay down their arms. To say that force is sometimes necessary is not a call to cynicism - it is recognition of history; the imperfections of man and the limits of reason.

Somewhere today, in the here and now, in the world as it is, a soldier sees he's outgunned, but stands firm to keep the peace.  Somewhere today, in this world, a young protestor awaits the brutality of her government, but has the courage to march on.  Somewhere today, a mother facing punishing poverty still takes the time to teach her child, scrapes together what few coins she has to send that child to school -- because she believes that a cruel world still has a place for that child's dreams.

Let us live by their example.  We can acknowledge that oppression will always be with us, and still strive for justice.  We can admit the intractability of depravation, and still strive for dignity.  Clear-eyed, we can understand that there will be war, and still strive for peace.  We can do that -- for that is the story of human progress; that's the hope of all the world; and at this moment of challenge, that must be our work here on Earth.

*Conclusion*

Obama’s Nobel Peace Prize perfectly expresses his approach to questions about war and peace. Ever pragmatic, cognizant of what the world is, and committed to the rules of just war thinking, he is also open to rules and changes that would help make the world a safer place He has the steel within him to do what is necessary protect the national interest and protect global interests but within a nexus of legal and moral constraints and norms. Interestingly enough, ex-President Jimmy Carter has become a harsh critic of the Obama Administration’s use of drone warfare. (Carter, 2012)**.** Carter’s moral compass cannot countenance the use of weapons of mass destruction such as the neutron bomb; nor is he impressed with arguments that new weapons technologies such as drones will cut down on the number of civilian deaths.

To Obama, accidental killing of civilians is unfortunate, but can be justified morally. Obama’s vision of responsibility, pragmatism, duty and moral commitment, may also be influenced by the wartime experiences of one of his historical models, Abraham Lincoln. Responding to a question about what he thought of the new Steven Spielberg film *Lincoln*, he offered some interesting comments. After first acknowledging that no president should ever measure themselves against the record and legacy of Lincoln, he said:

“And so the magnitude of his challenges and the magnitude of his gifts are of a different scope and scale of any subsequent President. I do think that there are lessons to be drawn. Part of what *Lincoln* teaches us is that to pursue the highest ideals and a deeply moral cause requires you also engage and get your hands dirty. And there are trade-offs and there are compromises. And what made him such a remarkable individual, as well as a remarkable President, was his capacity to balance the idea that there are some eternal truths with the fact that we live in the here and now, and the here and now is messy and difficult. And anything we do is going to be somewhat imperfect. And so what we try to do is just tack in the right direction.

And you do understand that as President of the United States, the amount of power you have is overstated in some ways, but what you do have the capacity to do is to set a direction. And you recognize you're not going to arrive with -- you'll never arrive at that Promised Land, and whatever seeds you plant now may bear fruit many years later.

So being able to project across a very long timeline while still being focused on the immediate tug and pull of politics I think is a useful lesson, and an accurate portrayal of how I think about my work day to day” (Brevet, 2012).

Both approached the question of using new weapons technologies by asking whether they were justified in moral and ethical terms. One of them deferred; the other accepted these new tools of technology as a way to protect the national interest. And, both presidents have justified their decision making within their own personal and moral frameworks.

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