MORAL JUSTIFICATIONS FOR RESORT TO WAR WITH NICARAGUA: THE ATTITUDES OF THREE AMERICAN ELITE GROUPS

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Among ethicists, a debate rages over the applicability and usefulness of the just war ethic (Yoder 1984). Critics question the credibility of the just war tradition, arguing that just war precepts are either so ambiguous or so watered-down that they can offer no moral guidance. Supposedly, policy-makers end up embracing either moral crusades or a "blank check" national interest ethic, even though the rhetoric of just war ethics might be employed for public effect. It is interesting that no empirical evidence exists regarding these issues. In attempting to shed light on these matters, we surveyed three elite groups influential in U.S. foreign policy: American newspaper editors, foreign service officers, and Catholic clergy serving in the United States. Using American-Nicaraguan relations as a test case, our goal was to determine whether these elites adhered to the criteria for justifiable resort to war found in the traditional literature.

Because of its coherence and importance as an ethical approach, we have drawn heavily from Michael Walzer's *Just and Unjust Wars* (1977) for our organizing framework. Walzer is a normative ethicist whose work falls within the "just war tradition," which embraces mainly Christian just war doctrine, international law, elements of military thought, and contributions from various academic scholars (see Johnson 1981: xxi–xxiv). Just war thought establishes criteria on when resort to war is morally justifiable (i.e., the issue of *jus ad bellum*) and how war should be fought (*jus in bello*). Walzer's work addresses both sets of issues, although here we draw only upon his views regarding the former. In the following sections we identify various moral views on

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warfare, including the just war tradition, describe our research design, and present our empirical findings.

Moral Justifications for War

On the question of the moral justifications for war, the just war principles of "just cause" and "last resort" are central (e.g., see Cohen 1989; Lackey 1989; Johnson 1981, 1984; National Conference of Catholic Bishops 1983; O'Brien 1981; Ramsey 1961; Tucker 1966; Walzer 1977). The just cause principle states that resort to war is justifiable only as a defensive response to an armed attack which threatens substantial harm to a victim nation, a requirement that is also the main thrust of international law (Lackey 1989: 33–36). The last resort principle holds that war is not justified unless all peaceful methods for conflict resolution have been exhausted. This requirement was most relevant in earlier centuries when just cause was defined to include the righting of "wrongs received," where such wrongs might be of lesser gravity than actual armed attack. The current restrictive definition of just cause in both Christian just war doctrine and international law, however, diminishes the independent status of the last resort principle (see Johnson 1984: 24–25).

Although Christian just war doctrine stresses just cause as defined above and justifies that which we label as "defensive war," Walzer has examined the morality of several other types of war. These include preventive war, preemptive war, humanitarian intervention, and military intervention to protect the right of national self-determination. The following are Walzer's assessments of the morality of these categories of war.

Defensive War

Walzer fully supports defensive war as a morally justifiable response to actual armed attack, which is central to the just war doctrine. His contribution to just war thought lies in his examination of the morality of the other categories of war.

Preventive War

Preventive war is rejected by most other contemporary just war theorists (but for an important exception, see Ramsey 1961, 1968). We include this category of war for examination because of its importance in discussions of American policy as will be noted below. A preventive war is launched against a state considered likely to commit

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aggression in the near or even the long-term future. The usual scenario cited by advocates of preventive war is that of a military balance shifting in favor of a potential aggressor who might eventually become militarily superior to some potential victim state. The advocates of preventive war argue that such war is moral because it is really a "defensive war." Its purpose is to prevent future successful aggressive war by the "bully" state. Morality should allow potential victims the right of unilateral defense while they still hold the military advantage, particularly since the international system lacks effective centralized peace-keeping capabilities.

The moral arguments against preventive war center on the last resort principle. According to this principle, methods short of war should be tried first to deal with potential problems, e.g., diplomacy, arms control, or an arms buildup to maintain the balance of power. A preventive war is an early resort to the exclusion of lesser means. Critics of preventive war also argue that governments may err in estimating the intent of another state, and launching a preventive war is choosing the certain evil of war over the uncertain evil of future aggression.

Preemptive War

Like preventive war, a preemptive war involves striking first. However, the scenario here is that of a clear and immediate danger, as for instance, when the armed forces of another state are mobilized and moving toward one's borders presumably to attack. The moral justification for a preemptive war is that morality should not condemn a state to wait for an actual crossing of its borders; a state should have the advantage of striking first in order to preempt and defeat an obvious aggressor. Walzer and other just war theorists generally are receptive to the preemptive argument, but with the caveat that a preemptive strike should be based on solid evidence of an imminent attack.

Humanitarian Intervention

International law asserts the fundamental *rights* of states to sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the fundamental *duty* to refrain from forceful interference in the internal affairs of other states. Working from a theory of human rights, Walzer stresses that the legal rights and duties of states derive ultimately from the moral rights of individuals to life and liberty, and the individual moral duty not to deprive innocents of life.

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An exception to a state's inviolate right to sovereignty can occur when a government uses its right to freedom from outside interference to violate the human rights of its citizenry by engaging in genocidal behavior or by acting inhumanely toward foreign residents. Assuming that the international community refuses to act, a "protector" state may take unilateral military action for the humanitarian purpose of protecting the innocent. The conditional factors on such intervention are that the intervening state should be motivated by humanitarian and not selfish political purposes, and that no immediate alternative exists for rescuing the innocent, the so-called last resort requirement.

Intervention to Protect National Self-Determination

The morality of force to protect the right of national self-determination has been a matter of debate among scholars in recent years, particularly in connection with the so-called Reagan Doctrine of aiding "freedom fighters" attempting to overthrow Marxist governments, e.g., Nicaragua, or to defeat Soviet military intervention, e.g., Afghanistan (see Johnson 1988). The heart of this debate concerns the proper interpretation of the right of national self-determination. Walzer (1977) supports the more common interpretation embedded in international law.

He argues that the right of national self-determination is the right of a people to determine their political system and domestic affairs free of external intervention. National self-determination implies a political process that can range from electoral democracy to civil war. Although strongly supporting the value system that underlies democracy, Walzer stresses the argument of John Stuart Mill that democracy and the conditions necessary for its survival cannot simply be imposed by outsiders. Expressed differently, the argument is that the existence of a dictatorial system or civil war does not imply a lack of self-determination as long as outsiders are not interfering to determine the outcome of the political process. Accordingly, a "protector" state can use military force to protect another state's right of national self-determination only when there has been a prior military intervention by a third state. Hence, military action to protect self-determination must always be counter-intervention. In addition, when intervention has been defeated, the forces of the counter-intervening state must leave the victim state and not stay to impose its own governmental system, an act which itself would be a violation of the right to national self-determination.

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According to this reasoning, American aid to the resistance forces in Afghanistan was morally justifiable because of prior Soviet military intervention. However, American support for the Nicaraguan Contras violated the Nicaraguan right to self-determination since the Sandinista government came to power through an internal process rather than through military action by outsiders.

Attacks on Just War Thinking

Among ethicists and theologians, criticisms against the just war tradition have grown, especially since the Vietnam War and the debate over U.S. nuclear weapons policy in the 1980s. Critics argue that most Americans do not follow the just war tradition, though its rhetoric is freely employed. Instead, it is argued that the majority really adheres to a crusader ("this is a war against godless communism") or a national interest ("my country, right or wrong") ethic (Yoder 1984).

At a minimum, contend critics, the just war tradition can be made credible only if its criteria can be shown to exercise effective policy restraints. "What needs therefore to be tested is whether (just war) criteria can really function so as in any specific cases to exclude a particular cause, a particular weapon, a particular strategy, a particular tactical move" (Yoder 1984: 9). The issue of credibility seems to divide naturally into two questions:

1). Are the just war concepts clear enough to allow judgments to be made in foreign policy contexts?

2). Can constraining cases of negative moral judgment against military actions be identified?

On the first question, critics argue that the just war tenets are too ambiguous to provide guidance. Their case may be summarized as follows: there exists no formal operational statement on how the just war theory should work (Yoder 1983: 46 ff, 58 ff, 477 ff). It has not been translated into legal, political, or military form; its meaning is taken simply as *self-evident*. That a government is "legitimate," that a war is "defensive," that a military operation is a situation of "last resort," that one evil is "proportionate" to another, and so on are all judgments that the just war doctrine assumes can be made with some confidence, consensus, and accuracy.

But often it is precisely because there is no agreement on these matters that wars are fought. For example, revolutionary wars erupt because there is disagreement over legitimate authority. Or opinions

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on what constitutes "last resort" will differ depending on which party benefits from the status quo. In a pluralistic world composed of competing political groups, people will never agree on what constitutes a just government, a just cause, or a just war (Childress 1980). Hence, because of these ambiguities it is doubtful that the just war tradition can offer concrete moral guidance on policy matters.

On the possibility of identifying principled negative judgments against war, just war critics remain skeptical. If the meaning of such precepts is problematical, then how can one expect to hold the line against the pressures of political expedience and special pleading? Under these circumstances, one would expect to find many principled justifications for politically expedient wars, but few principled objections to such wars. Testing the validity of these conjectures for various American foreign policy elites is the concern of the following sections.

Research Design

Studies of American elite groups concerning such moral issues are rare because it is difficult to obtain access to these individuals. Our survey results were obtained in 1987 using mail questionnaires that were sent randomly to selected national samples of three elite groups.

Regarding American diplomats, a letter describing our project and asking for voluntary encouragement of foreign service officer (FSO) participation was sent to the chief of mission of all American foreign service posts. A similar letter was sent to the public affairs officer at each post, and a varied number of questionnaires ranging from three to thirty, depending upon the size of the post, was included for distribution to all willing FSOs. Post information was drawn from Department of State Publication 7877: *Key Officers of Foreign Service Posts* (September 1986). A total of 2800 questionnaires was mailed in this manner and 511 completed surveys were returned, but we have no way of knowing how many actually were distributed to diplomatic personnel as the responses to our efforts were quite varied. Some chiefs of mission had additional questionnaires copied for distribution to personnel, while others refused to participate. Categorized by rank, 20 percent of the FSO respondents were senior diplomats, 52 percent midlevel, and 29 percent junior officers. By area of specialization, 15 percent were administrative, 12 percent consular, 17 percent economic, 37 percent political, 13 percent United States Information Service, and 6 percent other specializations.

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The Catholic clergy respondents were obtained from a random sample of the 18,459 priests assigned to parishes in the United States. Our source for addresses was *The Official Catholic Directory* (November 1986). We sent our questionnaire to 1518 priests and all 382 members of the American heirarchy. The response rates were 25 percent and 22 percent, respectively, for the priests and the hierarchy. A sample of newspaper editorial page editors was drawn at random from the listing of individuals who worked for American daily newspapers in 1987. The list was provided by the Editor and Publisher Company of New York City. Our questionnaire was sent to 1586 individuals, and 371 returned completed forms, which is a response rate of 23 percent.[1]

In examining the views of elite groups on the *jus ad bellum* issues of war, we used Walzer's categories of war. We chose substantive scenarios patterned from contemporary American-Nicaraguan relations as a focal point in our survey since moral arguments regarding Central American were prominent during the latter 1980s (Johnson 1988; Kornbluh 1987: 169–212; Lacey 1986; Miles 1986; Secrest 1986; Walker 1987).

The first part of the survey consisted of thirty-four Likert items designed to measure support for a dozen doctrines and interrelated concepts concerning war. These items were laced with the terminology of moral judgment, and a cover letter instructed respondents to use their own judgment in interpreting the meanings of these terms. The next part of the survey consisted of a series of scenarios describing possible Nicaraguan policies or actions. Respondents were asked to check all the situations "that you feel are serious enough to justify the U.S. going to war with Nicaragua." These scenarios were designed to measure support and opposition for most of the Walzer war justification categories as these applied to American debates on Nicaragua circa 1986. However, no interpretive guidance or just war terminology accompanied the Nicaraguan scenarios or the preceding items. Hence,

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[1] Our questionnaires included a number of other items relevant to issues of international conflict and separate set of descriptors for each group of elite respondents. We acknowledge the possibility that the individuals who were most interested in our survey chose to participate, but if that was the case, it did not affect the basic structure of elite attitudes. While these results are not reported here, the structure exhibited by other American elites is virtually identical to that observed among the American military (Brunk et al. 1990), which had a much higher response rate to our survey. A copy of each of the three questionnaires can be obtained by writing the authors.

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the survey was designed to measure agreement with the substantive positions of Walzer's assessments, but not to indicate whether respondents were aware of or supportive of the just war tradition or competing doctrines.

Elite Agreement with Just War Norms

The percentages of individuals who indicated that each situation would justify the United States going to war with Nicaragua are presented in Table 1. The category of war described in each of the scenarios is given in parentheses. The scenarios are arranged in order of the general level of support for going to war, and did not appear in this order in the questionnaire.[2]

TABLE 1
Situations that Would Justify the U.S. Going to War with Nicaragua

Specific Scenario	Percentage Indicating that this Action by Nicaragua Justifies War: Diplomats	Editors	Clergy
A. Nicaragua Establishes a Communist Government (Protect Right of National Self-Determination)	4.3	3.5	5.0
B. Nicaragua Starts a Major Military Buildup (Preventive War)	**7.6**	**6.5**	**7.8**
C. Nicaragua Aids other Communist Movements (Intervention or "Indirect Aggression")	14.3	16.7	13.4
D. Nicaragua Asks the Soviets to Establish Bases (Preventive War)	35.5	41.2	25.7
E. Nicaragua Attacks a Neighboring Country (Defensive War)	62.9	45.8	35.8
F. Nicaragua Is about to Attack the U.S. (Defensive and Preemptive War)	82.7	80.3	65.3
Average Response	34.6	28.1	21.8
Number of Respondents	511	371	481

[2] The item asked individuals to, "Please check all the situations below that you feel are serious enough to justify the U.S. going to war with Nicaragua."
A. If Nicaragua sends aid (arms, money, advisers, etc.) to communist revolutionary movements in neighboring countries.
B. If Nicaragua sets up a communist government.
C. If Nicaragua invites Soviet military bases to be set up within its borders.
D. If Nicaragua starts a military buildup that overshadows its neighboring states.
E. If there is clear evidence that Nicaragua is going to join an attack on the U.S.
F. If Nicaragua invades a neighboring country.

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Elite Support for Defensive War

The heart of Walzer's analysis is that war should be waged to defend against actual armed attack. The three elite groups showed strong agreement with this fundamental justification. An average of 76.1 percent of the respondents supported war against Nicaragua as justifiable in the case of imminent Nicaraguan attack against the United States (scenario F).[3] The respondents were less supportive of war to defend another nation that was a victim of direct Nicaraguan aggression (Scenario E). This justification received majority support only from the FSOs (62.9 percent) and 48.2 percent average support from the three groups. The result suggests an overall attitude of moderation among respondents, rather than one of "hawkishness."

The survey results for scenario C where Nicaragua provides aid to communist revolutionaries in adjacent countries also are relevant. In international law, such actions are considered "intervention" in the affairs of other countries, or "indirect aggression," rather than "aggression" in the sense of armed attack that can justify a defensive war response (von Glahn 1981: 576–85). A large percentage agreed with this distinction. Only 14.8 percent saw this scenario as a legitimate justification for military action against Nicaragua. This position potentially put all three groups into conflict with the Reagan Administration, which labeled such actions as "Nicaraguan (and Cuban) aggression, aided and abetted by the Soviet Union," and claimed that American security policies toward Central America were "to deter and defend against aggression. . . . We help our friends help themselves" (Reagan 1984: 134).

This American justification was addressed by the World Court in *Nicaragua* v *United States* (1986). The Court ruled that customary international law held that the supplying of arms by Nicaragua to rebel groups in El Salavador and other Central American states, which the Court thought had ended by 1981, was "intervention" rather than "armed attack." While a violation of international law, it was not serious enough to justify the hostile measures taken by the United States in the name of "collective defense." Moreover, the Court held that the mining of Nicaraguan harbors and attacks against oil installations by the United States were violations of obligations under international law "not to use force against another state." The Court also ruled that

[3] In such instances "average" refers to the average of responses of the three separate elite groups, rather than the average of the sum of all individuals from the three groups.

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American arming, training, and supplying of the Contras was illegal intervention in Nicaraguan affairs (Henken et al. 1987: 708–36).

Support for Preventive War

Two of the scenarios involved the justifiability of preventive war. In scenario D, Nicaragua "invites Soviet military bases to be set up within its borders," while in scenario B, "Nicaragua starts a military build-up that overshadows its neighboring states." For the latter scenario, the three elite groups overwhelmingly rejected war as only 7.3 percent considered such Nicaraguan actions as a justification for American military action. In the case of Soviet bases (scenario D), there also was substantial opposition, although a larger percentage (34.1 percent) supported this justification.

The preventive war argument was central in the Reagan Administration's justification of its hostile policies toward the Sandinistas. Administration officials contended that the Sandinista government already had amassed conventional forces that gave it military superiority over its Central American neighbors; that it had allowed Nicaraguan territory to become a strategic military asset for Soviet naval and air power; and that Nicaragua was quickly becoming a Soviet bastion (Shultz 1986). Aside from the accuracy of these charges, none of the survey groups, including the FSOs, showed much support for preventive war as a moral category in the Nicaraguan secnario.

Elite Views on the Self-Determination Issue

The final scenario (A) involved the issue of war or military intervention to protect the right of national self-determination. To recall, Walzer considers national self-determination to be violated if an outside power militarily intervenes to control another state's affairs, and a justifiable war to protect the right of self-determination would have to be a responsive act of counter-intervention against an initial intruder. Accordingly, the existence of a communist system would not necessarily represent the absence of self-determination if it was the product of internal political developments. A contrasting position is taken by Krauthammer (1986) in support of the Reagan Doctrine applied to Nicaragua. He equates self-determination with electoral democracy and therefore considers American aid to the Nicaraguan "freedom fighters" as fully supportive of the national self-determination principle.

Our surveyed elite groups supported the position embodied in Walzer's more conventional understanding of the meaning of national

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self-determination. Over 95 percent of them considered the establishment of a communist system in Nicaragua not to be a sufficient justification for war.

Cognitive Structure

Factor analysis is a technique that allows for an examination of underlying cognitive structure. As a methodology, it has the substantial added advantage that the amount of variance explained by important factors is a measure of the shared, systematic component to elite reasoning. This is not possible to determine by examining simple frequency counts. An analysis of this shared variance, in turn, should reveal in more detail the underlying structure to American elite attitudes regarding international conflict issues.

A general pattern is evident in Table 1 upon close inspection. For scenarios D, E and F, the clergy expressed substantially less support for each justification than did the secular elites. This pattern changes for scenarios A, B and C where we see a smaller percentage of support from the three groups, but almost equal levels of support. These results suggest that American elite standards of normative judgment on such issues do not necessarily comprise a unidimensional scale of attitudinal positions, but are composed of at least two dimensions of evaluation.

A factor analysis confirms this speculation. The results from a varimax rotation are presented in Table 2 and show that the responses to scenarios A, B and C are strongly associated. The same is true for scenarios E and F, while scenario D is moderately correlated with each

TABLE 2
Factor Analysis of Item Responses

Scenario	Factor 1 (Indirect Threat)	Factor 2 (Direct Threat)
A. Adopts a Communist Government	.81	-.02
B. Starts a Major Military Buildup	.76	.06
C. Aids Communist Movements	.68	.34
F. Is about to Attack the U.S.	.00	.74
E. Invades a Neighboring Country	.09	.74
D. Asks the Soviets to Establish Bases	.45	.55
Eigenvalue	2.33	1.10
Variance Explained	38.8	18.4

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dimension. In total these two dimensions explain 57.2 percent of the variance in responses. They are only moderately related to one another, as is shown by an oblique analysis in which the factors are seen to have a correlation of 0.26.

The difference between the two dimensions seems to be one of direct versus indirect threat. Dimension two clearly represents actions that present a direct and imminent threat to the United States or its Central American allies. The scenarios of dimension one correspond to annoyances, but not direct threats. This two-factor solution suggests that another variable besides simple belief in the particular efficacy of normative principles is important in the evaluation of warfare.

Ideology and Support for Military Intervention

Elite responses have a clear pattern in that support for American military action increases as the severity of the Nicaraguan threat increases. We will now examine what factors besides ethical beliefs may influence opinions about resort to war. While Brunk et al. (1990) reported that the most important predictor of warfare attitudes among the military was political ideology, they also discovered a variety of other factors that were weakly related to such attitudes. We therefore asked a series of questions about one's administrative position, functional specialization, and various personal characteristics. Our reasoning was that different experiences might expose a person to different types of normative problems and thus influence one's opinions on warfare issues. However, we quickly determined that the only variable that makes a major difference on elite attitudes is poltitical ideology. This was measured in our surveys by asking individuals to indicate "What is your political viewpoint?" Possible answers were "liberal," "moderate," and "conservative." A pattern emerges here. Consistently across all three groups the liberals are less accepting of justifications for war against Nicaragua, conservatives are the most accepting of such justifications, and moderates lie between the two.

In Table 3 we examine the positions of liberals, moderates, and conservatives on each of the six individual items concerning justifications for military action. The two scenarios for justifying war that are rejected by most individuals concern the adoption of a communist government by Nicaragua (A) and a military buildup by that country (B). These are overwhelmingly rejected by both liberals and moderates, but receive some support from conservatives among all three elite

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groups. In the most extreme cases for the justification of a war against Nicaragua, a small minority of conservatives find themselves at odds with almost all the liberals and moderates, and these conservatives even are pitted against most of their fellow conservatives.

TABLE 3
PERCENT SUPPORTING JUSTIFICATIONS BY IDEOLOGICAL POSITION

The U.S. is Justified in Going to War if Nicaragua:	Liberals	Moderates	Conservatives
A. Adopts a Communist Government			
Diplomats	2.8	2.2	**17.1**
Newspaper Editors	1.5	1.3	**13.2**
Clergy	1.4	4.4	**17.5**
Average	1.9	2.6	**15.9**
B. Starts a Major Military Buildup			
Diplomats	4.2	7.0	**15.7**
Newspaper Editors	2.9	4.4	**17.6**
Clergy	2.7	8.2	**12.5**
Average	3.3	6.5	**15.3**
C. Aids Other Communist Movements			
Diplomats	5.6	12.8	**34.3**
Newspaper Editors	2.9	13.5	**42.6**
Clergy	4.1	13.1	**29.2**
Average	4.2	13.1	**35.4**
D. Asks the Soviets to Establish Bases			
Diplomats	22.6	35.2	**54.3**
Newspaper Editors	29.3	38.4	**64.7**
Clergy	12.3	27.1	**37.5**
Average	21.4	33.6	**52.2**
E. Invades a Neighboring Country			
Diplomats	**47.6**	67.8	**75.7**
Newspaper Editors	**39.7**	45.0	**70.6**
Clergy	23.2	49.7	**47.9**
Average	36.8	54.2	**65.7**
F. Is about to Attack the U.S.			
Diplomats	74.8	87.5	**85.7**
Newspaper Editors	66.2	81.2	**91.2**
Clergy	43.8	69.4	**79.2**
Average	61.6	79.4	**85.4**

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Two scenarios for the resort to war receive only lukewarm support. These are whether Nicaragua aids communist movements in other countries (C) and whether it allows Soviet bases to be established within its borders (D). Here the demarcation between ideological groups can still be seen, but there is no longer a natural alliance between liberals and moderates. Instead, gaps develop among the support rates of all three groups.

Examining the final two questions (E and F) concerning actual Nicaraguan aggresssion shows that there is still some hesitancy among these American elites to use military force. The tendency of liberals is still to feel that American military action against Nicaragua is not justified, and almost 40 percent of liberals oppose American action even if Nicaragua is about to join in an attack on the U.S. Interestingly, the moderates shift closer to the conservatives, which suggests that a conservative-moderate alliance forms when the United States is faced with conditions of actual aggression.

Discussion

Our research provides the first empirical evidence supporting the credibility of just war theory. In doing so we have provided answers to our initial inquiries. First, are the just war concepts clear enough to allow consistent judgments to be made in foreign policy context? Our study answers yes. The survey patterns suggest our respondents were able to respond to various war scenarios in a systematic way that is consistent with contemporary just war doctrine. Our factor analysis showed that direct threat scenarios were distinguished from indirect threats by the respondents in a clean, orderly manner. Also, the scale-like rankings of the scenarios from least to most "war-justifiable" and the systematic respondent variation along ideological lines both suggest that respondents were making systematic judgments. Just war advocates claim that their criteria are self-evident to all and applicable to all. Hence, evidence that people do in fact share a common understanding analogous to just war criteria is a key element in establishing its credibility as a moral guideline.

Assuming that at least part of the respondents share a just war outlook, does such thinking produce meaningful policy restraints? Our findings again suggest a positive answer in at least three ways. First, the survey responses clearly display a reluctance to wage war. As noted earlier, only in the scenarios involving actual Nicaraguan aggression do clear elite majorities find war supportable, and even this sup-

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port is lukewarm. Such sentiments are consistent with the just war tradition's teaching that war is justifiable only if clearly defensive. There is no evidence of a strong, expedient realpolitik view of war or of a predominant anti-communist crusading view. This is again consistent with the just war tradition's teaching that war is a last resort measure, that one should be predisposed against war, and that the burden of proof always rests with the advocates of war.

Second, a reluctance to wage war seems not to be a product of reason of state thinking. Given the extreme power disparity between the U.S. and Nicaragua, and the geopolitical threats contained in some of the scenarios that were rejected by our respondents, we believe that respondent restraint is unlikely to be a product of reason in state calculations, at least of the Machiavellian variety. Similarly, one can discount an anti-communist crusading outlook. Elite restraint, therefore, seems to be a rejection in principle of the "blank check" understanding of reason of state, realism, realpolitik, national interest, necessity, and moral crusading.

One might argue that our respondents' defensive outlook and military restraint, while consistent with just war reasoning, are really products of realist calculations. Perhaps geopolitical prudence and national interest, rather than moral judgments, are at play here. No matter how altruistic a policy choice might appear, it usually is possible to construct an alternative, "national interest" explanation. While we cannot completely discount the idea that these elites were responding to some higher order, amoral realism, we believe it is more likely that they were weighing both moral just war considerations and practical concerns. When assessing risk and war issues in the abstract, even the American military incorporate evaluative frameworks that utilize both practical and just war components (Brunk et al. 1990). It is possible that when faced with a specific scenario regarding Nicaragua, our respondents shifted solely to amoral reasoning, but this seems unlikely.

Might the practicality of prudence alone, uninfluenced by moral concerns, account for elite choices? While this too cannot be discounted completely, we again think it unlikely. Prudence is an extremely ambiguous and weak policy guide (Smith 1986: 216, 234–38). It serves as a general precept that is seen by elites as spanning almost all moral and reason of state frameworks (Brunk et al. 1990: 98–99). It cannot serveas a distinguishing, alternative explanation. Similar objections can be raised against purely national interest or reason of state explanations in trying to account for the systematic, elite responses. In urging that government be guided by the pursuit of national interests or reasons of

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state, there is no agreement among advocates of this view as to what these interests are in either a theoretical or practical sense. This vagueness is especially evident on an issue like Nicaragua where even basic matters of fact are often in dispute.

For these reasons, we believe that the consistency of elite judgements on Nicaragua and just war precepts reflects the influence of those precepts. We do not deny that practical, political calculations entered into elite decisions, but we feel that these calculations were not the sole considerations and that just war elements played an important role in respondent attitudes.

However, some qualifications accompany our findings. First, we do not know the limits of our respondents' commitment to the substantive content of just war norms. If the price of following such norms is too high, they might be abandoned. For example, evidence exists that some military officers would ignore moral restrictions if the very existence of their "in group" was at stake (Brunk et al. 1990). Similarly, "last ditch defense" thinking may be hidden among our three elites. As a matter for future research, changing the general scenario to one involving a nuclear superpower as the rival state would highlight these matters. Second, we must distinguish the conceptual and individual prerequisites of the just war tradition from the social prerequisites that allow the just war criteria to operate. Our findings address only the former, but individual judgements are not the same as organizational behavior. We do not know what sorts of institutional forms and decision making processes are most suitable for bringing organizational policy implementation in line with the just war criteria. Finally, we do not know to what extent elite restraints reflect enduring moral concerns, as opposed to transitory, historical sensitivities, such as the Vietnam syndrome.

As for the current America-Nicaragua controversy, we can speculate about the policy implications of these survey results. One significant aspect of American policy in the context of morality is the importance that the Reagan Administration apparently assigned to taking the "moral high ground" in the domestic policy arena. National security strategists within the Administration considered Vietnam-like "low intensity conflict" (LIC) to be the main Soviet threat in the foreseeable future (e.g., see Larkin 1986; Klare and Kornbluh 1987; Miles 1986; Walker 1987). The Administration's LIC strategy was the culmination of almost two decades of study on why America lost in Vietnam. One conclusion reached was that the "hearts and minds" of the American

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people had not been won for the Vietnam commitment. From this conclusion it followed that public support was essential for success in the anticipated struggle for the Third World, and part of this support would have to be based on the moral sensibilities of the American public. As expressed by a Pentagon study, American LIC strategy was a "carefully created, sophisticated and ongoing public diplomatic effort" to establish that the Reagan Doctrine was necessary for both national security and *moral* reasons (Klare and Kornbluh 1987b: 14; Kornbluh 1987; 159–212; also see Miles 1986; Walker 1987).

Whether the "moral" approach of the Reagan Administration was just a tactic to a sincere commitment, it is clear that the Administration's public justifications for hostile policies toward Nicaragua were laced with moral terminology. Nicaragua was called a "totalitarian jungle" and a "communist reign of terror," and the Contras were described as "freedom fighters." The Sandinistas were committing "aggression" against their neighbors. Cuban-Nicaraguan communist subversion posed a threat to all of Central America, Mexico, and eventually the southern border of the United States. This made American help to its Central American allies defensive in nature and "morally . . . the only right thing to do" (see Reagan 1984).

Public opinion surveys conducted during the Reagan period indicated a lack of support for the Administration's policy toward Nicaragua, but they did not examine attitudes on the major moral aspects of the controversy (e.g., see Kenworthy 1987). Our evidence indicates that American elites disagreed with the Administration's moral and legal justifications for its anti-Nicaraguan policies. Although ideological orientation was important in determining the degree of restraint among elite respondents, even a majority of the less restrained conservatives only supported American military action as a direct response to Nicaraguan aggression or as a preventive action. While the liberal-conservative distinction is an important component of attitudinal positions on the moral issues surrounding resort to war, the attitudes of American elites on international conflict issues appear to be generated by even more fundamental principles than political ideology.

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