



CENTER ON AMERICAN AND GLOBAL SECURITY

INDIANA UNIVERSITY

School of Global and International Studies
College of Arts and Sciences

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Professor Scott Sagan

"Atomic Aversion and Just War Doctrine: New Experimental Evidence"

Professor Scott Sagan, Professor of Political Science and Senior Fellow at the Center for International Security and Cooperation and Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University, spoke on the topic of "Atomic Aversion and Just War Doctrine: New Experimental Evidence". The lecture was held on Friday, November 7th at the Maurer School of Law. Professor Sagan presented his findings on the American public's opinion on the use of nuclear weapons and the principles of the just war doctrine.

Professor Sagan first presented experiment data for surveys that centered on the use of nuclear weapons. The basis of the questions was if the participant would be willing to use nuclear weapons on a target if it had the same effect as conventional weapons, a slightly greater effect, or a much greater effect. The results Professor Sagan presented indicated that the majority of the public were willing to accept the use of nuclear weapons, even if the results were equal to that of conventional weapons. He suggested that this evidence implies a fading of the "nuclear taboo" in the United States.

The evidence for the second topic, just war doctrine, was the next segment of his presentation. The surveys for this experiment were similar to the nuclear force survey as they polled American public opinion on the use of force based upon differing outcomes for U.S. forces, enemy combatants, and civilians. A central tenet to the just war doctrine, proportionality, was found in the experiments to be broadly accepted by the American public. The results demonstrated that the American public is less willing to accept higher number of civilian deaths when the expected damage to the target is low and more willing when it would avert large U.S. military casualties. The evidence also demonstrated that the American public is willing to accept non-combatant casualties if it results in a greater chance of success to the mission. This provides evidence that the public does not support the principle of distinction in regards to the just war doctrine. Coinciding with these findings, the study also asked participants if they would be more willing to support an attack that featured civilian deaths if those civilians were in support of the targeted military groups, though non-combatants. In these results, the findings also show that the participants were more willing to accept the civilian deaths if they were indeed supporters of the adversary.

Professor Sagan concluded his results with a summary of the findings. These included the American public's view on certain just war doctrine principles and their willingness to adhere to it based upon U.S. interests. He then noted the results showing the survey results regarding the use of nuclear weapons and the noticeably high U.S. public's acceptance of their use.