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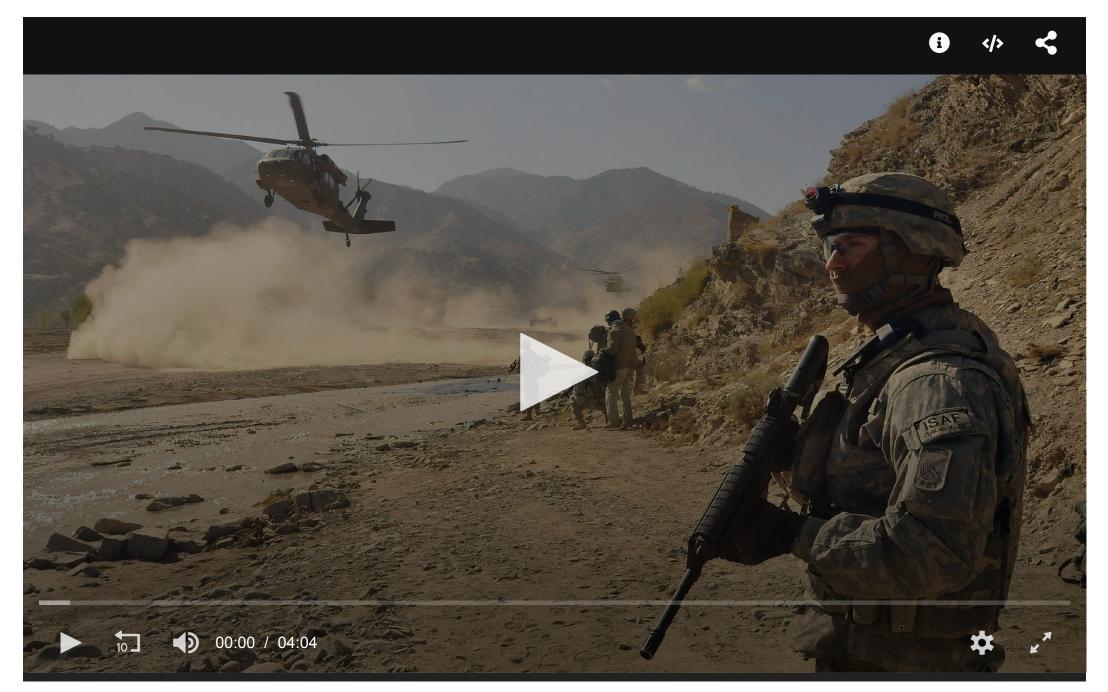
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Morality and the Afghanistan War December 4, 2009

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KIM LAWTON, guest anchor and managing editor: Religious groups had mixed reactions to President Obama's new plan for the war in Afghanistan. Some expressed hope that the additional 30,000 American troops will indeed bring stability by 2011, when Obama said the

US will start to withdraw. But others were disappointed by the military escalation. A coalition of moderate and progressive Christians had pushed for a "humanitarian" surge, rather than a military one. In his speech to the nation, Obama said America began the war, in part, to defend what he called "the values we hold dear":

President Obama (speaking at West Point): "America, we are passing through a time of great trial. And the message that we send in the midst of these storms must be clear: that our cause is just, our resolve unwavering. We will go forward with the confidence that right makes might."

Joining me now is John Carlson, associate director of the Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict at Arizona State University. He's joining us from San Diego. John, did President Obama make the moral case for his plans for the Afghanistan war?

JOHN CARLSON (Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict, Arizona State University): I think he gives us a good framework for thinking about the moral implications of that war. He started his speech by taking us back to the events of September 11th, the slaughter of innocents, and reminding us of the tremendous moral legitimacy and consensus about that legitimacy that we enjoyed at that time. He reminded us of the oppressive regime of the Taliban that supported them, and then he closed his speech, as we just saw, again reminding us of the moral source of America's authority. So I think those are good moral bookends to a political argument for thinking about the moral implications there.

LAWTON: Well, in fact, it seems like a lot of the public discussion that we've been hearing has been based on the military strategy, political implications, expediency. There really hasn't been a lot of moral discussion about the implications of this war, has there?

CARLSON: I quite agree with that. It's been there, here and there, but not as much as it could be or should be or certainly was in —surrounding the deliberation about the initial invasion of Afghanistan.

LAWTON: But what's not being discussed? What are some of the moral implications that you're not hearing and you think we need to be examining?

CARLSON: Well, I think there are two in particular that need to be lifted up here. The first is to remember the plight of the Afghan people under the Taliban prior to September 11th, and also what the plight of the Afghan people would be should the Taliban return to power, and that's particularly significant if one thinks about the treatment of women and girls, and so we really can't afford to ignore that at all. The second is that there is a moral responsibility on the part of the United States. When you invade a country and overthrow its government and occupy it and put in a new government you incur responsibilities. We may have been there for eight years, but we have never put forward the resources needed to succeed or even to be able to say we've done all

LAWTON: What about the moral responsibility to the troops, to the American people who are concerned about the cost of this and allocating those resources which people say could be used for other things as well?

CARLSON: There are clear moral implications there, and it is important to keep those in mind, and the president stressed in his speech that there's this concept of a balancing act, so recognizing the moral implications of those features is very important as well, particularly the human cost of war, both for American lives but also for Afghan lives.

LAWTON: And I know that you are concerned about the long-term ethical implications. What do you mean by that?

CARLSON: Well, I talk about what we might consider the moral legacies of war, and that involves thinking about how the moral outcomes in many cases outweigh, in some cases outlast even, the original reasons for waging a war. So World War II was not waged to end the Holocaust, nor was the Civil War waged to end slavery, but those were important outcomes of those wars, so we need to keep those long-term moral legacies in mind, particularly if you're thinking here about the liberation of the Afghan people from the oppressive regime of the Taliban.

LAWTON: And, very briefly, there's been a movement stressing a humanitarian surge. Is that also something that should be incorporated into these plans?

CARLSON: I think the importance of civilian groups and building the infrastructure of society cannot be underestimated, so one has to support that, I agree. One also has to remember, of course, that those groups require security. It doesn't help to build a school and staff it with teachers if it's going to be bombed the next day, so security is crucial, and the military piece of that has to be kept in mind.

LAWTON: All right. John Carlson, thank you very much for being with us today.

CARLSON: Thanks for having me on the show.

that we can do, we have earned the right to withdraw.

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