

Nuclear Ethics

SLAV 205

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My assistant came running to me, looking all disturbed and worried. I wonder what could have gotten into him?

“Lord Sandy!,” he exclaimed loudly, while still paying appropriate respects.

“How can I help you, Ishmael?”

“I have an essay deadline for my Ethics class tomorrow. You are the greatest leader to ever grace our cursed land with your holy presence,” my assistant said adoringly.

“All of that is true. Is there something I can do about your ethics essay?”

“Well, yes. One of the questions is something I believe your majesty can enlighten us. Would you equip your country’s armed forces with nuclear weapons as deterrence or use a nuclear weapon against an enemy country?”

As a leader of a nation, it is no secret that most of all, I must protect and improve the rights, safety, and security of my people. The pride and independence of citizens of my nation. If another nation-state or a country comes to us with a fight or dares to threaten us, we shall match the foreign terror and threat with our own, until the said influence and caused are fully eradicated from my people’s minds and hearts. Yes, I would and will use nuclear weapons as a deterrence. If it ever comes to a necessity of a nuclear response against an enemy country, then we shall strike them down from above with all of our might and power.

I do wonder on those lonely nights, starving for some real human connection, longing for a true feeling flowing through my veins, just once. I

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wonder, am I an ethical person? Is it ethical for me to use nuclear weapons as a deterrence, putting the scare into the entire world of my arsenal? I want to ponder about that with my imaginary deontological and utilitarian friends.

From a deontologist's point of view, nuclear deterrence policy goes strongly against moral principles, as it involves a conditional statement of using them in a specific situation, which by itself is wholly immoral. Usage of such a dramatic weapon will cause deaths of not thousands, maybe millions, but most assuredly of billions of people. All those lives will be lost, therefore for deontologists, which focus on the argument of the morality of the action itself, nuclear deterrence is simply wrong.

However, is it the right ethical framework to apply in this situation? If we are threatened by someone else with fewer deontological moral principles, the next sure thing coming for us is sure destruction.¹ I do not believe Deontologists Argument can keep a nation safe in the modern world, equipped with nuclear toys. What is also wrong with it is not only its absolutist position regarding nuclear deterrence but also its focus on a hypothetical scenario of using nuclear weapons under possible conditions.

The mere fact that I would write a plan of defending myself with a nuclear arsenal in case of my nation got attacked with the same type of weapon is itself morally wrong. If a nation doesn't have a nuclear deterrence policy set up, another nuclear power could easily overwhelm with a high chance of attacking the ones who cannot defend themselves with nukes. Having a nuclear deterrence policy, but with no actionable blueprint on what to do in case of a real attack also makes a nation weaker, therefore even more of a military target.²

This leads me to the realization that the Deontologist's Argument would prevent me from equipping my country with nuclear weapons, even if it is meant for deterrence, for the protection of my people against external threats of a nuclear nature. As for a leader, this is unacceptable. What leader would blindly stick to the ethical argument that only works on a small scale and apply it to the security considerations of a whole nation? I must find another way.

¹*Pakistan's Nuclear Testing*, Hasan-Askari Rizvi, pp. 98-100

²*Deterrence and Deontology*, McMahan, pp. 531-532

Utilitarianism tells us that if any action leads to a consequence of maximizing the happiness and well-being of affected people, therefore it must be justified. It is the only ethical construct, in which we can safely and easily argumentative pro-war stances, such as viewing even the short-term negative effects as leading to the prosperity and good of a nation in the long-term run. My decision to equip my country with nuclear weapons would be wholly justified and approved from a utilitarian framework, as I am providing security to my nation.

However, it makes me think, about whether the utilitarian mindset and the utility should apply only to my countrymen or the whole world. Defending for ourselves is a positive for us, however, the heated geopolitical nature of nuclear deterrence policies might, directly and indirectly, result in much discomfort not only to my people, but to the whole world, such as economic restrictions, limitations on free trade, hostile relationships, and restricted travel. The utilitarian point of view on nuclear deterrence depends from which angle we will look.

History teaches us all. Recall the still ongoing debates over the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Many arguments share the utilitarian point of view, such that it was impossible to make Japan surrender unless there was an overwhelming destructive force pushed on them. They believe that the bombings themselves prevented massive casualties on both sides from the planned invasion of Japan. Kyushu was to be invaded in November 1945 and Hondo four months later. However, after many decades of discussing the event, other analyses have been brought up.

Many critics believe that the nuclear attack on Japan was inherently immoral and a war crime.³ Further discussion on Japan's armed forces and military strategies now lead us to believe that a simple naval blockade and an invasion by conventional warfare would have forced Japan to surrender with no conditions.⁴ Some critics of the bombings have even concluded that Japan was to surrender after the Soviet Union invaded Manchuria.⁵ Did the utilitarian-backed usage of nuclear weapons result in the greater good?

³*The Collins Encyclopedia of Military History*, Dupuy & Dupuy, BCA 1994, p. 1308

⁴*Nuclear weapons, international law, and the normalization of state crime*, Kramer, Ronald C, pp. 94-121

⁵*The Battle for Manchuria and the Fate of China: Siping, 1946 (Twentieth-Century Battles)*, Harold M. Tanner, pp. 30-31

No, it has only resulted in tragic losses, inhuman treatment of the Japanese people, and a big crisis back at home, where the usage of nuclear weapons was widely condemned.⁶

Many heinous acts could be viewed from a utilitarianistic point of view as fully justified and ethical. However, standing here, I realize, that violence breeds violence, and it has to be this way. The actual usage of nuclear weapons as of means of attacking another country would be deemed highly unethical by deontology and utilitarianism, as both would result in great human suffering, which is incredibly tough to offset with any financial or political gains received by any of the sides.

On the other hand, nuclear deterrence for the sake of the security of a nation is fully justified and deemed ethical from a Utilitarianistic point of view, so I would equip my nation with such a force as a last-resort instrument against any foreign aggression. The usage of such an instrument, however, is something that cannot be found ethical, no matter from what lens you look. The destruction and human price paid are simply too high. Even if it is unethical, whether it comes to the point of retaliating against someone else's aggression, I would be called an unethical leader. That is the price I will pay.

⁶*Recent Literature on Truman's Atomic Bomb Decision: A Search for Middle Ground*, Walker, J. Samuel, pp. 311-315