

The Bush Doctrine

Ethics Paper

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SGM Nicholes, L09

16 November 2005

Ethics, the principles of conduct governing an individual or a profession. The president of the United States has an ethical obligation to the country to conduct himself with unquestionable moral integrity. As the leader of the most powerful nation in the world, President George W. Bush has changed the way our country conducts foreign policy with the release of the 2002 National Security Strategy. Does the establishment of policy legitimize or give ethical acceptance to an issue? President Truman first established our policy of containment and deterrence during the start of the cold war, a policy that has served our nation well for over half a century. With the invasion of Iraq, our nation applied a policy of preemptive strike; normative ethics would argue that preemptive war is unethical.

September 11, 2001 the United States changed forever when a little known terrorist organization attacked our way of life. One year later the Bush administration released its first National Security Strategy. Published every four years the National Security Strategy outlines America's major security concerns and the administrations plans to handle these concerns. The four pages of chapter V taken from speeches President Bush gave following the 9/11 attacks outline a shift in American policy from one of containment to one of unilateral preemptive strike, the Bush Doctrine. In a speech to Congress on September 20, 2001, President Bush stated, "*And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism... Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime...*" June 1, 2002, in his graduation speech to Army cadets at West Point President Bush stated, "*...our security will require all Americans to be forward-looking and resolute, to be ready for preemptive action when necessary...*"

The release of the 2002 National Security Strategy formalized these speeches into national policy, "... *today, our enemies will use weapons of mass destruction as weapons of choice... We cannot let our enemies strike first.*" It also goes on to argue the need for unilateral preemption due to self-protection: "*We will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively against such terrorists; to prevent them from doing harm against our people and our country... nations need not suffer an attack before they can lawfully take action to defend themselves against forces that present an imminent danger of attack.*" This fundamental shift in the policy of the United States begs the question; is a policy of "first strike" ethically acceptable?

Ethics are the foundation by which a person lives their life. What a person believes is right or wrong and how they apply that to the decisions they make in their life. One's personal values determine whether they are a moral person. These values come from many places the biggest being the home where an individual grows up. Parents pass values to their children thus determining if that child will lead a moral life. There are many other influences school, friends, and sports to name a few, but the family without question is the foundation.

Society adopts the moral principles that individuals have constructed for themselves as the norms which society lives by. This would be the simplest explanation however; ethics is much more than individual values. Ethics start with the individual but are present at all levels of society to include business and government.

Certain professions develop their own ethical standards, the norms society accepts as ethical behaviors are not specific enough for that profession. The medical profession is an example of a profession that has moral obligations specific to their profession. Doctors collectively have moral obligations to society in the manner in which they execute their duties

that are different from the norms of society. Thus, they have their own ethical code that guides their behavior as doctors. The President of the United States must also look further than the values his parents gave him as he executes the duties of establishing policy on behalf of our society.

Arguments on both sides of the debate make a strong case. History also lends itself well to both sides. America has had long standing policy of interventionism, especially in the affairs of South America. However, America has never expressed its intent to strike first in such an open way as it has with the Bush Doctrine. This is where the argument blurs, if we as a society accept the Bush policy; then is it ethically acceptable. How do we then react when Russia adopts this policy and attacks Georgia for harboring Chechen rebels? Are we saying it is ethically acceptable for India to attack Pakistan for their state sponsored support of terrorism in Kashmir? Have we changed the norms by which countries may conduct themselves in our quest to rid the world of the terrorist that will stop at nothing to hurt our way of life?

The Invasion of Iraqi is not the ethical issue of this paper. Rather the Policy that our government has now adopted in its stance to protect our country from terrorist. We have had a fundamental shift in what is ethically acceptable in regards to safeguarding our country. For the first time in our nation's history, we have openly declared we will attack first to safeguard our way of life. President Bush has led our country into a new chapter in its history that only time will judge. Our responses to the attacks of 9/11 have had just cause and can be morally justified. Every nation has the right to self defense and can easily justify their actions in world opinion if just. However, a national policy openly stating we will attack first to defend our way of life leaves our nation looking like the aggressors rather than the defenders of freedom.

References

The National Security Strategy of the United States of America. National Security Counsel. September 2002.