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AP Language & Composition

10/31/14

Can Pacifism be an Effective National Policy? and Can Pacifism Viably Create Change?

The debate for pacifism as a national policy and ethical philosophy stems from ancient times, from Buddhist India and Mohist China to early Christians and Roman objectors. In recent times, pacifist philosophy stems from early Protestant movements and later from Utopian, peace promoting movements. Today, their legacy is carried on by non-violent dissidents such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr, and the Occupy Movement. Many pacifists argue that war and violence are contrary to human nature and advocate for a general philosophy of extending peace to all persons; others argue that peace is the ultimate ideal of a society and a person, but may not always translate as such in reality. On the other hand, anti-pacifists argue against many weak-points of pacifism- specifically the fact that peace as a national policy is unrealistic. For example, they cite that people must be willing to fight to defend themselves, their loved ones, and their property. Others claim that every person must uphold their duty to protect and serve their nation. While the debate rages on, the question remains: is pacifism a realistic national policy, and does it create change?

PRO: Pacifism CAN be an effective national policy and create change

Pacifism, many argue, is a clunky and unrealistic belief. They say that the concept of pacifism would be difficult to implement even in a perfect world, and that the absence of violence is completely impossible and should not be given any weight. And they are right. At

least, they are right about what they perceive pacifism to be. Pacifism, however, is not a lack of *belief* in violence, nor is it a belief that violence can be completely eliminated. Rather, pacifism is an *ideal* that violence should be restrained to only last-case scenarios, for use only when more diplomatic means of solving issues have either failed or are deemed futile. As such, pacifism immediately becomes an agreeable concept to those who once called it irrational.

To be completely fair, there are many conflicts in the world, such as the constant fighting over the Gaza Strip or the tensions between India and Pakistan, that likely will never be solved by diplomatic means. However, most of those kinds of conflict have already erupted into violence, and those that have are no closer, if not farther from resolution due to the fighting. In reality, a diplomatic approach to these problems from the start (which, I realize, sounds outlandish as these conflicts have their roots from almost a hundred years ago) would have resulted in a faster and more complete solution to the territorial disputes in both cases.

Of the cases where diplomatic means did not or would not have worked, oftentimes it is merely because one or both sides of the conflicts were aiming for war. Naturally, when such a situation occurs where a group or civilization is intending for war to occur, violent conflict is largely inevitable. For example, Nazi Germany in World War II was largely aiming for a war to occur in that they invaded many countries surrounding them such as Austria and Poland. As a result, diplomacy was not a viable reaction to the German annexation of the surrounding countries. Germany did not and would not have responded favorably to polite requests to stop conquering Europe. So yes, in this case, pacifism would not have produced any successful result, but only because Nazi Germany was pushing for a war.

Pacifists have been looked down upon as unpatriotic cowards, but there is no cowardice or lack of patriotism wanting your fellow countrymen to live on, and to wish that the resources spent on war were instead used to better their home country. The concept of pacifism means that instead of using funds to destroy other nations, resources are used to build up both other countries and the home country. As such, the fact that “when all but one of the [British pacifists] refused to move supplies, they were court-martialled and sentenced to death by firing squad” during World War I is ridiculous and unacceptable (Williams). Pacifism is not a zealotry that believes all war should end, but it is a resistance from wars that are either futile or unnecessary.

Pacifism, again, is not a lack of belief in war, nor is it a refusal to acknowledge the necessities of war or even the existence of war. Rather, the concept of pacifism is that war should be reserved for times where it is absolutely necessary and unavoidable. The last resort stance that pacifists have on war saves millions of lives, and also resolves many conflicts without the spilling of blood.

CON: Pacifism CAN NOT be an effective national policy or create change

A key argument against pacifism is that nonviolence is not always a possible solution in the face of certain crises. For example, the recent civil war in Syria is a clear example of the failure of diplomatic passivity. International failure to intervene or lend support to the rebels or the government resulted in the creation of another Jihadist breeding ground, giving rise to fanatical factions such as the Islamic State. Further failure to create a comprehensive military response to the IS threat allowed them to gain large areas of control and continue its ethnic cleansing policy, as seen in the current campaign to eradicate the Kurds.. Ex-Ambassador to

Syria Robert Ford argues that the international failure to provide *military* support resulted in its failure (Ford).

Another example of international failure is the Rwandan Genocide, in which the lack of military intervention in the Congo by UN Peacekeepers resulted in the death of over half a million Tutsi in Rwanda. A writer from the Harvard International Review argued that failure to recognize the Rwandan and Darfur genocides, and even more the failure to lend military or armed defence resulted in the deaths of millions of innocent Tutsi and Africans (Diep). He further argues that international intervention is necessary for the prevention of cases like Rwanda, Darfur, and the Holocaust; which in the face of some ultra-belligerent factions such as the Interhamwe is impossible without *armed* intervention.

Anti-pacifists consider pacifism a naive solution to conflict, and argue that wars and violence are permitted under the *Just War Theory*, which the Encyclopaedia Britannica claims to state that the two basic elements of just war are “an account of just cause and just means.” These take into account, among other things, collateral damage and the viability of other options. Pacifists argue against it, citing that human fallibility skews the idea of “just cause”. Certain experts argue that people like the Nazis and the Soviets see their cause as more just than others (Cline). However, some anti-pacifists argue that “just cause” has clear guidelines, such as minimal loss of human life and anti-oppressive causes. The true confusion comes from policies such as pre-emptive strike, in which the line between just cause or hasty action is blurred, however the true question that anti pacifists pose for pacifists is: would you stand and watch while your nation is attacked?

PRO: Troy's Personal Viewpoint

By the definition of pacifism in my argument, I fully agree with the pacifist ideals and concepts, and do share the belief that war or violent conflict should be reserved to a last-resort scenario. War is only justifiable when it is forced upon one or both sides, and even then, a diplomatic solution can often fully or partially resolve the conflict.

CON: Sketch's Personal Viewpoint

In my opinion, war is a means to an end, rather than an end, and a part of a complex diplomatic cycle involving many complexities. In the ancient world, many times war was in fact a first resort- which I wholeheartedly disagree with. With the rise of economical pressure in politics, as seen in the Viking age Danegeld system and the Quraysh Tribe's embargo on Muslims, war was eventually supplanted from being supported by economic pressures to being a secondary resort. In the modern period, war is increasingly less used as a threat- instead, the buildup of arms was enough. We see this in the militarization of the Rhine by Nazi Germany in the 30s, and the Nuclear Proliferation of the Cold War. There is no doubt that today, military action is seen as secondary to economic pressures such as the freezing of assets, embargoes, and punitive tariffs. However, that is not to say that the military has its place.

The ideals of certain ultra-pacifistic groups are intensely naive, and often attempt to create a national policy where all diplomacy is dedicated to preventing war. While they do not speak for the majority of pacifists, I find fault in the idea that war must always be prevented. In certain times, military measures may not be the last resort but may be the best resort. For example, while the Falkland War could have been negotiated with drawn out peace talks, British

military response created a firm message louder than any conference- Britain was willing to fight to retain control of its overseas territories.

There is little doubt that pacifists could help solve issues- Gandhi's Passive Resistance advocates and Martin L. King's own non-violent side of the Civil Rights Movement both helped to achieve great strides in civil liberties. However, there was an equally violent side in both; violent religious unrest broke out with India amongst Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims, while the Black Panthers and Malcolm X' movements showed Americans that Blacks were willing to fight for their civil rights. For every non-violent movement, there is a violent movement that caused it, resulted from it, or goes alongside it.

I personally agree with the Just War Theory- to an extent. While a "just cause" of a war is difficult to objectively state, the consequences of belligerent action are clear. In any event, military action must consider the following event: will there be more loss of life or livelihood with military action, or without? While the French did not suspect that strong, early defensive measures against the Nazi Regime was necessary, the German occupation of France in WWII clearly showed the failure of France's lack of swift military action.

Some might argue that crises in the modern world may be solved with less personnel and more diplomacy, but the Syrian War is a clear display of the contrary. On the other hand, swift Russian measures during the Georgian War showed that quick military measures could solve conflicts. While some argue that it was unjustifiable, the citizens of South Ossetia and Abkhazia- the disputed regions- would argue for the Russian sides, and very little collateral damage was incurred as a result of the conflict. Both sides show the failure of a pacifistic national policy and the efficiency of swift and clean military action.

A good national policy must rationally and logically weigh the consequences of all diplomatic actions seriously and consider every option. There can be no place for weak and middling measures to international affairs like asset freezes and small economic pressures. The best option must be chosen for every individual crisis, even when it involves military action. Not all military action is violent either- the build-up of forces and arms in key strategic and tactical locations are enough to give leverage in positions. A good national policy must not limit the consideration of military action, but must also consider the consequences of all options. What people must understand is that, though pacifistic ideals have its place, a nation must be firm in its actions if it plans to protect its international standing and the safety of its citizens; lest we suffer the same fate of the proxy states during the Cold War.

Negotiation

Both of us agree that the highest ideal is peace, and the most minimal loss of life possible. However, successive diplomatic failures can and will leave a nation with war as its only option. Similarly, life or death situations can and will happen, and if the situation causes for violence, then there is little choice- take arms and fight back, or die. However, violence is only a last resort and is only to be used when all other options are null and void. A nation can have a policy where military measures are a last resort- a good example is Iceland, which has no standing military, or Sweden and Switzerland, both nations that have been neutral and uninvolved in any war since the Seven Years' War and the Napoleonic Wars, respectively. Furthermore, although violent movements do contribute to change, nonviolent movements do have the power to create change; the Black Panthers may have fought for civil rights, but it was

Martin Luther King and his followers that secured it. In the end, pacifism as an ideal is not only an admirable national policy, but also one which everyone should strive for.

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