MICHAEL WALZER’S MORAL CRITIQUE OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY IN
THE CONTEXT OF THE POST-WAR AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY DEBATE

A thesis presented to
the faculty of
the College of Arts and Sciences of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts

Sara M. Kupfer
August 2003
This thesis entitled

MICHAEL WALZER’S MORAL CRITIQUE OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY IN
THE CONTEXT OF THE POST-WAR AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY DEBATE

BY

SARA M. KUPFER

has been approved for
the Department of History
and the College of Arts and Sciences by

Kevin Mattson
Associate Professor of History

Leslie A. Flemming
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
This thesis discusses Michael Walzer’s role as a public critic of American foreign policy from the mid-1950s to the present. The purpose of this discussion is two-fold. First, it seeks to trace out a voice on the American liberal left that does not fit the common stereotype of a negativist, ideologically rigid leftist critic. Walzer’s alternative liberal vision as articulated in the course of the past four decades demonstrates the ways in which it is possible for intellectuals on the left to remain true to liberal values and put forward a highly nuanced and constructive critique of official foreign policy without succumbing to negativism or ideological dogmatism.

Second, this discussion is based on the premise that Walzer’s ideas can best be understood not just by analyzing them philosophically but also by considering Walzer’s main intellectual influences, his personal background, and the historical context in which he is writing. Although a lot has been written on Walzer’s political thought per se, there has so far been no attempt to place the public writings of this important political philosopher in the context of his times.

This thesis proceeds chronologically and is divided into five chapters. Chapters I and II discuss Walzer’s personal background, education, and early political writings for *Dissent* magazine in the 1950s. Chapters III and IV deal with Walzer’s political activism in the 1960s and discuss how his opposition to the Vietnam War led him to think about the
moral aspects of warfare in more systematic terms, culminating in the publication of his most significant philosophical work on foreign policy, *Just and Unjust Wars*, in 1977. Chapters V and VI look at Walzer’s contributions to the public foreign policy debate during the presidencies of Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and Bill Clinton, and also deal with Walzer’s response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The thesis concludes with an epilogue outlining today’s liberal foreign policy dilemma with regard to America’s recent war in Iraq and thereby considers the continued significance of Walzer’s alternative left-liberal foreign policy vision.

Approved:

Kevin Mattson

Associate Professor of History
Acknowledgments

To complete this thesis, I was able to rely on the support of a number of individuals and sources of financial support. First of all, I would like to thank my adviser, Professor Kevin Mattson, for having done a superb job as my thesis director. With his enthusiasm for the topic and expertise in twentieth century American leftist thought, he was able to provide exceptional guidance throughout the thesis writing process.

Furthermore, I would like to thank the two other members of my thesis committee, Professors Chester Pach and Paul Milazzo, for their useful advice and perceptive criticism.

Moreover, I would like to thank Professor Michael Walzer himself for having given so generously of his time and granting me a long interview. Having been able to meet him in person and clarifying some of the issues discussed in this thesis was extremely helpful.

The Contemporary History Institute at Ohio University (CHI) provided generous fellowship support, a travel grant, and an intellectually highly stimulating academic environment, thus creating absolutely ideal conditions for completing an M.A. in contemporary history.

I was able to count on additional financial support from my parents in Switzerland. I especially would like to thank them for having so wholeheartedly supported my endeavor to venture outside the confines of a historically stable and politically neutral Switzerland and pursue new opportunities on the other side of the Atlantic.
Along with the faculty of the OU history department, my fellow history graduate students have provided an extremely supportive environment in the course of my two years of graduate studies at OU. I am deeply grateful for having been able to rely on their warm support and friendship throughout the thesis writing process.

Last but not least, I would like to express my gratitude to Jeffrey T. Kuhner, for having so forcefully encouraged me to pursue graduate studies in the United States after finishing my B.A. in Canada. I think it was the best decision I could possibly have made. Had it not been for him, I would never even have dared to dream of a place like Ohio University.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ...........................................................................................................................................3

Acknowledgments ..........................................................................................................................5

Introduction ..................................................................................................................................8

I. Walzer 1935 – 1957 and the Post-War Liberal Consensus .........................................................16

II Walzer 1957 – 1964: Harvard Graduate School and Political Activism .................................42

III The Vietnam War: Intellectual Dissent and the Antiwar Movement .....................................75

IV Grappling with the Vietnam Experience: Walzer’s Academic Work in Just War Theory ..........109

V Moral Criticism Versus “Moralism:” The Carter Years and the Reagan Era .............................134

VI Michael Walzer as a Public Just War Theorist in the Aftermath of the Cold War ..................155

Epilogue .........................................................................................................................................169

Bibliography .................................................................................................................................179
Introduction

Michael Walzer counts as one of the most important political philosophers in America today. Walzer’s theories of justice have been widely discussed and analyzed by philosophers and political scientists alike, and he has become a well-known and oft-cited authority on theories of just war and distributive justice. But Walzer is not only a distinguished academic; he also has a significant career as a public intellectual. For over forty years, he has been serving as editor of the leftist magazine *Dissent* and is currently a contributing editor for *The New Republic*. Furthermore, Walzer is known within former New Left circles as a 1960s political activist who worked for causes such as civil rights, nuclear disarmament, opposition to the Vietnam War, and the formation of a left-liberal Democratic coalition in support of the Presidential candidacies of Eugene McCarthy and George McGovern.

For over four decades, Walzer has been a public critic of American foreign policy, mostly in the pages of *Dissent*. As a critic of America’s cold war policies in the late 1950s and the 1960s, Walzer started to look for a set of universal moral principles – which he eventually found in the Christian just war tradition - that allowed him to make a distinction between justified and unjustified American interventions abroad, and to elaborate on the moral issues involved in America’s controversial policy of nuclear deterrence. In fact, Walzer’s activities as a public critic of American policy and his scholarly research as a political theorist became mutually reinforcing. On one hand, his public involvement in protesting particular government policies abroad gave him the impetus to study the moral issues involved in international politics in a more systematic and scholarly fashion. On the other hand, his academic work, in which he sought to
establish the principles of modern just war theory, formed the basis of his subsequent public critique of foreign policy and thus enabled him to criticize American actions abroad in a principled and highly sophisticated manner.

At the core of Walzer’s public writings is his attempt to put forward a thoughtful leftist critique of American foreign policy. For Walzer, socialism has always stood for a set of universal human values. As he once wrote, “left politics starts with the defense of three core values: “secular enlightenment, human rights, and democratic government.” Indeed, there is a remarkable consistency in Walzer’s public writings with regard to his general argument on foreign policy. Although he greatly elaborated on his principles of justice in the course of his forty-year long career, he has continued to hold on to the view that the defense of basic human values ought to be at the center of any “decent” leftist critique. His academic work in just war theory thereby helped inform his principled leftist critique without resorting to the negativist polemics and ideological dogmatism that have become so common among the mainstream American left in the past three decades.1

Indeed, Walzer not only is a man of the left, he also is one of the American left’s harshest “internal” critics. In a spring 2002 article in *Dissent*, he caught the widespread attention of intellectuals in the United States and Europe by stating: “The leftist critique – most clearly, I think, from the Vietnam years forward…has been stupid, overwrought, [and] grossly inaccurate.” In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, some representatives of the American left had suggested that the terrorist perpetrators represented the poor and powerless of this world who sought to take revenge on the

---

United States for its economically exploitative policies in the Third World. Walzer thereby criticized leftist intellectuals for rigidly adhering to a “Marxist theory of imperialism” that prevented it from recognizing the true motivating factor for the attack – religious fundamentalism. Instead of condemning the attacks in the name of universal human values, the left was searching for excuses to put the blame on the United States.²

In his thought provoking 2002 *Dissent* article, Walzer laments that as a result of the left’s political powerlessness in the United States, the left has taken on an “adversarial” and entirely negativist stance in American society. He maintains that members of the American left today are acting as “internal aliens” and lack any sense of solidarity with the rest of the American people. Indeed, the left has positioned itself as a “righteous minority” that prefers to moralize rather than participate in constructive political debates. According to Walzer, left-wing intellectuals, who have pledged to side with the poor and downtrodden in the world, are inherently uncomfortable with the idea of belonging to the world’s economically and militarily most powerful nation. Thus, they almost feel compelled to dissociate themselves from their government’s policies and take on an attitude of “total opposition.” In doing so, however, the left is no longer able to make basic moral distinctions between right and wrong. Instead, everything the American government does becomes morally suspect. At the same time, foreign opponents of the United States, even if they violate basic moral norms, are being exonerated from their violent deeds.³

This spring, George W. Bush’s controversial war against Iraq has further exacerbated the rifts between government supporters and left-wing critics of American

---

² Walzer, “Can There Be A Decent Left?”
³ Walzer, “Can There Be A Decent Left?”
foreign policy. While neoconservative war hawks supporting the Bush administration claimed that the war objective of removing Saddam from power was in fulfillment of the highest liberal ideals, left-wing anti-war protesters morally condemned American military action while failing to denounce Saddam’s brutal regime in the name of universal human values. Indeed, according to the renowned political theorist Hedley Bull, the idea that “moral distinctions…can be drawn between one war and another [has been] discouraged by ideological fanaticism of the left and the right.” Bull further laments that ideologues on both sides of the political spectrum “proclaim the morality or immorality of particular kinds of war, but in dogmatic terms that do not admit of the possibility of inquiring into the bases of these assertions.” Thus, the moral language employed by many American politicians and intellectuals today often appears opportunistic. Their moralistic assertions are not grounded in a set of basic, universal moral principles but instead seek to further a particular political or ideological viewpoint or justify policies pursued primarily for pragmatic purposes.4

Lamenting that the American left has adopted a consistently adversarial attitude toward their government, Walzer offers the following explanation for the left’s predicament today: “The cold war, imperial adventures in Central America, Vietnam above all, and then the experience of globalization under American leadership: all these, for good reasons and bad, produced a pervasive leftist view of the United States as global bully-rich, privileged, selfish, hedonistic, and corrupt beyond remedy.” Indeed, distinguishing the “good” from the “bad” reasons for criticizing American foreign policy has become a lifelong endeavor for Walzer in his search for a “decent” leftist politics in

---

4 Hedley Bull, “Recapturing the Just War for Political Theory,” World Politics 31 (July 1979), 589.
the United States. In doing so, Walzer put forward an alternative liberal vision of American foreign policy that seeks to remain true to a basic set of liberal ideals. Indeed, the remarkable consistency in Walzer’s foreign policy argument over the past four decades demonstrates that his liberal guiding principles in foreign policy have proven to form a useful basis for constructive social criticism and thus have endured the test of time.⁵

The following thesis will discuss Walzer’s role as a leftist critic of American foreign policy from the mid-1950s to the present. The purpose of my discussion thereby is two-fold. First, it seeks to trace out a voice on the American left that does not fit the common stereotypes of an American left that is “alienated,” “adversarial,” and ideologically rigid. By discussing Walzer’s morally principled critique of American foreign policy in the past four decades, my thesis seeks to demonstrate the ways in which it is possible for intellectuals on the liberal left to remain true to the values of social democracy and criticize their government without succumbing to negativism or ideological dogmatism. It will show that a nuanced leftist critique of American foreign policy is possible after all.

Second, the following discussion is based on the premise that Walzer’s ideas can best be understood not just by analyzing them philosophically, but also by taking into account Walzer’s main intellectual influences, his personal background, and the historical context in which he was writing. Although a lot has been written on Walzer’s political thought per se, there has been no attempt so far to place his public and academic writings in the context of his times. Indeed, Walzer did not write in a vacuum. For example, it is

⁵ Walzer, “Can There Be A Decent Left?”
important to recognize that Walzer’s vision of an independent social democratic left has strong intellectual roots in the history of American leftist thought in the twentieth century. As Walzer reminded his readers in his 2002 *Dissent* article, he “grew up with the Americanism of the popular front in the 1930s and 1940s.” It is thus crucial to consider Walzer’s personal background and main intellectual influences in order to be able to understand his public work fully. Walzer once explained that social critics always have to come from somewhere. In Walzer’s words, critics are “insiders” who are “committed to the society whose policies or practices they call into question – who care about what happens to it.” Although critics may by “oppositional figure[s]” in their respective societies, they always also have a particular place in it. They cannot help but look at their society and criticize their government from a particular point of view, a viewpoint derived from their own unique social and personal background. It is this background that this thesis seeks to trace out.  

Moreover, it is crucial to look at Walzer’s public essays also in the context of the main intellectual foreign policy debates that were taking place at the time. In doing so, this discussion seeks to show who Walzer was arguing against when elaborating on his alternative vision of American foreign policy. Moreover, it will discuss how Walzer’s foreign policy critique compared to other lines of criticism at the time, and how supporters of the government intellectually justified official government policy in return.

Finally, Walzer is an interesting person to look at in the broader context of the history of the post-war American left because he is in many ways part of a “missing generation” of American leftists. Born in 1935, he took on the role of a “transitional

---

figure” bridging the gap between the Old and the New Left. Walzer played this transitional role not simply because of his age. As a public philosopher and political activist, he consciously drew inspiration from both generations of American leftists, and his political philosophy thus sought to combine ideas and causes espoused by the Old and the New Left. The fact that his ideas of social democracy, which were strongly modeled on the experiences of the independent Old Left, were not taken up by young radicals in the 1960s ultimately demonstrates to what extent the New Left was unwilling to learn from the history of the Old Left and to accept continuity in American leftist thought.

Walzer’s articulate vision of how a social democracy could be built in the United States - a vision that seeks to reconcile socialist ideals with the demands of practical politics - serves as an example of the way dominant leftist thought in the United States could have evolved but did not.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter I will cover the period between 1935 and 1957 and consider Walzer’s family background, formal education, and the broader political context of the emerging cold war consensus in the United States. Chapter II will discuss his political activism and intellectual contributions to Dissent magazine as a graduate student at Harvard (until 1961) and subsequently as an assistant professor at Princeton (until 1966). Chapter III will deal with Walzer’s opposition to the Vietnam War, which stood at the center of his political activism in the 1960s. In particular, it will discuss his public antiwar activism in the context of the broader intellectual debates on Vietnam that were taking place at the time. Chapter IV will discuss how Walzer’s opposition to the particular war in Vietnam led him to think about the moral aspects of warfare in more general and systematic terms, culminating in the
publication of his most significant philosophical work on foreign policy, *Just and Unjust Wars*, in 1977. Chapter V, then, will give some background on the foreign policy ideas espoused by Presidents Carter (1977-1981) and Reagan (1981-1989) and deal with Walzer’s contributions to the public foreign policy debate in the course of their presidencies. Moreover, chapter VI will look at Walzer’s role as a moral philosopher in the post-cold war period, ending with his intellectual position on the “war on terrorism” as articulated in 2001 and 2002. This discussion will conclude with an epilogue, in which we will outline the liberal foreign policy dilemma with regard to America’s recent war in Iraq and thereby consider the continuing significance of Walzer’s alternative left-liberal vision of American foreign policy.
Michael Walzer formed his political views early in his life. Although Walzer has not written extensively about his childhood, the few anecdotes and autobiographical statements he provides all suggest that he has been strongly influenced by his parents’ political tastes and convictions from early on. Moreover, his political views further matured during his college years at Brandeis University, where he soon became associated with the independent socialist left. Walzer also drew inspiration from the politics of the emerging British New Left, with which he came into close contact during a postgraduate year at Cambridge University. This chapter thus will deal with some of Walzer’s formative influences and give a brief overview of the political context in which he grew up.

Walzer was born in New York City on March 3, 1935, into a Jewish family of Eastern European origins. His parents, Joseph P. and Sally (Hochman) Walzer, were small shopkeepers in the Bronx. Although his parents were not politically active and were preoccupied with making a living during the economic hardships of the Great Depression, they nevertheless identified themselves with the non-communist American left in the 1930s.¹

Walzer’s parents subscribed to the New York based popular front journal PM, which was in print between 1940 and 1948. According to Paul Milkman, the readership of PM generally was “more politically committed and more liberal than the average New York newspaper reader” and “a substantial majority were Jews.” On domestic issues, the journal championed labor rights and racial equality, and it staunchly supported Roosevelt’s New Deal. On issues of foreign policy, PM was strongly anti-fascist, supported America’s alliance with the Soviet Union to defeat Hitler in Europe, and continued to see fascism as posing the most serious challenge to liberal democracy even after Hitler’s defeat. Walzer later started to read the journal as a boy (we will therefore deal with some of PM’s post-war political views later on), and reading PM thus was Walzer’s first exposure to the world of political ideas.²

Walzer was raised in the Bronx until he was eight years old. As he recalls, he attended a public “neighborhood school” where half of the student body was Jewish. In 1944, Walzer’s family moved to Johnstown, Pennsylvania, where he continued his formal education in the public school system. In contrast to the Bronx, however, Walzer’s family found itself to be in an ethnic minority. While Walzer’s parents never fully integrated in the new neighborhood and, according to Walzer, “never set foot in the home of a non-Jew,” Walzer seemed to have integrated well in the new environment and played with non-Jewish children on the street and in each other’s homes. As he explained in a 1996 article, he cannot remember that his peers ever made a big issue of the fact that he came from a different ethnic and religious background. In his high school, he was one of only five Jews out of 73 students in his class. Yet, Jewish boys were disproportionately well

² Walzer, interview with author; Paul Milkman, PM: A New Deal in Journalism 1940-1948, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University, 1997), 178, 179.
represented in student politics, Walzer remembers, and he eventually was elected president of the student council at his local high school.³

Besides student politics, Walzer also was exposed to adult political activism in Johnstown while he was growing up. Johnstown’s economy was heavily based on the local steel and mining industry, and the town thus had a large working class. As a boy, Walzer was able to witness first-hand the successful union organizing activities of the local labor unions, which he found very inspiring.⁴

Walzer came of political age at a time when the liberal post-war consensus dominated American political debates about foreign policy. After World War II, a series of aggressive moves on the part of the Soviet Union soon made it clear to most Americans that the Soviet Union was a hostile power, and that accommodation with the Communist state was not a viable option for the United States. On the liberal left, there existed only one faction of Progressives, represented by the Progressive Citizens of America (PCA) and the Democratic candidate Henry Wallace, who continued to challenge the emerging consensus. Wallace and the PCA argued that the Soviet Union was only acting in its own self-defense when trying to establish “friendly” governments in Eastern Europe. Thus, they maintained that the United States should try to cooperate with the Soviet Union by acknowledging the country’s legitimate security needs with regard to Europe.⁵

³ Michael Walzer, “Thought on Democratic Schools,” Dissent 24 (Winter 1976), 64-65; on Walzer’s experience as a Jew in Johnstown, see Michael Walzer, “Minority Rites,” Dissent 43 (Summer 1996), 53-54.
⁴ Walzer, interview by Amy Otchet and confirmed in interview by author;
In fact, the journal PM was a staunch supporter of Wallace and the PCA. PM continued to see world events through the lens of antifascism (and not anticommunism). In the early post-war era, it still considered the Soviet Union a valuable American ally in the fight against fascism and believed that a continued friendship between the two world powers was necessary to secure world peace. Moreover, PM took a more lenient stance toward communist-friendly political movements in Eastern Europe that fought fascism during World War Two. For example, the journal remained very sympathetic toward the Yugoslav leader Joseph Tito also after the war. Moreover, PM echoed Wallace’s call for the emergence of independent social democracies across Europe. During the 1948 Presidential campaign, in which Wallace ran as an independent candidate against President Truman, PM endorsed Wallace almost uncritically.6

Considering the fact that Walzer’s parents were avid readers of the journal, Walzer explains, “the natural thing for me and my parents would have been to support Wallace.” Yet they did not. His parents voted for Harry Truman instead, and Walzer, who was 13 years old at the time, supported his parents’ decision. During the presidential campaign of 1948, Walzer wrote his first political pamphlet titled “Between the Lines,” in which he sought to explain to his friends and friends of his family why he was supporting Truman. As Walzer remembers, the main reason why he opposed Wallace was because of the candidate’s statements on Berlin. Wallace repeatedly asserted that he was unwilling to commit US troops to sustain a Western city in the Soviet-occupied Eastern Germany. In contrast, Walzer and his parents strongly believed in the necessity of maintaining this Western stronghold in the symbolically significant former German

---

6 Milkman, *PM*, 180-83.
capital. Indeed, the position outlined by Walzer reflected the views of many American liberals at the time, who strongly started to oppose the conciliatory foreign policy agenda proposed by Wallace and his followers. Henry Wallace’s Progressive party failed to win the support of a significant number of New Deal liberals in the United States, who instead decided to back Truman’s candidacy for president. Shortly before Truman’s official nomination at the 1948 Democratic Party convention, PM folded, and the Progressives became marginalized in the mainstream political discourse.\(^7\)

In the aftermath of World War II, the American anti-Stalinist left and liberal internationalists found common cause in their opposition to communism. Both saw communism as the most serious threat posed to liberal democracy. This view also became reflected in official government policy. In 1947, George F. Kennan publicly called for an American “policy of containment, designed to confront the Russians with unalterable counter-force at every point where they show signs of encroaching upon the interests of a peaceful and stable world.” President Truman subsequently endorsed Kennan’s assessment of the Soviet threat and made it the basis of the “Truman Doctrine,” in which he stated that the United States was to give aid to local insurgents and foreign governments that were fighting communist subversion attempts. Liberals and the anti-communist left came to agree with the Truman Doctrine in principle.\(^8\)

---

\(^7\) Walzer, interview with author; Milkman, \textit{PM}, 207; Ehrman, \textit{The Rise of Neoconservatism}, 12-13. In taking this position, Walzer’s parents essentially came to endorse the same views represented by Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), which was founded by a group of prominent liberals – among them Reinhold Niebuhr, James Loeb, and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. – in 1947. The author has no evidence whether Walzer’s parents knew of the organization at the time.

Many leftist intellectuals who joined the post-war liberal consensus on foreign policy had been members of the Popular Front against fascism in the second part of the 1930s, and some of them were former communists or fellow travelers. After World War II, they sought to formulate their views on foreign policy in such a way as to ensure that they could clearly dissociate themselves from leftist apologetics of the Soviet Union. They rejected any utopian visions for the world’s future – something that reminded them too much of the communist ideology they now so fiercely opposed. Instead, they sought to base their views on a “realistic” assessment of the world situation. They particularly were attracted to the writings of the liberal theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, who re-introduced the notion of original sin into American political discourse by stressing “the power of self-interest in human society.” Niebuhr argued that because humans were by nature driven by their will to maximize power, counterforce was the only means by which evil people could be stopped. Thus, when dealing with a hostile and expansionist power like the Soviet Union, it would be illusionary to assume that one could appeal to the Soviets’ conscience or sense of justice in order to change their behavior.9

Niebuhr’s ideas had a strong influence on the Harvard historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who formulated what was to become the most succinct statement of cold war liberalism. In The Vital Center, Schlesinger argued that the United States needed to actively defend the principles of democracy and liberalism in the world if it wanted to prevail in the cold war. Indeed, the foreign policy views expressed by vital center liberals not only became reflected in important government documents, such as the NSC-68, but also became part of official foreign policy rhetoric. Indeed, the cold war consensus based

on vital center liberalism and anti-communism was not to face any serious political challenges from radical groups until the mid-1960s.\textsuperscript{10}

Walzer remembers that he and his parents supported the post-war liberal consensus from the beginning. As a teenager, Walzer approved of many of Truman’s policies in the early cold war. He supported the Marshall Plan and American military aid to the Greek government during the Greek civil war. Moreover, Walzer approved of Truman’s decision to intervene in the Korean War in 1950. As he would later explain, he considered North Korea’s invasion of the South a clear act of aggression against the independent state of South Korea, whose population broadly supported the South Korean government and did not want to live under communist rule.\textsuperscript{11}

According to Walzer, the fact that his parents were Zionists and were committed to the creation and defense of the state of Israel also shaped his perceptions of the Soviet Union and the early cold war. In fact, PM, with its large Jewish readership, made the Palestine question the most important foreign policy issue in the early post-war years and strongly supported the creation of an independent Jewish state. With the founding of the state in 1948, the Soviet Union, which initially supported the creation of Israel, increasingly turned hostile toward the newly found state after it had become clear that Israel could not be drawn into the Soviet communist orbit. Consequently, Israel became dependent on the West for its defense - first on France, and, from the early 1960s onward,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{10} Ehrman, \textit{The Rise of Neoconservatism}, 12-16.
\textsuperscript{11} Walzer, interview with author; For more on Walzer’s views on the Korean War, see, for example, Walzer, \textit{Just and Unjust Wars}, 117-122.
\end{flushright}
on the United States. As Walzer recalls, increased Soviet hostility toward Israel thus intensified his suspicions of the communist dictatorship.\textsuperscript{12}

That said, however, Walzer, continued to be “worried about the hardening of the two blocks.” By the time Walzer graduated from high school in 1952, he had come to adopt a position that has often been described among independent leftist circles as one of “critical support of the West.” When Walzer enrolled at Brandeis University in the fall of 1952, he soon found a new intellectual “home” that allowed him further to develop these political views.\textsuperscript{13}

**Brandeis and Irving Howe**

In the fall of 1952, Walzer enrolled at Brandeis University in the suburbs of Boston, Massachusetts. Brandeis was founded in 1948 by a group of wealthy American Jews. According to the literary critic Irving Howe, who accepted a teaching position at the university in 1953, the student body at Brandeis “formed a sediment, perhaps the last, of the best of immigrant Jewish culture.”\textsuperscript{14}

The atmosphere on campus was conducive to lively debates and the free exchange of ideas. The school emphasized the notion that learning involved active engagement in discussions, and it encouraged students to resolve conflicts of opinion by way of rational argument. Brandeis also had a decidedly left-wing orientation. Many of the predominantly Jewish faculty members were radical émigrés. Prominent faculty members associated with the left included social democrats, such as the literary critic Irving Howe

\textsuperscript{12} Walzer, interview with author; on PM and the Palestine question, see Milkman, *PM*, 195-197.
\textsuperscript{13} Walzer, interview with author.
and the sociologist Lewis Coser, as well as radical Marxists, such as Herbert Marcuse.

With regard to the student body, some of the Brandeis students came from families with a Communist background – so-called “red-diaper babies.” Walzer, though not a “red diaper baby,” soon came to identify himself with the “Brandeis left” upon entering the university.\(^{15}\)

The Brandeis campus was one of the few platforms where the sectarian political debates of the 1930s between Marxists, Trotskyists, and independent leftists were able to continue. The school was something of an oasis for radical thought in the midst of the conservative 1950s. At the time Walzer enrolled at Brandeis, McCarthyite witch-hunts against alleged communists and radicals were at their height, and pressures for conformity among America’s intellectual elite were strong. Yet, as one author pointed out, federal investigators left the Brandeis faculty more or less unscathed for fear of being deemed anti-Semitic.\(^{16}\)

In his sophomore year, Walzer made his acquaintance with a social democratic intellectual who would have a decisive influence on him and his future intellectual development. The intellectual was no other than the literary critic Irving Howe. In 1953, Walzer enrolled in the first class Howe taught at Brandeis, which marked the beginning of Walzer’s lifelong association and friendship with the intellectual. Howe soon became a model intellectual for Walzer. As Howe’s biographer Gerald Sorin points out, Walzer never completely overcame the “student-teacher relationship” with Howe. For Walzer,


Howe was a model of a “literary/political intellectual” who was able to make ideas derived from a serious study of English literature relevant to a broader public.\textsuperscript{17}

Howe was born in 1920 into an immigrant Jewish working class family in the Bronx. When the Great Depression hit in 1929, his family started to suffer under severe economic hardships and struggled to make ends meet. Like many other Jews growing up in the Bronx during the Depression, Howe was attracted to socialist ideas. On one hand, the socialist ideology provided a description of the desperate economic situation and offered a self-empowering vision for a better future. On the other hand, values of social justice espoused by socialists also were part of “Jewish religious culture.” According to Howe’s biographer Gerald Sorin, there was a strong “ethic of solidarity” among the Jewish immigrant community in New York City. Community members organized mutual-aid and philanthropic organizations and formed local labor unions. According to Sorin, participation in socialist politics served young Jews as a means to assimilate to American society by removing themselves from their close-knit immigrant community while still adhering to some of the “humanistic” values of Jewish religious culture.\textsuperscript{18}

Upon entering the City College of New York, Howe joined the Trotskyite Young People’s Socialist League (YPSL). Howe soon became known as the “theoretician” of Alcove 1, which engaged the Stalinists in Alcove 2 in fierce intellectual debates. When World War II started, radicals faced the difficult choice of either siding temporarily with the capitalist powers to defeat fascism or maintaining their “radical purity” by siding with

\textsuperscript{17} Sorin, \textit{Irving Howe}, 98; Maurice Isserman, \textit{It I Had a Hammer...The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left}, (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 88; for Walzer on Howe, also see Michael Walzer, “Irving Howe 1920-1993” \textit{Dissent} 40 (Summer 1993): 275.

\textsuperscript{18} Sorin, \textit{Irving Howe}, 6-7, “ethic of solidarity” quote on page 7; for information on the reasons for why many young Jews in the Bronx were attracted to socialist ideas, see 12-13;
neither of the two warring camps. Howe concluded that it was important first to defeat fascism before progressive reforms could be promoted at home. He subsequently joined the American Army and spent an important part of his three years of military service in Alaska.¹⁹

By the end of the war, Howe no longer identified himself as a Marxist but nevertheless retained the hope for progressive social transformation in the United States. However, the political environment of the 1950s was not conducive to leftist ideas. The socialist movement in the United States, which was plagued by sectarian infighting and government persecution, was a weak and insignificant political force in the 1950s. It lacked any clear agenda, and many intellectuals on the left were unsure about their exact political goals. For Howe, his socialist commitments became less political and took on more the form of a set of ethical ideals.²⁰

Howe distinguished himself from other post-war intellectuals who were part of the anti-Stalinist left in the 1930s in important respects. Unlike former 1930s Marxists and Trotskyists, such as Sidney Hook, Irving Kristol, and Nathan Glazer, Howe was not seduced by the militant anti-communism his former fellow radicals adopted almost uncritically after the Second World War. Rather, Howe sought to maintain a critical distance from the pragmatic liberalism endorsed by the Truman administration and instead remain true to liberal ideals.

No other issue highlighted the different interpretations of liberalism promoted by Howe, on one hand, and militant cold war liberals, on the other hand, better than their

---

¹⁹ Bloom, *Prodigal Sons*, 35-36, 38 on City College; “theoretician” quote on page 40; for Howe and World War II, see 126 and 135.
different ways of dealing with the communist threat. For example, militant anti-communists such as Sidney Hook held that small violations of civil liberties in the United States were justified in order to combat communism at home and abroad. After all, Hook maintained, communism posed the largest threat to liberal values. He stated:

Liberalism cannot be identified with the traditional beliefs in specific, absolute or inalienable rights, since every such right is in fact evaluated in terms of its consequences for society and is therefore subject to modification…To say that we cannot preserve our freedom by sacrificing [rights] is an empty piece of rhetoric, because a particular freedom must sometimes be sacrificed to preserve other freedoms.

Indeed, militant cold war liberals uncritically supported the Truman administration’s strongly anti-communist rhetoric and were reluctant to defend the freedom of speech of communists within the United States. They failed to speak out enough against McCarthyism in the early 1950s, either because their anti-communist convictions led them to support the purging of communists in educational and governmental institutions, or because they were afraid of being identified as communists themselves.²¹

Howe shared the militant anti-communist liberals’ aversion to communism, but he believed that liberal principles, such as the right to free speech, needed to be upheld despite or precisely because of the communist threat. In the early 1950s, he started to refer to the post-war decade as the “age of conformity,” and accused liberal intellectuals’ uncritical endorsement of the government’s brand of pragmatic cold war liberalism. Howe argued that “conformity is often a form of betrayal” and that “betrayal may consist of a chain of small compromises.” During the anti-communist witch-hunts initiated by Senator Joseph McCarthy, Howe was one of the few intellectuals on the anti-communist

²¹ Hook quoted in Bloom, Prodigal Sons, 239.
left who took a strong public stance against violations of civil liberties in the name of anti-communism.\(^{22}\)

As for his views on foreign policy, Howe supported his government’s policy of containment in principle. To use one of Dwight McDonald’s well-known phrases, Howe clearly “chose the West” in the ideological struggle between the communist and the capitalist camp. Indeed, he recognized the serious ideological and geopolitical threats posed by an expansionist Soviet Union. For example, he supported the Marshall Plan and American military aid to Western Europe on pragmatic grounds, arguing that if European states decided to form independent socialist governments, as the American Workers’ Party wanted them to, Western Europe too easily became dominated by the USSR.\(^ {23}\)

While he supported the United States in the cold war in principle, however, he continued to criticize many of America’s foreign policies in particular. In 1954, for example, Howe was one of the few isolated voices to protest the CIA’s involvement in the toppling of the radical Arbenz regime in Guatemala. At the same time, however, Howe continued to be a strong supporter of popular, anti-Stalinist radical movements in developing countries. Unlike most liberals on the anti-communist left in the 1950s, he favored the emergence of independent radical democracies in the Third World, which he envisioned would be built on the respective countries’ unique historical and cultural traditions.\(^ {24}\)

In principle, Howe accepted Niebuhr’s notion that human nature was not perfectible. Instead of dwelling on the dark side of human nature, however, Howe

\(^{23}\) Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer*, 105-110.
\(^{24}\) Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer*, 105-110; Sorin, *Irving Howe*, 155.
emphasized humans’ inborn capacity to act morally. His differences with Niebuhr’s notion of original sin thus were more one of emphasis rather than principle. He agreed with vital center liberals that the existence of repressive regimes in the world – most notably communist ones – demonstrated that humans had an ingrained capacity for evil. Yet, events within the Soviet communist bloc, such as the popular uprising in Hungary and the riots in Poland in 1956, served as a proof for Howe that “there was something ‘intrinsically recalcitrant’ about human nature.” In short, Howe agreed with Saul Bellow’s phrase “evil is as real as sunshine.” Howe never gave up the hope that humans could change for the better. According to his biographer Sorin, this attitude reflected the traditional Jewish notion that humans had a responsibility to work toward human betterment. It is important to emphasize this view of human nature, since Walzer came to display a similar attitude toward human nature in his later philosophical work.25

The Founding of Dissent Magazine

The main platform for Howe to elaborate on his alternative interpretation of liberalism was the magazine Dissent, which he founded together with Brandeis sociologist and social democrat Lewis Coser in 1954. As a professor at Brandeis, Howe never felt entirely comfortable with his affiliation to a university. He was eager to continue to address a broader public audience and thus used the newly founded magazine as a venue for engaging in contemporary public debates.26

According to Howe, Dissent was to become a platform for intellectuals on the “moderate left,” who acted as “isolated critics without a social base.” Rather than putting

25 Sorin, Irving Howe, 167 (Saul Bellow quote also found on that page).
26 Sorin, Irving Howe, 102.
forward a particular ideological agenda, the magazine meant to treat socialism as a set of values, or, in Howe’s words, as an “intellectual problem” first and foremost. In the first issue of *Dissent*, Howe stated that he sought to “bring socialist politics and liberal values closer together” at a time when liberal ideas had increasingly come into disrepute.27

As Walzer later remembered, his reading of the first issue of *Dissent* marked a turning point in his life. “Some weeks after reading it,” Walzer explains, he “went home from Brandeis” and shocked his parents when he told them that instead of becoming a lawyer, he “wanted to be an intellectual.” (He thereby did not mention to his parents that what he “really wanted was to be a left-wing intellectual.”) As Walzer recalls, it was “quite natural for me to gravitate into the *Dissent* orbit” while at Brandeis. Already before starting college, Walzer had come to adopt a political position that very closely resembled that of Howe and Coser’s in 1954. Like the intellectuals associated with *Dissent*, Walzer was in support of liberal anti-communism in principle, especially with regard to foreign policy. At the same time, Walzer recalls that he was “critical of the domestic versions of anticommunism from very early on.” In the early 1950s, Walzer went to see a speech by Senator McCarthy at a local fairground about alleged communists in Washington, and he remembers “becoming quite scared by the demagoguery.” Walzer thus from the beginning shared Howe’s suspicion of militant anti-communism at home.28

As a student at Brandeis, Walzer soon began to work for *Dissent* magazine as a research assistant. As Walzer recalls, the founders of the magazine had more modest

---

28 For Walzer’s comment on reading the first issue of *Dissent*, see Michael Walzer, “Dissent at Thirty,” *Dissent* 31 (Winter 1984), 3; remaining information taken from Walzer, interview with author.
expectations than young Dissent readers in the 1950s as to what the magazine could accomplish. For the moment at least, it looked as if the editors contented themselves with trying to keep the American socialist tradition alive during a conservative period. In contrast, Walzer and other young readers hoped that Dissent was to serve as a platform for the “reinvention of socialist ideas and the reestablishment of new (non-Marxist) grounds of democratic commitments that the left had honored.” Indeed, Walzer continues to believe that many of the articles in Dissent, which stressed values such as “democracy, civil liberties, oppositional politics, citizen activism, decentralization” laid the groundwork for the development of an ideology of “participatory democracy embraced by the New Left in the 1960s.”

As a leftist magazine in the 1950s, Dissent particularly distinguished itself as one of the few publications in the United States to take an unwavering stance against McCarthyism. The magazine thereby stressed its commitments to liberal ideals when criticizing the anti-libertarian implications of the McCarthy witch-hunts. At the same time, however, it condemned the ideas espoused by American communists and the practices of communist regimes abroad with equal harshness. Members of the democratic left had always seen the existence of the communist bloc as a serious obstacle to progressive reform in the United States. They feared that the negative Soviet example prevented them from effectively proposing an alternative political vision for a more just and egalitarian social order without being automatically accused of endorsing totalitarian politics. In fact, the editors of Dissent remained relentless proponents of a so-called “third

---

29 For information on Walzer’s research assistantship at Dissent, see Isserman, If I Had a Hammer, 110; remaining information on Walzer and the early years of Dissent taken from Walzer, “Dissent at Thirty,” 3-4.
way” in the United States. As Walzer later explained, a “third way” described a type of “socialism that didn’t rely on the state but encompassed a decentralized and highly participative form of democratic politics, with workers’ control of factories.” Indeed, Walzer and Dissent magazine never believed that true socialism could exist outside of a democratic setting.  

The idea of a “third way” also was prominent in the social democratic approach to foreign policy issues. As stated, Howe wanted the United States to encourage the establishment of independent radical democracies in the newly de-colonized countries of the Third World. In one of the first issues of Dissent, Howe argued that the best policy for the United States to adopt toward the Third World was “to undercut the hold of Stalinism by a genuine appeal of radical democracy.” He contended that only if the United States helped the peoples of the Third World to address their legitimate desire of creating a more just and equitable economic order in accordance with their own cultural traditions, could the United States prevent peoples of the Third World from drifting into the communist camp.  

As the historian Maurice Isserman points out, however, Howe’s hope that the American government would hone his advice and encourage the emergence of independent “third forces” in the developing world may have been a bit naïve considering the parameters of the early cold war and the fact that the American government was  

---

30 Sorin, Irving Howe, 110-111, 115-121 and Isserman, If I Had a Hammer, 93-98; Walzer quoted from Walzer, interview by Amy Otchet.  
31 Isserman, If I Had a Hammer, 105. When calling for radical democracies in the Third World, Howe, for example, would have approved of the idea that a Third World nation may democratically decide to redistribute land more equitably or to decide on the public ownership of important national resources and key industries. For Howe, as long as such radical reforms took place within a democratic framework and were not enforced by a tyrannical government or under the dictate of Moscow, he did not object to them. He believed that the peoples of the Third World should be free to determine the nature of their social and economic system according to their own unique cultural traditions.
taking a rigid two-camp approach to world politics. In fact, most *Dissent* articles on foreign policy were based on the unfounded assumption that the American government’s refusal to support independent radical movements in the Third World was only a matter of bad judgment and thus could easily be corrected. According to Isserman, *Dissent* hardly questioned in the 1950s whether American actions abroad were not rather prompted by broader underlying ideological commitments on the part of American government officials, commitments which may not have allowed them to be more tolerant toward anti-capitalist radical movements. According to Isserman, the magazine was “radical” in the sense that it criticized government cold war policy at a time when many intellectuals either “acquiesce[d] or apologize[d] for” American military interventions in the Third World. However, the magazine “was not so radical in the sense of ‘going to the root’ by attempting to understand why all these bad decisions were constantly being made, and giving a name to the system that produced them.”

Yet, it seems that Isserman’s critique is almost beside the point. The magazine, from the beginning, never sought to put forward a rigid ideological framework to “explain” or even “predict” American foreign policy. Instead, the editors of *Dissent* continued to treat foreign policy issues on a case-by-case basis. To be sure, this approach did not resonate well with the more ideologically inclined American left, as we will see later on. Yet, their case-by-case approach allowed the *Dissenters* to take the particularities and complexities of every new foreign policy situation into account and, ultimately, to keep them more honest in their assessments.

---

32 Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer*, 105-107.
Social Democracy Versus Communism

At the time Walzer worked as a research assistant for Howe and Coser during the 1955-56 academic year, the two editors were writing a history of the American Communist Party. In fact, 1956 was a particularly fateful year for communist parties in the West in general and in the United States in particular. Events within the Soviet Union caused the crisis within the international communist movement. In February 1956, the new Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev gave his “secret speech” at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, in which he questioned some of Stalin’s dogmatic interpretations of communism. In particular, Khrushchev’s damning critique of Stalin’s cult of personality and Stalin’s purges of fellow communists in the 1920s and 1930s tarnished the image of one of the communist movement’s most important leading figures. Furthermore, Khrushchev argued in the speech that the communist ideology was dynamic and could be adjusted to the particular needs of different communist countries. This argument was mistakenly interpreted by some communist nationalists in Eastern Europe, especially in Poland and Hungary, as a green light from Moscow to initiate political reforms at home and ask for more national independence. In the cases of both countries, however, Khrushchev was unwilling to allow for more self-determination and did everything within his power to suppress nationalist stirrings in the Soviet sphere of domination.  

Members of the American Communist Party disagreed as to how they should respond to these new developments within the communist bloc. In fact, the CP split into

33 Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer*, 22-30, 110; on Khrushchev’s “secret speech” and its effects on Hungary and Poland, see, for example, Ferenc A. Vali, *Rift and Revolt in Hungary* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1990), 212-214.
two main factions. One faction continued rigidly to adhere to the Soviet party line and stood fully behind the new Soviet leader. The other faction wanted to take a more independent stance and become more critical of the Soviet Union. The sectarian infightings that flamed up in 1956 accelerated the disintegration of the American CP, a party that was already seriously weakened as a result of government persecution of Communists in the aftermath of the Second World War.34

The first article Walzer wrote for Dissent in 1956 was related to the research he did for the magazine on the American Communist Party. In particular, he sought to investigate how the events of the first half of 1956 changed the Party. As a case study, he looked at the Communist Party’s reaction to the worker’s riots in Poznan, Poland, which took place in June 1956. Walzer argued that the Party failed to live up to its claim that it had become more critical of the Soviet Union in the aftermath of Khrushchev’s “secret speech.” The CP did not dare to take an independent stance on the Polish issue. Instead, it waited for Khrushchev’s reaction to the riots and subsequently lent the Soviet leader its uncritical support when he called upon the Polish government to suppress the protests. For Walzer, the case of Poland once more showed that communism could not be reformed. Walzer stated that if the CP had broken with the official Soviet party line over the issue of Poland, the American CP could no longer have called itself “communist.” According to Walzer, the CP’s virtual endorsement of the suppression of the riots only “reveal[ed] the deepest sickness of the Communist Party.”35

34 Isserman, If I Had a Hammer, 25-35.
The next blow to Communist Parties in the West came in November of the same year, when Soviet tanks rolled into Hungary and brutally suppressed a popular uprising that protested Soviet Communist domination of their country. The crisis in Hungary started when Hungary’s new prime minister, Imre Nagy, gave in to popular demands for political reforms, dismissed all Stalinists from the government, and started to allow non-communist to take part in the government. Next, Nagy announced Hungary’s withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and declared Hungary’s neutrality. On November 4, 1956, the Soviet army crushed the revolution, arrested and later executed Nagy, and installed a new prime minister who immediately reversed all the reforms Nagy had initiated.\footnote{Sara Kupfer, “The Hungarian Revolution and the Suez Crisis,” (unpublished seminar paper, University of Saskatchewan, 1999), 2-9.}

Not surprisingly, the editors of Dissent applauded the revolution. Howe, who described the revolution as “sublime,” saw it as proof that change within the communist camp was possible after all. Indeed, the revolution intensified his hopes for the emergence of an independent socialist “third camp” in Eastern Europe. As Walzer fondly remembers, “it suddenly looked as if the Eastern bloc was profoundly shaken, and had there been a willingness to loosen up NATO, there seemed suddenly to be possibilities of the sort that didn’t appear again until 1989.” Walzer still sees the moment as a “missed chance,” but he also admits that “it is hard to imagine the political forces that could have seized the moment.”\footnote{Howe quoted in Sorin, Irving Howe, 159; Walzer quoted in Walzer, interview with author.}

In the aftermath of the failed uprising attempt in Hungary, Dissent again served as a platform for the social democratic left to criticize the failure of other Western leftists to condemn Soviet actions in Eastern Europe and distance themselves from the communist
camp. In the winter 1957 issue of *Dissent*, Walzer, who spent the 1956-57 academic year on a Fulbright fellowship in Cambridge, England, contributed an article that did exactly this. He criticized the British left for failing to support the revolutionaries because they apparently saw the Hungarians’ effort to liberate themselves from the Soviet yoke as a futile attempt that was doomed to fail from the beginning. According to Walzer, the British left opposed “free elections” in Hungary because it did not consider them “a practical possibility.” As Walzer recalls, “the Hungarian Revolution was greeted with suspicion on the British left,” and the “sense of excitement that you read in *Dissent* simply wasn’t there.”

Walzer’s 1957 *Dissent* article reflects his uneasiness with the British left’s position. Walzer criticized the British left for arguing along the lines of *realpolitik* and for failing to remain true to social democratic ideals, which would have required them to condemn the Soviet action on moral grounds. He rejected the argument made by British leftists that they should try to work together with the Soviet Union as a way of bringing about a “gradual transition to democracy” in Eastern Europe. Hence, Walzer lamented that the British left had “accept[ed] Russian Communism into the world of Western Social-Democracy.”

Instead of accommodating the Soviets, Walzer wanted the social democratic left to clearly dissociate itself from the tyrannical communist regime. In his article, he called the “recognition” of an independent Hungary a “by no means insignificant duty.”

Moreover, Walzer wanted Western social democrats to support independent “third

---

forces” in Eastern Europe and in the Third World, an action he believed “could change the
parameters of the cold war decisively.” Moreover, he wanted the British socialists to ally themselves with independent socialists throughout the world and work toward ending the cold war. As he stated in the article, “Socialists…ought to have launched a vigorous campaign to break up the NATO-Warsaw Pact tension and free all Europe from the coercion which it implies.” According to Walzer, Western socialists should not recognize the status quo and instead try to find “an alternative to the cold war.”

**Walzer and the British New Left**

Indeed, Walzer’s “third camp” argument echoed some of the foreign policy views endorsed by the then-emerging British New Left, with which Walzer came into contact while studying at Cambridge. Walzer was in England when the new radical journal *Universities and New Left Review* (ULR) was founded, a journal in which he became very interested. ULR was created by a group of mostly young British socialists who sought to dissociate themselves from Soviet communism in the aftermath of the Twentieth Congress and the Hungarian Revolution. They thereby sought to remain unaffiliated with any political movement, including the British Labour Party. Associated with ULR were Marxist historians such as Edward Thompson, Christopher Hill, and Eric Hobsbawm. The Canadian Christian socialist Charles Taylor was on the ULR editorial board at Oxford University together with two formerly communist academics. In fact,

---

40 Walzer, “Hungary and the Failure of the Left,” 162, 159, 162.
Walzer remembers attending a New Left meeting in Oxford where Isaac Deutscher spoke.\footnote{On Walzer and his contacts with the emerging British New Left and ULR, see Isserman, If I Had a Hammer, 115 and confirmed in interview with author; For information on ULR, see, for example, Michael Kenny, The First New Left: British Intellectuals after Stalin (London, England: Lawrence & Wishart, 1995), 15-19 and Lin Chun, The British New Left (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 1993), 13-15; on Walzer’s attendance of the meeting in Oxford, see Walzer, interview with author.}

Intellectuals associated with the journal sought to revive Marx’s early writings, which put more emphasis on humanist values rather than scientific social analyses. Walzer was very attracted to the British New Left’s re-discovery of the early Marx, especially with regard to “early Marxist conceptions of community and alienation.” Moreover, Walzer applauded the British New Left’s “willingness to push a more democratic agenda” and to “break with the centralism of the CP.” These two key concerns, of course, were also shared by the editors of Dissent magazine, a magazine to which Walzer had “already felt connected in some very deep way” at the time he left for England in the fall of 1956.\footnote{On the British New Left’s rediscovery of the “early Marx,” see Chun, The British New Left, 31; on Walzer’s attraction to the early Marx and his comment about Dissent, see Walzer, interview with author.}

The British New Left also made innovative contributions to the writing of Marxist social history. Thompson, for example, re-introduced the concept of individual moral responsibility into Marxist historiography. Moreover, historians associated with the journal took a more empirical approach when studying contemporary British society rather than projecting ideological dogmas onto current events. Moving away from economic determinism, they explored other factors, such as cultural forces, to account for historical change.\footnote{Chun, The British New Left, 65-76, 127-131; Kenny, The First New Left, 69-73.}
On issues of foreign policy, the British New Left also was quite active. The British New Left pushed a foreign policy agenda that aimed at breaking up the rigid, bipolar world order created by the United States and the Soviet Union. For example, it strongly supported national liberation movements in the Third World. Moreover, the New Left called upon the British government to withdraw from NATO and pursue a policy of “positive neutralism.” It called upon Britain to forge an alliance with non-aligned countries, to pressure the U.S. and the USSR to end the cold war, and to work toward a more equitable distribution of wealth in the world. These policy recommendations were in tune with the British Left’s desire to spread humanist socialist values in the world. Of course, some of these policy recommendations were also advocated by Dissent at the time. All in all, however, Walzer asserts that he had been more influenced by the British New Left on domestic issues rather than on issues of foreign policy.  

In 1958, members of the British New Left launched a popular movement for nuclear disarmament, also referred to as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). CND denounced nuclear weapons as immoral and called for unilateral nuclear disarmament by Britain. In stressing their moral opposition to nuclear weapons, the members of CND did not work through regular political channels but used unconventional methods of civil disobedience to attract public attention. Most famous were the CND’s marches to the British missile base in Aldermaston, which started on Easter 1958.

Walzer came into contact with CND when he returned to England on a sabbatical year in 1964. From the beginning, however, he disapproved of the group’s advocacy of

---

44 Chun, The British New Left, 55.
45 Kenny, The First New Left, 189-194; Isserman, If I Had a Hammer, 142.
unilateral British nuclear disarmament. Walzer remembers that he “was never attracted to the unilateralist position.” As Walzer explains, “unilateralism in Britain depended upon Americans using the weapons,” and he did not consider European unilateral nuclear disarmament as a sensible policy recommendation for the left to promote when seeking to work toward a nuclear-free world. In contrast, Walzer sided with the position advocated by *Dissent*, which “generally was against unilateralism but in favor of disarmament.” The magazine thus called for a staged multilateral disarmament process that included mutual guarantees and on-site inspection regimes.⁴⁶

Although Walzer had always believed in the necessity of working toward a better world, he never lost sight of pragmatic considerations. Indeed, Walzer’s attempt to deal with the discrepancy between ideals and what is practical would become a distinguishing feature of his politics. As this discussion will demonstrate, Walzer’s political ideas have remained remarkably consistent in the course of his forty year-long career as a public political philosopher. This first chapter thus sought to illuminate some of the formative influences that shaped Walzer’s political thought and highlight some of the characteristics of his and the Dissenters’ political ideas. In the next chapter, we will discuss how Walzer continued to articulate his political ideas in the pages of *Dissent* as a graduate student at Harvard (until 1961) and subsequently as an assistant professor at Princeton (until 1966). Moreover, we will look at how Walzer made his first experiences in practical movement politics in the early 1960s.

⁴⁶ Walzer, interview with author. Walzer, then an assistant professor at Princeton University, spent the entire calendar year of 1964 in London, England.
Upon his return from England in summer 1957, Walzer enrolled in the graduate program in government at Harvard University. While on his Fulbright at Cambridge, Walzer started to do research on sixteenth and seventeenth century English Puritanism, in which he found the “origins of radical politics.” He continued to pursue this interest at Harvard, where he worked with Samuel Beer, a specialist in British politics. According to the Harvard alumni Roger Rosenblatt, Beer was “the most admired liberal on the faculty and a longtime hero to undergraduates.”¹

In his dissertation project, Walzer found important similarities between the Puritans in sixteenth century England and the Bolsheviks in early twentieth century Russia. As he stated in his preface: “the Calvinist saint seems to me now the first of those self-disciplined agents of social and political reconstruction who have appeared so frequently in modern history.” Walzer was particularly interested in the question of why Puritans, at this particular point in time, suddenly became attracted to radical ideologies and were willing to commit to the strict rules of revolutionary organizations. He found that English society in the sixteenth and seventeenth century went through a process of rapid modernization, which caused a considerable degree of social dislocation. Submitting to the rules of congregational life thus gave these early radicals a sense of

belonging and the feeling of serving a higher purpose in life at a time of rapid social change.  

Although Walzer’s study stressed the social origins of Puritanism, he stopped short of taking a Marxist approach of social determinism to explain the Puritan Revolution. As the political scientist John F. H. New explains, Walzer “s[aw] the Puritans as intellectuals and as literary gentry, as new men who were made new by Puritan ideology.” Similar to the new Marxist historians in Britain, such as Hill and Thompson, Walzer stressed the autonomous role that ideas and cultural factors played in influencing the actions of particular social groups and, consequently, in shaping the course of history.  

Walzer concluded that Calvinism in England should be seen more as an ideology rather than as a religion. Although early Puritans sought to establish a society that was organized according to ideals derived from religion, the movement itself used pragmatic and secular means to achieve its ends. Walzer observed, however, that the Puritan religion served an important social function at the time when a secular liberal state and a capitalist economic system started to take shape in England. He explained that the “worldly asceticism” taught by the Puritan religion induced people to exercise self-restraint and thus “helped shape the disciplinary basis of the new economy and politics.” Without the socializing role of the Puritan faith, Walzer concluded, British society could not have been held together considering the many new economic and political freedoms.

---

2 Michael Walzer later published his dissertation under the title *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1965); for his comparison of the Puritans to the Bolsheviks, see especially page 314; Walzer quoted from vii.

individual Englishmen gained in the seventeenth century. This observation is interesting, since Walzer would recognize the important role of shared religious and cultural values in modern and modernizing societies both in his work on American domestic politics and in his attitude toward modernizing societies in the Third World. Walzer published his dissertation under the title *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* in 1965, and the book was favorably received by scholarly critics.⁴

**Radical Politics and the Civil Rights Movement**

As a graduate student, Walzer remained committed to participate in contemporary political debates. At Harvard, he became involved in a discussion group called the “New Left Club.” Participants in the discussion circle included the leftist historians Stephen Thernstrom and Gordon Levin, as well as the radical scholar Gabriel Kolko. The club was modeled on the British discussion circles organized by the New Left journal ULR, which Walzer got to know while at Cambridge. Although the “New Left Club” was not politically active, the ideas generated in the course of their regular debates influenced future members of SDS, especially Todd Gitlin.⁵

As Walzer told the historian Maurice Isserman, he never aspired to be “only an academic.” In the course of the 1960s, Walzer became a regular contributor for *Dissent* magazine and eventually joined the magazine’s editorial board. For Walzer, *Dissent* was important because it gave him an outlet where he could address a wider public and be intellectually involved outside the confines of academia. Walzer thus shared the public commitments of the previous generation of radical intellectuals, such as Irving Howe,

---

⁵ Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer*, 115.
who had never felt entirely comfortable in academia and was eager to remain involved in public intellectual debates.\(^6\)

From the beginning, the editors of *Dissent* did not simply content themselves with debating politics. They were on the lookout for new radical political activism in the United States. The start of the student-sit ins in North Carolina on February 1, 1960, which protested segregation, finally brought what the editors of *Dissent* had been waiting for since the founding of the magazine. On the first day of the student sit-ins, Irving Howe thus asked Walzer to go to North Carolina and report on the civil disobedience campaign for *Dissent*. The sit-ins inspired optimism among the Dissenters that social change in the United States was possible after all, and it became the first radical action in the United States *Dissent* reported on.\(^7\)

According to Walzer, he instantly felt “solidarity” with the black student protesters. In fact, he soon became involved in the protests himself by speaking at student meetings and in Black churches. Upon his return from North Carolina, he helped organize the Northern support movement, which started to picket Woolworth stores in the Boston area to show solidarity with the Black student protesters in the South.\(^8\)

Besides the substantive issues involved in the sit-in protests, what especially caught the interest of American radicals on the Old and the emerging New Left were the methods of protest employed by the Black civil rights activists. In particular, American leftists were impressed by Black community organizing and their non-violent civil

---

\(^6\) Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer*, 115-16.
disobedience tactics. Howe and Walzer, for example, were hoping that the civil rights movement would lay the foundations for a “new indigenous American radicalism,” that employed democratic means of community organizing to achieve its democratic ends.9

Enthusiasm for the civil rights activists’ emphasis on direct action can be clearly detected in the second Dissent article Walzer wrote on the emerging civil rights movement. In the article, he observed how young black student activists had little patience with the NAACP’s legal approach to achieve full civil rights for African Americans; instead, the young asked for “personal encounter[s].” Walzer was impressed by the way members of different generations and classes in local black communities were cooperating in protesting segregation. From his interviews with young activists, Walzer concluded that the young had little interest in supporting conventional political candidates. Instead, they sought to achieve political change through new strategies of non-violent protest outside of conventional political channels.10

In another 1960 Dissent article related to the civil rights protests entitled “The Idea of Resistance,” Walzer reflected on the broader question as to how the methods of protest used in the civil rights movement could be applied to other political causes the left sought to promote. He lamented that intellectuals in the post-war era had given up the hope for radical social change. According to Walzer, post-war radicals no longer worked wholeheartedly toward a better world because they lacked utopian ideals. He thereby hypothesized that the fear of “revolutionary terror” inhibited American radicals from working outside conventional political channels to protest unjust laws. In the article, however, Walzer reiterated his conviction that radical political change could be achieved

9 Sorin, Irving Howe, 154.
without resorting to violence. For him, the Southern protest movement against segregation served as a case in point. The civil rights activists in the South demonstrated that it was possible to resist particular laws one considered immoral without seeking to revolutionize the entire political system. Although the civil rights activists were violating particular local laws with their civil disobedience campaigns, Walzer explained that the legal violations could be morally justified because they “appeal[ed] to a higher law and the conscience of the community.”

Walzer felt that the civil rights activists’ unconventional means of resistance were necessary to draw attention to those injustices in America that politicians were unwilling to address. He thus accused liberals of failing to promote more citizens’ involvement in conventional politics. In a comment he wrote on John F. Kennedy’s electoral victory in fall 1960, Walzer emphasized the conservative nature of Kennedy’s politics and argued that the new President had not been brought to power by a new liberal political movement. Walzer instead believed that the new civil rights organizations were much more likely candidates for a “new liberalism” in the United States. Despite his reservations about Kennedy, however, Walzer nevertheless encouraged American “socialists and radicals” to cooperate with liberal politicians as a way of strengthening the political clout of the American left. At the same time, he called upon leftists not to lose sight of their larger, more radical political aspirations.

Walzer’s involvement in the early civil rights movement allowed him to gain first-hand experience in movement politics. The civil rights movement led him to reflect

---

on the question of how citizens could change unjust government policies through non-violent means of resistance and by appealing to moral values shared among ordinary Americans citizens. Moreover, as a political activist, he learned about the importance of building coalitions when fighting for liberal political causes.

With the rise of Black Nationalism in the mid-1960s, however, white civil rights activists started to lose common ground with their black colleges. At the time, Walzer strongly opposed “black power militancy” as a “terrible political mistake.” He felt that Black Nationalism considerably weakened America’s black minority politically. Yet, Walzer cannot remember any open “ideological clashes” between black activists and his EPIC friends. Rather, he retrospectively recalls, he “drifted out” of the movement because he was soon “caught up in the opposition to America’s growing involvement in Vietnam.” The experience gained as a civil rights activist, however, would prove to be indispensable for his protest activities against official American policies abroad in the later course of the 1960s.\textsuperscript{13}

**Cuba, the Castro Regime, and the American Left**

The first instance where Walzer became publicly involved in the protest of an American action abroad was in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba in 1961. Indeed, according to the historian Van Gosse, the Bay of Pigs invasion was the first major instance in the cold war where an American action abroad (committed in the name of anti-communism) led some cold war liberals to challenge the underlying assumptions of the dominant liberal cold war consensus and thus provoked a rift within the American

\textsuperscript{13} Walzer, “Blacks and Jews: A Personal Reflection,” 402.
anti-communist liberal left. Moreover, the arguments put forward by liberal and radical protesters in the aftermath of the invasion already outlined many of the themes that dominated intellectual debates about America’s growing military involvement in the Vietnam War later in the decade.\(^\text{14}\)

Cuba was a particularly sensitive issue for liberals and leftists already in the 1950s. During the Eisenhower administration, many intellectuals on the liberal left criticized the president for propping up the authoritarian Batista regime in Cuba and for failing to encourage democratic reforms on the island. In 1959, Fidel Castro, the leader of a popular revolutionary guerilla movement in Cuba, finally succeeded in deposing Batista and set up a radical government in Havana. Many American intellectuals on the liberal left applauded the Cuban revolution and hoped that Castro would serve as an example of a Third World leader who successfully led a popular, democratic movement against an oppressive, authoritarian dictator. The Cuban revolution demonstrated to many liberals that indigenous forces could do a better job at democratizing their country than could the United States by propping up reactionary dictatorships. According to Gosse, the Cuban revolution led some liberals to question whether supporting right-wing dictators was a useful American strategy for promoting values of democracy and liberalism in the cold war world.\(^\text{15}\)

By October 1959, however, the Eisenhower administration had turned hostile toward Castro and publicly called for Castro’s removal from power. In return, radicalized liberals, black nationalists, and members of the Old and the emerging New Left, formed

---


the Fair Play for Cuba Committee in April 1960. The main purpose of the Committee was to provide a counter-weight to the administration’s hostile anti-Castro rhetoric. In doing so, it sought to remain non-partisan and simply called upon the United States not to engage in subversive activities and to allow the Cuban people to maintain their right of self-determination.¹⁶

A prominent member of the Committee was the sociologist C. Wright Mills, who visited Cuba in summer 1960. On his trip, he interviewed Cuban rebels, intellectuals, and government officials, and also met with Fidel Castro on several occasions. He immediately fell in love with the country, identified with the rebels, and supported the revolution uncritically. In November 1960, Mills published *Listen, Yankee*, which is a collection of eight fictional “Letters” written in the first person. While the letters sought to represent the voices of the Cuban people, Mills made no secret that he sided with the Cuban rebels. According to the historian Kevin Mattson, Mills’ emotional attachment to the rebels led him to abandon his critical independence as an intellectual. Rather than giving a balanced and realistic picture of the Cuban situation, he sought to project his own views of an ideal socialist society onto Cuba.¹⁷

The book quickly became a bestseller and, according to Gosse, a “key radicalizing text” for the baby-boom generation on American college campuses. Thanks to Mills’s book, the intellectuals’ critique of American policy toward Cuba entered the mainstream of American political debate and, according to Gosse, it became “fashionable to consider the Cubans’ point of view.” Mills directed his pro-Castro polemics not only against cold

---

¹⁶ Gosse, *Where the Boys Are*, 175-76.
war liberals, but also against the anti-communist Old Left, which he chastised for holding onto the unfounded assumption that Castro’s regime would inevitably evolve into a totalitarian dictatorship.\footnote{Gosse, Where the Boys Are, 176, 180, 182.}

Needless to say, Irving Howe was not particularly impressed with Mills’s romantic idealization of the Cuban revolution. In fact, he accused Mills of ignoring the authoritarian tendencies of Castro. According to Walzer, *Dissent* magazine never shared “the enthusiasm about Castro expressed by the majority of American leftists at the time.” Rather, *Dissent* maintained its deep “hostility to communist dictatorships” and continued to stress that “the commitment to democracy was an absolutely necessary feature of any imaginable socialism.” Thus, *Dissent* was very critical of the Castro regime from the beginning.\footnote{On Howe, see Gosse, Where the Boys Are, 182; Walzer, interview with author.}

Cuba, however, was not the only foreign policy issue on which the editors of *Dissent* disagreed with the regular *Dissent* contributor C. Wright Mills. Howe also was critical of Mills’s favorable depiction of Eastern European communism. Moreover, Howe strongly disliked Mills’s 1959 polemical critique of American foreign policy in *The Causes of World War III*, which he reviewed for *Dissent* when the book was published. In the book, Mills argued that the United States shared an equal responsibility for the cold war, and that the U.S. government should work toward a relaxation of cold war tensions by stopping to judge the Soviet communist system as being inferior to American capitalism. For Howe, such a recommendation amounted to a tacit endorsement of the dictatorial practices of communist regimes, which, after all, were regimes that did not enjoy the consent of the people governed. Howe thus accused Mills of asserting that the
United States was the moral equivalent of the Soviet Union. After a fierce exchange of opinion between the two, Howe severed the year-long ties his magazine had maintained with the radical sociologist.20

The Bay of Pigs Invasion and Intellectual Dissent

During Kennedy’s election campaign in 1960, Kennedy repeatedly denied that he would intervene in Cuba. At the same time, however, he voiced fears that Castro was moving into the Soviet camp. Indeed, Kennedy was strongly committed to the defense of the “free world” and demonstrated his allegiance to vital center liberalism by appointing the Harvard historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., to work as an adviser for his administration. After Kennedy’s inauguration, Schlesinger publicly proclaimed that Castro was a Soviet puppet. In doing so, he sought to rally the support of the American left. Both Schlesinger and the President expressed the hope that the more moderate Cuban Alliance for Progress would eventually come to dominate the Cuban government.21

On April 17, 1961, President Kennedy gave a green light to a CIA-backed invasion of the Bay of Pigs, an invasion that was undertaken by a brigade of Cuban exiles. The Kennedy administration expected the military operation to trigger a popular uprising in Cuba. It further hoped that the uprising would bring to power a moderate, democratic government and thus prevent the country from falling prey to Soviet imperialism. Cuba, however, lacked a strong enough democratic movement that could have posed a serious challenge to Castro’s popularity. Consequently, the CIA-backed

20 Sorin, Irving Howe, 170.
21 Gosse, Where the Boys Are, 213.
invasion failed miserably as the invading exile brigade was defeated by Cuban militia in the course of only three days.

Meanwhile, many intellectuals on the American liberal left became convinced that Kennedy’s military operation “exposed for the first time how anti-Communism had bred a commitment to empire.” American liberals had always believed that their country’s mission abroad was to oppose imperialism – particularly Soviet imperialism – and not to become an imperial power itself. According to Gosse, the Bay of Pigs invasion “altered the domestic political landscape, producing the first publicly visible dissent over imperial policies since the beginning of the Cold War.” While most members of the Old Left kept silent, young radicals protested the invasion all the more. (The Old Left’s strong commitment to anti-communism thereby prevented it from condemning the invasion in any meaningful way.) Mills and young radicals on the emerging student New Left drew inspiration from the revisionist historian William Appleman Williams, who argued that the invasion was an “inevitable” result of America’s economically driven imperial foreign policy.  

While protests from the radical left do not seem to have come as a particular surprise, more remarkable were those protests that came from liberal cadres close to the Kennedy establishment. To be sure, liberals did not harbor any sympathies for Castro, but they nevertheless opposed the invasion on legal and ethical grounds. While those on the radical left saw the invasion as a logical consequence of American liberal anti-communism, liberal protesters saw the invasion as an aberration and betrayal of American values and ideals.

---

22 Gosse, Where the Boys Are, 212-13.
A prominent liberal opponent of the invasion was Senator William Fulbright, who warned Kennedy prior to the invasion that the image of the United States as an anti-imperialist and pro-democratic nation would be seriously tarnished if the CIA went ahead with its invasion plan. Moreover, divisive arguments about the invasion erupted at the annual convention of Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), where opponents of the invasion were pitted against the followers of ADA founder Schlesinger. Furthermore, liberal newspapers such as The New York Times and The New York Post condemned the invasion. In his regular column, Walter Lippmann criticized the failed invasion attempt on practical grounds. He pointed out that the United States simply lacked the military capacity to prevent popular revolutions all around the world. Moreover, he argued that it was illusory for the United States to think that the U.S. Marines could control the “revolutionary peasantry” after they had taken over “Havana and a few cities.” A month later, Lippmann elaborated on his critique of American imperial policy in the developing world. He argued that “the Dulles system of Asian protectorates” in countries like Iran, Laos, and Vietnam, compelled the United States to prop up regimes that were “intolerably reactionary.”

Particularly notable also was the public disapproval voiced by faculty members of America’s Ivy League universities, which was a clear departure from the supportive role academics, especially in the Northeastern elite universities, had played in backing America’s cold war foreign policy up to that point. Harvard University was the first school to issue a signed statement to protest the invasion. Walzer, who was a Ph.D. candidate at Harvard at the time, helped to put together a protest rally on the Harvard

---

23 Gosse, Where the Boys Are, 212, 223-224.
campus. In fact, small protests against the invasion took place in at least twenty cities and college towns across the United States, which was quite a remarkable departure from the conservative political atmosphere of the 1950s.\(^{24}\)

**Walzer’s Alternative “Liberal” Vision for Dealing with Cuba**

In the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs, Walzer elaborated on his opposition to the invasion in a Special Supplement of *Dissent*, which was distributed to all subscribers of the magazine. In his essay, Walzer sought to stake out a middle position between the left’s Marxist polemics against the invasion and the Kennedy administration’s justification for the action in the name of anti-communism. In his pamphlet, Walzer conceded to liberal anti-communists that Castro was “dangerous…as a model of rapid totalitarian transformation.” He made it clear that by opposing the invasion, he was not endorsing Castro and his anti-American rhetoric. Walzer also expressed his hopes that Castro would eventually be removed from power. Walzer, however, clearly disagreed with liberal defenders of the invasion on one important point. He strongly objected to the idea that the Cuban regime should be changed by way of a foreign military invasion. Instead, he insisted that Castro had to be removed from power from within and by his own people.\(^{25}\)

In the pamphlet, Walzer also addressed the arguments made by radical leftist opponents of the invasion. He conceded to the radical left that there had been a long history of American economic exploitation in Latin America. He further agreed that, in the eyes of the Cubans, American intervention was consistent with American foreign

\(^{24}\) Gosse, *Where the Boys Are*, 225; Walzer, interview with author; the protest rally is also mentioned in Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 90.

\(^{25}\) Michael Walzer, Pamphlet, “Cuba: The Invasion and the Consequences,” *Dissent* (June 1961), 5.
policy in the past and thus fitted the Cuban revolutionaries’ Marxist analysis of American foreign policy. Walzer, however, disagreed with the radical left’s assertion that the invasion was a logical result of American cold war foreign policy. Instead, Walzer stressed contingency in history. He wrote, “It is simply not possible to accept and to live with the idea that incidents like the Guatemalan putsch and the Cuban invasion are inevitable, that the United States is trapped forever in its role as defenders of the status quo.” He further pointed out that the invasion was not consistent with, but was an aberration of, Kennedy’s self-proclaimed American foreign policy principles. In fact, Walzer argued that the President acted against his self-proclaimed goal of creating a “free ‘alliance for progress’” in Latin America.26

Walzer then proposed an alternative policy toward Cuba that would be more consistent with American values of promoting individual freedom and democracy abroad. He encouraged individual Americans and U.S. government officials to continue to publicly criticize the Castro regime for violating civil liberties. At the same time, he called upon the United States to bolster the more democratically-minded members of the Castro regime and support them in finding an alternative to Castro. How exactly Walzer wanted the United States to achieve this aim, however, he did not elaborate upon.

Walzer further explained that American backing of reactionary forces in Cuba was counterproductive because it only radicalized the indigenous population. Moreover, he emphasized that the United States should not try to enrich itself in Cuba and instead needed to be sensitive to legitimate Cuban demands for more social justice in their country. He asserted that if the United States did not establish economic ties with Cuba

---

26 Walzer, “Cuba: The Invasion and the Consequences,” 6, 9 (italics his).
on an equal footing, Cubans would have no other choice but to become dependent on the Soviet Union for their economic survival. Walzer suggested that the U.S. government negotiated a compromise agreement with the Alliance for Progress led by Castro. The United States thereby would tolerate the nationalization of key industries, while the Cuban government would in return offer modest compensations for expropriated American companies. For Walzer, it was crucial that the United States put aside its economic self-interest in Latin America and instead supported the limited nationalization of key industries for the benefit of the native population.²⁷

Indeed, Walzer’s view of how a sensible left should relate to the issue of Cuba echoed his arguments he made in 1957 when discussing the way in which he believed the social democratic left should have reacted to the Hungarian Revolution. As in his critique of the British left’s failure to support the Hungarian revolutionaries, Walzer in 1961 again stressed the importance for Western socialists to remain true to their humanistic values and democratic principles when making judgments on foreign policy issues. He thus stressed the importance for intellectuals on the left to remain morally consistent. He wanted American social democrats to hold foreign regimes up against the same moral standards they were applying to their own government at home.

Todd Gitlin, who was an undergraduate student at Harvard and enrolled in one of Walzer’s discussion sections at the time, remembers participating in the protest rally that Walzer helped organize. As Gitlin recalls, he agreed with the content of Walzer’s pamphlet in principle. He did not have any sympathies for Castro either. However, Gitlin had strong reservations about the feasibility of Walzer’s proposition that the United

²⁷ Walzer, “Cuba: The Invasion and the Consequences,” 8-10.
States should back radical democratic forces in Cuba. Gitlin recalls that he “thought it naïve in the extreme to expect the United States, with its imperial history in the Caribbean, to install a radical democrat in Havana.”

Furthermore, Gitlin asked at the time: “What gave the United States…the right to try” to bring about a new leadership in Cuba? Indeed, it becomes clear in Walzer’s article that although he opposed American military intervention in Cuba, he knew very well what kind of political forces he wanted to have in power in Cuba. In fact, there seemed to be a tension between Walzer’s condemnation of the CIA’s intervention on behalf of the Cuban right and his call for American backing of the radical opposition to Castro. Although Walzer opposed American military aid to Cuba’s radical democrats, his call to support the democrats would nevertheless have involved American meddling in the internal affairs of a sovereign state. So where, then, did Walzer draw the line between legitimate and illegitimate ways of interfering in the domestic political affairs of the island country? When confronted with this question in an interview in 2003, Walzer explained that he had always stood for the idea that the United States backed, “in non-military ways, democratic elements in dictatorial regimes in Latin America and Eastern Europe,” especially in those cases where oppressive regimes created “large numbers of refugees and political prisoners.” For example, he thought that “American trade unions” could connect with dissidents and Cuban trade unions and “provide money and moral support.”

Not everybody on the social democratic left, however, was willing to take such active measures in support of radical “third forces” in Cuba. For example, Walzer’s

---

28 Gitlin, The Sixties, 90.
29 Walzer, interview with author.
colleague at Dissent, Michael Harrington, put more emphasis on the principle of non-interference. In an article he wrote in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs invasion, Harrington concluded that it was the Cubans, and only the Cubans themselves, who could lead a revolution against Castro and put their country on a more democratic path. Harrington thereby wanted Americans to remain passive, and he did not call upon fellow socialists to engage in any action in support of the Cuban radicals.\footnote{Gosse, Where the Boys Are, 232-33; The American Socialist Party was not very active in protesting the invasion. The party’s staunch anti-communism prevented it from doing so, and the party leader Max Shachtman even came down to supporting the invasion.}

The subtle differences in opinion that existed between Walzer and his colleagues on the independent left, however, were nothing compared to the heavy opposition his stance on Cuba triggered on the part of the more orthodox academic left. In the summer 1961 issue of Dissent, the Marxist Joyce Kolko fiercely attacked Walzer’s essay on the Bay of Pigs invasion. In her letter, she implied that Walzer’s position on Cuba was too moderate to be legitimately be associated with the left, and she accused Walzer of being ideologically if not morally inconsistent. She thereby attacked both Walzer’s interpretation of the invasion and his policy recommendations to the U.S. government.\footnote{Michael Walzer, Exchange with Joyce Kolko, “Cuba and Radicalism,” Dissent 8 (Autumn 1961): 517-19.}

Kolko heavily criticized Walzer’s case-by-case approach when dealing with American actions abroad, which she believed led him to draw the erroneous conclusion that the Bay of Pigs invasion simply was a policy “mistake.” According to Kolko, Walzer’s approach to foreign policy questions thus blinded him from seeing that American action in Cuba was consistent with the way American policy had been
conducted in the past. She thus emphatically disagreed with Walzer’s assumption that the
United States could easily change or modify its policy toward Cuba.

Furthermore, she disagreed with Walzer’s policy recommendations. In her letter, she argued that Walzer violated his socialist credentials by pragmatically suggesting that Cuba should compensate American businesses for the confiscated property. She implied that it was not the task of American socialists to find a compromise solution that would make the creation of a socialist government in Cuba acceptable to business interest groups in the United States.

When replying to Kolko’s accusations, Walzer dismissed her critique as polemical. He particularly attacked Kolko’s and the American left’s anti-Americanism. He pointed out that anti-Americans in the Third World did not discriminate between different kinds of Americans, and that there was no reason for American socialists to expect that anti-American radicals in Cuba and elsewhere would join forces with American leftists. Walzer thus stated that there was no point in “encourag[ing] people to hate us (as Americans).” Moreover, Walzer maintained that dismissing the Bay of Pigs invasion simply as another example of America’s moral depravity was a very unconstructive way of voicing opposition to a particular American action abroad.  

Referring to Kolko’s analysis as “pseudo-Marxism,” Walzer accused the radical left of distorting history for the sake of ideological consistency. In his reply to Kolko, he re-iterated his view that the course of history was contingent on decisions made by individual leaders. Because it was possible to think of alternative policies toward Cuba within the framework of the present political circumstances, Walzer maintained, one

might as well discuss alternatives “which are at least conceivable in the America we know.” If the left wanted to maintain its negativist stance toward U.S. foreign policy and continue to argue that the present government was incapable of changing its policy, the left might as well “abandon politics altogether.” Indeed, Walzer’s argument with Kolko already laid out the general parameters of the intellectual debates Walzer would continue to have with the radical left for the next forty years.\(^\text{33}\)

**In Search for a New Radical Cause: The Threat of the Nuclear Arms Race**

In the aftermath of the invasion, Cuba no longer was an important issue among peace activists. First, peace activists did not expect the United States to attempt another invasion in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs. Second, liberals, who initially sympathized with Castro, no longer supported the dictator after he had publicly proclaimed his allegiance to the Soviet Union in December 1961. What worried peace activists more was the heightening of cold war tensions in the aftermath of the unsuccessful Vienna Summit between Khrushchev and Kennedy in 1961. After the summit, both Kennedy and Khrushchev took a series of steps that were interpreted by the other sides as hostile moves. Khrushchev gave in to the pleadings of his East German counterpart Walter Ulbricht and built the Berlin Wall; moreover, he proclaimed his intention to resume atmospheric testing. Meanwhile, Kennedy increased military spending and also announced the resumption of nuclear tests.\(^\text{34}\)

Kennedy’s announcement heightened concerns about the health effects of the nuclear fall-out caused by the tests and, simultaneously, renewed popular opposition to


the nuclear arms race. Indeed, opposition to the nuclear arms race had been a long-standing issue for peace groups in the United States. Already in the 1950s, after the United States and the Soviet Union had developed their first hydrogen bombs, members of different political persuasion in the United States found common cause in their opposition to atomic weapons. Liberal internationalists, such as the World Federalists and the Federation of American Scientists, with such prominent members as Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein, called upon the international community to establish legal mechanisms that would regulate and later ban the testing and production of nuclear weapons. Even tough-minded “realists,” such as George F. Kennan and the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, started to question the rationality of waging a cold war on military terms considering the destructiveness of nuclear weapons.35

In 1957, Norman Cousins (a former president of the United World Federalists and editor of Saturday Review), founded the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE) together with a group of scientists and women’s peace groups. Eager not to make his new organization come across as pro-communist, Cousin ended up purging the organization of communists and communist sympathizers. Moreover, he made sure to call upon both sides in the cold war to ban nuclear testing and base his arguments on technical and scientific evidence rather than political rhetoric. Cousins wanted SANE to be issue-oriented and not to take sides with any particular political viewpoint.36

Walzer and many of his white friends in the civil rights movement became active in SANE after 1961. As the civil rights movement slowly was taken over by Black

36 Isserman, If I Had a Hammer, 180-185.
Nationalists, idealistic young white activists like Walzer were “looking for a new cause” to embrace. According to Walzer, he and his friends found in SANE an organization that addressed a pressing contemporary issue in a sensible way. Walzer was particularly attracted to SANE because the organization was not “unilateralist” on the issue of nuclear disarmament. As Walzer remembers, he had from the beginning opposed the idea of unilateral nuclear disarmament because it would have left the United States vulnerable to Soviet nuclear blackmail. Instead, he, like the founding members of SANE, wanted the United States to enter into a mutually verifiable agreement with the Soviet Union that called for multilateral nuclear disarmament in stages.\footnote{Walzer, interview with author.}

In contrast to SANE, which was initially founded by liberal internationalists, pacifist groups in the United States also took up the cause of nuclear disarmament. Although Walzer had no interest in pacifism and was not directly influenced by American pacifists, it is nevertheless important to mention the contribution of pacifist groups to the emerging peace movements in the 1960s. American pacifism has a long historical tradition. According to Isserman, “American pacifism in its origins was largely an offshoot of evangelical Protestantism and of the moral reform crusades of the early nineteenth century.” After the First World War, prominent socialists, such as Norman Thomas, became attracted to pacifism and considered “the possibility” to use “Gandhi’s means” to achieve “Marx’s ends.” Alliances started to emerge between socialists and pacifists during the 1920s and 1930s, which extended into the post-World War Two period. Radical pacifist groups gained increased prominence among young activists in
their support of the civil rights movement, a movement that heavily relied on non-violent forms of resistance.\textsuperscript{38}

Examples of prominent pacifist groups in the 1950s and 1960s were the Catholic Worker Movement of Dorothy Day, with which Michael Harrington was associated, CORE in the American South, and various intellectuals associated with \textit{Liberation Magazine}, such as Dave Dellinger, A.J. Muste, and Bayard Rustin. What particularly distinguished the pacifists from other groups was that their message was primarily moral, not political. Moreover, radical pacifists were able to catch public attention because of their unconventional methods of protest. They drew inspiration from the British pacifist Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), which used civil disobedience tactics to protest Britain’s production of nuclear weapons at British atomic weapons facilities. Inspired by the CND campaigns, the American pacifist Albert Bigelow caused a public sensation in 1958 when he attempted to enter a nuclear testing zone in the Pacific with his sail boat. Another example of an American pacifist disobedience campaign were Day, Muste, and Rustin’s participation in the Civil Defense protests of the early 1960s, where they refused to take shelter and allowed themselves to be arrested without resistance. Pacifists stressed individual moral conscience over ideology. They believed in individual sacrifice and the one-on-one encounter with the enemy. Indeed, their principled message, which stressed individual moral responsibility instead of political expediency, inspired idealistic young activists on the emerging New Left.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{38} Isserman, \textit{If I Had A Hammer}, 127, 129, 142.

\textsuperscript{39} Isserman, \textit{If I Had a Hammer}, 142, 145, 150-55.
Toward a New Peace Movement

Shortly after the election of John F. Kennedy, a group of Harvard undergraduate students, among them Todd Gitlin, founded the peace group Tocsin. The group sought to serve as a counterweight to those members of the Harvard faculty who supported the new administration as advisers. Tocsin feared that Kennedy would continue to follow the policy recommendations of militant anticommunist liberals if the liberal left did not object. Therefore, Tocsin tried to convince broad sections of the American population, including unions and business groups, to support liberal “doves” in the Senate and encourage them to speak up against the arms race.40

Many members of Harvard’s student SANE, who had become alienated from the moralistic posture adopted by the organization, joined Tocsin. As Gitlin remembers, he was attracted to Tocsin because it sought to come up with solutions to ease cold war tensions that were both practical and realistic. Tocsin thereby did not align itself with any political party or ideological position. First and foremost, the group served as a non-partisan study and discussion group. Its student members wrote research papers on a variety of foreign policy issues and made well-informed policy recommendations. Tocsin even was able to arrange meetings with congressional assistants and low-level government officials sympathetic to their cause.41

The most important policy issue taken up by Tocsin in its early years was the question of nuclear deterrence. While some members favored total nuclear disarmament, others were not willing to go thus far. Instead, they were thinking of ways to limit the two

40 Gitlin, The Sixties, 87-88, 92.
41 Isserman, If I Had a Hammer, 197; Gitlin, The Sixties, 89-91, 93.
powers’ nuclear capacity and worked on policy recommendations for a test ban treaty that would be mutually verifiable.\textsuperscript{42}

In the aftermath of Kennedy’s announcement to resume nuclear testing, Tocsin decided to organize a peace march on Washington, which was scheduled for February 17, 1962. Because of its small size, Tocsin depended on the cooperation of groups like SANE and the student Socialist Peace Union (SPU) in order to organize an effective protest march. Finding a common platform the different peace groups could endorse, however, was not an easy undertaking. While Tocsin was willing to work together with government officials and made suggestions for policy changes that were relatively moderate and feasible for the Kennedy administration to adopt, SPU called for more radical changes in America’s political structure. According to Gitlin, SPU was alienated from the Kennedy administration’s cold war liberalism and thus “suspicious of [Tocsin’s] accommodating politics.”\textsuperscript{43}

At the time of the preparations for the rally, Walzer had already moved to Princeton, New Jersey, where he accepted a position as an assistant professor at Princeton University. Still, Gitlin contacted his former instructor during the preparations for the demonstration. According to Gitlin, Walzer’s “influential counsel” was important in the drafting of a peace agenda that the various participating parties in the rally could adopt. Walzer and the organizing committee at Tocsin thereby took a lowest-common-denominator approach by keeping their peace slogans general.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{42} Gitlin, \textit{The Sixties}, 88.
\textsuperscript{44} Gitlin, \textit{The Sixties}, 93-94.
The peace agenda adopted by the organizing committee called for an end to atmospheric testing as well as for unilateral, conciliatory American gestures toward the Soviet Union. One such conciliatory gesture Tocsin recommended was the withdrawal of American missiles from Turkey. Doing so, Tocsin explained, would not have been a significant concession from a military point of view because the missiles could have been easily knocked out in a Russian first strike. From a symbolic point of view, however, the action would have been significant and may even have prompted Russian concessions in return. Tocsin’s resolution also called for an increase in economic assistance to developing countries and U.S. support for independent radical movements in the Third World.45

Walzer himself participated at the rally and reported on the peace march in the spring 1962 issue of Dissent. He concluded that the demonstration turned out to be a success. Measured by the standards of the 1950s, 5000 student participants was a very good turnout. Gitlin and other leaders of Tocsin thereby were able to meet with national security adviser McGeorge Bundy and other members of the Kennedy staff.46

In his report on the rally for Dissent, Walzer made no secret of his strong sympathies with the peace group Tocsin, and he criticized the SPU and pacifists for promoting utopian views of world peace. Indeed, he praised Tocsin for its pragmatic, intellectually informed, and constructive policy suggestions. He explained that the group had a “highly sophisticated awareness of the realities of the cold war.” It “treated the cold war as a real conflict of interest and values and not merely as an invention of evil or insane men, and it proposed non-military ways of carrying on that struggle” Walzer

45 Gitlin, The Sixties, 93-94.
further wrote: “I find this sort of thing very much preferable to the willfully naïve (often deliberately irrational) and self-righteous peace claque which has often substituted for argument in the past.”

Unfortunately, however, the alliance that Walzer helped to forge between the moderate, reform-oriented members of Tocsin and more radical peace groups proved to be extremely tenuous. The organizing committee’s lowest-common-denominator approach did not remove the important ideological differences between the participating peace groups. In his memoirs, Gitlin remembers how he was torn back and forth between the more moderate reformism espoused by members of Tocsin and the more radical Marxist ideas espoused by other peace groups. In particular, he vacillated between the two positions when thinking about the issue of nuclear deterrence. On one hand, he sought to condemn the strategy as completely irrational. On the other hand, he also understood that a “minimum deterrent” may be necessary for the United States to keep in order to ensure the country’s safety from nuclear blackmail. Siding with the more moderate leftists represented by Tocsin, Gitlin ultimately came to accept the idea that revolutionary changes in American policy were unlikely to occur, and he thus tried to convince his peers that the passing political reforms was the only realistic goal to aim for. It was an argument that his former instructor Michael Walzer had made all along.

The New Left Versus Dissent: Early Tensions

After the peace march, Walzer was eager to establish a more formal peace coalition between his friends at Dissent and the student peace groups who participated at the rally.

---

48 Gitlin, The Sixties, 95.
For that purpose, the editorial board of Dissent invited representatives of SDS, among them Tom Hayden and Paul Potter, to participate at a symposium, which was held in early spring 1962. Irving Howe was hopeful that the young, energetic radicals could bring new life to the politically impotent American left.  

From the beginning, however, Howe had strong misgivings about the New Left’s attitude toward communism. He accused the young radicals of lacking historical consciousness and of failing to take seriously the threat posed by Soviet totalitarianism. He thereby reiterated the arguments he made in his hostile letter exchange with C. Wright Mills in the pages of Dissent two years earlier. The founding members of the New Left took inspiration from Mills’ writings, and Howe criticized Mills and his young followers for their naïve hope that the communist bloc could reform itself. Moreover, Howe disliked the New Left’s uncritical support of radical revolutionary regimes in the Third World. At the meeting, Howe lost his temper and started to berate the young radicals for their naiveté. He later admitted that he should have been more patient with the young radicals and could at least have allowed them a fair hearing. Yet, he remained convinced that the differences in opinion between the two groups were too substantial to have been able to be resolved. As Howe stated in his autobiography: “We simply could not remain quiet about our deepest and costliest conviction: that if socialism still has any meaning, it must be set strictly apart from all dictatorships, whether by frigid Russians of hot Cubans. There is the value of tact, but also the value of candor.”  

In many ways, Walzer’s assessment of the positive and negative aspects of the New Left did not differ substantially from Howe’s view of the young radicals. Walzer

---

49 Howe, A Margin of Hope, 291-293.
50 Howe, A Margin of Hope, 291-293;
had mixed feelings about the emerging New Left. In an article he wrote on the young radicals in the spring 1962 issue of *Dissent*, Walzer said that he liked the pro-active nature of young activist and their enthusiasm for radical politics. Moreover, he praised “their desire for personal encounter.” Like Howe, he liked SDS’ s endorsement of the principle of participatory democracy and its call for more public debate on political issues. He thereby favorably contrasted the young radicals with the Old Left’s “false sophistication” and “surrender of self to history.”

At the same time, however, he criticized the New Left for failing to put forward more concrete policy recommendations. Instead, he observed that their protests against government policy were “almost purely negative,” and he warned in his 1962-article that Americans may soon turn away from paying attention to the protests of the young activists exactly for that reason. According to Walzer, young radicals “lack political perspective” and put too little intellectual and organizational effort into the creation of a “coherent viewpoint.” However, he conceded that the ideological polarization of the cold war also was partly to blame for the young radicals’ failure to formulate an alternative political vision. He explained that the cold war “has left us with narrowed political sympathies and narrowed minds.”

In the summer of 1962, the New Left sought to address what Walzer referred to as their lack of a “coherent viewpoint” at a conference in Port Huron, Michigan. The conference was organized by SDS, the student department of the League for Industrial Democracy (LID). LID was the social-democratic wing of the Old Left, and was anti-communist to its very core. SDS had been at loggerheads with its elder comrades at LID.

---

over the question of their relationship to communism. Should SDS allow communists into their organization? And what kind of standpoint vis-à-vis the Soviet Union should SDS adopt? Tom Hayden, chairman of SDS, did not share the strong anti-communist sensibilities of the Old Leftists. Hayden considered the Soviet system a “dinosaur,” which did not represent a rival alternative to the American left. For Hayden, Communism was an abstraction, and he felt that the largest threat to the American left came from anti-communism and not communism per se.53

SDS opposed militant anti-communism at home and adopted a more benign view of the Soviet Union. Hayden argued at the conference that the USSR was not inherently expansionist, but that America’s hostile attitude toward the Soviets led the Soviet Union to dominate neighboring countries as an act of self-defense. SDS adopted William Appleman Williams’ interpretation of the cold war by stressing that America’s century-old imperial drive to secure markets and resources abroad was a major source of America’s confrontation with the Soviet Union. Moreover, he argued that the staunchly anticommunist posture of the American government prevented it from making conciliatory moves toward the Soviet Union. Free from the ideological baggage of the 1930s, young radicals believed that they could take on a fresh and unbiased view of radical social experiments in the newly decolonized countries of the Third World. Many came to romanticize Fidel Castro and lent their uncritical support to revolutionary movements in the Third World.54

54 Gitlin, The Sixties, 113; on SDS taking up the arguments of William Appleman Williams, see John Patrick Diggins, The Rise and Fall of the American Left, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 223; Gitlin, The Sixties, 121.
Moreover, the New Left started to distinguish itself from the Dissenters with regard to their increasingly hostile attitude toward liberalism. The members of SDS felt that the Kennedy administration was not committed to serious change in the United States but was merely “tinkering” when faced with domestic problems. For example, the leadership of SDS believed that Kennedy failed to move fast enough on the civil rights issue, and it accused the administration of cooperating too closely with big business.\(^{55}\)

In short, SDS felt that liberals had lost touch with the American people. The New Left drew inspiration from C. Wright Mills’ *The Causes of World War III*, which argued that American foreign policy was no longer controlled by democratic processes. According to Mills, the cold war led to the creation of a “Permanent War Economy” at home; as a result, American leaders, who were in cahoots with the “military-industrial complex,” had every interest in maintaining cold war tensions as a way of ensuring America’s continuing need for purchasing weapons. Mills thereby argued that only if American democracy became more participatory and Americans had regained democratic control of their country’s foreign policy, cold war tensions could be eased because the United States would no longer be forced to promote the corporate interests of the “power elite.”\(^{56}\)

\(^{55}\) Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 121.

\(^{56}\) Mattson, *Intellectuals in Action*, 79-81; Tom Hayden discusses the important influence that Mills’ theory of the “power elite” had on the authors of the Port Huron Statement in *Reunion*, 76-83. In fact, the historian Maurice Isserman attributes the later disintegration of the New Left to the young radicals’ unwillingness to learn from the sectarian mistakes of the Old Left. Harrington, Walzer, and Howe tried to take the lessons of the 1930s seriously; they understood that it was strategically necessary for the American left to cooperate with liberals and work for small victories if they ever wanted to affect political change. Howe repeatedly criticized the self-righteous and moralistic posture adopted by members of the New Left, which he believed prevented them from working toward actual political change. Howe stated: “Politics requires more than rectitude; it requires skill, intelligence, compromise, sometimes even a little cunning.” (Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer*, 219; Irving Howe, *A Margin of Hope*, 301.)
Michael Harrington, who was about Walzer’s age and a member of Dissent’s editorial board, officially broke with Hayden and SDS at the Port Huron meeting. He argued that the Port Huron statement was not critical enough of the Soviet Union and of communists at home. Moreover, Harrington disliked the young radicals’ romantic depiction of Fidel Castro and their uncritical support of revolutions in the Third World. A year later, Howe, who shared Harrington’s misgivings, terminated his relationship with the leadership of SDS.  

It is interesting to consider Walzer’s position in the context of this growing ideological chasm that emerged between the Dissenters and the New Left. Walzer has often been described as a transitional figure between the Old and the New left, as somebody who could have bridged the gap between the two generations of American leftists. For example, Walzer was a student of Howe’s in 1953 and later a teacher of Gitlin’s at Harvard in 1960. On one hand, Walzer’s 1962 critique of the young radicals in Dissent echoed many of the arguments made by Howe at the time, which leads one to suggest that Walzer very much looked at the New Left from the viewpoint of his Old Left colleagues at Dissent. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that Walzer wrote his 1962 Dissent article in the first person, which shows that he nevertheless counted himself as part of the young generation of American leftists. In an interview, Walzer confirmed this “dual role” he played at the time. He explained that although his “deepest intellectual formation was really with the kind of democratic left represented by Dissent” he was closely tied to the emerging New Left “on a personal level” and actively participated in

---

57 Gitlin, The Sixties, 121, 172; Sorin, Irving Howe, 204-5. Howe officially broke with Hayden at an oft-quoted meeting between SDS and the Dissenters at the home of Joseph Buttinger in October 1993, where the two personally clashed over the issue of communism.
some of the New Left’s political activities, such as in the civil rights movement and in SANE. He explains that because “Dissent was committed to decentralized democratic politics,” he “found a lot of the community organizing of the New Left exciting and worthwhile.”  

Walzer also had certain personal characteristics that suited his role as a possible mediator. His debating style was not as confrontational as Howe’s or, for that matter, Hayden’s. After the 1962 meeting between SDS and Dissent, for example, Walzer asked Howe to “tone down his criticism” of the student leaders. Ultimately, however, Walzer’s disagreement with Howe was more about tactics than about substance. In contrast to Howe, Walzer initially was willing to downplay the flaws in Hayden’s line of argumentation and his alleged authoritarian leadership style. According to Sorin, Walzer remained connected to SDS and “was friendly with Tom Hayden until the mid-sixties,” when also he, as did many others, became alienated from Hayden’s authoritarian tendencies. Walzer thus continued to “move back and forth” between Dissent and the New Left until the middle of the decade, when opposition to the war in Vietnam began to dominate the politics of the New Left. Indeed, the Vietnam War was a watershed event that both opened new opportunities for cooperation between the Dissenters and the New Left in their common opposition to the war but also helped exacerbate the tensions between the two generations of leftists as the antiwar movement became increasingly radicalized. The anti-war movement and Walzer’s role in it will be the topic of the next chapter.  

---

59 Sorin, Irving Howe, 204, 208; Walzer, interview with author.
Opposition to growing American military involvement in Vietnam was at the center of Walzer’s political activism in the 1960s. From 1965 onwards, Walzer publicly opposed the war in Vietnam in the pages of *Dissent* and as a community organizer in the streets of Cambridge. Indeed, the war polarized the foreign policy debate in the United States. It shattered the cold war consensus and radicalized opinions on the left and the right. Walzer’s significance in the context of the antiwar debate in the 1960s was his attempt to put forward a morally nuanced critique of the war while trying to mediate between the increasingly radicalized antiwar movement and liberal politicians opposing the war.

**Early Opposition**

Walzer’s intellectual critique of the Vietnam War as articulated during the second half of the 1960s has to be understood against the backdrop of the Vietnam debate that preceded Johnson’s escalation of the war in 1965. Indeed, America’s antiwar opposition is often associated with the rise of the student New Left and the student-based antiwar movement. It is important to recognize, however, that intellectual opposition to American
involvement in the Vietnamese conflict did not originate with the New Left. The first vocal intellectual opposition to the war came from liberals close to the establishment.¹

By the middle of the 1950s, divisions within the liberal camp emerged between the so-called “globalists” and the “selectivists.” Already in the mid-1950s, an initially small group of liberals (also referred to as the selectivists) challenged the globalist application of the policy of containment by pointing to America’s limited resources. Selectivist liberals thus argued that the United States needed to distinguish between primary and secondary spheres of interest before deciding whether the United States should commit its troops to prevent the spread of communism abroad. Prominent proponents of a more selective application of the policy of containment were the political scientist Hans Morgenthau, George F. Kennan, The New Republic editor Walter Lippmann, and members of the editorial board of The Nation magazine. The selectivists thereby were pitted against the globalists, also referred to as “‘hard’ cold warrior liberals,” who formed the majority of cold war liberals in the 1950s and early 1960s. Their viewpoint was represented by liberal supporters of the establishment, such as Arthur Schlesinger, the editorial boards of Foreign Affairs and Encounter, and members of the staunchly anti-communist Old Left, such as Sidney Hook. In contrast to the

selectivists, the globalists argued that the United States had to contain communism everywhere in the world (regardless of America’s immediate geopolitical interests). Opposite to American intervention in Vietnam among selectivist liberals in the late 1950s and the early 1960s was based on purely pragmatic grounds. First, they did not consider South Vietnam a strategically vital enough area for the United States to be worth a costly war. Second, they based their opposition against further American military involvement on their early recognition that a war in Vietnam would simply be unwinnable. They understood that the pro-American South Vietnamese elite lacked enough popular support to form a stable government. Third, they early recognized that the South Vietnamese Viet Cong had important indigenous nationalist roots and was not necessarily attracted to Soviet communism; thus, they maintained that the government’s so-called “domino theory” could not be applied to South East Asia. Forth, they were skeptical about whether military methods were appropriate means when trying to halt the spread of radical movements in developing countries. Morgenthau, for example, suggested that American economic assistance to South Vietnam might be the only appropriate means by which the United States could ease radical sentiments in the country.

---

2 The distinction between the globalists and the selectivists has been made in Tomes, *Apocalypse Then*, 54; For more information on the selectivists, see Tomes, *Apocalypse Then*, 13, 54-69, 91, 96, 98; on the globalists, see Tomes, *Apocalypse Then*, 12, 37-38.

By basing their critique of American involvement in Vietnam on cold calculations of power, selectivist liberals did not allow their personal moral objection to communism guide or influence their foreign policy thinking. They were classic proponents of America’s post-war “realist” school of international relations. Certainly one the most eloquent proponents of post-war realism was the German-born Hans Morgenthau, who outlined his theory of international politics in his 1948 text *Politics Among Nations*. In the book, he argued that moral principles could not be applied to the realm of international politics. Leaders of states were driven exclusively by their essentially amoral, selfish desire to maximize power. According to Morgenthau, this was simply the way humans behaved when entrusted with power, and it was impossible to change human nature. Morgenthau can be referred to as a “descriptive” realist, because he derived his realist theory from the way he believed statesmen actually behaved.  

In contrast to Morgenthau, George F. Kennan, another prominent proponent of post-war realism, can be described as a “prescriptive” realist. He believed that state actors were not exclusively driven by the need to maximize power but were free also to include moral considerations when making foreign policy decisions. Kennan concluded from his historical observations that states, such as the United States, sometimes fight wars to achieve moral objectives. This, however, was exactly what Kennan believed statesmen should refrain from doing. In his 1950 book *American Diplomacy*, Kennan harshly criticized America’s “moralistic-legalistic” approach to foreign policy. He said that by

---

pursuing wars “in the name of high moral principle,” the United States was setting its war objectives too high and thus was unable to conclude a war “short of some form of total domination.” He concluded in his study of American military interventions in the first half of the twentieth century that the “source of [American] confusion” lay in the idea that moral objectives could be achieved through military means. The United States thus was well advised to stop judging other countries on the basis of American moral standards and “admit that our own national interest is all we are really capable of knowing and understanding.”

In contrast to the selectivists, globalist cold war liberals believed that the United States also had a moral mission in the world. According to Tomes, globalists were “idealistic enough to believe in the value of the tradition of Woodrow Wilson, who saw Americans as having a missionary responsibility to export democratic American institutions to less fortunate places in the world.” Although they understood that the United States sometimes was forced to back reactionary governments abroad to forestall the spread of communism, they were nevertheless confident that democracy would ultimately prevail in these countries. They deeply believed that “the American way of life…was universally yearned for.” First and foremost, they saw the cold war as a struggle of ideas. They felt that their country was to remain true to its moral commitment to prevent the further spread of communism wherever it occurred and should not simply succumb to an a-moral type of pragmatic power-politics as the selectivists suggested.

---

5 George F. Kennan, *American Diplomacy 1900-1950*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1951), 101, 102. Clearly, Kennan is too complex a thinker to be placed squarely into the realist camp. In fact, Kennan did pay attention to ideological factors and moral considerations in his writings. However, Kennan has predominantly been classified as a realist because of his forceful critique of Wilsonianism, and it is this aspect of Kennan’s thought this discussion seeks to highlight as a contrast point to Walzer’s moral argument.
From the selectivists’ point of view, however, the globalists’ strong moral aversion to communism blinded them from analyzing the facts on the ground in a dispassionate or “objective” fashion; thus, they failed to recognize the nationalist roots of Vietnamese radicalism and the fact that the local balance of power in South Vietnam did not favor pro-American political forces. In their principled, anti-communist approach to foreign policy, the globalists refused to support any solution of the Vietnam conflict that would have resulted in the unification of Vietnam under Communist rule. They argued that the United States had to make a “lesser evil” choice by continuing to back a reactionary regime in the South to prevent the communists from taking over.⁶

*Dissent* magazine took a position on the question of Vietnam that differed from that of both the globalists’ and the selectivists.’ In fact, the magazine was from the beginning very pessimistic about the conflict. Already in 1954, *Dissent* contributor Jack Rader warned against increased American attempts to dominate newly independent countries in South East Asia. He believed that such an attempt could lead to a direct confrontation with the USSR. Moreover, Rader argued that most popular struggles in Asia were aimed at achieving national independence, not communism. He doubted that there could ever be stability and peace in the region. The best one could hope for, Rader maintained, was the eventual establishment of social democracies in these newly independent countries. According to the intellectual historian Robert Tomes, Rader’s article was very representative of the social democratic viewpoint at the time. It offered

---

⁶ Tomes, *Apocalypse Then*, 56, 75.
“a socialist critique of classes, elites, and power structures” mixed with a “faith in radical
democratic political processes.”

*Dissent* expressed no sympathies toward Moscow or Peking, nor did the magazine
have any illusion about the ruthless nature of the North Vietnamese communist regime.
Yet, the magazine also distrusted the liberal establishment in Washington and did not
want the United States to prop up a reactionary regime in the South. The Dissenters
differed from globalist liberals by stating that the United States should not settle for
lesser-evil choices; rather, they wanted the U.S. to remain true to democratic ideals when
seeking to prevent the spread of communism abroad.

As an independent Old Leftist, *Dissent* editor Irving Howe was anti-communist
enough that he could not bring himself to accept the idea of an unconditional American
withdrawal from Vietnam. He wanted to have the assurance that South Vietnam would
remain free from communist domination. Howe initially held out the hope that the
American-backed leader Ngo Dinh Diem would be a suitable “third force” candidate in
South Vietnam. Indeed, the idea of supporting independent “third forces” in the newly
decolonized regions of the Third World had always figured prominently in Howe and the
Dissenters’ foreign policy recommendations from 1954 onwards. The Dissenters thereby

---

8 See, for example, Irving Howe, “Last Chance in Vietnam,” *Dissent* 11 (Summer 1964), 275-278; For a
discussion of the way Howe’s “left anti-Communism” differed from that of the anti-communism of the
York University, 2003), 227-229. As an example of an Old Left anti-anticommunist who supported the viewpoint
of globalist liberals, Sorin mentions the Socialist Party member Max Shachtman, who publicly supported the war in
Vietnam until the end. He argued that a “communist victory” was unacceptable under any circumstances even at the
cost of backing an undemocratic regime in the South. In fact, Shachtman’s hawkish position shocked the editorial
board of *Dissent*. Howe became alienated from the Socialist, among other reasons, as a result of their differences over
the question of Vietnam. Howe was not willing to support any non-communist government in the South and continued
to express his hope for the emergence of a third force. His magazine continued to put emphasis on symbolic gestures by
arguing that while the facts on the ground do not inspire hope for the establishment of a “third force,” it was
nevertheless crucial for the United States to reiterate its moral commitment to democracy
defined “third force” movements as anti-Stalinist radical democratic movements that would be built on the respective countries’ unique historical and cultural traditions.\(^9\)

Howe’s initially positive image of Diem as a popular, anti-communist nationalist was influenced by Joseph Buttinger, a significant financial supporter of *Dissent* magazine who had met with Diem on a trip to Vietnam in the late 1950s. After Diem’s assassination in 1963, when it had become clear that there was no suitable South Vietnamese successor regime with enough popular support to form a stable government, Howe called for a negotiated peace accord that would guarantee the survival of a non-communist regime in South Vietnam. He hoped that with enough U.S. support, a new South Vietnamese government could initiate radical economic reforms. As a result, he believed, such a government could eventually attract enough popular support to lure the Vietnamese peasantry away from the communist Viet Cong. Of course, the chances for such a solution to take place and succeed were extremely slim. But Howe’s deep aversion to communism prevented him from acknowledging that a “third force” solution in South Vietnam simply was unrealistic. His stubborn adherence to the idea of a “third force” in Vietnam led to tensions between him and younger members on the independent social democratic left. In particular, there was an important difference in opinion between him and his co-editor Michael Walzer.\(^10\)

\(^9\) Sorin, *Irving Howe*, 156-157; Also see Howe, “Last Chance in Vietnam;” 275-278; a good description of the “third force” argument can be found in Isserman, *If I Had a Hamme*, 105 – 108.

Walzer Joins the Debate

Walzer and Howe disagreed about what the United States should or could do to prevent its further entanglement in the Vietnamese conflict. Walzer, who was an assistant professor at Princeton University at the time, started to think about the question of Vietnam only after he had returned from his sabbatical year in England at the end of 1964. He and his friends in the peace group SANE only started to focus on the question of Vietnam early in the year of 1965, when Johnson started to escalate the war by launching the bombing campaign Operation Rolling Thunder. 11

Indeed, Walzer came up with a position on Vietnam that differed from that of his fellow *Dissent* editor and mentor Irving Howe. In the Spring 1965 issue of *Dissent*, the two laid out their differing perspectives on the nature of the conflict. Howe argued that the United States had missed an important chance after Vietnam’s partition in 1954 by failing to support a democratic alternative to the reactionary military regime the United States ended up supporting in South Vietnam. In bolstering an unpopular reactionary regime in the South, Howe maintained, the United States alienated potential backers of a democratic “third force” and thus compelled the economically desperate South Vietnamese peasantry to side with the communists. 12

In contrast to Howe, Walzer maintained that a democratic alternative, which Howe referred to as a “third force,” had never existed in South Vietnam in the first place. Walzer stated that “the national liberation movement [in Vietnam] was from the beginning led by the Communists” (emphasis his). According to Walzer, the United States ended up supporting the reactionary South Vietnamese regime not out of its own

---

free choosing, but because there existed no other group the U.S. possibly could have supported against the communists.  

Howe and Walzer’s disagreement with regard to South Vietnam’s internal political conditions also led them to different conclusions as to what steps the United States could take to extricate itself from the conflict. Howe continued to call for a negotiated peace treaty, in which the North Vietnamese would pledge not to interfere in the South. Moreover, Howe wanted the United States to help the South Vietnamese to establish a relatively stable coalition government. As Howe had already stated in *Dissent* a year earlier, it would be “inhumane” to simply withdraw American troops and leave the South Vietnamese at the mercy of the Communists.  

Walzer, however, argued that the United States should never have gotten involved in the Vietnamese conflict in the first place. There never was any “missed chance” because a popular, non-communist political force had never existed in the South. He thus pragmatically concluded that the United States had to accept an undesirable political outcome in Vietnam and withdraw its troops immediately. Walzer then gave two different justifications for his call for immediate American withdrawal. For one, Walzer echoed the argument of the realists by stressing that it was unnecessary for the United States to hold on to South Vietnam for geopolitical reasons. Holding on to Vietnam would be “literally insane” from a power-political perspective, Walzer stated. For another, Walzer opposed America’s military intervention on liberal political grounds. He maintained that although he was uncertain whether this reason alone would have justified American intervention, there may have been a stronger case for American support of the

---

South Vietnamese government if the government had had “major local and popular support.” He thus concluded in his reply to Howe that only vital American strategic interests combined with the South Vietnamese government’s broad popular support could have justified an American intervention. These two conditions were both met in the case of the Korean War, where Walzer believed American intervention was justified. While asserting that American withdrawal would not have weakened the United States as a global power, Walzer ultimately based his argument against intervention on Lockean consent theory, which says that a government could only be deemed legitimate if the people governed had given their voluntary consent, which he found was not the case in South Vietnam.¹⁵

It is interesting to note how Walzer’s argument combined the pragmatic, geopolitical argument of the realists with the liberal ideal of what constitutes a legitimate government. Walzer, however, insists up to this day that he had not been influenced by Morgenthau and the realists’ early critique of the war in Vietnam. According to Walzer, the realists “belonged to the other camp in the world of political scientists” with whom he maintained little dialogue. Walzer admits that he may have come to similar conclusions as some of the realists on the question of Vietnam, but he came to these conclusions independently and for his own reasons. As can be inferred from his response to Howe, Walzer was deeply concerned about the broader question as to what can morally justify a foreign intervention in support of a government. Although he was willing to consider the power-political consequences of American policy alternatives in Vietnam, he ultimately believed that the United States, when pursuing its pragmatic national interest, also needed

¹⁵ Walzer, “Comments and Opinions,” Dissent 12 (Spring 1965), 156.
to consider the legitimate right of the South Vietnamese people to determine their own form of government.  

In the fall of the same year, Walzer elaborated on the more general question as to the circumstances under which American interventions in the cold war were justified. He did so in a co-authored article, which appeared in the fall 1965 issue of *Dissent*. The article was based on a talk he gave at the first teach-in on Vietnam at Princeton University together with his Princeton colleague and China-specialist John Schrecker.  

The first part of the article echoed many of the arguments put forward by the realists in the course of the Vietnam debate. In an interview, Walzer explained that the more realist-sounding arguments in the article were mostly the contribution of this colleague Schrecker and thus did not stem from him. Walzer’s own intellectual contributions were better reflected in the second part of the article, in which the authors made their case against American cold war interventions on moral grounds. Yet again, Schrecker’s pragmatic arguments and Walzer’s moral reasoning supplement each other well. The article ultimately demonstrates that Walzer’s moral case against intervention was geopolitically feasible and thus made his moral argument sound less abstract.  

16 Walzer, interview with author.  
18 Despite Walzer’s aversion to realist political theory, this discussion will continue to show that Walzer’s policy critique often resembles that of the realists. Walzer has always acknowledged that it is important to take the consequences of a particular policy action into account. For example, he would never be willing to support a war fought for a just cause if it could be clearly established that the consequences of the war would be catastrophic. Similarly, in his argument about nuclear deterrence, Walzer was ready to live with the lesser-evil choice of having to make immoral threats to ensure America’s safety from Soviet nuclear blackmail. Moreover, like the realists, Walzer has always acknowledged the limits of American power, and he continues to believe that America could and should not use its military power shape the world in its own image. Indeed, Walzer’s moral argument has always been infused with a “healthy” pragmatism. He has always been convinced that considering the consequences of a particular American action abroad is necessary not just from a geopolitical point of view, but also from a moral standpoint. Walzer can thus be described as a pragmatic moral critic.
In the first part, Schrecker explained that the communist camp in the 1960s no longer was monolithic and that radical movements in the Third World had indigenous roots with no aspirations to join the communist camp. Furthermore, the authors pragmatically asserted that it was simply impossible for the United States to wage a war “against the revolutionary movements of three continents.” The article thereby equally blamed the U.S., the USSR, and China for disregarding these geopolitical realities and imposing their cold war paradigm on the developing world. In fact, both pragmatic arguments echoed the arguments made by the realist Hans Morgenthau in his 1965 book *Vietnam and the United States*. In the book, Morgenthau also stressed the changed geopolitical parameters of the cold war in the aftermath of the Sino-Soviet split, which he believed made American interventions in the Third World geopolitically unnecessary and ultimately counterproductive.\(^{19}\)

Yet unlike the realists, Walzer and Schrecker went on to argue against cold war interventions in Third World domestic struggles on liberal grounds. The authors explained that radical movements in the Third World all aimed at “modernizing” their respective countries according to their particular cultural traditions. Already in an earlier *Dissent* article, Walzer had argued that the process of “modernization” could take on many different forms, and that developing countries were not required to follow either the capitalist or the Soviet communist model of industrialization. Walzer and Schrecker thus lamented that as long as the USSR, China, and the U.S. continued to view domestic political struggles in the Third World through the lens of the cold war and interfered in

---

\(^{19}\) Walzer and Schrecker, “American Intervention and the Cold War,” 432.
modernization processes, they were “narrowing the range of experience and possible ideological choices” for the peoples of these countries.\textsuperscript{20}

Walzer and Schrecker’s article sought to demonstrate that respecting a developing country’s right to self-determination also was geopolitically beneficial for the United States. The authors maintained that nationalist revolutionaries, who sought to develop their respective countries according to indigenous cultural traditions, would hardly be willing to accept qualifications on their sovereignty and become Soviet satellites. They would only accept Soviet aid if they were forced to do so as a result of America’s backing of reactionary forces within their respective countries. Walzer and Schrecker thereby cited Castro’s Cuba as a historical example of a country that had suffered exactly such a fate.\textsuperscript{21}

Ultimately, the authors took a strong stance against the liberal establishment’s moralistic approach to foreign policy and the attempt of globalist liberals to impose America’s way of life on the peoples of the Third World. They argued that “American anti-Communism conceals, or rather does not quite conceal, chauvinism and condescension.” Indeed, the article represented a serious attempt by Walzer to think about the moral implications of American interventions in the cold war. It touched upon questions of legitimate and illegitimate uses of force Walzer was to greatly elaborate upon in his future academic work.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{20} Michael Walzer, “The Only Revolution: Notes on the Theory of Modernization,” \textit{Dissent} 11 (Autumn 1964): 432-440. In this article, Walzer challenges the theory of modernization as put forward by influential political scientists in the 1950s and early 1960s, such as S.M. Lipset and W.W. Rostow. In the article, Walzer criticizes the modernization theorists’ underlying assumption that there was “a single, long-term historical process in which all mankind is destined to participate” (432); Walzer and Schrecker, “American Intervention and the Cold War,” 436.

\textsuperscript{21} Walzer and Schrecker, “American Intervention and the Cold War,” 435.

\textsuperscript{22} Walzer and Schrecker, “American Intervention and the Cold War,” 445.
The Student New Left and the Radicalization of the Antiwar Opposition

Walzer and Schrecker’s article on the moral aspects of cold war interventions was published at a time when the anti-war debate among intellectuals was becoming fiercer, more polarized, and more emotionally charged. The intellectual atmosphere no longer was conducive to sophisticated intellectual arguments made by political theorists. In fact, the historian Jennifer See, who studied the way Morgenthau’s critique of the war was received by the public in the course of the 1960s, found that while the nuanced arguments made by Morgenthau had a broad resonance among intellectuals – especially liberal intellectuals – at the beginning of the decade, his anti-war arguments no longer had much bearing on intellectuals opposing the war later in the decade. Clearly, the intellectual climate changed as the war went on.  

Anti-war opposition intensified in summer 1965, when Johnson publicly announced the dispatch of 100,000 ground troops to Vietnam with additional troops to follow. Even liberal critics, who had so far opposed the war on purely “realist” grounds, expressed their outrage about the war in moral terms. According to See, Morgenthau’s critique of the war took on a moral dimension from fall 1965 onwards. First, Morgenthau introduced the concept of individual moral responsibility by holding individual administration officials accountable for the war. Second, he argued that the United States lacked any “transcendent end” for fighting the war and thus was not able to morally justify its war effort. Third, he implied that because a guerilla war could only be fought with immoral means – i.e. “the indiscriminate killing of everybody in sight” – the war

---

had to be deemed unjust and immoral. He even went as far as to accuse the United States of being engaged in “genocide.”

Walter Lippmann’s critique also took on a moral tone. While pointing to the high number of civilian war casualties in South Vietnam, he put moral responsibility for the war atrocities on the President himself, who had deliberately ignored Lippmann’s warning not to escalate the war in 1963. Indeed, Lippmann became estranged from the government as a result of the war. He started to sympathize with the emerging anti-war movement and listen to radical critics of the war. He also began to share the concerns of radical critics that the United States was becoming an imperial power in Asia. Another moral concern Lippmann expressed was his worry that the Vietnam War diverted urgently needed tax money from social programs at home and thus jeopardized America’s domestic liberal agenda.

In 1965, the student New Left – represented by SDS – entered the war debate and established itself as the nation’s leading anti-war organization. In fact, the student New Left was a relative latecomer in the public intellectual debate about Vietnam. When SDS was founded, the organization was mainly concerned with domestic issues, especially civil rights and the problem of poverty. For the leadership of SDS, the conflict in Vietnam was not a central issue until late in the year of 1964, when it started to organize a large anti-war march in Washington, which was held on Easter in 1965.

From the beginning, the New Left’s antiwar position was more radical than the one adopted by liberals and members of the social democratic Old Left. Todd Gitlin, for

---

25 Steele, 577, 571, 575; .
example, remembers that he strongly disagreed with Howe’s position on Vietnam. For him, the Vietnam issue became one of the main stumbling blocks preventing the formation of an alliance between the Dissenters and SDS in 1964. Gitlin criticized Howe’s reluctance to support unconditional American withdrawal at the cost of a communist victory. In this respect, Gitlin’s position was identical to Walzer’s. Yet, unlike Walzer, he also opposed the Dissenters’ call for building a political coalition between liberal war opponents and the American left. He did not believe that liberals had an interest in listening to leftist critics. For him, Congress’ adoption of the Gulf of Tonkin resolution in August 1964, which considerably increased Johnson’s war-making powers, proved that liberals were unwilling to adapt their policy according to public opinion. 27

Gitlin remembers that during the preparations for the 1965 Easter March, SDS leaders could not agree on whether to openly side with the communist Viet Cong or whether SDS should simply protest American intervention without expressing sympathy for America’s adversary. The SDS leadership ultimately settled the issue by describing the Vietnamese conflict as a “civil war.” This definition allowed SDS to oppose American military presence on the grounds that the United States had no right to intervene in the internal affairs of another state. There was a diversity of opinion among the participants of the Easter March, and SDS thus initially kept its anti-war slogans general. 28

In 1966, however, SDS started to openly identify with the Viet Cong. SDS president Paul Potter argued that both the students and the South Vietnamese Viet Cong were struggling against the same “system,” which prevented oppressed peoples at home

and abroad from working toward radical social change and a more just economic and social order. The leadership of SDS thus came to see the war not simply as a policy mistake, as the Dissenters and liberal opponents of the war saw it, but considered the war a logical outcome of America’s aggressive, imperialist foreign policy. For them, ending the war in Vietnam was only one first step. To prevent future Vietnams from occurring, they believed America’s entire political system and capitalist culture would have to change.  

SDS president Paul Potter blamed liberals who dominated “the system” for the foreign policy debacle in Vietnam. He implied that the liberal governing elite was tied to what Eisenhower had referred to as the “military industrial complex” and thus depended on continued mobilization at home and the expansion of capitalist markets abroad to secure its future economic well-being. Indeed, the New Left came to distinguish itself in its outright opposition to the liberal establishment. Despite the fact that prominent liberals spoke up against the war, the New Left did no longer differentiate between different kinds of liberals and became deeply suspicious of everybody who belonged to the liberal camp. They saw the war in Vietnam as a direct and inevitable result of liberal cold war policy; thus, they wanted liberals to repudiate their whole foreign policy framework, not just change their policy toward Vietnam.  

For the New Left, liberal opponents of the war did not go far enough in their critique. Morgenthau, who was the leading voice in the anti-war debate early in the decade, became marginalized at the expense of more radical public critics of the war. In particular, MIT linguistics professor and socialist-anarchist Noam Chomsky displaced

29 Gitlin, The Sixties, 184.
30 Gitlin, The Sixties, 184-185.
Morgenthau as one of the country’s leading anti-war intellectuals during the second half of the decade. Chomsky rose to prominence as an anti-war intellectual when he published a highly influential essay in *The New York Review of Books* in February 1967. In his article, which was titled “The Responsibility of Intellectuals,” Chomsky chastised intellectuals for having failed to live up to their moral responsibility of serving the American public as independent critics. Intellectuals were unable to keep a critical distance from their government because they all bought into the same intellectual cold war consensus. As critics, Chomsky contended, intellectuals instead needed to see behind the guise of official government rhetoric and reveal to the public the underlying “ideology” on which America’s decision to intervene in Vietnam was based. In Chomsky’s words, intellectuals had a responsibility to expose the “hypocritical moralism” of government rhetoric.31

Chomsky argued that the Vietnam War was not just the result of bad politics but a logical consequence of cold war liberalism as promoted by America’s powerful governing elite and its intellectual supporters. For him, the war in Vietnam was the ultimate proof that liberalism, as an ideology, had become nothing but a false justification for the power elite to pursue its self-interested, economically exploitative imperial policies in Asia.

In his antiwar critique, Chomsky was particularly suspicious of liberal opponents of the war, who continued to support the government’s containment policy and only were critical of certain aspects of America’s cold war policy, such as the U.S. intervention in

Vietnam. He instead implied that intellectuals could only regain their moral purity if they no longer served as spokesmen for official government policy and took on a posture of total opposition. Indeed, he rejected the idea that government policy could be changed from within and called for the complete abolition of America’s cold war liberal government establishment. According to Tomes, however, Chomsky’s radical critique of America’s power structure ultimately became as ideologically rigid as the arguments put forward by liberal apologetics of America’s Vietnam policy. Like staunch supporters of the Vietnam War, also Chomsky had to simplify and distort historical facts to make his case. 32

Walzer on “Moral Judgment in Time of War”

Around the time Chomsky published “The Responsibility of Intellectuals,” Walzer was writing an article for Dissent that sought to inject nuance into the increasingly polarized public discourse on cold war foreign policy. Indeed, the article demonstrates how the ongoing Vietnam War continued to prompt Walzer to grapple with the moral aspects of warfare in a more general and principled fashion. As Walzer remembers, the “moral...
language” he was using at the time was “only half-conscious.” In contrast to Chomsky, however, Walzer did not come to oppose American use of power in principle but sought to counter the moralistic anti-war posture of the radical left with a more nuanced moral argument.³³

In his thoughtful 1967 *Dissent* article, Walzer addressed an argument made both by the far right and the far left amidst the increasingly polarized war debate at the time. In particular, he sought to refute the argument that, during times of war, “there are no moral limits, only practical ones, only the “limitations of force itself” and the ‘law of violence.’” He introduced his article with two quotes: one by General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the other by the former pacifist Bayard Rustin. Eisenhower argued that all wars were proceeding according to their own logic of violence, and that each warring party was solely driven by its effort to inflict as much harm on the other side as possible. In fact, Eisenhower’s claim echoed the arguments made by conservative defenders of the Vietnam War. War hawks at the time also implied that all wars were equally brutal, and that the high amount of casualties in the conflict should not deter America from pursuing its just and necessary cause of defeating communism in South East Asia. Rustin repeated Eisenhower’s line of reasoning by stating that in every war, the different warring parties were equally brutal, and that it was impossible to differentiate between different levels of brutality. In fact, some anti-war activists on the New Left increasingly became attracted to the pacifist argument, which said that the resort to arms could never by morally justified. At the outset of the article, Walzer thus lamented that such arguments reflected

“a very common American view and one sufficiently serious to warrant careful refutation.”

In the article, Walzer argued that the Vietnam conflict provided a particularly suitable case to demonstrate that there existed different “degrees of ugliness” in wars. He stated that in the Vietnam War, “the destructive powers of the two protagonists are so radically unequal, [that] a casual insistence on equal brutality cannot satisfy even the least scrupulous of moralists.” He explained that the nature of the war – the fact that the United States was fighting guerillas in a foreign country – forced the United States to fight in civilian areas and thus kill a disproportionately large number of civilians, which was unacceptable under common human moral standards.

In contrast to the invading Americans, Walzer asserted, the Vietnamese guerillas had to exercise more restraint and ensure that they would not cause too much damage to the civilian population because they depended on popular support for their continued military success. Walzer thus echoed Morgenthau, who also began to argue in 1965 that the nature of the war in Vietnam was forcing the U.S. to employ immoral methods of warfare; thus, America’s intervention became morally illegitimate regardless of the cause for which the war was being fought. Walzer maintained that the guerillas were in a better position in the eyes of the “moral opinion of mankind” because they were fighting an invading army that was much more powerful and much more prone to kill innocent civilians. He concluded that because the United States could fight the war in Vietnam only with immoral means, it should not be fighting the war in the first place.

Without explicitly mentioning Kennan, Walzer’s article elaborated on one of Kennan’s core arguments in American Diplomacy. Echoing Kennan, Walzer argued that wars fought for lofty goals and high moral principles “are potentially so much more brutal than wars fought for realistic and limited objectives.” Yet, while Kennan, as a realist, opposed America’s moralistic approach to warfare mainly on pragmatic grounds, Walzer argued against moral crusades on ethical grounds. Kennan maintained that a moralistic approach to warfare was wrong because it forced the United States to go beyond its national interest and become involved in all-out battles that did not serve America’s limited strategic goals. Walzer, in contrast, argued that so-called “wars to end all wars” were wrong because they led countries to abandon any moral inhibitions with regard to the way the war was being conducted. This was the case because a country fighting a war in the name of lofty ideals was under the illusion that any means could be employed to pursue a morally righteous cause. Clearly, the article suggested that Walzer did not hold the view that wars should or could be conducted as a means to achieve eternal world peace. He implied that there would always be wars as long as humans existed, and it was therefore never justified to violate international war conventions, designed to protect civilians, in the pursuit of a higher cause.  

Walzer felt that especially in wars where a large power imbalance existed between the two warring sides, outside observers had a particularly important role to play in protesting violations of the principle of non-combatant immunity. He stated, “It is enormously important that the moral opinion of neutral nations and of all mankind be mobilized to uphold those precarious barriers, distinctions and limits which stand

between conventional warfare, ugly as it is, and criminal brutality.” He admitted that “moral judgment…is highly vulnerable to distortion,” but he emphasized that it was nevertheless important to continue to grapple with questions of morality and warfare.  

Walzer’s intellectual contributions to the Vietnam debate bore similarities to those of other sophisticated intellectual critics at the time, such as Morgenthau. Although Morgenthau had little in common with Walzer, either politically or ideologically, they both acknowledged the complexity of the situation in Vietnam. They realized that neither the liberal establishment’s cold war paradigm nor the radical left’s Marxist ideology could provide an accurate analysis of the conflict the United States was facing in Vietnam. Indeed, both sides put forward a rather simplistic analysis of the war by depicting the conflict in black and white terms. While supporters of the war blamed an allegedly monolithic, communist expansionism for the war in Vietnam, the radical left attributed the war to American imperial ambitions. In their eagerness to take sides, some radicals even started to glorify America’s communist adversary. As some liberals argued at the time, the New Left had “become pro-war – only it wanted victory by the other side.”

---

38 Walzer, “Moral Judgment in Time of War,” 292. Walzer, of course, greatly elaborated on this topic in *Just and Unjust Wars*. In particular, he started to make a very clear distinction between *jus in bello* and *jus ad bellum* (he fails to clearly separate the two concepts in his 1967 article). It can be clearly inferred from his later writings on just war theory that, according to Walzer, the mere fact that the U.S. army was much more powerful than the Vietnamese guerillas did not yet make the Vietnam War unjust. As he made it clear in 2002, the fact that the United States is the world’s only superpower does not automatically mean that all wars the U.S. is fighting are unjust. In *Just and Unjust Wars*, he explains that an unjust war can be fought with just means, and that a just war can be fought with unjust means. In the case of Vietnam, Walzer believed that the United States was violating both *jus in bello* and *jus ad bellum* principles, but he would later separate the two arguments completely and deal with the two aspects of just war theory separately.

39 Quoted from Tomes, *Apocalypse Then*, 190.
Walzer’s Political Antiwar Activism

Walzer sought to counteract the growing desperation among war opponents not only as a philosopher but also as a political activist. By 1967, the anti-war movement had become dominated by the radical left. The liberal peace groups that initially started the anti-war movement became marginalized. Many young people who opposed the war joined SDS because they saw it as the strongest anti-war organization. Yet many of these new members did not contribute sophisticated arguments to the Vietnam debate. Nor did they put forward any constructive suggestions as to how the United States could find a satisfying solution to the conflict. They recognized that even if the United States were to withdraw, the bloodshed would continue in Vietnam. As DeBenedetti and Chatfield observe, there was a clear change “from protest to resistance” as the war dragged on.\(^{40}\)

On various occasions, Walzer lamented that there was a strong class dimension to the clashes between anti-war activists, on the one hand, and supporters of the war in Vietnam, on the other. He acknowledged that the lower classes carried the highest burden of the war. For one, the poor were more likely to be conscripted considering that most of them did not benefit from the draft exemptions given to college students. For another, they often voluntarily joined the army for lack of career prospects at home. When Walzer moved back from Princeton to accept a teaching position at Harvard University in 1966, he witnessed a number of clashes between student protesters and the Cambridge police. He thereby observed that the police officers who collided with the Harvard student protesters often came from working class backgrounds. Many of them were offended by the protests considering that their own sons were more likely to be drafted than Harvard

students, who came from privileged family backgrounds and found ways to get around the draft.\textsuperscript{41}

In the pages of \textit{Dissent}, Walzer argued in 1966 that selective conscription in the United States could not be morally justified. In a democracy, every obligation citizens owe to their state should be applied universally. He then went on speculating that if conscription in the United States was truly universal and members of all social classes were equally affected by the draft, it would have put a major constraint on the government’s ability to wage a war that was as controversial as the one in Vietnam. Instead, the decision to fight in Vietnam was made by America’s educated, upper class elites who do not have to risk their own lives or the lives of their sons in the conflict. Walzer concluded that citizens should only have an obligation to serve the army if their own homeland was immediately endangered, which was not the case with regard to the conflict in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{42}

Walzer further argued that domestic reforms aimed at a more equitable distribution of wealth and power in the United States would have a positive effect on American foreign policy. He stated that “a successful civil rights movement or a successful war on poverty would be a restraint on the president’s war making powers, since it would give a voice to those whose sons are already dying and at the same time cut down the enlistment rates.”\textsuperscript{43}

As a political activist, Walzer made an effort to extend the anti-war protests, which were heavily centered on university campuses, to include the broader political

\textsuperscript{42} Walzer, “Democracy and the Conscript,” 16-22.
\textsuperscript{43} Walzer, “Democracy and the Conscript,” 17.
community. In 1967, Walzer participated in the Vietnam Summer project at Harvard. The project was dominated by Bostonians and Harvard faculty, but also included members of the Democratic Party, especially reform democrats and radical liberals. The acting president of SDS, Paul Potter, and some “old-guard” SDS members joined the project as well. According to one participant, these “old-guard SDS radical-liberals” had become marginalized from the leadership of the antiwar movement after 1965 and thus sought to retake control of the antiwar movement by participating at the project. The project thus not only sought to build a peace coalition between different social classes and age groups, but also between different political camps. In particular, the project was a serious attempt to build an alliance between liberal “doves,” and leftist elements in the United States.\footnote{Ted Halsted, \textit{Out Now! A Participant’s Account of the American Movement Against the Vietnam War} (New York: Monad Press, 1978), 291-93.}

The Vietnam Summer project called upon young activists and students to use non-violent means of civil disobedience as practiced by civil rights activists in the early 1960s. It called upon student leaders to build a popular base in their communities and on their university campuses so that there would be a well-organized peace movement by the beginning of the academic year in fall. According to Walzer, the Vietnam Summer project aimed at a “pragmatic and popular politics” and sought to appeal to a broader middle-class audience. Ultimately, the organizers of the project hoped to create a political base in support of peace candidates in the upcoming elections.\footnote{Michael Walzer, \textit{Radical Principles: Reflections of an Unreconstructed Democrat}, (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 170; Halsted, \textit{Out Now!}, 293.}

Furthermore, Walzer assumed the leadership of a local peace group called the Cambridge Neighborhood Committee on Vietnam (CNCV). It sought to bring faculty, students, and community members from all walks of life together and encourage them to
participate in discussions about the war. Moreover, the group organized a referendum on Vietnam. After long court battles, Cambridge received permission to hold a referendum on the war during the November 1967 municipal elections. Although 61 percent of the voters rejected the referendum, it still sent out a strong message to Washington by demonstrating the extent to which opposition to the war was growing even among working class citizens residing in Cambridge. The referendum reflected the group’s attempt to use regular political channels to promote change in American government policy.  

**Toward Building a New Left-Liberal Coalition**

Ultimately, Walzer and his colleagues at *Dissent*, most notably Howe and Michael Harrington, aimed at more than simply mobilizing popular resistance against the war. They saw the antiwar movement as a stepping stone in their effort to build a new political movement made up of radical liberals and social democrats. The editors of *Dissent* believed that the building of a coalition between the anti-war movement and liberal politicians within the Democratic Party was necessary to promote change in government policy.  

The more moderate factions of the peace movement, including the social democratic left associated with *Dissent*, supported the presidential campaign of the Democratic antiwar candidate Eugene McCarthy in 1968 and thus successfully infiltrated the Democratic Party. According to Walzer, McCarthy’s campaign made the American

---

47 Garber, “Comments and Opinions,” 105.
left a respectable political force.⁴⁹ Walzer himself accompanied McCarthy on one of his campaign trips in 1968, and he also wrote position papers for the candidate. He lamented, however, that the McCarthy campaign divided the Democratic Party between liberal opponents and defenders of the Vietnam War. According to Walzer, those “Democratic politicians most highly regarded by American workers were themselves implicated in the Vietnam war and unable or unwilling to break away from it.” The Party as a whole ultimately failed to take a public stance against the war. Says Walzer: “Trapped by their past commitments or still believing in the Cold War ideology they had so long espoused, they did not repudiate the horrors of Vietnam even after Nixon had made those horrors his own.”⁵⁰

Further, Walzer lamented that the peace movement, which remained very middle class-based, was unable to reach out to the Democratic Party’s working class constituents, who carried the main burden of the war. Moreover, many American citizens were alienated by the peace activists’ movement style. According to DeBenedetti and Chatfield, the peace movement increasingly became identified with the counterculture. The media thereby helped foster this negative image by paying a disproportionate amount of attention on the extremist fringe and countercultural elements of the peace movement.⁵¹

But the fault of the New Left’s alienation from mainstream liberals also lay with the New Left itself. More concerned with preserving their radical purity than with political effectiveness, many New Left activists refused to join mainstream politics.

---

⁴⁹ Walzer, Radical Principles, 171.
⁵⁰ Walzer, interview with author; Walzer, Radical Principles, 172.
⁵¹ Walzer, Radical Principles, 172; DeBenedetti and Chatfield, An American Ordeal, 189.
Instead, they maintained a hostile attitude toward “liberals.” In contrast, the willingness
to enter into political coalitions to promote evolutionary social change was a defining
feature of the post-war social democratic left represented by the Dissenters. Howe, who
had lived through the 1930s, had witnessed first-handedly the destructiveness of leftist
sectarian politics and did not want to repeat the mistakes of the Old Left. Walzer, whose
parents had been supporters of the Popular Front, shared his mentor’s aversion to leftist
sectarianism. Furthermore, his personal experiences as a former civil rights activist in the
early 1960s reinforced his conviction that sectarianism was politically self-defeating.
Indeed, he had always considered the black nationalists’ exclusion of white civil rights
activists a disastrous political move because it made African Americans politically less
powerful in the country. At the end of the 1960s, Walzer could thus repeat his critique of
exclusivist political movements when it became clear that the New Left was not
interested in building political coalitions.52

In fact, Walzer gave vent to his frustrations with the New Left’s movement style
in his 1971 book Political Action: A Practical Guide to Movement Politics. The tone of
the book was strikingly pragmatic. He expressed little sympathy for grand utopian ideals
of bringing about revolutionary social change. In the book, he criticized the 1960s student
movement for engaging in “random militancy” and for lacking political character.
According to Walzer, many young activists were plagued by a feeling of powerlessness,
which led them to “political promiscuity, a feeling that anything goes, a desperate search
for immediate if superficial effects because real effects are by definition beyond reach.”53

---

52 Walzer, Radical Principles, 171; Halsted, Out Now!, 293.
122.
Yet, Walzer also acknowledged the positive aspects of the 1960s student movements. In *Political Action*, he contended that the civil rights and peace movements demonstrated that a well-organized citizens’ movement could have positive effects on policy-making. According to Walzer, however, it was important that the movements remained disciplined and open to compromise. Unfortunately, the student movement of the 1960s lacked “a community base or a coherent strategy” and also led itself to be highjacked by sectarian ideologues and “isolated terrorists.” Walzer thus concluded the book by calling upon American citizen activists to take their movements back into their own hands and set themselves goals that were more modest and realizable.  

According to Tomes, Walzer’s fellow Dissenters Howe and Harrington emerged as leaders among social democrats who tried to rescue liberalism from the New Left’s full-scale assault. For Howe, it was impossible to reject liberal values, and it was painful for him to see them under attack by the New Left. For him, a commitment to liberal values was still the best defense against totalitarianism. In particular, Howe, Harrington, and Walzer valued the liberal commitment to the social welfare state. On the domestic political side, they called for rigorous political reforms, such as a more equal distribution of wealth. 

At the same time, they sought to distance themselves from liberal anticommunism. By early 1968, the editorial board of *Dissent* was finally able to agree on a common position on the question of Vietnam, which had initially led to tensions between Howe and his much younger co-editor Walzer. In the aftermath of the Tet offensive, Howe endorsed Walzer’s call for unconditional American withdrawal from

---

55 Tomes, *Apocalypse Then*, 172.
Vietnam. He wrote in Dissent that it was “better [to have] peace with the probability of a Viet Cong take-over than a war which can only go on and on, without resolution, without reason, without honor.” Howe thus came to oppose the war on pragmatic grounds by arguing that the United States should withdraw because it was unwinnable. In the end, pragmatic considerations trumped his ideological commitment to anti-communism and the hope for the emergence of a democratic “third force” in Vietnam, a hope he had held on to throughout most of the turbulent decade.56

**The Dissenters in the Early 1970s**

To be sure, the Dissenters continued to hold on to the view that the main purpose of American foreign policy was to prevent the further spread of communism abroad. At the same time, however, they suggested that the United States pursue this goal with political and economic means rather than through the use of force. Thus, the Dissenters distinguished themselves from cold war liberals more with regard to the methods of conducting foreign policy than with regard to the ultimate cold war objective of containing communism.57

According to Tomes, however, Dissent failed to put forward a coherent foreign policy vision in the aftermath of Vietnam. Many democratic socialists started to turn away from Vietnam and foreign policy questions and, instead, focused on domestic issues. This shift can also be observed in Walzer’s public writings in Dissent in the 1970s, which mostly addressed domestic concerns. (Walzer, however, continued to be

---

57 Tomes, Apocalypse Then, 170-172.
preoccupied with foreign policy questions in his academic work, as we will see in the next chapter.)

Despite the Dissenters’ failure to spell out a coherent foreign policy vision in the course of the 1970s, Walzer’s contribution to the antiwar movement of the 1960s remains significant from the vantage point of the independent social democratic left today. On an intellectual level, the articles he published in *Dissent* sought to inject nuance into the increasingly polarized Vietnam debate. In his public writings, he sought to establish, in an as dispassionate fashion as possible, the moral issues involved with regard to America’s controversial military intervention in South Vietnam. On a political level, Walzer sought to translate the mobilized anti-war opposition into a more permanent, left-of-center political coalition. Considering the state of the American left today, both attempts have remained unsuccessful. Walzer’s efforts, however, nevertheless pointed the American left into an alternative direction. It was a direction the left ultimately chose not to take, but the political strategies proposed and the intellectual arguments made by Walzer and the Dissenters were serious efforts to counteract the left’s increased alienation from the political mainstream, a sense of alienation that has plagued leftist

---

58 Walzer, interview with author. The last time Walzer was involved in a big Washington demonstration was to protest American invasion of Cambodia in 1970. In 1972, Walzer, for the last time, was active in a Democratic presidential campaign when serving as the chair of McGovern’s Middle East Task Force. After the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Walzer started to travel to Israel on a regular basis, where he became associated with the leftist Israeli peace organization Peace Now. Walzer had always supported a two-state solution that guaranteed Israel’s security within its borders. Although he did approve of the establishment of defensive enclaves on the West Bank, Walzer opposed the expansion of Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories as an unjustified occupation and a serious impediment for peace. With regard to his involvement in Israeli politics, Walzer explained in an interview that he had “always thought of [him]self as doubly connected” by identifying himself both as an American and as a Jew with a strong commitment to the existence of the state of Israel. When criticizing Israeli government policy, Walzer explains, he does so “from within, as a Jew committed to the enterprise.”

To limit the scope of this paper, however, we will not deal with Walzer’s involvement in Israeli politics in any greater detail. Instead, the remainder of this discussion will focus on two key themes Walzer continued to address in his critique of American foreign policy in the aftermath of Vietnam: the question of what constitutes a just military intervention and the issue of nuclear deterrence.
opponents of American foreign policy up to this day. The way Walzer dealt with the
Vietnam experience intellectually will be the topic of the next chapter.
Grappling with the Vietnam Experience:

Walzer’s Academic Work in Just War Theory

Intellectuals in the Aftermath of Vietnam

In his discussion of intellectual opposition to the Vietnam War, Tomes argues that what most anti-war intellectuals shared in common by the early 1970s was a “new sense of powerlessness as intellectuals.” The fact that the bloodshed in Vietnam was continuing for five more years even after the Tet offensive had demonstrated that American victory was not imminent led to a deep sense of frustration and disillusionment among those intellectuals who had hoped to have a positive influence on policy making. Intellectuals such as Lippmann and Morgenthau, who had maintained direct ties to the Johnson administration during the early war period, felt that their voice was simply being ignored by the President. Similarly, antiwar activists on the radical left initially hoped that they could change American foreign policy by leading a popular movement aimed at making the American government system more democratic and more responsive to the needs of ordinary Americans. Their hopes also became frustrated with the coming to power of the Republican President Richard Nixon in 1969. ¹

Walzer did not fit this stereotype of the disillusioned and frustrated intellectual. According to Walzer, he “never thought of himself as being powerful” in the first place, and he “cannot remember a moment where [he] felt disempowered or frustrated

¹ Tomes, Apocalypse Then, 204.
politically.” Walzer never believed that intellectuals were entitled to any special role in political life. “You made your argument and hoped that people would listen,” Walzer explained in an interview. In an academic article entitled “Philosophy and Democracy,” Walzer maintains that although “the most general truths of politics and morality can only be validated in the philosophical realm” and thus cannot be decided upon by a popular majority, he does not believe that “philosophers have [any] special rights in the political community.” Walzer argues, “In the world of opinion, truth is indeed another opinion, and the philosopher is only another opinion maker.”

Walzer drew different lessons from the Vietnam experience than many other intellectuals who were active opponents of the war in the 1960s, and who have also received the most attention in the historical literature on intellectual foreign policy debates in the post-Vietnam decades. A case in point is Tomes’ study, in which the author concludes in a generalizing fashion that the Vietnam experience led to a new “realism” among intellectuals. According to Tomes, intellectuals turned to realism because they had become disillusioned with idealist principles in American foreign policy. They felt that the Vietnamese quagmire resulted from Johnson’s naïve belief that American democratic values and institutions could be exported to every far-flung corner of the world.

---

3 There are few synthetic studies on the topic, but see, for example, Robert Tomes, Apocalypse Then; John Ehrman, The Rise of Neoconservatism: Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1994 (New Haven: Yale University, 1995); Also see Henry Kissinger, Diplomacy (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 742-746. Kissinger only discusses objections to Kissinger’s realpolitik among liberals and conservatives as the two main intellectual challenges to realism; Tomes, Apocalypse Then, 234; also see his entire final chapter on the aftermath of the Vietnam debate, 204-235.
Intellectuals’ rejection of idealism in foreign policy led to a new diversity in intellectual viewpoints on international politics. Yet despite this new diversity, two different “extremes” in intellectual opinion started to crystallize in the course of the 1970s. Intellectuals on the far left started to oppose American involvement abroad in general and essentially became proponents of a new isolationism. Along the lines of Chomsky and Mills, they believed that American foreign policy was guided by a self-interested, economically motivated military-industrial elite. Because they felt that the self-interested motives of the American foreign policy establishment were illegitimate, they argued that the United States was to refrain from intervening abroad altogether.4

The other extreme embraced by disillusioned intellectuals was a renewed appreciation for the principles of realpolitik. In fact, a strong emphasis on power politics could be discerned in official government policy from 1969 onwards. President Nixon appointed the former Harvard political scientist Henry Kissinger to serve his administration first as National Security Adviser from 1968-1973, and then as Secretary of State under the Nixon and Ford administrations. The German-born Kissinger was a strong proponent of realpolitik. He wrote his dissertation on the Peace of Westphalia and admired statesmen like Metternich, who placed the national interest before any other moral and ideological considerations and thus had enormous flexibility in his diplomatic maneuvers. In his dissertation, Kissinger attributed the fact that there had been no major war in Europe throughout the nineteenth century to Metternich’s skillful pursuit of

4 Ehrman, The Rise of Neoconservatism, 25-26; Tomes, Apocalypse Then, 204-235.
restoring a balance of power in Europe, which prevented any single power from
dominating the Continent.5

As secretary of state, Kissinger became the main intellectual proponent of a
policy of détente with the Soviet Union. He sought to de-emphasize the ideological
component of the cold war and instead focus on common interests and concerns. Through
skilled diplomacy, he sought to ease cold war tensions by establishing increased
economic ties and conducting arms control negotiations with the Soviets. In conformity
with the principles of realpolitik, Kissinger did not exclude any method of diplomacy that
helped improve America’s leverage in global politics. Kissinger was willing to dismiss
ideological and moral scruples as unnecessary obstacles to America’s pursuit of the
national interest. He argued that improved relations with communist China would
strengthen the United States vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and eventually help the United
States to achieve a peace settlement in Vietnam. Kissinger always stressed that the policy
of détente was only a means to an end. He pursued Détente as a way of increasing
America’s geopolitical position and ultimately achieving an American victory over the
Soviet Union short of war.6

Liberal internationalists in the 1970s, despite their vocal opposition to Kissinger’s
brand of realpolitik, shared Kissinger’s pragmatic approach to foreign policy issues. The
Vietnam debacle reinforced their conviction that U.S. foreign policy should never be
guided by abstract ideological principles, and that the United States needed to take into
account the new geopolitical realities that had emerged as a result of the Sino-Soviet

5 For Kissinger’s positive portrayal of Metternich and his celebration of 19th century realpolitik, see, for
example, Kissinger, Diplomacy, 1-200.
6 Kissinger, Diplomacy, 703-61.
split. The most influential spokesman of the liberal internationalist position in the 1970s was the political theorist Stanley Hoffmann, a colleague of Walzer’s at Harvard University. Hoffmann strongly promoted the view that the United States needed a new paradigm in foreign policy that reflected the new realities of the multipolar cold war world. He argued that in the aftermath of Vietnam, the United States no longer was the only unquestioned superpower in the world, and that a realistic American foreign policy had to reflect this fact.7

Walzer’s response to the Vietnam experience fits none of the intellectual categories outlined by Tomes and other historians writing on the main foreign policy debates of the 1970s. He neither became a leftist advocate of a new American isolationism, nor was he seduced by the new realism espoused by so many intellectuals at the time. For Walzer, “the real effects of the struggle against the Vietnam War [were] moral.” He believed that it was neither realist principles nor Marxist conspiracy theories that convinced so many Americans in the 1960s that American intervention in Vietnam was wrong. Walzer thought that many people felt at the time that the war in Vietnam was wrong not simply because it was an unnecessary war from a geopolitical perspective or

7 Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 741-746; Ehrman, *The Rise of Neoconservatism*, 27-32; Tomes, *Apocalypse Then*, 218, 230. Although liberals shared Kissinger’s view that issues in international politics had to be dealt with pragmatically and on a case-by-case basis (and opposed “moralism”), they opposed both Kissinger’s motives and political methods. In principle, liberals approved of Kissinger’s effort to improve relations with the Soviets and resume arms control negotiations; however, they argued that Kissinger did so for the wrong reasons. While Kissinger pursued détente exclusively because he believed that détente was in America’s own power-political interest, liberals called for a policy of détente as a way of promoting a more just and peaceful world order. According to Kissinger, liberals believed that only by embracing “Wilsonian concepts of collective security, judicial settlement of disputes, and emphasis on disarmament” could the United States ever be secure (Kissinger, 743). Moreover, liberals disapproved of Kissinger’s secretive style of diplomacy. Liberals had always stressed open and democratic procedures, which would allow the American people to hold their leaders accountable for their policy actions. The Dissenter’s loathed Kissinger and voiced objections similar to those made by liberals at the time. On the right of the political spectrum, conservatives voiced a different set of “moral” objections to Kissinger’s *realpolitik*. We will deal with the conservative opposition to Kissinger’s *realpolitik* in the next chapter.
because it was fought for allegedly economic motives, but because the war was morally unjustified and fought with immoral means. According to Walzer, intellectual opposition to the Vietnam War “re-established the importance of moral and legal discourse about military conduct and political authority.”

From the beginning of his academic training and subsequent career as a political theorist, Walzer had a strong aversion to realist political theory. Walzer later explained that “realism was the reigning doctrine in the field of ‘international relations’” when he enrolled in Harvard Graduate School between 1957 and 1961, and “moral argument was against the rules of the discipline as it was commonly practiced.” Although some realists – such as the “selectivist” liberals during the early Vietnam debate - acknowledged that there were limits to American power in the world, they accepted these limits solely for pragmatic reasons, not moral ones. According to Walzer, even leftist opponents during the early 1960s “spoke a language of interest.” Intellectuals such as Mills and Chomsky both sought to show that behind the guise of the government’s moralistic rhetoric lay hidden the pragmatic economic interests of the military-industrial elites.

Walzer believed that the nature of the war in Vietnam made it increasingly difficult for intellectuals to formulate their opposition to the war in purely pragmatic terms. In fact, as the above discussion has shown, even realists such as Morgenthau and Lippman started to express their opposition to the war in moral terms. Walzer, however, insisted in an interview in 2003 that he was not aware of this shift in the realist argument at the time. Yet the fact that even realists in the 1960s felt compelled to give vent to their

---

8 Walzer, Radical Principles, 173, 174.
frustrations about the war by employing moral language only strengthens Walzer’s case that there was something about the Vietnam War that led many people feel an almost instinctive revulsion against American intervention that could only be expressed in moral terms. According to Walzer, the Vietnam War changed the political debate about warfare. “What happened then was that people on the left, and many others, too, looked for a common moral language. And what was most available was the language of just war.” “Almost against its will,” Walzer remembers, “the left fell into morality. All of us in the antiwar camp suddenly began talking the language of just war – though we did not know that that was what we were doing.”

The Writing of Just and Unjust Wars

Michael Walzer spent the first half of the 1970s reflecting on the moral aspects of warfare. The Vietnam War, and his personal revulsion against it, led him to think and write about warfare in more general terms by continuing to ponder the question he started to address in his 1960s Dissent articles: under what conditions can the resort to arms be morally justified? Throughout the Vietnam debate, Walzer had always stressed that although he believed America’s intervention in the particular war in Vietnam was wrong, there were circumstances under which wars could be morally justified. First and foremost, he had World War II in mind, a war he remembered from childhood and had always considered a necessary and just war for the United States to fight. As he explained in an interview, “pacifism was never anything I could understand. It seemed to me so

---

obvious that when you face a really awful political regime, you have to be ready to fight.”

What shared moral principles, however, made Walzer and many antiwar activists in the 1960s “feel” that while American use of force against the Axis powers in World War II was justified, America’s military intervention in Vietnam was not? What exactly triggered the moral revulsion so many peace activists expressed when America fought in Vietnam? Answering such questions, Walzer believed, was the task of the moral philosopher, and he embarked upon a scholarly project that sought to elaborate on the moral aspects of warfare. Walzer explains:

Political and moral philosophy ought to help us at those difficult times when we choose sides and make commitments. But it does so only indirectly. We are not usually philosophical in moments of crisis; most often, there is no time. War especially imposes an urgency that is probably incompatible with philosophy as a serious enterprise. The philosopher is like Wordsworth’s poet who reflects in tranquility upon past experience (or other people’s experience), thinking about political and moral choices already made. And yet these choices are made in philosophical terms, available because of previous reflections. It was, for example, a matter of great importance to all of us in the American anti-war movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s that we found a moral doctrine ready at hand, a connected set of names and concepts that we all knew. Our anger and indignation were shaped by the words available to express them, and the words were at the tips of our tongues even though we had never before explored their meanings and connections.

In his research project that culminated in the publication of Just and Unjust Wars in 1977, Walzer sought to explore our culturally shared moral norms when it came to questions of warfare. He found that the roots of these shared moral norms dated back to the early Christian just war tradition as initially formulated by St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and the Spaniards Suarez and Vitoria.

---

11 Walzer, Just and Unjust Wars, xxii; Walzer, interview with author.
12 Walzer, Just and Unjust Wars, xvii.
The “Rediscovery” of Christian Just War Doctrine

Indeed, Walzer was able to draw upon a rich intellectual tradition in Western thought that deals with questions of war and peace. It is thus appropriate to give a little bit of background on this tradition. At the beginning of the early Christian Crusades, the Christian theologian St. Augustine sought to find a middle ground between the position of Christian pacifists, on the one hand, and Christian crusaders, who were willing to use war as a means of conversion, on the other. In his attempt to define the limits of the use of force, Augustine came up with the argument that wars could only be justified for the limited goal of preserving the peace but not to conquer new territory and spread the faith. According to Walzer, Christian just war theory “made war possible in a world where war was, sometimes, necessary.”

With the increased separation of church and state in Europe in the course of the eighteenth century, however, just war doctrine became confined to the realm of theology and lost its bearing on practical international politics. In fact, it was mostly theologians – especially Catholic theologians – who kept the just war tradition alive. Still, there were a few secular philosophers, most notably Hugo Grotius, who tried to incorporate just war principles into modern international law. In the aftermath of the Thirty Years War in Europe, Grotius sought to limit the occasion for states to go to war by devising a state system that was based on the principle of national sovereignty. He believed that if all European states mutually respected each others’ right to territorial integrity and political independence, major European wars could be avoided in the future. Yet, Grotius’ attempt to base his theory of the modern state system on secular moral principles remained rather

---

unsuccessful in practice. Instead of relying on a set of universal principles to limit the use of force, European states started to form strategic alliances as a way of preventing one single power from being able to dominate or conquer the Continent. States thus began to rely on a balance-of-power system to maintain international peace and security.\textsuperscript{14}

People’s faith in the idea that a well-conceived alliance system in Europe could successfully prevent major wars from occurring, however, was shattered with the advent of the First World War. According to the political scientist Lynn Miller, the Great War convinced many statesmen that it was necessary to find ways by which the “recourse to war might be restricted.” Subsequently, states sought to develop an international legal framework aimed at limiting the occasions in which states could legitimately go to war. These efforts resulted in the signing of a series of international treaties. Examples were the Covenant of the League of Nations, which stated that states had an “obligation” to resolve conflicts peacefully; the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact, which banned the use of force except in the case of self-defense; and, ultimately, the UN Charter, which seeks to “prohibit any unilateral act of force such as armed reprisal or intervention.” Many just war principles developed by early Christian philosophers – principles such as proportionality and self-defense – thus have found their way into modern international laws of warfare as we know them today.\textsuperscript{15}


\textsuperscript{15} Miller, “The Contemporary Significance of the Doctrine of Just War,” 259-264.
**Restoring Just War Principles to the Realm of Moral Philosophy**

Walzer’s work in just war theory, however, is not concerned with international law per se. For one, Walzer has always argued that just because the UN Charter prohibits the use of force (except in cases of individual or collective self-defense) does not yet mean that there do not exist occasions when the resort to arms can be justified on ethical grounds in defiance of the law. (For example, Walzer morally sanctioned NATO’s armed humanitarian intervention in Kosovo despite the fact that NATO acted in violation of international law.) For another, Walzer laments that states often misappropriate legal language. He explains that by insisting on the legal principle of national sovereignty or self-defense, heads of state seek to justify any armed action they deem necessary in pursuit of their perceived national interest. In other words, Walzer believes international law has been hijacked by the realists.\(^{16}\)

At the outset of *Just and Unjust Wars*, Walzer thus confronts the realist paradigm head-on. He seeks to refute the classical realist argument that there is no room for moral judgment when it comes to planning and executing a war. Walzer’s argument against the realists is two-fold. First, he argues that realism does not accurately describe the way humans actually behave during times of war. Classical realists were wrong to argue that those who are engaged in warfare had no choice but to maximize power and to inflict as much pain on the enemy as possible. Throughout history, Walzer argues, humans have always accepted certain limits on their behavior, even during times of war. Moreover, he maintains that humans are not compelled to act in a certain, predetermined fashion. Humans cannot avoid making choices, even when planning and conducting a war. Walzer

---

\(^{16}\) Walzer, “The Triumph of Just War Theory,” 927.
thereby draws an analogy between strategy and morality. He demonstrates that even Thucydides’ account of the Peloponnesian wars included passages where the warring parties discussed different war strategies. Walzer thus concludes that as long as there is room for strategic choices, moral considerations almost inevitably intrude into the decision making process.\(^{17}\)

Furthermore, Walzer argues that by merely describing how soldiers, generals, and statesmen act, realists fail to grasp “the moral reality of war.” It is equally important to look at the ways humans think about and justify particular acts of war. Even in cases where statesmen and soldiers lie about their actions in war, their insincerity reveals that they are aware of existing moral norms in warfare. Walzer observes that what most people “want, even in war, is to act or to seem to act morally.” Says Walzer: “the moral reality of war is not fixed by the actual activities of soldiers but by the opinions of mankind.”\(^{18}\)

Despite the predominance of realist arguments in the public discourse about international politics, Walzer believes that the moral principles of just war theory have remained deeply embedded in the culture of Western civilizations up to this day. As he observed during the Vietnam debate, “the language of just war forms part of our day-to-day moral discourse.” In *Just and Unjust Wars*, he thus sought to write “a book of practical morality.” He wanted to find out how ordinary “citizens (and sometimes soldiers) argue about war.”\(^{19}\)

---

\(^{17}\) Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 3-20.  
\(^{19}\) Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, xxi, xix.
The book thus well illustrates Walzer’s conventionalist approach to philosophy. He is not interested in abstract moral principles but instead uses historical case studies to show how humans actually behave when engaged in combat, and how they argue and make moral judgments during times of war. He historically documents that the struggle of states to seek security at the expense of others has always been limited. In his book, he thus shows that even in an anarchical international system, states must and often have followed a set of principles embedded in the Western just war tradition.20

In *Just and Unjust Wars*, Walzer sought to refine the moral argument about warfare he started to develop as a public war opponent in the pages of *Dissent*. In his academic work, however, he started to make use of the traditional just war distinction between *jus in bello* and *jus ad bellum*. While *jus ad bellum* addresses the question of what constitutes a legitimate *reason* for going to war, *jus in bello* deals with the laws of combat and thus is concerned with the *means* with which a war is being fought. The laws of combat thereby equally apply to all warring parties regardless of whether one of the two parties had taken up arms for a legitimate reason, such as self-defense. In his *Dissent* articles in the 1960s, Walzer had not yet made a clear distinction between the two just war concepts. In particular, he argued during the Vietnam debate that among other reasons, the Vietnam War was unjust and immoral because the nature of the conflict forced the United States to fight the war with immoral means. After having studied just

---

20 As a secular thinker, Walzer was interested in the secular application of the Christian just war doctrine. Moreover, it should be noted here that, as Walzer points out in an essay, “there is no Jewish theory of war and peace.” (See Michael Walzer, “War and Peace in the Jewish Tradition,” in Terry Nardin, ed., *The Ethics of War and Peace: Religious and Secular Perspectives* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University): 95-114, quote on page 95.) The lack of a just war theory in the Jewish intellectual tradition is not surprising considering the fact that Jews did not have a state of their own until recently. In fact, the Christian just war doctrine is based on the concept of the state system and primarily is concerned with the protection of sovereign states.
war theory more thoroughly, Walzer separated his discussion of *jus in bello* from his analysis of what constitutes a legitimate reason for going to war.

**Walzer on Interventions**

At the beginning of his discussion of *jus ad bellum*, he sets up a paradigm – which he calls the “legalist paradigm” – that seeks to define in what cases the resort to arms is justified. Walzer thereby seeks to “limit the occasion for war” by stating at the outset that “nothing but aggression can justify war.” For Walzer, the reason why aggression against a sovereign state is wrong is because it denies citizens of a political community their right to choose their own form of government and determine their own, common way of life. Says Walzer, “When states are attacked, it is their members who are challenged, not only in their lives, but also in the sum of things they value most, including the political association they have made.” As in his 1960s *Dissent* articles, in which he sought to defend the right of developing countries to modernize according to their own cultural traditions, Walzer again uses a distinctly liberal definition of a political community in his just war theory. According to Walzer, aggression forces people to either fight for or abandon their fundamental human rights of life and liberty, and it is immoral to put them into this position. Indeed, Walzer states that the right to life and liberty “are somehow entailed by our sense of what it means to be human.”

He then adds five revisions to the legalist paradigm, which would justify military action in the absence of a prior act of aggression. He bases his revisions on consequentialist considerations. If it can be clearly established that the consequences of

---

not going to war against another state would be fatal to one’s own political community, military action may be justified under limited circumstances. One example for a justified armed attack, as Walzer sees it, are “preemptive” military strikes against a state which is in its final preparations to launch an attack against another state (as he believes was the case in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war).³²

Another example of a justified intervention, according to Walzer, is to “rescue” a people threatened with massacre (such as India’s humanitarian intervention in Bangladesh in 1971). Says Walzer, “People who initiate massacres lose their right to participate in the normal (even in the normally violent) processes of self-determination” and “their military defeat is morally necessary.” He stresses, however, that the rescuing army has to withdraw as soon as the massacre has stopped. Another occasion where Walzer sees a foreign intervention as justified is to help a secessionist movement within an empire or a multinational state, but only if the secessionists enjoy broad popular support. In an interview, Walzer explained that as a Jew, he has always had sympathy for stateless people and thus became “a defender of some lost causes like the Biafrans and the Kurds.” When elaborating on his “legalist paradigm” in an academic article in 1980, Walzer philosophically justifies his support for foreign interventions on behalf of a broad-based secessionist movement because “there is no fit at all between government

³² Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 80-85. The distinction Walzer makes in *Wars* between a “preventive” and a “pre-emptive” war would again become relevant in the contemporary debate about America’s war against Iraq. For Walzer, a war can only legitimately be deemed “pre-emptive” if the threat posed by a state is “imminent.”
and community, and the state cannot claim, once the rebellion has reached certain proportions, even a presumptive legitimacy.”

Overall, however, he sets the threshold for legitimate foreign interventions very high. A war can never be justified as a means to destroy, conquer, or reform a regime. The experience of Vietnam thereby looms in the background of his discussion of what justifies a foreign intervention. In one section of the book, Walzer deals directly with Vietnam. He bases his discussion on the premise that the conflict in South Vietnam primarily was a “civil war.” He then considers two official arguments the American government put forward in the 1960s in order to justify American intervention even while acknowledging “the existence of a civil war.” First, the United States claimed that it was aiding a “legitimate government” that was under attack. According to Walzer, to justify such a claim, one first had to establish what constitutes a “legitimate” government. In his view, “what is crucial is the standing of that government with its own people.” Because the South Vietnamese regime had lost its legitimacy in the eyes of its own people, and because it was unable to form a stable government despite massive American economic, technical, and military support, the South Vietnamese regime could no longer be deemed a “legitimate” government worthy of foreign assistance by the early 1960s. Walzer thus applied his famous “self-help” test, which says that a government that is unable to stay in power by itself is not worth saving.

Second, Walzer takes on the American government’s argument that it was intervening only in reaction to North Vietnam’s prior military support of the Viet Cong in

---

the South. According to Walzer, foreign intervention on behalf of one side in a civil
conflict may be justified only if it seeks to balance out prior foreign military assistance
given to the other party of the conflict. This is what Walzer refers to as a “counter-
intervention.” In the case of Vietnam, however, the United States went far beyond
evening out the imbalance caused by North Vietnam’s prior intervention. In fact, Walzer
maintains that the local balance of forces clearly favored the side of the Viet Cong even
without North Vietnamese help. While the Viet Cong enjoyed considerable local support,
the South Vietnamese government did not. He reiterates that “the goal of counter-
intervention is not to win the war.” American intervention thus did much more than just
leveling the plainfield. In the end, the Vietnamese conflict became “an American war,
fought for American purposes, in someone else’s country.”

The Argument on Nuclear Deterrence

Another section in the book that is interesting in the light of Walzer’s activities in SANE
in the early 1960s is his philosophical discussion of the moral issues involved regarding
nuclear weapons. He deals with nuclear weapons as part of his section on *jus in bello*,
which discusses the legitimacy of the means employed in warfare. Walzer bases his
discussion of *jus in bello* on the principle of non-combatant immunity. He strongly
emphasizes that the primary responsibility of military planners is to minimize civilian
casualties. When discussing nuclear weapons, Walzer asserts that their use can never be
morally justified because their deployment always leads to a disproportionate amount of
civilian casualties. Walzer thus seems to agree with the arguments made by peace groups

---

in the 1950s and 1960s, namely that nuclear weapons constitute a fundamentally different species of weapons that “are simply not encompassable within the familiar moral world.”

Walzer concludes that the use of the bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki was immoral because at the time of the nuclear bombing, Japan no longer posed an imminent military threat to its neighbors or, for that matter, to the United States. At the time the United States dropped the bomb, it did not find itself in a situation of “supreme emergency” where America’s existence as a free country was in danger. For Walzer, therefore, Truman in 1945 did not have to make the agonizing choice between a full-scale military invasion of the Japanese mainland and the use of nuclear weapons. Instead, Walzer asserts that by keeping up the oil and weapons embargo on Japan, the country could have been successfully contained. Thus, for Walzer, it was morally wrong for the United States to target tens of thousands of civilians to bring about Japan’s unconditional surrender, a military objective he believed was misguided, unnecessary, and hugely disproportionate to the actual military threat Japan posed at the time. According to Walzer, “all that was morally required was that [the Japanese] be defeated, not that they be conquered and totally overthrown.” While admitting that “some restraint upon their war-making power might be justified,” he contends that Japan’s “domestic authority was a matter of concern only to the Japanese people.” It is important to highlight this argument because it again illustrates Walzer’s reluctance to sanction the use of military

---

force as a way of eradicating a regime that, though evil, does not pose an immediate threat to its neighbors and is not massacring its own citizens.\textsuperscript{27}

Having made a persuasive case that the use of nuclear weapons is always immoral, Walzer agonizes over the question whether the threat to use nuclear weapons (nuclear deterrence) is morally permissible. At first, Walzer makes it clear that because the use of nuclear weapons is immoral, also the threat to use them has to be considered immoral. This is so because a country cannot threaten another country with nuclear retaliation without being willing to actually use the weapons in the case of an attack.

After condemning nuclear deterrence on deontological grounds, Walzer ultimately settles the question of the legitimacy of nuclear deterrence with a consequentialist argument. As we recall, Walzer has never had any sympathy for unilateralists in the peace movement for nuclear disarmament, and he reiterates the same misgivings in \textit{Just and Unjust Wars}. He argues that the consequences of giving up nuclear weapons unilaterally would be disastrous for the United States. He states, “Deterrence, so we have been told, guards us against a double danger: first, of atomic blackmail and foreign domination; and second, of nuclear destruction.” Indeed, he implies that nobody has the right to demand from a country to leave itself defenseless and risk giving up its existence as a free country. For Walzer, America’s right to self-defense ultimately trumps the undesirability of having to make immoral threats. He concludes that “though [deterrence] is a bad way, there may well be no other that is practical in a world of sovereign and suspicious states. We threaten evil in order not to do it, and the

\textsuperscript{27} Walzer, \textit{Just and Unjust Wars}, 251-268, quote on 268. It is important to keep this argument in mind in the light of today’s Iraq debate. Walzer has remained uncomfortable with the idea of seeking “total victory” over a foreign regime up to this day. He essentially echoed his argument about Japan in World War Two when he opposed Bush’s policy of regime change and called instead for the containment of Saddam.
doing of it would be so terrible that the threat seems in comparison to be morally
defensible.” That said, however, Walzer nevertheless emphasizes that the United States is
under a moral obligation to move away from its dependence on nuclear deterrence and
take steps to initiate a multilateral nuclear disarmament process. With this sophisticated
argument, Walzer offers a highly nuanced philosophical response to the debate about
nuclear weapons that dominated American peace movements in the 1950s and early
1960s.28

Walzer’s argument about nuclear weapons reflects a pragmatism he has also
demonstrated as a political activist in the 1960s. In Just and Unjust Wars, he shows that
although absolute principles are important, it is crucial to take into account the
consequences of a principled action. This also explains why Walzer has little patience
with the moral argument put forward by pacifist moral philosophers. In fact, many
political theorists responding to Just and Unjust Wars argued that Walzer failed to make
a convincing case against pacifism. Walzer, however, never had any interest in
considering pacifism as a viable alternative to realist power-politics. In a short 6-page
afterword to Wars, Walzer argues that pacifism is simply unrealistic considering the
current state of the world. He refutes pacifism on the grounds that there exists no
historical example where a coordinated pacifist movement alone had driven out an
invading army. He also notes that occupying forces have to share the same moral values
as pacifist resisters. Certainly, he asserts, the Nazi government in Germany would not

28 Walzer, Just and Unjust Wars, 273-74.
have reacted favorably to the pacifists’ appeals to respect their right to non-combatant immunity, and their tactics ultimately would have been self-defeating.²⁹

The Theoretical Basis of Walzer’s Just War Theory

Critics of Walzer have sometimes argued that there is a tension between his acceptance of the existence of a set of universal moral values in his just war theory and his “soft” cultural relativism in his theory of distributive justice, as elaborated upon in his 1983 work *Spheres of Justice*. This seeming tension, however, only exists on a superficial level. Walzer’s argument for the existence of universal moral norms has to be understood in the context of his overarching philosophical concept of “thick” and “thin” morality. He discusses this concept in his 1994 book *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad*.³⁰

According to Walzer, every society or political community has its own particular “thick” or “maximalist” moral code that is unique to its particular culture. Humans, when thinking about morality, always start to think in “maximalist” moral terms. They think about morality in terms of concrete, culturally defined concepts of right and wrong. Walzer argues, however, that if one compares the “thick” moral codes of different cultures and strips away all the cultural particularities, one is left with a set of basic moral concepts that all cultures of the world share in common. He refers to these core principles as “thin” or “minimalist” moral values.

²⁹ For critiques of Walzer’s failure to philosophically engage the pacifist argument against war, see, for example, Brian Orend, *Michael Walzer on War and Justice*, 61-85 and Joseph Smith, “Growing up With Just and Unjust Wars: An Appreciation,” *Ethics and International Affairs*, 11 (1997), 3-18; Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 329-335.

To give one example: Walzer explains that every human society shares the notion that social goods have to be distributed justly. Every culture, however, has a different idea of what “just distribution” means in practice and assigns different values to particular social goods in accordance with its unique, culturally defined value system. Thin morality thus only defines a set of general, universal principles (i.e. the principle of “just distribution”), and it is the task of individual political communities to give these abstract moral principles a concrete and practical application in everyday life.31

In contrast to Walzer’s argument on distributive justice, his just war theory, which deals with relationships between different political communities, is based on “thin” moral principles. His “legalist paradigm” only seeks to reflect those moral norms he thinks all civilized societies in the world share in common. For example, as can be inferred from Just and Unjust Wars, some of the “thin” principles Walzer believes apply to the realm of international relations are: the right of each political community to territorial integrity and political self-determination; the notion that the intentional targeting of unarmed civilians during warfare is wrong; and that the systematic persecution and killing of particular ethnic or religious groups within a state is deeply objectionable to the conscience of humankind and thus justifies a foreign intervention on behalf of the persecuted.

Considering Walzer’s “soft” cultural relativism when it comes to the way a political community decides to structure its own society and economy, it is not surprising that Walzer is extremely uneasy about the idea of using military power to reform or change the political structure of another country. This is an important thing to keep in mind when trying to understand Walzer’s critique of American military interventions.

31 Walzer, Thick and Thin, 21-40.
during the cold war and beyond. From the beginning of his activity as a critic of American foreign policy, Walzer objected to unprovoked American military interventions abroad. For example, he protested against the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 because he considered it a serious violation of the country’s right to national self-determination, and he subsequently objected to American intervention in Vietnam on the same grounds. Furthermore, he always opposed American attempts to impose its distinct economic structure and political system on other countries. When arguing against American cold war interventions in the 1960s, he stressed that developing countries ought to modernize according to their own “maximalist” cultural traditions and should not be forced to choose between the American capitalist model and the Soviet communist system. In *Just and Unjust Wars* and later in *Thick and Thin*, therefore, Walzer gave his long-held opposition to ideologically-driven American armed interventions a sophisticated philosophical basis.  

---

32 Throughout his career, Walzer had been concerned with the question of what constitutes good social criticism. In the 1980s, he embarked upon scholarly projects that addressed this issue. In *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Harvard University, 1987) and later in *The Company of Critics* (Basic Books, 1988), Walzer developed his concept of “connected criticism.” According to Walzer, a critic is most effective if (s)he criticizes his or her society and government policy by using the moral standards and cultural ideals shared by the members of the society that (s)he is criticizing. In *The Company of Critics*, Walzer praises critics such as Albert Camus and George Orwell for criticizing their respective countries’ imperial wars while remaining loyal to their country’s patriotic values. When opposing imperialist policies, they were appealing to values of justice and equality they believed were shared by their fellow citizens. It is thus worth pondering the question: to what extent is Walzer living up to his ideal of “connected criticism?” Walzer has always been a very cosmopolitan thinker, drawing upon the ideas of a variety of Western intellectuals regardless of their national origin. Walzer did not consciously seek to draw upon America’s indigenous radical tradition (although he did admire critics such as Randolph Bourne), and he also was not directly influenced by American Pragmatism (although, in practice, aspects of pragmatism can be found in Walzer’s thought). As Walzer admitted in an interview, he vicariously adopted the cosmopolitan worldview of the New York intellectuals, most importantly Irving Howe. Like the New York intellectuals in the 1930s, Walzer often used the cosmopolitan standards of the American independent left in his foreign policy critiques and did not appeal to distinctly American values. Considering Walzer’s philosophical framework as elaborated upon in *Thick and Thin*, it is debatable to what extent it is possible for him to be a connected critic in the “thick” sense of the term when it comes to questions of foreign policy. Indeed, considering Walzer’s “soft” cultural relativism, he is limited in his ability to use “maximalist” American values in his foreign policy thinking. Walzer argued in
Just War Theory in the Aftermath of Vietnam

According to the political theorist Chris Brown, Walzer’s publication of *Just and Unjust Wars* in 1977 was part of a general “burst of just war theory…generated by Vietnam.” As Walzer remembers, secular just war theory suddenly became a respectable academic subject and was discussed among political scientists and philosophers alike. Walzer thereby played a significant role in reviving the secular just war tradition and restoring it to the realm of international relations theory. According to the renowned political theorist Hedley Bull, prior to the 1970s, there has been “no work [addressing the question of just and unjust wars] by any philosopher in the English-speaking world, writing from a secular point of view, that is of importance.” Before the Vietnam War, it was almost exclusively Christian – especially Catholic – theologians who elaborated on the just war doctrine and thus kept this important intellectual tradition alive.  

*Thick and Thin* that a country could not impose its “thick” or “maximalist” cultural values on other states. As a critic, Walzer observed this rule in practice. For example, when criticizing Communist regimes during the cold war, Walzer sought to do so in the name of “minimalist” or universal moral principles. Ultimately, Walzer believed that in the international arena, the United States could only legitimately promote and act according to “thin” moral values because American foreign policy affects other states that do not share the same “maximalist” moral code. As a critic of American foreign policy, Walzer has been using the moral standards of modern just war theory. He based his just war principles on universal human values or, to use his term, on a “minimalist” moral code. Although the “minimalist” just war principles are universal and thus part of America’s “maximalist” moral code, they also do not strike us as distinctively “American” values. First and foremost, a just war theorist maintains his loyalty to his country only indirectly by adhering to universal (and not nationalist) values (although he claims that universal values are part of every culture’s moral structure.) So while it is true that Walzer himself is a very cosmopolitan thinker, his conception of the world’s moral structure also limits him in his ability to use America’s “maximalist” moral code when making foreign policy recommendations.

33 Chris Brown, “Theories of International Justice,” *British Journal of Political Science*, 27, (April 1997), 285; Walzer, “The Triumph of Just War Theory,” 929; Hedley Bull, “Recapturing the Just War for Political Theory,” *World Politics* 31 (July 1979), 589; also see Douglas Lackey, “A Modern Theory of Just War,” *Ethics* 92, (April 1982), 533-46. It is interesting to note here that while the just war doctrine suddenly was re-discovered and taken up by secular political philosophers in the aftermath of Vietnam, the initial proponents of the doctrine, namely Catholic theologians, started to argue that it was no longer possible to fight “just wars” in modern times. The reason for this shift was the advent of modern weapons technology, especially nuclear weapons. In the aftermath of World War Two, Christian theologians started to question whether the resort to arms could ever be morally justified considering the destructiveness of modern warfare. Invoking the just war rule of proportionality, they contended that the amount of causalities
Although it was a particular historical experience – the experience of Vietnam – that led Walzer to think about the moral aspects of military interventions, the just war principles he elaborated upon in *Just and Unjust Wars* have endured the test of time. From the publication of *Wars* onwards, Walzer successfully continued to apply his “legalist paradigm” to contemporary foreign policy issues - most recently to America’s “war on terrorism.” The guiding principles he established in the aftermath of Vietnam allowed him to put forward a morally consistent critique of foreign policy without succumbing to leftist polemics. Indeed, understanding how Walzer’s moral argument evolved in the context of the antiwar debates of the 1960s, and appreciating his efforts, as an academic, to revive modern just war theory as a basis for criticizing American foreign policy, is vital to understanding Walzer’s public argument in the foreign policy debate of today.

---

expected in any modern war could no longer justify the resort to arms even if done so for a just cause. In contrast, secular just war theorists, such as Walzer, sought to use and apply these ancient Christian just war principles to the new circumstances of modern warfare. (A good illustration of this new position taken by the Catholic Church is a statement issued by the editors of *La Civilt Cattolica*, a Jesuit magazine tied to the Vatican, after the Persian Gulf War. The statement is reprinted under the title of “Modern War and the Christian Conscience” in ed. David E. Decosse, *But Was it Just? Reflections on the Morality of the Persian Gulf War* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 107-127.)
Moral Criticism Versus “Moralism:”
The Carter Years and the Reagan Era

The Carter Years

Independent intellectuals and academics were not the only ones who found a renewed appreciation for discussing moral issues in international affairs. A renewed concern for moral principles also became reflected in official American foreign policy in the second half of the 1970s under the presidency of Jimmy Carter. During the election campaign, Carter successfully appealed to many Americans’ uneasiness with the Nixon administration’s pursuit of realpolitik. As Kissinger explains in his memoirs, “having traversed the full emotional distance of America’s disillusionment in Vietnam, many Americans began to look for reassurance through the reaffirmation of a moral commitment rather than calculation of interest.”¹

Besides challenging the Nixon administration’s realist foreign policy doctrine, Carter equally opposed the militaristic anti-communism pursued by his Democratic predecessor Lyndon Johnson. Indeed, many Americans in the 1970s felt that it was Johnson’s misguided anti-communist fervor that got the United States into the Vietnamese quagmire. Echoing liberal critics of the Vietnam War, Carter’s Secretary of State Cyrus Vance explicitly called America’s intervention in Vietnam a “mistake” and

¹ John Dumbrell, American Foreign Policy: Carter to Clinton (New York: St. Martin’s, 1997), 12; Kissinger, Diplomacy, 742.
argued that “the US had illegitimately attempted to ‘prop up a series of regimes that lacked popular support’ and to impose its values on Southeast Asia.”

Carter promised to “balance…tough realism on the one hand and idealism on the other,” and he asserted that he would make “those moral values that have always distinguished the United States of America from other countries” again part of official American foreign policy. In particular, Carter sought to make the promotion of human rights the cornerstone of his policy. He wanted the American government to apply the same ethical standards it was promoting at home also to allied governments abroad. Carter thus started to pressure pro-American right-wing authoritarian dictatorships in the Third World to initiate liberal reforms and respect human rights. He insisted that the United States should not compromise its democratic values when seeking to contain communism abroad.

Carter’s commitment to human rights initially resonated well with the American public. Liberals, on the one hand, believed that by focusing on human rights, the United States would no longer be tempted to support abusive, right-wing authoritarian dictatorships in the Third World. Conservatives, on the other hand, hoped that the human rights issue could be used as a powerful tool further to discredit communist regimes in the eyes of world public opinion. Carter, however, soon disappointed conservatives because he was unwilling to place anti-communism at the center of his foreign policy. At the same time, liberals started to lose faith in Carter because he lacked any concrete

---

2 Dumbrell, *American Foreign Policy*, 12.
action plan to translate his noble foreign policy principles into a concrete and consistent policy.  

Walzer did not write any substantial public critique of Carter’s foreign policy. In the second part of the 1970s, Walzer’s public articles on foreign policy were mostly concerned with the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Israeli-Egyptian peace process, which led to the signing of the Camp David accords in 1979. Walzer thereby gave Carter some credit for convincing Sadat to visit Jerusalem in 1977 and sign a peace treaty with Israel.

Moreover, in a short political comment he wrote for Dissent in 1980, Walzer exclusively deals with Carter’s domestic policy by criticizing the President’s failure to systematically address problems such as growing unemployment, environmental pollution, and the state of the American economy. In the same issue, his co-editor Irving Howe dismissed Carter as an “opportunist.” It does not seem that either Howe or Walzer took Carter very seriously. Most likely, Carter’s failure to turn his political vision – both in domestic and foreign policy – into practical politics went against the Dissenters’ pragmatic sensibilities. Nevertheless, it is surprising that Walzer never dealt with Carter’s foreign policy vision intellectually. After all, Carter’s foreign policy agenda closely resembled that of George McGovern’s, whom Walzer supported in 1972.  

---

4 Dumbrell, American Foreign Policy, 12, 17.
5 Michael Walzer, unsigned editorial, “Hope in the Middle East,” The New Republic 177 (December 3, 1977): 5-6; Walzer and Howe’s comments on Carter’s domestic policy failures can be found in “Comments and Opinions,” Dissent 27 (Fall 1980), 381 (for Howe) and 384 (for Walzer); the observation that McGovern’s foreign policy agenda was very similar to that of McGovern has been made in Gaddis Smith, Morality, Reason, and Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 242.
The Rise of the Neoconservatives

So far, this discussion has focused on the liberal and leftist critique of “realist” political thought. While liberals endorsed Carter as an alternative to Kissinger and his amoral pursuit of foreign policy, Walzer made his principled case against realism in *Just and Unjust Wars*. Soon, however, Walzer had to pay attention to another intellectual reaction against power politics. This time, the challenge came from the right of the political spectrum. While Walzer used the “thin” principles of just war theory to challenge the realist conception of international relations, an initially small group of intellectuals in the early 1970s started to raise a different kind of “moral” objections to realism in foreign policy. Mostly made up of academically trained social scientists and former vital center liberals, this group of intellectuals started to be referred to as the “neoconservatives” by the middle of the decade.

First and foremost, the neoconservatives distinguished themselves in their strong moral stance against communism. They considered themselves “old school” vital center liberals who believed that they alone, unlike mainstream 1970s liberals, had remained true to the tenets of 1950s cold war liberal anti-communism. They saw the cold war primarily as an ideological struggle between two irreconcilable political and social systems and thus wanted anti-communist principles to remain at the core of American foreign policy.⁶

Initially, the neoconservatives’ foreign policy critique was directed against the Nixon administration’s handling of the cold war. According to Kissinger, they were “moral absolutists” who rejected the idea that the United States could negotiate and enter

into compromises with the Soviets. For example, the Russia specialist and Harvard historian Richard Pipes championed the neoconservative viewpoint by emphasizing that because the Soviet system differed so fundamentally from that of the Americans, it was simply impossible for the two ideological foes to find common ground. He explained that Kissinger’s term “détente” did not have the same meaning for the Soviets; even if the Soviets were to give in to American demands and no longer employed military methods to spread communism abroad, they would continue to use “subversion, propaganda, political blackmail and intelligence operations” to increase Soviet influence in the world. Thus, Pipes implied that Kissinger underestimated the importance of ideas in the conflict by focusing exclusively on the geopolitical parameters of the cold war.\(^7\)

Just as neoconservatives staunchly opposed the *realpolitik* politics of the Republican right during the first half of the 1970s, so too did they rail against the Carter administration’s more conciliatory policy toward the Soviet Union in the second half of the decade. In fact, the neoconservative movement gained further steam during the Carter years. Jeane Kirkpatrick, a professor of government at Georgetown University, thereby emerged as a leading neoconservative critic of Carter’s foreign policy. In 1979, she wrote an influential article for *Commentary* entitled “Dictatorships and Double Standards.” Kirkpatrick’s article gave the neoconservatives, who, from the beginning, had

\(^7\) Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 744.; Richard Pipes quoted in Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 746. It should be mentioned here that neoconservatives also took a strong stance against the foreign policy views of the New Left. In doing so, they often failed to distinguish between the radical left and other liberal-left critics of American foreign policy. Such an attitude toward the left can be discerned in Peter Collier and David Horowitz’s book on the 1960s generation *Destructive Generation: Second Thoughts about the ’60s* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). The authors were part of the New Left in the 1960s and drifted into the neoconservative camp after they had become disillusioned with radical politics. In the book, they identify Noam Chomsky as “the intellectual godfather of the post-Vietnam left” and present him as the spokesman of the left’s viewpoint – as if there only existed one single “leftist” line of argument. They cite Chomsky’s essay “The Responsibility of Intellectuals” as proof that the post-Vietnam left is anti-American to the core, and that it sees all evil in the world as originating from the United States.
instinctively opposed American accommodation with communist regimes, a sophisticated intellectual basis. In her article, she eloquently explained that anti-communism in foreign policy could be justified on both moral and realist grounds.

From a moral point of view, she maintained, Carter failed to recognize that the gravest and most systematic violations of human rights still occurred within totalitarian communist states and not in America-friendly authoritarian regimes. Thus, she insisted that there was a “double-standard” in Carter’s foreign policy because he only took active measures to protest human rights violations in allied right-wing dictatorships and failed to do so when it came to communist regimes.⁸

Further, Kirkpatrick argued that also from a realist perspective, Carter’s human rights policy was misguided. Because of Carter’s refusal to provide military aid to right-wing authoritarian regimes, she maintained, the United States had suffered a series of strategic setbacks. By putting pressure on pro-American authoritarian regimes to reform, the Carter government weakened existing autocratic regimes abroad and thus created fertile ground for left-wing movements to become politically powerful. She warned that as a result of Carter’s policy, the Soviet Union had been able to expand its influence in regions such as Southern Africa, the Caribbean, and, most dangerously, in strategically vital areas such as Iran and Nicaragua.⁹

The most controversial aspect of Kirkpatrick’s argument was her assertion that while it was possible for right-wing dictatorships to evolve into more democratic forms of government, no communist regime had ever been able to democratize. She stated,

⁹ Kirkpatrick, Dictatorships and Double Standards, 40-44.
“The history of this century provides no grounds for expecting that radical totalitarian regimes will transform themselves.” By arguing that communist governments were not capable of reform while right-wing dictatorships were, Kirkpatrick morally sought to justify her pragmatic call for American support of right-wing dictatorships in the Developing World.\footnote{Kirkpatrick, \textit{Dictatorships and Double Standards}, 37, 44.}

Ultimately, she posited, Carter’s foreign policy failed to take the geopolitical and ideological realities of the cold war into account. It was thus necessary for the United States to do everything within its power to prevent the proliferation of pro-communist and communist governments in the world. She stated, “No problem of American foreign policy is more urgent than that of formulating a morally and strategically acceptable, and politically realistic, program for dealing with non-democratic governments who are threatened by Soviet-sponsored subversions.”\footnote{Kirkpatrick, \textit{Dictatorships and Double Standards}, 34, 35.}

Disenchanted with President Carter’s foreign policy agenda, Kirkpatrick and most of her fellow neoconservatives left the Democratic Party in 1979 to support Ronald Reagan’s presidential candidacy. As Ehrman puts it, the neoconservatives were unable to find a “new Truman” within the Democratic Party who could have represented their political views. In Reagan, they found a political leader who shared the neoconservatives’ deep moral aversion to communism, and who was willing to take a more confrontational stance against the Soviet Union.\footnote{Ehrman, \textit{The Rise of Neoconservatism}, 99. Of course, Carter’s conduct of foreign policy was not the only issue that alienated neoconservatives within the Democratic Party. The neoconservatives also started to oppose their Party’s domestic political agenda in the course of the 1970s.}
When Reagan became president in 1981, the neoconservatives no longer simply formed an intellectual movement, but some of them became part of the official foreign policy establishment. Kirkpatrick, for example, became Reagan’s ambassador to the UN. Many of the arguments made by neoconservative critics of American foreign policy in the course of the 1970s became reflected in what was later referred to as the Reagan Doctrine. According to Reagan biographer William Pemberton, the Reagan Doctrine was “based on Reagan’s City on a Hill vision that the United States’ mission was to lead the world to democracy and freedom.” The doctrine said that the United States was to provide military aid to political groups abroad that were fighting communist or pro-communist movements inside their countries. As Reagan stated in his 1985 State of the Union address, “We cannot play innocents abroad in a world that’s not innocent; nor can we be passive when freedom is under siege.” Under his presidency, the Reagan Doctrine provided the intellectual justification for American anti-communist interventions in Central and South America, as well as in other parts of the Third World.13

In the early 1980s, the Reagan administration started to provide military and logistical support to the right-wing Contra rebels in Nicaragua. At the time, the Contras were fighting the leftist Sandinista movement, which had taken over power in the country under the leadership of Daniel Ortega Saavedra. Indeed, some Reagan administration officials strongly believed that Nicaragua under the Sandinistas was becoming a close Soviet ally and was ready to back other communist revolutionary movements in Central America. Reagan’s support of the Contras led to heavy political and intellectual

---

controversies in the United States. While it was true that Ortega supplied left-wing rebels in El Salvador with weapons, many liberals in the United States argued that the Sandinistas did not pose as serious of a threat to American security as the Reagan administration claimed. In essence, liberal opponents of Reagan’s Nicaragua policy echoed the liberal critique of America’s ideologically rigid and hostile treatment of Castro’s radical government in the immediate aftermath of the Cuban Revolution. Also in the case of Nicaragua, liberals initially felt that the country would not automatically turn into a Soviet satellite, and that the radical domestic reforms initiated by the Sandinistas primarily addressed domestic grievances held by the landless peasantry against Nicaragua’s small but wealthy landed elite. Moreover, liberals could point to the fact that the Nicaraguan people expressed their support for the Sandinista government in a 1984 referendum. In short, they argued that the Reagan administration should not meddle in Nicaragua’s domestic affairs; instead, they wanted the United States to solve its dispute with Nicaragua over the Sandinistas’ alleged weapons supplies to El Salvador through diplomatic means.\textsuperscript{14}

Reagan’s Nicaragua policy was a key trigger for renewed peace activism in the United States. Certainly, the memory of Vietnam helped foster Americans’ skepticism of U.S. interventions in Third World domestic struggles. The peace movement that began to form in the early 1980s, however, was not led by 1960s peace veterans. Rather, it was formed by Church groups and Third World aid organizations with first-hand experience in Latin America. The peace groups emphasized their solidarity with the people of Latin America, a sense of solidarity they claimed was based on universal human values.

\textsuperscript{14} Pemberton, \textit{Exit with Honor}, 174.
Moreover, they sought to be non-political and thus did not want to become associated with any political party or leftist ideology. Walzer himself did not take part in these renewed peace activities, but he continued to serve as a critic of American foreign policy in the pages of *Dissent* and *The New Republic* in the course of the 1980s.¹⁵

**Walzer’s Response to the Neoconservatives**

In the early 1980s, Walzer took issue with the neoconservatives’ moral justification for stepping up American interventions in the cold war. In *Dissent*, he published two articles refuting Kirkpatrick’s case for U.S. support of right-wing authoritarian regimes in “Dictatorship and Double Standards.” In particular, he sought to demonstrate that Kirkpatrick’s argument not only was morally flawed, but also was based on an incorrect reading of history and a false interpretation of the political realities of the cold war world of the 1980s.¹⁶

In his two *Dissent* articles, Walzer particularly challenged Kirkpatrick’s assertion that right-wing authoritarian dictatorships were an entirely different species of political regimes than communist dictatorships. Walzer argued that the sharp distinction Hannah Arendt drew in the 1950s between totalitarianism and authoritarianism no longer applied to the cold war world of the 1980s. Totalitarian regimes had evolved over time and come to share similar characteristics with “old-fashioned” authoritarian dictatorships. He further explained that totalitarian regimes could not maintain the revolutionary

momentum forever. In the 1980s, totalitarian societies no longer resembled popular movements and instead had become dominated by party elites. Like in authoritarian states, therefore, the population of communist societies was expected to remain passive.\footnote{Walzer, “On Failed Totalitarianism,” 297-299.}

In addition, Walzer challenged Kirkpatrick by pointing out that authoritarian regimes were not necessarily more benign than communist dictatorships. As a case in point, he mentioned the Turkish massacre of Armenian Christians early this century. For Walzer, the Armenian massacre illustrated that, like the communists, authoritarian regimes also had been involved in the systematic persecution of minorities within their borders. From a moral perspective, therefore, the distinction between totalitarian and authoritarian regimes was artificial and did not hold in practice.\footnote{Walzer, “On Failed Totalitarianism,” 300.}

In contrast to Kirkpatrick, Walzer believed that it was not inconceivable that totalitarian regimes could evolve into different governmental structures. In his 1981 article, he prophetically argued that Eastern European satellite states, by virtue of their previous history and political culture, ultimately were more likely to transform into democracies (provided the Soviets did not prevent them from engaging in political reforms) than authoritarian states in the Third World. While Walzer saw potential for democratic reforms in Easter Europe, he refuted Kirkpatrick’s assertion that any authoritarian government was more likely to democratize than totalitarian ones. Responding to Kirkpatrick, he maintained that the chances that American-supported dictatorships, such as those of Argentina and Zaire, whose populations had never been exposed to democratic political procedures, would embark upon a more democratic path were even slimmer than in the case of the Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe.
Ultimately, Walzer called Kirkpatrick’s artificial distinction between totalitarianism and authoritarianism nothing but an “apologia for authoritarian politics.” By arguing that any government that was not “totalitarian” was closer to democracy, he implied, the United States was watering down the definition of democracy to the point of rendering the term meaningless. By pursuing such a policy, the United States was compromising the very values it was seeking to promote. According to Walzer, Kirkpatrick’s suggested policy would ultimately result in the “loss of confidence in the idea of a free world.”

Walzer made it clear in his articles that he wanted the Reagan administration to take a more differentiated approach toward allied governments in the Third World. He proposed that the United States needed to strike a balance between its strategic interests and ideological commitments. First and foremost, he maintained, American “strategic interests” required the United States to side with those local political forces in the Third World that enjoyed the largest amount of popular support. The United States thereby should continue to support the most popular political forces as “long as there is a real chance of keeping the winners out of the Russian camp.” Ultimately, he explained, it was not in America’s pragmatic self-interest to give unconditional support to an unpopular dictatorship that lacked any popular base. He agreed with Kirkpatrick that the United States could not expect every right-wing government that was allied with the United States to share all of America’s democratic commitments. Yet, Walzer argued that while America’s pragmatic interest sometimes required the United States to maintain friendly ties to undemocratic regimes, the United States did not need to condone the policies of

authoritarian dictatorships and instead should “maintain some critical distance.” He explained, “Foreign policy is always a double business: we have to pursue our interests and we have to defend our values.”

Walzer’s argument against Kirkpatrick reflected his long-held belief that the American government had to remain true to a basic set of moral principles when conducting foreign policy. It is thereby important to distinguish Walzer’s call for observing basic moral principles from the “moralism” promoted by the neoconservatives. The moral argument put forward by the neoconservatives, Walzer implied in his critique of Kirkpatrick, was ideologically motivated; it was not derived from a basic set of “minimalist” moral principles he believed all cultures of the world shared in common (the kind of principles he sought to trace out in Just and Unjust Wars). Rather, he accused neoconservatives of seeking to make the world over in America’s image.

As can be inferred from his articles, Walzer believed that the neoconservatives employed moralistic language for two reasons. First, he implied that some neoconservatives used moralistic arguments to justify their essentially “realist” or geopolitical objectives in the world. Second, he also acknowledged that some neoconservatives were true ideologues whose anti-communist zeal prevented them from understanding the local origins of domestic conflicts in the Third World. In fact, Walzer explicitly used both explanations in his critique of the Reagan administration’s policy toward Nicaragua.

In a 1986 article in The New Republic, he made his case against American backing of the Contra rebels. Echoing his argument on foreign interventions in Just and

---

Unjust Wars, Walzer stated that American military aid to the Contras was morally unjustified because the Contras lacked any broad-based popular support. He explained that he “would feel differently about a genuinely popular struggle.” Considering the unpopularity of the Contras among their own people, however, the United States had “no right to waste Nicaraguan lives” by arming the Contras and enabling them to prolong the civil war. He thereby accused the Reagan administration of failing to understand that Nicaraguans did not share the “anticommunist zeal” of the Washington establishment.21

As in his critique of the Bay of Pigs invasion two and a half decades earlier, Walzer again made it clear in the case of Nicaragua that he did not endorse the dictatorial practices of the Sandinistas. “The Sandinistas will remain our enemies,” Walzer stated, and the United States should continue to treat them as such. Yet the U.S. should do so in ways short of military intervention. Echoing his moral argument against foreign interventions in Just and Unjust Wars, he emphasized that foreign military action could not be justified in every case where a popular revolution might be appropriate. Moreover, he explained that American military intervention was counterproductive because such action only strengthened and reinforced Nicaraguans’ perception of an outside enemy, a perception on which “totalitarian movements” such as the Sandinistas thrived. According to Walzer, the only legitimate option open to the United States was to use “soft” means of coercion (i.e. economic and political means) to make life difficult for the Sandinistas. Moreover, he suggested that the United States provided generous developmental and humanitarian aid to other countries in Central America in order to demonstrate to

---

Nicaraguans that there were real economic incentives if they established a government that reflected the democratic values the American government wanted them to adopt.\textsuperscript{22}

**Walzer and the Renewed Debate on Nuclear Deterrence**

As part of his militantly anti-communist cold war policy, Reagan stepped up America’s nuclear capabilities. He did so partly in reaction to the Soviet Union’s intensified build-up of strategic forces in the course of the 1970s. In fact, Reagan’s new nuclear policy was two-pronged. For one, the Reagan administration sought to enhance America’s nuclear first strike capabilities. For another, the President announced his controversial Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) in 1983. With SDI, he sought to build a defensive shield that would protect the United States from Soviet nuclear attack by intercepting and destroying enemy missiles in space before they could hit the U.S. homeland.\textsuperscript{23}

Despite the increased protection from Soviet nuclear attack SDI seemed to offer, opponents of Reagan’s proposed policy feared that SDI ultimately left the United States less secure than before. In particular, they argued that by building a protective shield and thus rendering the United States immune from nuclear attack, the U.S. would destabilize the nuclear deterrence system, which was based on the principle of mutual assured destruction (MAD), a system they believed had so far successfully averted a nuclear confrontation between the two superpowers. Indeed, the combination of Reagan’s renewed nuclear arms build-up and SDI made many Americans fear that Reagan’s new

\textsuperscript{22} Walzer, “Bleeding Nicaragua,” 15-16.  
\textsuperscript{23} Pemberton, *Exit with Honor*, 130-132.
policy ultimately increased the likelihood of a nuclear confrontation between the United States and its communist counterpart.\textsuperscript{24}

In reaction to Reagan’s controversial nuclear policy, American peace activists launched a renewed campaign for nuclear disarmament. The campaign incorporated a variety of organizations, ranging from professional organizations to multi-issue peace groups and grassroots movements. The main umbrella organization uniting these diverse peace groups was called the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign, or Freeze. The activists involved in Freeze were multilateralists who called upon both sides of the cold war to work toward nuclear disarmament. According to the anti-nuclear activist John Trinkl, the goal of Freeze was “a bilateral moratorium on the production, testing, and deployment of nuclear weapons.” He explains that Freeze sought to use “grassroots pressure and local referenda,” which it hoped would eventually lead to the passing of appropriate “Congressional legislation and a treaty with the USSR.” In fact, the Freeze campaign was able to attract broad popular support in the course of the 1980s.\textsuperscript{25}

Besides renewed protest activities at the grassroots level, many intellectuals spoke out against the nuclear arms race in the 1980s. Indeed, the decade witnessed a proliferation in literature critical of America’s nuclear deterrence policy. Both realists and radical leftists criticized the perceived irrationality of Reagan’s nuclear policy. For example, George F. Kennan publicly opposed Reagan’s heavy reliance on nuclear weapons. He called the amassing of nuclear weapons irrational and asserted that America’s nuclear build-up ultimately left the United States less safe than before. He

\textsuperscript{24} Pemberton, \textit{Exit with Honor}, 131.
lamented that the American government was controlled by a “military-industrial establishment,” which had a vested interest in the continuation of the cold war on military terms. Kennan thereby stressed that it was illusionary to think that a cold war could be waged on military terms in an age of nuclear weapons and hydrogen bombs. American foreign policy was built on “primitive assumptions,” Kennan maintained, the American government’s dichotomous cold war thinking led to a distorted view of international politics that made a more nuanced diplomatic approach toward the Soviet Union impossible. He proposed that America’s political elite needed to adopt a “new mindset” that took into account the new realities of the nuclear age. He thereby expressed little faith in democratic processes to change American foreign policy for the better. He argued that politicians had to “cater[ ] to” the American people’s anti-communist hysteria in order to remain popular with their electorate. Consequently, Kennan believed that American foreign policy should be put into the hands of “a body of senior statesmen” that was “wholly disengaged […] from the political process” and was able to provide the American president with “thoughtful and measured advice in the great matters of war and peace.”

While realists, such as Kennan, opposed the nuclear arms race on rational grounds, others opposed it primarily on moral grounds. In 1982, the leftist journalist and political activist Jonathan Schell published his widely-read book *The Fate of the Earth*. In the book, Schell argues that Americans are living “on borrowed time,” and that nuclear extinction of the human race is an inevitable result of nuclear deterrence policy. Schell expresses his conviction that nuclear weapons would eventually be used by the United

States and the Soviet Union. This is so because nuclear weapons are at the disposal of military strategists who have been trained to think in terms of conventional warfare and thus perceive it as their military duty to use every means available to win a war. With the arrival of the nuclear age, Schell believes that it no longer makes sense for states to fight wars at all. He argues that any war fought would eventually lead to the use of nuclear weapons and result in the physical extinction not only of the population of the state against which a nuclear first strike has initially been launched, but would eventually result in the destruction of the entire human species. According to Schell, the question Americans are facing is no longer whether the United States will survive as a political entity, but whether humankind will be able to survive as a biological species. He suggests at the end of the book that the only option humankind has to avert a nuclear holocaust is to “rise up” and “cleanse the earth of nuclear weapons.”

Walzer also contributed to the renewed debate on nuclear deterrence. His argument on nuclear deterrence, however, lacked Schell’s fatalism, and he sought to work within the given political structure when suggesting better ways of dealing with the existence of nuclear weapons. In an article he contributed to *The New Republic* in 1984, he was particularly concerned with the relationship between American reliance on nuclear deterrence and the future survival of America as a democracy. At the beginning of the article, he provocatively asks: “Does deterrence defend democracy?” He begins the article with the observation that America’s “policy of deterrence has been worked out and implemented by small groups of politically powerful and scientifically expert men and women.” Thus, America’s decision to acquire nuclear weapons was not subject to a

---

27 Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982); for Schell’s discussion of the logic of conventional war strategy, see 189-93; quote on 231.
democratic decision making process. Yet Walzer explains that, historically speaking, this is nothing new or unusual because decisions with regard to weapons development and war strategy have been made by governing elites and military experts also in the past. Instead, what Walzer believes is new about the nuclear age is that the political leadership of a nuclear power can launch a nuclear strike against another country without having to rely on citizen participation in the war. Walzer thus makes the interesting observation that while in conventional wars, governments still depend on the cooperation of its citizens to fight, nuclear wars can be fought while the citizenry remains passive.28

On a more optimistic note, however, Walzer observes that the American government’s acquisition of nuclear weapons also has triggered renewed political activism and democratic debates in the United States. He states that at no prior point in American history had there been such strong popular opposition – expressed in citizens’ movements such as Freeze – aimed at one single type of military weaponry. Moreover, American presidential candidates have regularly made questions of nuclear policy part of their policy platforms. These are all “democratic response[s],” Walzer insists. In other words, he implies that the mere fact that the United States possesses nuclear weapons does not yet endanger democratic political processes in the United States.29

Yet ironically, Walzer laments, the future survival of the United States as a democracy depends on America’s ability to deter the Soviet Union from using nuclear blackmail, and the United States can only do so by keeping the very weapons that democratic grassroots movements seek to abolish. In his article, however, Walzer

---

28 Michael Walzer, “Deterrence and Democracy: In a Nuclear Age We Need Both ‘Normal’ and ‘Abnormal’ Politics,” The New Republic 191 (July 2, 1984), 16-17.
explains that while anti-nuclear activists are good at expressing Americans’ “sense of danger,” they are ultimately unable to understand the complexity of nuclear deterrence strategy. He maintains that these are issues can only be properly understood by scientific and strategic experts. Walzer concludes that, ultimately, the serious issues involved in questions of nuclear strategy cannot be resolved democratically, and that nuclear policy has to remain in the hands of dispassionate experts who can appreciate “the complexity of the issues” and are capable of “‘cool’ appraisal and study.”

In his call for dispassionate nuclear experts, Walzer’s solution does not seem to differ so substantially from George F. Kennan’s proposed establishment of a “body of senior statesmen.” Yet, in contrast to his realist counterpart, Walzer has more faith in democratic decision making processes and strongly believes in the “common sense” of the American people. Walzer observes that even seemingly dispassionate experts disagree among each other both with regard to political and strategic issues. He notes that also experts sometimes seek to pursue their own political agendas. Walzer thus calls upon experts to “relocate[...] their private politics” to the realm of democratic politics and debate their political disagreements within the public realm. In “a significant sense,” Walzer argues, both the opponents and the supporters of nuclear deterrence are “right.” It is necessary, however, that the two sides engage in a democratic dialogue to “find the appropriate political method of bringing common sense to bear on nuclear policy.”

Ultimately, Walzer is optimistic that a middle ground between the two positions can be found. Says Walzer, “Though neither set of political strategists is likely to state it clearly, the goal is simply this: to achieve a minimal and so a relatively decent deterrent

---

31 Walzer, “Deterrence and Democracy,” 20, 21
policy and a controlled and limited nuclear regime.” As Walzer explains, he ultimately bases his argument for a “decent” nuclear deterrence policy on his “faith in common sense” and the idea that “men and women with common sense won’t fight nuclear wars.” For Walzer, this common sense ultimately rests with the American people. Therefore, he argues that the “risks of deterrence” have to be “constrained” through “democratic politics.”

As shown, Reagan’s pursuit of a militaristic and highly moralistic cold war foreign policy led Walzer to address his two main moral concerns that had preoccupied him as a political activist in the 1960s and as a just war theorist in the 1970s. These concerns were the issue of nuclear deterrence and the question of what constitutes a legitimate military intervention. In fact, the latter question in particular continued to preoccupy Walzer in the aftermath of the cold war. Moreover, Walzer would again take up his public argument against the neoconservatives’ moralistic approach to foreign policy when George W. Bush took office in 2001. Walzer’s continued role as a public just war theorist in the aftermath of the cold war will be the topic of the final chapter.

---

Michael Walzer as a Public Just War Theorist
in the Aftermath of the Cold War

Just War Theory in the 1990s and Beyond

According to a recent article in *Foreign Affairs*, the moral rhetoric employed by President Carter in the late 1970s and Reagan in the 1980s “left behind something approaching a consensus among Democrats and Republicans.” This new foreign policy consensus is based on the premise that the promotion of universal moral values should form an intrinsic part of official American policy abroad. According to the article, the consensus partly is the result of a general “backlash” against “the realpolitik policies of Nixon and Henry Kissinger,” which “both Republicans and Democrats” rejected as immoral and in conflict with American ideals.¹

Of course, the end of the cold war gave American advocates of a more morally consistent foreign policy an additional boost. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the single most important threat to America’s national security had been removed. The United States now was the sole undisputed superpower in the world, and it could suddenly “afford” to pay increased attention to moral issues in international politics.

But Americans’ increased attention to moral principles in international affairs – especially with regard to military interventions – also was a direct result of the Vietnam experience. Just as modern just war theory suddenly became a respectable academic

---

subject in the realm of international relations theory, so too did just war language successfully enter American public discourse on foreign policy. Looking back on the successes modern just war theory had in the United States in the post-Vietnam decades, Walzer observes that, for better or worse, the language of just war today is being invoked not only by clerics and intellectuals, but also by politicians, American presidents, and military generals. Although heads of state have been using moral language to justify wars throughout history, what Walzer believes is a relatively new phenomenon since the Vietnam War is that Americans now seem to be paying increased attention also to *jus in bello* (and not just *jus ad bellum*) principles. Walzer thereby implies that the Vietnam experience has made Americans more sensitive toward the principle of non-combatant immunity. Indeed, American government officials and army representatives today have come increasingly to emphasize American efforts to spare civilian casualties when fighting wars.²

At least in part, Walzer believes, the observance of *jus in bello* principles when sending American troops abroad also serves American presidents’ own self-interest in bringing wars to a successful conclusion. Indeed, he maintains that the experience of Vietnam had demonstrated that observing basic *jus in bello* principles – especially with regard to the protection of civilians in combat zones – is both politically and militarily advantageous. Observing these principles not only helps increase domestic political support for American military action abroad, but also aids America’s military effort by enticing the good-will of the enemy country’s local population.³

Yet despite American presidents’ repeated claims that they are now consciously observing the principles of just war, Walzer believes that just war theorists still have a very important public “function.” Obviously, just war theorists continue to serve as independent critics in holding their government’s actual policies up against the just war standards the government is claiming to observe. At the same time, Walzer has demonstrated in the course of the post-cold war period that it is also sometimes necessary to defend the principles of just war vis-à-vis opponents of official military action abroad. In particular, Walzer has continued to challenge arguments made by members of the radical left, who either dismiss the principles of just war altogether or are taking the principle of non-combatant immunity to an extreme. Walzer thus explains: “Just war theory is not an apology for any particular war, and it is not a renunciation of war itself. It is designed to sustain a constant scrutiny and an immanent critique.” Walzer’s attempt to apply the principles of just war to issues of war and peace in the post-cold war period will thus be the topic of the remainder of this chapter.  

The Persian Gulf War of 1991

The United States “went halfway around the world to do what is moral and just and right.” So proclaimed George Bush in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War. Indeed, the quote illustrates how Bush was using the language of just war to explain the rightfulness of the American-led war to expel Saddam from Kuwait. Walzer, though suspicious of Bush’s actual intentions, nevertheless agreed with the Republican President’s claim that just war doctrine legitimized American military action in defense of Kuwait. In an article

---

in *The New Republic*, he defended the American-led liberation of Kuwait as a war fought for a just cause.⁵

By endorsing the 1991 Gulf War in principle, Walzer parted with many other intellectuals on the left. Indeed, many prominent leftist intellectuals, ranging from Todd Gitlin to Christopher Hitchens and Noam Chomsky, opposed the war. Many leftists were reluctant to support the war because they thought the war would be fought for pragmatic reasons, especially oil. In his 1991 *New Republic* article, however, Walzer refuted this leftist argument. He referred to the fact that those Americans who were most concerned about protecting America’s economic interests in the Gulf merely call for the containment of Saddam. In fact, realist proponents of containment argued at the time that Saddam would not be able to dictate the oil price as long as he did not conquer oil-rich Saudi Arabia. Addressing leftist war opponents, Walzer emphasized in his article that from a moral point of view, the case was very clear-cut. Failing to resist would come close to an American endorsement of Saddam’s egregious act of aggression.⁶

Besides questioning the “purity” of the Bush administration’s intentions in the Gulf, war opponents raised fears about the possible consequences of a war against Iraq. Such concerns were expressed by Todd Gitlin and, more interestingly, by Christian just war theorists, who generally opposed the war. Referring to the just war rule of proportionality, theologians in the United States argued that the high amount of casualties

---


the war would cause, combined with the possible risk of regional escalation, trumped the
jus ad bellum argument that the war would be fought for a just cause, namely self-
defense.\(^7\)

To be sure, Walzer shared the war opponents’ uneasiness about the possible consequences of the war. In his *New Republic* article, he admitted that the Gulf War “might well be politically or militarily unwise [to fight].” However, he asserted that it was ultimately the task of American military experts to calculate the risks of fighting the war and decide on appropriate military actions. He posited that, as a just war theorist, it was not his role to decide whether the war should actually be fought. It was enough for him to establish that, in principle, expelling Saddam from Kuwait would remain a just cause even if the United States decided not to pursue it.\(^8\)

**Humanitarian Interventions**

When President Clinton took office in 1993, he and many of his liberal supporters started to advocate the idea that the United States should use its unparalleled military might for selfless moral purposes, such as the protection of human lives in war-torn countries where official government authorities were either unwilling or unable to do so. Many liberals, who opposed the 1991 Gulf War because they thought the war was fought for selfish economic and geopolitical objectives, enthusiastically embraced Clinton’s call to use American power in the name of universal rights. During the Clinton administration, the United States thus increasingly became involved in so-called “humanitarian

\(^8\) Walzer, “A Just War?” 306.
interventions” abroad. Examples were American intervention in Somalia, the UN-led intervention in East Timor, and the NATO bombing of Kosovo. In fact, as stated in the latest issue of *Foreign Affairs*, “humanitarian intervention is perhaps the most dramatic example of the new power of morality in international affairs.”

The most revolutionary aspect of this new type of foreign interventions was the fact that the humanitarian crises the Clinton administration was facing in the 1990s almost all occurred within states. In fact, Clinton justified American humanitarian interventions by arguing that the moral imperative to save lives should be placed above America’s obligation under international law to respect the sovereignty and national integrity of other states.

The question as to the circumstances under which the United States could legitimately intervene in other states, however, was a difficult one to answer for a just war theorist like Walzer, who stated in *Just and Unjust Wars* that, in principle, “nothing but aggression justifies war.” To be sure, Walzer already made it clear in his 1977 book that in “extreme” cases, the use of force to rescue a people from systematic government persecution was morally justified. What exact conditions, however, have to be fulfilled to constitute such an “extreme” case?

Throughout the 1990s and, most recently, in a 2002 article in *Dissent*, Walzer has continued to make it clear that “every violation of human rights isn’t a justification” for intervening militarily. In his 2002 article, he states that if there exists no immediate humanitarian emergency, other states should use “diplomatic pressure or economic

---


sanctions” to pressure a government to respect the human rights of its citizens. In contrast, says Walzer, “when what is going on is the ethnic cleansing of a province or country or the systematic massacre of a religious or national community, it doesn’t seem possible to wait for a local response.” In this case, “anyone who can help should help.” Walzer insists that it thereby does not matter whether a country intervenes unilaterally or under the authority of the UN, although he admits that the latter would be the preferable solution.11

In 1999, Walzer wrote a noteworthy column in Dissent, in which he dealt with NATO’s military action in Kosovo. The allied military campaign was aimed at stopping Serbian ethnic cleansing in the Muslim province. In principle, Walzer approved of NATO’s decision to intervene on humanitarian grounds. In Dissent, however, Walzer criticized NATO for fighting the war with unjust means. At the time, NATO sought to achieve its humanitarian goals by using high-altitude planes to bomb Serbian military targets. The NATO bombing campaign thereby not only killed many Serbian civilians, but also accelerated Serbian ethnic cleansing on the ground, a process that could only have been stopped by a NATO ground intervention. NATO, however, refused to use ground troops for fear of putting its own troops at risk.12

At the time, Walzer harshly condemned the idea of “risk-free war-making.” In his 1999 Dissent article, he provocatively asked: “Are countries with armies whose soldiers cannot be put at risk morally or politically qualified to intervene?” Further, he explained that it was “not a possible moral position” for NATO to be “ready…to kill Serbian soldiers” and cause many civilian casualties while simultaneously seeking to protect the

lives of its own soldiers at all cost. Walzer thus insisted that the lives of civilians in
Serbia were no less valuable than those of NATO soldiers. Indeed, his powerful moral
statement with regard to the Kosovo war illustrates how seriously Walzer takes the
principles of *jus in bello* (especially with regard to non-combatant immunity) even at the
risk of having to accept a greater number of American military casualties.\textsuperscript{13}

Clinton’s use of American power for humanitarian purposes triggered intellectual
and political opposition from both sides of the political spectrum. For one, the radical left
remained distrustful of official American motives. Referring to American “imperialist”
designs, leftists such as Chomsky continued unabashedly to condemn American military
action abroad wherever and whenever it occurred. For another, neoconservatives were
equally opposed to humanitarian interventions but for different reasons. With the collapse
of the communist “evil empire,” they no longer saw any need to use American power in
cases other than the pursuit of America’s limited national interest. Indeed, American
democracy no longer seemed to be facing any serious ideological challenges from other
parts of the world. In neoconservative political circles, therefore, there was a renewed
appreciation for the principles of *realpolitik*, an appreciation shared by the incumbent
President George W. Bush in 2001.\textsuperscript{14}

**The War on Terrorism**

The neoconservatives’ perception of post-cold war global politics and America’s role in it
changed dramatically on September 11, 2001, when a group of Islamic fundamentalists,

\textsuperscript{13} Walzer, “The Triumph of Just War Theory,” 936; Walzer, “Kosovo, 5, 6.
\textsuperscript{14} Packer, “The Liberal Quandary Over Iraq;” On the neoconservatives’ embrace of *realpolitik* at the end of
the cold war, see Ehrman, *The Rise of Neoconservatism*, 173-206.
who had declared Islamic *jihad* on the United States, highjacked four airplanes and
slammed them into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, killing almost 3000
American civilians. In fact, the attacks powerfully demonstrated the threat that an
international terrorist group, intensely hostile to America’s way of life and motivated by
religious zeal, can pose to the United States. Neoconservatives in the Bush
administration, but also many liberals and a few insightful leftists, soon came to
understand that a new international “war of ideas” was starting to take shape.

From the beginning, Walzer unequivocally condemned the terrorist attacks of 9/11. At a *Dissent* editorial board meeting in November 2001, he explained that
“terrorism” could never be morally justified. Because “terrorism” involved the targeting
of “noncombatants,” it violated basic *jus in bello* principles. At the meeting, he reiterated
that civilian victims of terrorist attacks “aren’t killed incidentally in the course of actions
aimed elsewhere; they are killed intentionally.”

When President Bush declared his “war on terrorism,” Walzer joined a group of
academics and intellectuals from various political persuasions and religious backgrounds,
who together signed a public statement entitled “What We’re Fighting For.” In the
statement, the signatories invoked universal human values to condemn the terrorist
attacks, and they expressed their support of the President’s “war on terrorism” in
principle. The statement thereby sought to stake out a middle ground between two
ideational extremes in American foreign policy: moralistic militancy, on the one hand,
and cold-blooded “realism,” on the other. It called upon the American government to
conduct its war on terrorism with prudence and avoid “the harmful temptations…of

---

arrogance and jingoism.” Moreover, the statement challenged the realist argument that “war is essentially a realm of self-interest and necessity.” Invoking the language of just war, the statement read that “waging war” was at times “morally necessary as a response to calamitous acts of violence, hatred, and injustice.”16

Further, the signatories explained that while they remained loyal to their country and American values, they would continue to criticize those aspects of American society they found objectionable, such as rampant “consumerism” and “the notion of freedom as no rules.” In essence, the standpoint Walzer and his co-signatories were taking in their statement closely resembles the one Walzer adopted in the course of the cold war: it is a position that can best be described as one of “critical support” of the United States.17

In the course of the intellectual debates that flamed up in the aftermath of 9/11, Walzer had to confront arguments made by some of his fellow leftists. For example, many leftist contributors to The Nation magazine argued that the terrorist attacks were conducted in the name of legitimate grievances, shared by the peoples of the Third World, against American-led economic globalization and capitalist exploitation. Walzer countered this leftist argument, first, by pointing out that the perpetrators of the acts were not part of the economically disadvantaged classes in the Arab world. Second, he explained that Al Qaeda’s ultimate political objective – the establishment of an Islamic empire in the Middle East – was not widely shared by the world’s poor.18

---

17 “What We’re Fighting For,” 2.
Moreover, as a just war theorist, Walzer challenged the arguments made by what he referred to as the “postmodern left,” which argued that there existed no objective standards by which one could judge the morality of a particular act of war. For example, Noam Chomsky proposed that it was impossible to define the term “terrorism;” ultimately, it was the strong who imposed the term on the weak. Along similar lines, some radical leftists invoked the old maxim that “one person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter.” Walzer countered these arguments by positing that terrorism could be defined and morally condemned without taking into account the legitimacy of the objective sought by the terrorist. He argued that the use of terrorist tactics as a means to an end could be deemed immoral out of hand because it involved “the deliberate killing of innocent people.”

Furthermore, Walzer supported Bush’s war to topple the Al Qaeda-sheltering Taliban regime in Afghanistan. He considered the military operation a necessary and just war of self-defense. In contrast to Walzer, however, many intellectuals on the American left were either uneasy about the war in Afghanistan or even opposed to it. For example, many leftist contributors to *The Nation* magazine suggested that the war in Afghanistan was “unjust” because the war caused many Afghan civilian casualties. Walzer thereby cautioned against the tendency of the American left to take the just war principle of non-combatant immunity to an extreme. Indeed, the left was about to adopt a position that

---

could hardly be distinguished anymore from an outright endorsement of pacifist moral arguments.\textsuperscript{20}

According to Walzer, leftist opponents protesting the war in Afghanistan almost implied that the killing of even one single civilian already rendered U.S. military action in Afghanistan illegitimate. This was a misinterpretation of just war theory, Walzer asserted. After all, just war theory is based on the premise that the fighting of wars sometimes is necessary. In Afghanistan, the United States was fighting a war of self-defense, which is a legitimate reason for going to war. Although the United States was under a moral obligation to do everything within its power to protect civilian lives, the killing of innocents can never be completely avoided during times of war. In the aftermath of the Afghanistan campaign, Walzer thus reminded the left that “a just war is meant to be, and has to be, a war that it is possible to fight.”\textsuperscript{21}

Yet despite Walzer’s public support of the Bush administration’s initial reaction to the terrorist attacks, he remained keenly aware of the temptations and potential dangers involved in America’s militarization of the war on terrorism. In signing the statement “What We’re Fighting For,” Walzer was endorsing the view that the United States needed to recognize the limits of its power and not embark upon a moralistic crusade. According to the journalist Jedediah Purdy, the statement ultimately represents a “minority tradition in American political culture” that stands in opposition to America’s dominant foreign policy framework as represented by George W. Bush. Purdy explains that Bush’s worldview is based on the overly optimistic notion that “the United States is

\textsuperscript{20} On \textit{The Nation}, see Vanden Heuvel, \textit{A Just Response}, 255-69; Walzer, “The Triumph of Just War Theory,” 935.

\textsuperscript{21} Walzer, “The Triumph of Just War Theory,” 935.
an innocent nation, founded on decency and incapable of doing harm as long as it follows its truest instincts.”

The danger of such a moralistic approach to world affairs, the signatories of the statement clearly recognize, is that it leads American presidents to see the world in black and white terms and portray the war on terrorism as one between two moral absolutes. The same way the United States was willing to provide military support to anti-communist right-wing dictatorships during the cold war, the country again is tempted, as Purdy puts it, to “provide…any government” in the world that claims to fight terrorists “with a moral blank check” to clamp down on political opponents and violate basic human rights. As an example, Purdy mentions America’s acquiescence to Russia’s brutal clamp-down on Chechnyan rebels.

By lending his “critical” support to America’s war on terrorism, Walzer thus continues to urge his government not to ignore important moral issues in foreign policy by dividing the world into two moral absolutes. In many ways, Walzer thus is repeating the argument he made against Kirkpatrick in the early 1980s. Also with regard to America’s new war on terrorism, he wants his government to remain true to basic moral principles when deciding upon the means with which it seeks to pursue its morally justified cause of combating global terrorism. Indeed, Walzer’s alternative “liberal” foreign policy vision remains highly relevant today as American pundits and politicians continue to grapple with the question of how the United States is to pursue its war on terrorism most effectively. Walzer’s role in today’s foreign policy debate is to point us

23 Purdy, “The Pure Heart.”
into an alternative direction, a direction that differs from the one currently pursued by the Bush administration. It is here that we have to consider Walzer’s continued relevance as a public political philosopher.
Liberals today are facing a difficult foreign policy dilemma. Their predicament is over the recent war in Iraq. How should they respond to the Bush administration’s new doctrine of “pre-emptive” war, with which the administration justified the use of American power to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein? Did Bush’s policy of “regime change” in Iraq fulfill or betray liberal ideals? If the war could be justified on liberal grounds, why, then, was there not more enthusiasm about the war among liberals? If, however, Bush’s Iraq policy could not be squared with the tenets of liberalism, we have to ask the question a liberal journalist recently posed: “why [was] there no organized liberal opposition to the war?”\textsuperscript{1}

One difficulty liberals faced when trying to come up with a position on the Iraqi question was the Bush administration’s failure to put forward a coherent intellectual justification for the war. At various times and occasions, the President put forward three different reasons for seeking an invasion of Iraq: to rid Saddam of weapons of mass destruction; to prevent the Iraqi dictator from handing his weapons to terrorists; and to liberate the Iraqi people from a brutal dictatorship and establish a liberal democratic government in the country.

When making his case for “regime change” in Iraq, Bush used both idealist and realist arguments. In fact, according to neoconservatives in the Bush administration, the two different justifications are inextricably linked to each other. Neoconservatives continue to argue that idealist goals (i.e. the establishment of a democratic government in

\textsuperscript{1} Packer, “The Liberal Quandary Over Iraq.”
Iraq) ultimately serve America’s pragmatic interests. They strongly believe that terrorism and Islamic radicalism are fostered by repressive Arab regimes such as Saddam’s, and that the security threat posed by radical groups in Arab society can only be removed by transforming the regimes under which they live. In short, neoconservative advocates of the Bush administration’s policy believe that their call for democracy in Iraq is a realistic American response to combat terrorism.²

In contrast to the neoconservatives, however, a group of prominent “realist” political scientists in the United States publicly challenged the Bush administration’s “realist” case for a “pre-emptive” war against Iraq. They argued that the war would only drain American resources away from the war against Al Qaeda. Moreover, they believed that American military action against Iraq would further radicalize Arab public opinion and provide a further incentive for Arabs to participate in terrorist organizations. Finally, they feared that an American invasion would provoke Saddam, who had so far refrained from using chemical or biological weapons against any power that could retaliate in kind, to use these weapons in a desperate final attempt to save his regime. In short, American realists argued that a military invasion of Iraq ultimately would leave the United States weaker and more vulnerable than before.³

While many prominent realists disagreed with the neoconservative’s “realist” case for war against Iraq, some liberal idealists in the United States agreed with the Bush administration’s “idealist” justification for an American policy of “regime change.” Referring to Bush as a “closet liberal,” one commentator in The New Republic

---

enthusiastically proclaimed that “the impulse behind [Bush’s war] strategy reflects the highest-minded of liberal ideals.”

An example of an “idealist” on the liberal left who supported the war was *Dissent* editorial board member Paul Berman. In his book *Terror and Liberalism*, he makes his liberal case for an American-led invasion of Iraq. He thereby seeks to dissociate himself from neoconservative war hawks who justify the invasion on “realist” grounds. According to Berman, Saddam needed to be removed not simply because he posed a security threat to the United States, but because he presided over a regime that closely resembled that of fascist and communist dictatorships that sprung up in twentieth century Europe. In his book, Berman illustrates that both Islamic fundamentalists, as represented by groups like Al Qaeda, and secular Arab nationalists, such as the Baathists in Iraq, are in fact close ideological allies. Both of these radical Arab movements seek to offer alternatives to the Western liberal state model, which is based on the principle of human reason, the separation of church and state, and the legal distinction between the public and private spheres. Like fascists and communists, Berman contends, Baathists and Islamic fundamentalists are rebelling against the failure of the liberal state to instill in its people a sense of oneness with the state and to give citizens the feeling of serving a higher purpose in life. In the end, he contends, both radical ideologies are forms of “Muslim totalitarianism.”

By labeling Saddam and Al Qaeda “totalitarian,” Berman clearly dissociates himself from war opponents on the American left, who imply that terrorism is a “legitimate” form of “anti-Americanism.” In fact, American anti-war protests were

---

4 Kaplan, “Regime Change.”
5 Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), quote on 60.
dominated by radical leftists, who adopted a stance of “total opposition” to their
government. Using simplistic antiwar slogans such as “No Blood for Oil,” they failed to
formulate any constructive policy alternative to Bush’s militarization of the war on
terrorism. War protesters neither took an effort to morally condemn Saddam’s brutal
regime, nor did they acknowledge that Saddam’s weapons of mass destruction posed a
potential security threat to America and its allies.6

Meanwhile, war hawks taking part in the contemporary foreign policy debate are
making use of old leftist stereotypes to discredit even further the war opponents on the
liberal left. A case in point is Charles Krauthammer’s recent article in The New Republic,
in which he accuses the liberal left of failing to support the war simply because regime
change in Iraq has the pleasant side-effect of also benefiting the United States
economically. He claims that liberals are only willing to back American use of force as
long as American motives are entirely selfless, as was the case in Somalia and Bosnia.
Moreover, according to Krauthammer, while liberals have always acknowledged self-
defense as a legitimate reason for war (and thus broadly supported the war in
Afghanistan) they are uneasy about supporting the war in Iraq because an American
victory would automatically enhance America’s geopolitical position in the Middle East.
Krauthammer thus summarizes the liberal dilemma this way: “liberalism supports simple
self-defense but opposes national aggrandizement. It cannot therefore deal coherently
with war in Iraq, which not only requires a complicated notion of self-defense but which

6 Quoted from Kevin Mattson, “Book Review of Terror and Liberalism,” Society, (forthcoming); antiwar
slogan taken from Packer, “The Liberal Quandary;” for more information on the sorry state of the
American antiwar movement, also see, for example, George Packer, “Smart-Mobbing the War” The New
York Times (March 9, 2003), Section 6, Page 46.
necessarily will result in American aggrandizement through the extension of U.S. hegemony in the Arab world.\textsuperscript{7}

It is in the light of these polarized foreign policy debates, in which the realists are pitted against the idealists, and war hawks are set against radical war opponents suspicious of \textit{any} American military action abroad, that we have to consider Walzer’s continued significance as a liberal critic of American foreign policy. To be sure, Walzer does not have all the answers pertaining to the question of Iraq. Yet, in outlining his position before the war, Walzer was one of the very few voices to cut across the traditional dichotomies in today’s foreign policy debate. While rejecting the radical left’s posture of “total opposition” to any American use of force against Iraq, he also stopped short of advocating full-scale war. Moreover, his position on Iraq combined elements of both the idealist argument for war and the realist case against it. While endorsing the idealists’ call for a morally principled American stance against Saddam’s brutal regime, Walzer shared the realists’ aversion to American use of force in the name of idealist principles, and he echoed the realists’ fears about the possibly disastrous consequences that an American invasion of Iraq could have.

In important ways, Walzer’s position on the question of Iraq could have been predicted by someone familiar with his philosophical work, especially his “legalist paradigm” put forward in \textit{Just and Unjust Wars}. Applying just war principles to the case of Iraq, Walzer made a distinction between “pre-emptive” and “preventive” war. He argued that the war against Iraq advocated by the Bush administration fell into the latter category, and that just war theory did not sanction the use of force to eliminate threats.

that were potential but not “imminent.” Because the U.S. had no evidence that Saddam was just about to use weapons of mass destruction against the United States or neighboring Gulf states, Walzer believed that America’s legitimate security concerns with regard to Iraq could have been addressed by means short of a full scale military invasion.⁸

In two op-ed articles in The New York Times, Walzer outlined an alternative policy to the one followed by the Bush administration. He proposed that the United States continued to pursue the “little war” it had already started in Iraq. For example, Walzer supported the use of military means to enforce the inspections regime. After all, Saddam had an obligation under international law to declare all its weapons and to allow U.N. inspectors to visit any suspected sites at a time of the inspectors’ own choosing. Moreover, Walzer wanted the international community to impose so-called “smart sanctions” on Iraq. Such sanctions would not have targeted the Iraqi civilian population by depriving them of essential import goods; instead, the new sanctions regime would have ensured that Saddam could not acquire forbidden weapons material through black market channels.⁹

Finally, Walzer also addressed the legitimate humanitarian concerns voiced by idealist war hawks, who stressed that America had a moral obligation to liberate the Iraqi people from Saddam’s brutal dictatorship. Responding to idealists, Walzer repeated his long-held view that a military intervention on humanitarian grounds was only justified in the most severe cases. This view held that as long as a government was not engaged in

---

genocidal activities, other states should use measures short of full-scale military invasion to protest human rights violations in foreign countries. In the case of Iraq, Walzer argued that by enforcing the no-fly zones over Northern Iraq, the international community had thus far been successful in preventing Saddam from massacring the Kurds. To ensure the continued safety of the Kurds and other ethnic and religious groups in Iraq, Walzer additionally called for an extension of the no-fly zones over the entire country. By enforcing the no-fly zones, the weapons inspections, and an effective “smart sanctions” regime, Walzer believed that the United States could have addressed its legitimate security and humanitarian concerns without having to fight a war he expected to be costly in lives and money.¹⁰

Clearly, Walzer was willing to allow for the limited use of force against Iraq. What he opposed, however, was the idea that the United States should enter the country with the explicit goal of removing Saddam from power. Although Walzer was aware that by enforcing the no-fly zones and the weapons inspections, Saddam’s regime would have been seriously weakened and may well have collapsed, he strongly opposed Bush’s stated military objective of “regime change.” In fall 2002, Walzer argued in The New Republic that, in and of itself, “change of regime is not commonly accepted as a justification for war.” In his article, he explains that the idea of “regime change” reminds him too much of “the bad old days of cold war ‘spheres of influence’ and ideologically driven military or clandestine interventions.” He thereby listed a number of historical examples of this controversial cold war practice, such as America’s intervention in Guatemala and the Soviet invasion of Hungary. In the 1950s, of course, Dissent magazine had heavily

---

¹⁰ Walzer, “The Right Way.”
protested both military interventions as illegitimate infringements on the two countries’ right to national self-determination.\(^\text{11}\)

When making his case against a “preventive” war in Iraq, Walzer essentially rearticulated the containment argument of the early cold war period. While recognizing and morally condemning the evil nature of Saddam’s regime, Walzer continued to hold that the resort to war was unjustified when dealing with a dictatorship, though brutal, that was neither engaged in genocide nor posed an “imminent” threat to its neighbors. Ultimately, however, the position Walzer took before the war left him in a no-win situation. He opposed Bush’s war, but at the same time refused to join the peace movement because he did not want to do anything that would have “strengthened the hand of Saddam.” As the journalist George Packer commented before the war, “Walzer’s position offers cold comfort, for it ends up with Saddam still in power.”\(^\text{12}\)

Walzer’s antiwar position, which he backed up with just war principles, left many questions unanswered. After all, there may well be truth to the argument that Saddam’s Iraq posed a new type of security threat that traditional just war theory simply cannot adequately address. If one was to assume that Saddam was about to hand weapons of mass destruction over to terrorists, and considering the fact that terrorist attacks are very difficult to avert once terrorists had taken possession of these weapons, one could make a

\(^\text{11}\) Walzer, “No Strikes,” 21; Here we also have to consider Walzer’s long-held opposition to the war objective of achieving “total victory” over an evil regime. He opposed the war objective of “total victory” when arguing against Truman’s decisions to drop the atomic bomb on Japan during World War II. Also in the case of Japan, he believed that the Japanese regime could be contained enough so that it could no longer pose any harm to its neighbors. Walzer thereby emphasized that it ultimately was the task of the Japanese people, and not of foreigners, to overthrow their dictatorial regime. (For more on this argument, see Walzer, \textit{Just and Unjust Wars}, 251-268.)

\(^\text{12}\) Michael Walzer and George Packer as quoted in Packer, “The Liberal Quandary Over Iraq.”
forceful case that America’s invasion of Iraq was a “pre-emptive” war after all – and not, as Walzer claimed, a “preventive” one.

Nevertheless, Walzer’s case against America’s invasion of Iraq provided, and continues to provide, a valuable starting point for a more constructive public foreign policy debate. His “liberal” vision for dealing with Saddam constitutes a thoughtful attempt to formulate an alternative to the Bush administration’s militarization of the war on terrorism. By adhering to the principles of just war, he is able “to sustain [the] intelligent, responsible, morally nuanced” politics he had always believed the American left should espouse. Indeed, the principles of just war have given his foreign policy critique a remarkable consistency over the past four decades. Thus, it would be wrong to dismiss his antiwar position on Iraq merely as leftist opportunism. Rather, Walzer has demonstrated in the course of his public career that the moral guiding principles of the independent social democratic left, as he understands them, have endured the test of time. Walzer, indeed, has a message that is coherent and morally consistent.13

By rejecting all three extremes in the contemporary American foreign policy debate – anti-Americanism, realpolitik, and expressive moralism – Walzer, in many ways, represents a missing voice on America’s intellectual landscape. At a time when

---

13 Walzer, “Can There Be A Decent Left?” In fact, Walzer’s position on Iraq continues to reflect the three characteristics of his alternative “liberal” foreign policy vision that has informed his critique of official foreign policy in the course of the past forty years. First, Walzer continues to refuse to participate in the anti-American polemics that have become so common in the circles of the post-Vietnam left. Second, Walzer continues to argue against realpolitik by basing his foreign policy critique on the premise that governments cannot avoid making moral choices when conducting foreign policy. Third, Walzer continues to draw a clear line between adhering to a basic set of moral principles in foreign policy, which he had always advocated, and moralistic expression of American power abroad, which he had always abhorred. Indeed, Walzer acknowledges the existence of real evil in the world. At the same time, however, he also recognizes that the United States simply cannot remake the world in its own image. Although wars are sometimes necessary to fight he continues to hold there are clear moral limits as to the occasions in which the resort to arms can be deemed legitimate.
American values are again under attack, and Americans are searching for a new foreign policy consensus that, for one, reflects American values and, for another, helps the U.S. government to conduct the war on terrorism effectively, we need to hear his voice more than ever.
Bibliography

Interviews


Magazines


Books and Articles


Bull, Hedley. “Recapturing the Just War Theory.” World Politics 31 (July 1979), 588-599.


Institute for American Values. Pamphlet. “What We’re Fighting For.” (February 2002).


306.


292.


Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1970.


Walzer, Michael. Political Action: A Practical Guide to Movement Politics. Chicago:


Walzer, Michael. Radical Principles: Reflections of an Unreconstructed Democrat New

Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1965.


Walzer Michael. Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality. New York:

Walzer, Michael. “Students in Washington: A New Peace Movement.” Dissent 9 (Spring


**Unpublished Documents:**