President Obama's Nobel Peace Prize Speech: Embracing the Ethics of Reinhold Niebuhr

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After President Obama cited Christian theologian and ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971) as one of his favorite philosophers, the blogosphere erupted with commentary on what this might portend for the foreign policy of the new administration. Niebuhr had been known as the "pastor to the Presidents," with many, including Jimmy Carter, mentioning his influence on their moral reasoning. In recognition of his lasting impact on the Presidency, Lyndon Johnson awarded Niebuhr the Medal of Freedom in 1964. Pundits have had a field day speculating on the possible implications of Obama's self-defined connection to the ethics of Niebuhr. Will the foreign policy decision-making of the Obama administration thus mirror that of Carter, or that of other past presidents influenced by Niebuhr?

Mark Tooley describes Niebuhr as "probably the 20th century's finest ethicist in the liberal Protestant tradition," representing the school of "Christian realism." The rise of Nazism led Niebuhr to believe in a "transcendent evil" and he supported the war against Hitler. He criticized pacifists and Christian idealists who thought that force could never be justified (Tooley, 2009). Instead, Niebuhr argued: "Since reason is always, to some degree, the servant of interest in a social situation, social injustice cannot be resolved by moral and rational suasion alone, as the educator and social scientist usually believes. Conflict is inevitable, and in this conflict power must be challenged by power" (Niebuhr, 1932: *xiv-xv*). But even when force is justified, as in World War II (which he believed was a just war), he maintained that there were moral limits to the use of military power. Niebuhr, for example, criticized the Allied bombing of cities and questioned the use of nuclear weapons by the United States in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After World War II, he supported the efforts to contain Communism, but he strongly opposed the Vietnam War, and in general thought that U.S. involvement in unwinnable land wars in Asia was unwise (Tooley, 2009).

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Niebuhr explained his views of human nature and politics in his influential book, *Moral Man and Immoral Society,* which was later cited by the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., in his "Letter from Birmingham City Jail." In this work, Niebuhr asserts that people are capable of doing good, but groups are driven by "predatory self-interest." Niebuhr explains: "Individuals have a moral code which makes the actions of collective man an outrage to their conscience.... [This] symbolizes one of the tragedies of the human spirit: its inability to conform its collective life to its individual ideals. As individuals, men believe that they ought to love and serve each other and establish justice between each other. As racial, economic, and national groups, they take for themselves whatever their power can command" (Niebuhr, 1932: 9).

During a 2007 interview with *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, Obama explained what he learned from Niebuhr and why he called Niebuhr his "favorite philosopher." "I take away," Brooks quoted Obama as saying, "the compelling idea that there's serious evil in the world and hardship and pain. And we should be humble and modest in our belief that we can eliminate those things. But we shouldn't use that as an excuse for cynicism and inaction. I take away...the sense that we have to make these efforts knowing they are hard, and not swinging from naive idealism to bitter realism" (Brooks, 2007).

Great-nephew Gustav Niebuhr points out that Obama's political rhetoric often reflects Niebuhr's worldview. He notes, for example, that both Obama and his great-uncle avoid moral absolutes (i.e., good versus evil; you're with us or you're against us) and realize that "the U.S. is not always right and its enemies not always evil." Gustav Niebuhr pointed to Obama's Cairo speech to the Arab world, in which the president acknowledged the U.S. role in undermining and helping to overthrow a democratically elected government in Iran in the 1950s and avoided a "clash of civilizations" framework that can imply that the United States is free of moral stain. Gustav Niebuhr continues: "We can't see ourselves as the ultimate arbiter for what's good and moral. Reinhold would say to do that is to claim a perfectionism that doesn't belong to human beings" (Blake, 2010).

There were definite connections between Niebuhr's ethics and the moral framework put forward by Obama in his Nobel speech. After acknowledging the power of the nonviolent civil rights movement by declaring that he was a "living testimony to the moral force of nonviolence," Obama went on to argue that force is at times necessary and stated: "A nonviolent movement could not have halted Hitler's armies." "Negotiations cannot convince al Qaeda's leaders to lay down their arms." These sentiments clearly echo Niebuhr's critique of Christian pacifists (Obama, 2009).[1]

Obama Defines a "Just War"

George Bush was clearly not interested in the limitations on force outlined in "just war" theory when he decided to circumvent diplomacy and preemptively in-

vade and occupy Iraq in 2003. The just war ethical framework on the use of force did not appear to affect his foreign policy. Bush administration officials, of course, tried to justify their actions with moral language (good versus evil) and utilitarian calculations (the ends justify the means). Yet, these arguments fell way outside the basic understanding of just war theory embodied in *jus ad bellum* (the decision to go to war) and *jus in bello* (the treatment of prisoners and civilians during the war). Even though the Bush administration ignored it, just war theory did provide a useful framework for critiquing and morally evaluating both the U.S. decision to go to war in Iraq and the conduct of the generals and troops in the field.

The tenets of just war theory are well known. In Oslo, Obama summarized the theory as follows: "Over time, as codes of law sought to control violence within groups, so did philosophers, clerics, and statesmen seek to regulate the destructive power of war. The concept of 'just war' emerged, suggesting that war is justified only when it meets certain preconditions: if it is waged as a last resort or in self-defense; if the force used is proportional, and if, whenever possible, civilians are spared from violence."

It is perhaps telling that the president left out some key elements of just war theory. First, and most important, David Cortright notes that Obama "failed to mention the most important principle, the presumption against the use of force" (Cortright, 2010: 8). All just war theories that I know accept the idea that there is no justice in war. The whole point of the framework is to put limits on the government's legitimate use of violence as an instrument of foreign policy. In fact, all interpretations of just war theory recognize the injustice of war itself. Since modern warfare, in particular, involves the killing of innocents (civilians), it is fundamentally unjust. And thus, everything possible must be done to avoid it. Only if all that effort fails can war be waged following strict ethical standards in the fighting.

Cortright points to the ethical standard of "probability of success," another key element of just war theory ignored by Obama. "Military power should not be used in a futile cause or in circumstances where disproportionate force may be needed to succeed" (Cortright, 2010: 8). If the odds of success are small, a nation is not to unleash the fury and destruction of war. To many observers, this criterion was not adequately considered in the preparation of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In fact, in both of these countries the U.S. military has been forced to reconceptualize their mission, since military force alone proved to be a violent dead end. The U.S. military is now engaged in "nation-building" programs designed to win over the "hearts and minds" of the people in Iraq and Afghanistan. These new directions were not part of the original war planning and, instead, represent a last-ditch effort to save both operations.

Justice in war (*jus in bello*) is widely understood and accepted by the U.S. public, government, and military. Under international and national law, U.S. soldiers are seen as responsible for their actions during a war. They will be prosecuted for war crimes and are to report those who commit acts of violence against civilians.

Soldiers are to act to prevent and, if that fails, report acts of torture and other war crimes committed in battle.

Justice of war (*jus ad bellum*) concerns the justice surrounding a nation's decision to invade another state. As Obama noted in Oslo, the war must be a last resort, in self-defense, and proportional. If these stringent criteria are not met, the war is then illegal and/or unethical and the killing is not justifiable. The chief British prosecutor at Nuremberg stated this position clearly: "The killing of combatants is justifiable...only where the war itself is legal. But where the war is illegal...there is nothing to justify the killing and these murders are not to be distinguished from those of any other lawless robber bands" (Walzer, 1977: 38).

Accordingly, it can be argued, that a soldier is only required to follow "just" orders. A soldier must refuse immoral, illegal, or unethical orders both in the taking of the country into war (*jus ad bellum*) and in the treatment of prisoners and civilians during the war (*jus in bello*). This position is, of course, controversial. Some argue that a soldier does not have the information to be able to access whether the leader's decision to go to war is "just." A young private, 18 or 19 years old may not be aware of the legal case against U.S. actions in Iraq and thus has a limited amount of moral responsibility for the decision to engage in this war. As Michael Walzer (1977: 38–39) observes, the soldier is protected here by his or her ignorance. Yet degrees of moral responsibility rise up the chain of command. Lieutenant colonels, platoon leaders, battalion commanders, generals, and presidents do have the knowledge at their fingertips to access the legal and moral arguments for the intervention. They have a high duty to oppose illegal and unethical wars. Obama clearly agrees that a president has distinctive ethical duties of a more demanding nature than the moral responsibilities of a private citizen or a soldier. In fact, Obama's ethics appear to be strongly influenced not only by Niebuhr, but also by Machiavelli.

Obama Embraces Machiavelli's Two Moralities

In his Peace Prize speech, Obama made the following moral distinction between ethics of a private citizen versus that of a president:

> There will be times when nations—acting individually or in concert—will find the use of force not only necessary but morally justified.
>
> I make this statement mindful of what Martin Luther King said in this same ceremony years ago—"Violence never brings permanent peace. It solves no social problem: it merely creates new and more complicated ones." As someone who stands here as a direct consequence of Dr. King's life's work, I am living testimony to the moral force of non-violence. I know there is nothing weak—nothing passive—nothing naïve—in the creed and lives of Gandhi and King.
>
> But as a head of state sworn to protect and defend my nation, I cannot be

> guided by their examples alone. I face the world as it is, and cannot stand idle in the face of threats to the American people. For make no mistake: evil does exist in the world.... To say that force is sometimes necessary is not a call to cynicism—it is a recognition of history; the imperfections of man and the limits of reason.

Obama here echoes the well-known ethics of Niccolò Machiavelli, who argued that the welfare of the homeland had to be protected at all costs and thus sought to refine the political and military methods necessary to protect the state. Such methods would lie outside one's personal morality. These actions and methods may, in fact, be morally detestable to one's personal code of ethics. But, while a private individual has the luxury of living a morally pure life, this route is not an option for the Prince or President. When a leader makes himself or herself available for the welfare of others, he or she has a moral duty to protect the state. There are thus two moralities, two alternative ethical frameworks, and two conflicting systems of values (Berlin, 1971).

Similarly, Obama argues that "war is sometimes necessary, and war is at some level an expression of human feelings." Later, he states, "I—like any head of state—reserve the right to act unilaterally if necessary to defend my nation.... All responsible nations must embrace the role that militaries with a clear mandate can play to keep the peace." The protection of society may require harsh, brutal methods, but this is seen as necessary. Machiavelli's harsh and terrifying methods are well known, but they were designed for a specific purpose: a patriotic desire to protect and secure the nation. As he put it, to protect the state it is necessary for a leader to "have learned how to be other than good."[2] From this perspective, immoral actions (assassinations, denial of due process, or torture) are permitted in the pursuit of a society's basic interests. In exceptional circumstances, such acts may be acceptable and necessary to protect the state. There is no moral conflict here.

Realists often argue that survival in a wicked and corrupt world depends upon the willingness to use immoral means. Such actions as preventive war and torture are thus not in themselves necessarily right or wrong, but rather are evaluated on a case-by-case basis for their overall utility. Realists could approve of these actions if they protected the long-term interests of the nation. If preventive war and torture, however, were thought to create a more dangerous international system overall and thus threaten the security of the nation, most realists would oppose these policies. In this vein, Obama argues that even the United States faces limits on the types of force the state may use. Brutality and torture can backfire and undermine security. As Machiavelli made clear, Princes and Presidents must beware of exciting hatred, for hatred will destroy you in the end (Machiavelli, 1992: 40, 43).

In Oslo, Obama limited the use of force as follows:

> Even as we make difficult decisions about going to war, we must also think clearly about how we fight it.... Where force is necessary, we have

a moral and strategic interest in binding ourselves to certain rules of conduct. And even as we confront a vicious adversary that abides by no rules, I believe that the United States of America must remain a standard bearer in the conduct of war. That is what makes us different from those whom we fight. This is a source of our strength. That is why I prohibited torture. That is why I ordered the prison at Guantanamo Bay closed. And that is why I have reaffirmed America's commitment to abide by the Geneva Conventions. We lose ourselves when we compromise the very ideals that we fight to defend. And we honor those ideals by upholding them not just when it is easy, but when it is hard.

Obama's Foreign Policy: Oslo Compromised

Obama was elected on a promise of "change." In his foreign policy, the new president has brought about significant change, ending some of the most egregious and radical measures of the Bush administration. For example, Obama has called for the end to torture and indefinite detention; an end to the denial of habeas corpus and the granting of legal representation; a limiting of the use of presidential "signing statements" that nullify laws passed by Congress; and an end to the unilateral cancellation of treaties in defiance of Congress and the Constitution. Obama ordered Guantánamo to be closed within a year (yet later had to reverse this commitment). He abandoned George W. Bush's claim of inherent executive authority and instead insisted that the power to detain "enemy combatants" be found within the laws of war. Obama asserts the right to detain only those who provided "substantial support" to al Qaeda and the Taliban. All of this signified a significant improvement in Washington's attitude and approach to international law.

Yet in his Nobel speech, Obama articulated a traditional realist approach to statecraft and war. This approach has informed the direction of the administration's foreign policy around the world. For example, the president's endorsement of the basics of "just war" theory for primarily pragmatic rather than moral reasons, and his proclaimed limitations on the use of violence by the state—e.g., adherence to the Geneva Conventions and the ban on the use of torture—are traditional positions adhered to by all post-World War II administrations (with the exception of George W. Bush). In fact, after examining Obama's actions, it is difficult not to draw the conclusion that the Obama administration represents more continuity than change in the overall foreign policy of the United States.

It is thus not surprising to see the president quickly compromise the ethical commitments and principles he articulated in Oslo. In his drive for "victory" in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the war with al Qaeda, Obama, as a pragmatic political realist, has been willing to set aside legal and moral principles and commitments. The administration seems caught in a static worldview of the 20th century, and unwilling to conceptualize a foreign policy fundamentally based on international law and human rights. Instead, we see a return to military approaches with a skirting

of the laws, deemphasizing ethics—all of which will have extremely negative long-term consequences for the safety of the American people. Examine the following:

• Obama pledged in Oslo to protect civilians in warfare and adhere to norms of "discrimination" between civilians and combatants. While Obama stated that in waging war "whenever possible, civilians [should be] spared from violence," he acknowledged that in "today's wars, many more civilians are killed than soldiers." It is thus necessary for the United States to "adhere to standards that govern the use of force." Unfortunately, these moral commitments are difficult to reconcile with the administration's increasing use of remote-control drone air strikes in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

David Kilcullen, counterinsurgency adviser to General David Petraeus from 2006 to 2008, and Andrew Exum, an Army officer in Iraq and Afghanistan from 2002 to 2004, document how the steady increase in the use of drones in military operations in Pakistan created a "siege mentality among Pakistani civilians." By the middle of 2009, Kilcullen and Exum assert that the last three years of drone strikes had "killed about 14 terrorist leaders. But, according to Pakistani sources, they have also killed some 700 civilians. This is 50 civilians for every militant killed—a hit rate of 2 percent—hardly 'precision.'" Though Obama officials dispute these figures, it is overwhelmingly clear that there are large and unacceptable numbers of civilian deaths and that the principle of "discrimination" and the protection of civilians in warfare is not being respected. Kilcullen and Exum note a further consequence of this drone warfare: "Every one of these dead noncombatants represents an alienated family, a new desire for revenge, and more recruits for a military movement that has grown exponentially even as drone strikes have increased.... The persistence of these attacks on Pakistani territory offends people's deepest sensibilities, alienates them from their government, and contributes to Pakistan's instability." Finally, Kilcullen and Exum remind us that while drone strikes in Somalia in 2005 and 2006 did kill individual militants, public anger over the civilian deaths solidified the power of Islamic extremists. Over reliance on drone warfare in Afghanistan could lead to a similar result (Kilcullen and Exum, 2009).

Philip Alston, the United Nations special rapporteur on extrajudicial executions, asserted that the expanded use of armed drones by the United States was undermining global constraints on the use of military force. The logical outcome of the American example could be a chaotically violent world as the new weapons technology inevitably spreads. Alston thus called on the United States to exercise greater restraint in its use of drones in Pakistan, Yemen, and elsewhere. Alston stated that the U.S. example could quickly lead to a dystopia in which dozens of countries are carrying out "competing drone attacks" outside their borders against "terrorists." Alston continued: "I'm particularly concerned that the United States seems oblivious to this fact when it asserts an ever-expanding entitlement for itself to target individuals across the globe" (Savage, 2010).

P.W. Singer raises an additional ethical issue in the use of "robotic warfare" by the United States. Singer analyzes how the robotic revolution is changing the experience of war itself, removing the human suffering from those inflicting the carnage. Singer writes:

> This is leading some of the first generation of soldiers working with robots to worry that war waged by remote control will come to seem too easy, too tempting. More than a century ago, General Robert E. Lee famously observed, "It is good that we find war so horrible, or else we would become fond of it." He didn't contemplate a time when a pilot could "go to war" by commuting to work each morning in his Toyota to a cubicle where he could shoot missiles at an enemy thousands of miles away and then make it home in time for his kid's soccer practice. As our weapons are designed to have ever more autonomy, deeper questions arise. Can the new armaments reliably separate friend from foe? What laws and ethical codes apply? What are we saying when we send out unmanned machines to fight for us? What is the "message" that those on the other side receive? Ultimately, how will humans remain masters of weapons that are immeasurably faster and more "intelligent" than they are? (Singer, 2009; Mayer, 2009).

• Obama pledged in Oslo to "adhere to standards that govern the use of force," to "abide by the Geneva Conventions," and be a "standard bearer in the conduct of war." A central element of the laws of war is the banning of extralegal, arbitrary, and summary executions. This fundamental norm is found not only in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 3), but also in Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which recognizes the inherent right of every person to life, adding that this right "shall be protected by law" and that "no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of life." Furthermore, the ICCPR in Article 4, paragraph 2, provides that exceptional circumstances (public emergencies, etc.) may *not* be invoked to justify any derogation from the right to life and security of the person. The Fourth Geneva Convention and various other treaties, resolutions, and declarations also contain provisions directly related to the ban on extralegal, arbitrary, and summary executions.

Yet the Obama administration has approved extralegal, arbitrary, and summary executions. For example, the United States has targeted for killing an American cleric, Anwar al-Awlaki, who is suspected of encouraging and planning terrorist attacks against the United States. According to *The New York Times*, the government authorized the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to "in effect, execute one of its own citizens far from a combat zone, with no judicial process and based on secret intelligence." The American-born radical cleric is hiding in Yemen. Although a court warrant would have been needed to eavesdrop on this terrorism suspect, the National Security Council requires no judicial review to designate him for death.

As Vicki Divoll, a former CIA lawyer put it: "Congress has protected Awlaki's cellphone calls. But it has not provided any protections for his life. That makes no sense" (Shane, 2010).

Law Professor David Cole (2010) commented on how little public outcry arose from the news that "the president had decided to kill an American without charges, without a jury, without a lawyer, and without a trial.... By contrast, President Bush's assertion of the power to detain two Americans without trial—Yaser Hamdi and Jose Padilla—led to two Supreme Court cases and thousands of news articles, op-eds, and talk show debates.... In our peculiar post-9/11 world, it is apparently less controversial to kill a suspect in cold blood than to hold him in preventive detention." Cole goes on to note that the Obama administration has killed more suspected terrorists than it has captured. Obama ordered more drone attacks in his first year than Bush did in two full presidential terms.

International humanitarian law requires that if an enemy combatant can be captured rather than killed, the government is required to pursue that course. It may be that Awlaki cannot be apprehended and as a "belligerent" is a proper target. But, as Cole notes, "the American public just doesn't know. Are we simply to trust our government to make the right call? That's what the Bush administration argued about the men in Guantánamo—yet more than 500 of them have been released, suggesting that they were not, as claimed, 'the worst of the worst.' Unlike a detainee, a dead man cannot be released when the government realizes it has made a mistake" (Cole, 2010). An example of such an error occurred in 2004, when CIA officers seized a German citizen, Khaled el-Masri and held him in Afghanistan for months before acknowledging that they had the wrong man. Former CIA lawyer Divoll asks: "What if we had put him on the kill list?" (Shane, 2010).

• Obama pledged in Oslo to not "stand idly by" when nations "violate international law by brutalizing their own people. When there is genocide in Darfur; systematic rape in Congo; or repression in Burma—there must be consequences." Yet the Obama administration exerts very little pressure on Sudanese President al-Bashir, despite his indictment by the International Criminal Court for genocide (Knowlton, 2009). Activists have harshly criticized the administration by for offering Bashir too many "carrots," while imposing very few "sticks." Obama's special envoy to Sudan, Scott Gration, made the bizarre statement that he intended to win over Bashir with "cookies...gold stars, smiley faces, handshakes, agreements, talk, engagement." Gration also proposed that Sudan be taken off the U.S. terrorism list, laying the groundwork to lift the sanctions previously levied on Khartoum. In addition, the United States has not pressured China over its complicity with the violence in the Sudan. China has invested more than $9 billion in oil and has refused to back multilateral actions against Bashir (Allott, 2010; Norris, 2010). Meanwhile, the violence in Darfur and Sudan continued throughout 2009 and 2010. Eyewitness reports documented continual aerial bombardment of villages and attacks on civilian populations. Bashir kicked out aid agencies that were sup-

porting survivors of sexual violence and trying to protect thousands of women and girls from rape. Bashir continues to deny access to the U.N. to investigate attacks on civilians. Furthermore, there are areas in the Sudan where humanitarian agencies are simply not allowed to go (MacFarquhar and Simons, 2009; VOA News, 2010). Moreover, the Obama administration continues to face a ticking time bomb in Southern Sudan. In January 2011, Southern Sudan voted overwhelmingly for independence. If Bashir does not allow this separation to occur, the most likely result will be an escalation and intensification of the horrific violence between the north and the south (Biar, 2010; Prunier and Fick, 2010).

• Obama's first formal National Security Strategy (NSS), released in May 2010, emphasized diplomatic engagement and international alliances, while distancing the United States from the Bush administration's focus on unilateral American power and the right to wage preemptive war.[3] Yet the Obama NSS also embraces U.S. primacy in world affairs and reflects a basic continuity with the Bush years. In an echo of the Bush NSS, Obama declares that the United States "will maintain the military superiority that has secured our country, and underpinned global security, for decades." Obama's NSS continues the Bush precedent of using the "state secrets" act to withhold information from courts in terrorism cases, although arguing for more limited use. As with his Oslo speech, Obama's NSS signals a basic historical continuity in the overall direction of U.S. foreign policy (Sanger and Baker, 2010; Baker, 2010).

• Controversial policies instituted by George W. Bush in the "war on terror" have continued throughout Obama's first years. For example, CIA Director Leon Panetta stated that he intended to continue the policy of "extraordinary rendition," whereby prisoners are sent to foreign countries in which they often face torture or other cruel and inhuman treatment. He also stated the need to continue detaining terrorism suspects indefinitely without trials, even if they were arrested far from a war zone. The Obama administration also endorsed the Bush argument in court that a lawsuit by former CIA detainees should be shut down based on the "state secrets" doctrine (Savage, 2009; Schwartz, 2009). Obama has refused to release either photographs of "enhanced interrogation" or the documents describing the 92 interrogation videotapes illegally destroyed by the CIA (Perez and Gorman, 2009; Smith and Warrick, 2009). And the president is not interested in investigating illegal activities committed by the previous administration; there will be neither prosecutions nor an impartial "truth commission" to establish a clear record and help to prevent future abuses.

Conclusion

During his first years in office, Obama has cleared the air of the more noxious elements and arrogance of the Bush years. No longer is the world subject to the high moralizing and simplistic Manichaean reasoning of the Bush ideologues, whose urgent struggle over "good versus evil" pitted us against nations that are either "with

us or against us." Instead, Obama talks about multilateralism and mutual interests. Furthermore, he has sought to invigorate the nuclear nonproliferation regime and embarked, with Russia, on a potentially significant path toward reducing the world's nuclear arsenals. Obama's speech in Oslo referred to international relations beyond state interest and old divisions, "an insistence that there's something irreducible that we all share."

Human rights did not play a prominent role in Obama's foreign policy platform during his presidential campaign. Instead, he expressed admiration for the first President Bush and his national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft, while highlighting three areas: withdrawing from Iraq, refocusing on Afghanistan, and reengaging with friends and enemies around the world (Packer, 2010). In office, Obama has often acted like a traditional political realist, calibrating American interests country-by-country and avoiding moral pronouncements about democracy or human rights. After the Bush years of misdirected unilateralism and robust assertions of military power, such realist pragmatism has a refreshing quality.

Unfortunately, the moral limits to such an approach are all too clear in the many examples cited above—from drone missiles attacks to targeted assassinations. Obama and the foreign policy establishment seem unable to conceptualize a new foreign policy framework for the new century. Instead, the tired old realist prescriptions are being recycled. Historically, power politics has led to continual violence and wars, and perhaps even more important, caused the United States to ignore the underlying structural violence[4] infecting the current world system.

At its best, the Nobel Peace Prize Committee recognizes individuals who conceptualize politics as "the art of the impossible," successfully challenging the status quo to bring about constructive change for peace. For example, it was "impossible" for Wangari Maathai to lead a movement to plant a million trees (a million trees!) in Kenya; yet, she did it.[5] It was impossible for Nelson Mandela to lead a movement to end apartheid (end apartheid!) in South Africa; yet, he did it. It was impossible to conceptualize a way for the world to eliminate all land mines (abolish all land mines!); yet, this is exactly what the International Campaign to Ban Land Mines and Jody Williams accomplished. And it was impossible for the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to lead a nonviolent movement to end the violence of segregation and protect basic civil rights for minorities (end segregation!) in the United States; yet, he did it.

At its worst, the Nobel Peace Prize Committee recognizes individuals who conceptualize politics as "the art of the possible" and accept the limitations of the world's economic and political systems. Most notoriously, this framework led the committee to award the "Peace" prize to Henry Kissinger, despite his egregious and bloody actions in Southeast Asia and Latin America.

In presenting the award to Barack Obama, the Nobel Peace Prize Committee stated: "Obama has as President created a new climate in international politics. Multilateral diplomacy has regained a central position, with emphasis on the role

that the United Nations and other international institutions can play. Dialogue and negotiations are preferred as instruments for resolving even the most difficult international conflicts. The vision of a world free from nuclear arms has powerfully stimulated disarmament and arms control negotiations. Thanks to Obama's initiative, the United States is now playing a more constructive role in meeting the great climatic challenges the world is confronting. Democracy and human rights are to be strengthened" (Norwegian Nobel Committee, 2009). The selection Committee seemed to feel that Obama was somewhere in the middle between those who see politics as the "art of the possible" and those who see it as the "art of the impossible." Perhaps that is exactly where he is.

NOTES

1. All quotes from Obama's Nobel speech in this article can be found at Obama (2009).

2. I expand on Machiavelli's ethics in an earlier article in *Social Justice*; see Felice (2008). Though Machiavelli did not believe that "might makes right," he did argue that the ends justify the means. Machiavelli makes this point unambiguously clear in the forty-first chapter of the third book of his *Discourses on Livy*: "That advice deserves to be noted and observed by any citizen who finds himself counseling his fatherland, for where one deliberates entirely on the safety of his fatherland, there ought not to enter any consideration of either just or unjust, merciful or cruel, praiseworthy or ignominious; indeed every other concern put aside, one ought to follow entirely the policy that saves its life and maintains its liberty" (Machiavelli, 1996: 301).

3. The May 2010 "National Security Strategy" is available online at *www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf*. See also Karen DeYoung (2010).

4. Structural violence refers to the denial of subsistence rights to the most vulnerable sectors as a result of the workings of economic, political, and social institutions.

5. The Green Belt Movement, founded by Nobel Laureate Wangari Maathai, has now planted over 45 million trees across Africa. See The Green Belt Movement homepage at *http://gbmna.org/w.php?id=13*; "Wangari Maathai, Nobel Laureate, on Planting Trees and Protecting Forests," *EarthSky* (October 26, 2009). Available at *http://earthsky.org/human-world/wangari-maathai-says-that-trees-play-vital-role-in-reducing-greenhouse-gases*.

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