

## Staying Serious: Answers to the Warniks

Wade L. Huntley | May 2003

On the eve of the war in Iraq, Pete Du Pont published an essay in the *Wall Street Journal* entitled “Getting Serious: Questions for the Peaceniks” (online at <http://www.opinionjournal.com/columnists/pdupont/?id=110003194>). Du Pont posed six “familiar” questions “we ought to be asking the peace protesters.” Although Du Pont’s tone is depreciatory and cynical, the challenge to peace advocacy that the questions convey merits serious response, especially in light of the neoconservative exultancy that the disposition of the Iraq war has elicited.

Before turning to these questions, it is necessary to consider: who exactly are the “peaceniks” about whom Du Pont is concerned? If by peacenik Du Pont means the pacifist position that views all acts of war under any circumstances as unjustified, then I do not qualify. I acknowledge the right of collective self-defense as traditionally defined in just war doctrine. But, then, peace advocacy has never been limited to total pacifism.

On the other hand, to have opposed the war on Iraq does not by itself make one a peacenik either. Many people opposed this war for a myriad of reasons. I myself considered Washington’s initiation of war on Iraq as both an ethical breach and a practical mistake. But, peace advocacy is more than opposition; it is defined not by what it opposes but by what it proposes.

Presumably Du Pont was not addressing his questions to only pacifists or to all opponents of the war. However, the community of peace advocates is itself amorphous and kaleidoscopic. If I am indeed one of the “peaceniks” from whom Du Pont was seeking his answers, it is because I support the following convictions:

- Peace is more than the absence of war. This is no mere slogan of peace advocates but rather a philosophical statement with genuine content. For example, Hobbes’ famous concept of a “state of nature”—often used by modern realists to describe contemporary international relations—was not

merely a condition of open warfare but rather a condition in which, even absent warfare, the fear of violent conflict dominates life. In this same vein, peace advocates seek not merely to end military conflict but to end the fear of militarized violence, whether it stems from interstate conflict, domestic lawlessness, or oppressive government. Note a key implication of this last point: no peace advocate would consider oppressive government a peace solution. Political freedom is a precondition of peace—this is one of the ways in which peace is more than the absence of war.

- Peace is possible. Confronting the viewpoint that propensity to violence is intrinsic to human nature and that fighting and suffering are permanent features of human relations, peace advocates contend that peace is a concrete, realizable aim, not a utopian chimera. And history demonstrates the reality of this position. We see progress toward peace in the global delegitimization and abolition of human slavery. We also see this progress in the birth and spread of liberal democratic governance in the modern age. Indeed, most peace advocates see democracy as a great principle, and they simply exhort polities calling themselves free and democratic live up to these claims in practice.
- Each of us, as individuals, is morally bound to work to bring peace into our lives and our world, insofar as we are able. Hobbes himself saw this duty as the “first law of nature”: “That every man, ought to endeavour Peace, as farre [sic] as he has



hope of obtaining it.” For Kant, the genuine possibility of peace meant that the individual duty to seek peace is a categorical imperative. For peace advocates, building peace is not only a mandate of conscience but also a social responsibility, usually requiring political action—and thus most peace advocates are peace activists as well. This moral motivation does not entail pacifism, but it does firmly reject the Clausewitzian formulation that war is merely “politics by other means.”

- Building genuine peace requires, among other things, holding agents of war accountable for their actions in both moral and practical terms. As the Bush administration commenced its march toward war on Iraq, peace advocates helped rouse the citizens of the United States and people throughout the world to insistently press the administration to justify its compulsion in terms of both U.S. national interests and U.S. fidelity to the ethical norms of international behavior. If peace advocates were unable to stop the war, they were able to help establish the terms of reference by which the current administration may be held accountable—to U.S. voters, to the global audience, and to history. In this, peace advocacy tested and exercised the institutions of American democracy, compensating for their inevitable atrophy under a steady diet of sugar-pill patriotism, and doing American democracy a significant service in the process.

On the basis of these principles, let me now turn to Du Pont’s six questions.

### 1. Peace is important, but is peace without freedom acceptable?

This one is easy: of course not. As I noted above, peace advocates consider freedom to be a necessary precondition of peace. Freedom in this context means, minimally, eliminating fear of militarized violence, whether arising from interstate conflict, domestic lawlessness, or oppressive government. Such

freedom includes the capacity to think and speak freely and to exercise individual and collective control over the terms of one’s life (self-determination).

Let us consider the cases of freedom deprivation that Du Pont mentioned—Soviet gulag communism, Mao’s Cultural Revolution, Pol Pot’s bloody Cambodian reign, and (currently) Robert Mugabe’s Zimbabwe and Kim Jong-il’s North Korea. Each of these Du Pont described as countries “at peace.” Few peace advocates would agree!

The deeper answer to Du Pont’s question is this: just because peace without freedom is unacceptable does not mean that war in the name of freedom is always justified. This is especially true in the nuclear age, in which the ancient Greek adage, “Let justice be done, even if the world shall perish,” now connotes a prospect too real to serve as a simple proclamation of principle.

One must notice that in none of the cases Du Pont mentions did the United States launch a military invasion in the name of restoring freedom. Is Du Pont now advocating a U.S. intervention in Zimbabwe? Probably not.

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One may recall several other freedom-based uprisings that the United States failed to support with force of arms: Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Iraq in 1991. At the risk of getting too far afield, one might also mention the countless liberation movements of the past century that

the United States has actively suppressed in the name of anticommunism (no less cynically than the Soviet Union’s undercutting of foreign communist movements in the name of its own national interests).

Du Pont concludes that war is awful, but “enslaved peoples and peace without freedom are worse.” Yet, would Du Pont really have been willing to risk nuclear war to provide U.S. military support to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution? Would Du Pont really have supported further loss of U.S. soldiers’ lives in Indochina to prevent Pol Pot’s murderous reign? I

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suspect not. In fact, conservative realists frequently prioritize national security and global stability above defense of freedom in specific cases (sometimes in the name of freedom in a larger but less immediately tangible sense). Thus one does not have to be a peace advocate to recognize that the real world presents hard choices that cannot be reduced to the simple slogan “peace without freedom is unacceptable.”

2. If you believe that peace is paramount, which of the following wars would you not have fought:

- The Gulf War of 1991, which liberated Kuwait from Iraqi invasion and terrorism?
- World War II against Nazi Germany?
- The American Revolutionary War?
- The Civil War?
- The Korean War?
- The war that freed Afghanistan from the Taliban?

And if at the height of the Berlin blockade in 1948 the Soviet Army had attacked West Germany, Belgium, and France, would you have opposed an American military response?

I have already mentioned that peace advocacy and pacifism are different things; peace advocacy does not entail opposition to national self-defense. But Du Pont’s second question is most illuminating for what it fails to ask: the list of U.S. wars that he presents, stretching back to the American Revolutionary War, is highly selective. So one might easily ask Du Pont which of the following wars, omitted from his list, he would support:

- The Seminole Wars, which forcibly displaced native tribes in Florida to lesser lands west of the Mississippi River, costing the lives of thousands of U.S. troops?
- The Mexican-American War, opposed by many northerners due to its potential to extend slavery, costing thousands of U.S. lives and nearly \$100,000,000?
- The Spanish-American War, in which the United States used the pretext of the sinking of the U.S.S.

Maine to seize Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines from Spain?

- The Philippine-American War, caused by U.S. determination to retain colonial possession of the Philippines and costing thousands of U.S. lives and over 100,000 Philippine civilian lives?
- The U.S.-Vietnam War?

Du Pont’s mention of the hypothetical case of a Soviet attack on West Germany, Belgium, and France at the height of the 1948 Berlin Crisis suggests that he would have viewed a U.S. military response to such an attack wholly justified. Yet Du Pont does not mention the Soviet attack on Afghanistan in 1979. Does he consider it a mistake that the U.S. did not prevent the subjugation of the Afghan people with U.S. troops? Du Pont supports the 1991 Gulf War, which he says “liberated Kuwait from Iraqi invasion and terrorism.” Would not repelling Soviet occupation of Afghanistan have been an equally justifiable defense of the international sovereignty norm and a protection of the Afghan people’s freedom? Or was the Soviet occupation somehow less onerous to the Afghan people than the Taliban regime, whose ouster Du Pont applauds?

As I have mentioned, the point here is that holding freedom to be paramount does not justify every war undertaken in freedom’s name, any more than holding peace to be paramount blinds peace activists to the moral distinctions among different wars. The duty to peace does not proscribe recognizing a necessary and justifiable war when it takes place. However, few wars present the moral clarity of purpose of World War II (and even in that example, valid criticisms have been raised of certain Allied actions, such as the use of atomic bombs on Japan and the failure to bomb infrastructure used for the extermination of Jews).

Certainly, the recent U.S. invasion of Iraq does not rank nearly as high in terms of moral clarity as most of the wars listed in Du Pont’s question. One wonders: would Du Pont claim otherwise?

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### 3. Why will appeasement succeed with Saddam Hussein when it has failed with so many other dictators?

Let us take this question on the terms before it was made moot by the U.S. invasion. In illustrating the question, Du Pont cites the failure of the League of Nations to thwart Hitler's and Mussolini's aggressions and the reticence of the United Nations to use military means in defense of Bosnian Serbs. Both of these Du Pont describes as failures of collective security.

Of course, collective security and appeasement are not at all the same things. Appeasement as a conflict avoidance tactic can be used unilaterally as well as multilaterally. Collective security, by contrast, differs from unilateral military action in that it is sanctioned by a consensus of states with some appeal to international law and is not derived from a singular, self-interested government decision. So, collective security is not appeasement and the effort to achieve a collective security resolution in Iraq was not appeasement, by definition.

Moreover, in both of the historical cases Du Pont cites, the story is not really that collective security failed, but that it was not sufficiently tried. It is worth reviewing these cases for the lessons they yield relative to Iraq.

The United States did not even join the League of Nations, due to the U.S. Senate's rejection of the Versailles Treaty, thus handicapping this collective security mechanism from the outset. U.S. membership could have lent League of Nations mandates the leadership and enforcement muscle they needed. The United States also walked away from any role in the reconstruction of post-WWI Europe, allowing onerous reparations and economic collapse to fuel nationalistic resentments that led to the rise of fascism in Germany and Italy. Learning from these failures to create meaningful collective security mechanisms after WWI, the United States after WWII led cre-

ation of the United Nations and the reconstruction of Europe under the Marshall Plan (note that the Marshall Plan preceded NATO, and that the Soviet Union and Soviet-occupied states were invited to join).

Not unlike the United Nations, the United States, too, was reluctant to involve itself in the Balkans, supporting the UN resolutions but undertaking little effort to develop and lead a coalition for collective security enforcement. Indeed, conservative Republicans were the most vociferous opponents of

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the use of U.S. forces in the Balkans, objecting to "humanitarian intervention" and insisting that U.S. military forces *not* be used unless U.S. interests were directly at stake. Given that Mr. Du Pont in retrospect apparently applauds the Clinton administration's use of military force in Bosnia in 1995, one wonders if Du Pont supported this action at the time. One also wonders whether Du

Pont objected when Mr. Bush, in the 2000 campaign, condemned all "nation building" exercises. If the answer to these questions is no, then Mr. Du Pont appears to be one of the many conservatives fully prepared to appease dictators and ignore oppression when doing so suits U.S. political purposes.

These considerations apply revealingly to the case of collective security enforcement in Iraq. I share the view of war opponents such as Michael Walzer, who saw the collapse of UN inspections in 1998 as a danger to peace and who understood that the hesitancy by France and Russia (among others) was driven less by principle than by self-interest and was partly to blame for the inspections collapse.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, many self-described realists (not just peace advocates) favored containment of Iraq and continued UN inspections rather than war.<sup>2</sup> This position was hardly appeasement.

Peace advocates would have much preferred the United States to have been unambiguously committed to strengthening the enforcement capacity of col-

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lective security mechanisms. However, peace advocates recognized from the outset that Bush administration lip service to collective security was a pretense; the administration's passion for extracting the U.S. from every possible multilateral engagement is palpable and, in some cases, proudly proclaimed. President Bush's challenge to the United Nations last September to enforce its resolutions or risk irrelevance would have been welcome had it not been clearly a political ploy (ultimately failed) to gain UN sanction for the Iraq outcome (regime change) to which the administration had unilaterally committed itself long before.

Peace advocates do not oppose enforcing international law. Quite the contrary: most feel that collective security has yet to be seriously attempted, and many avidly favor strengthening the enforcement capacity of the UN and similar mechanisms. Peace advocates, however, do strongly oppose appropriation of the UN's international legal authority and the ideals of multilateralism to provide a veil of legitimacy for an aggressive and unilateral exercise of military force.

#### 4. May the United States take action to prevent attacks—before they occur—on its territory or people?

The central role of proactive use of military force in the Bush administration's national security policy has cast new attention on an old topic: legitimation of preemption.

Just war doctrine, based on the principles of legitimate self-defense, has long recognized a limited right of preemption. This right has always been restricted by prudential criteria: it must be a last resort, be proportional to the threat, and have a reasonable chance of success. More importantly, a real and imminent threat of attack must exist. Even in its early incarnation in the thought of Hugo Grotius, preemption was never justified merely to "weaken a rising power."

As emerging nationalism and total war technologies qualitatively magnified the dangers of offensive war, international law increasingly emphasized the self-defense limitation of legitimate war making and the imminence-of-attack limitation of legitimate preemp-

tion. Many interpret Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, affirming the right of self-defense "if an armed attack occurs," to forbid preemptive attack of any sort. Many peace advocates would ascribe to this view.

At the same time, peace advocates acknowledge that newly emerging issues, such as humanitarian crises, require that principles for ethical use of military intervention evolve to meet the needs of the times.

Many peace advocates critical of preemption have focused on the almost unlimited scope that the Bush administration allows itself in applying its new national security doctrine. Even measured against standards of legitimate preemption that are more permissive than most peace advocates would allow, the administration's position (both in principle and as applied to Iraq) is virtually unconstrained.

For example, in a 1998 work assessing whether there can be a moral case for preemptive attack to thwart emerging threats from proliferation of nuclear, biological, chemical, or radiological weapons, Brad Roberts (no peacenik) offers six criteria whose satisfaction would establish the "strongest moral case" for U.S. preemptive action:<sup>3</sup>

1. Actual threatened use of such weapons specifically against the United States;
2. Acquisition of such weapons in violation of international law;
3. Concern for broader U.S. regional security guarantees and/or power stability;
4. Approval of presidential action by the U.S. Congress;
5. Backing of the UN Security Council and any relevant regional organization;
6. Satisfaction of the prudential tests of last resort, proportionality, and reasonable chance of success.

Many peace advocates would insist on even more demanding criteria than these (some reject preemption outright). Yet, even by Roberts' criteria, the Bush administration's basis for war against Iraq is sorely wanting:

1. Iraq never threatened the use of such weapons specifically against the United States.
2. Even the Bush administration did not claim that Iraq still had an active nuclear weapons program. Moreover, the administration failed to convince most of the international community that Iraq still possessed biological and chemical weapons prohibited by UN sanctions, and it preempted the inspections process intended to discover these weapons.
3. Iraq's weak military posed no imminent risk to regional stability (as it had 12 years earlier), and the credibility of U.S. security guarantees to Iraq's neighbors was not in peril.
4. President Bush did obtain U.S. congressional approval.
5. President Bush failed to obtain either the backing of the UN Security Council, support from NATO, or even the full cooperation of key NATO ally Turkey.
6. Most of the world views the invasion of Iraq to have been both disproportional to the proven threat and commenced long before other reasonable options were exhausted.

At minimum, the Bush administration appears to have provably failed to meet criteria (1) and (5), demonstrably failed to meet criteria (2), (3), and (6), and satisfied only criterion (4). (Many peace advocates would claim that Bush satisfied none of these criteria—questioning, for example, the sufficiency of the domestic debate underlying U.S. congressional approval).

The example of justified preemption that Du Pont cites—President Roosevelt's order to the Navy in late 1941 to patrol the North Atlantic to defend against German submarines—is nearly as justifiable as any preemptive action can be. In this example, Roosevelt's action—eminently defensive in character—satisfied

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all the prudential criteria as well as the core standard of self-defense against imminent threat.

Peace advocates sorely wish that President Bush would be so prudent. Indeed, by palpably failing to meet even minimal criteria for a moral defense of preemptive war on Iraq, President Bush has probably undermined any hope that a U.S. doctrine of preemptive action could be reconciled to the ethical demands of the international community any time in the foreseeable future.

### 5. If not America, who? If not now, when?

The short answers that peace advocates would answer to these questions are: the United States only if fully supported by the international community, and only when all reasonable alternatives have been exhausted. But the real meaning of Du Pont's question lies in its supporting commentary, which requires explicit attention and response.

Du Pont states: "America's security objectives also call for changing the failed political culture of the Arab region." No peace advocate would support this position. By my reading of the public opinion polls, few Americans would support it either. This messianic vision exceeds even the amoral renderings of classic

*realpolitik*; it is a transformational agenda rekindling the self-righteous divination of nineteenth century Manifest Destiny. One suspects that Du Pont would also concur with Franklin Graham's unapologetic judgment of Islam as a "very evil and wicked religion" and would welcome the Bush administration's unleashing of U.S. evangelism in Iraq as implementation of the requisite remaking of Arab political society in the American image.

Du Pont also states: "People in these nations hate America, because they envy us. Their societies have failed, while democratic capitalism has succeeded." Of course, this is a profoundly ahistorical viewpoint, ignoring the legacies of colonialism and continued

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great power meddling with which Middle Eastern states have had to cope. More to the point, however; if indeed the people of the region “hate” America, it is mainly not from envy but from fear. The Iraq invasion demonstrates that the United States is now an undeterrable power. As the war wanes, the United States is ignoring the destruction of Iraq’s archaeological heritage, elevating a discredited Iraqi exile to leadership, sanctioning anti-Islamic evangelicalism, and acknowledging its intention to maintain military bases in Iraq for the foreseeable future (with undisguised intentions to thereby intimidate Syria and Iran). If indeed U.S. policy interest is, as Du Pont suggests, a wholesale reconstruction of Arab political culture, is the anger and fear of the people of this region really that surprising? Would Americans, confronting a nation implacably committed to the remaking of U.S. political culture by force of arms, feel any less insecurity and compulsion to resist? To answer this last question, we need look no further than U.S. anticommunism throughout the twentieth century.

**6. Finally, Abraham Lincoln said there was no middle ground between freedom and slavery. Can there be a middle ground between freedom and terrorism?**

Slavery involves mass subjugation, publicly, indefinitely, and backed by the authority and coercive instruments of government. It was the last of these qualities that elicited Lincoln’s absolutism: he recognized that a citizenry whose own government condoned slavery in any measure could never truly call itself free or stand as a beacon to the world.

Much terrorism is renegade, secretive, and fugitive. Such terrorism is symptomatic of deeper global maladies. Peace advocates have no sympathy for terrorism, but they judge that tit-for-tat attacks on agents of terrorism treat only the symptoms, not the disease. The world’s pervasive poverty and oppression does not cause terrorism, but the frustration and disaffection these conditions engender do function as a well-spring for the tiny minority (often themselves neither poor nor oppressed) willing to commit graphic violence for sensationalistic effect. Such individuals parasitically depend upon the existence of large com-

munities of suffering people for support and concealment, and they commandeer the resentment in these communities by claiming (often falsely) to be acting on behalf of these communities’ needs. Peace advocates argue that concerted U.S. action to alleviate poverty and oppression worldwide would starve and expose such terrorists both materially and ideologically and, in so doing, would thwart terrorism in the long run more effectively than a thousand military strikes. In short, freedom, not military force, is the real antidote to terrorism.

State-sponsored terrorism does display many of the characteristics of slavery. At this level, peace advocates would concur with Lincoln’s absolutism: a citizenry whose own government condones terrorism in its name cannot yet call itself free nor represent itself as a model to other nations. Peace advocates also believe in exposing and condemning terrorism in all its forms, and therefore, mindful of U.S. aid to authoritarian governments and CIA adventurism over recent decades, they consider it no compromise of their censure of the Taliban’s Afghanistan or Saddam’s Iraq to also point out that the nation of Lincoln itself still stands on a shaky “middle ground.”

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*Wade L. Huntley*  
<[huntley@peace.hiroshima-cu.ac.jp](mailto:huntley@peace.hiroshima-cu.ac.jp)> is an associate professor for security studies at the Peace Institute of the Hiroshima City University and an analyst for *Foreign Policy in Focus* (online at [www.fpiif.org](http://www.fpiif.org)).

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**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Michael Walzer, “N-inspection yes, war no,” *The Daily Yomiuri*, February 1, 2003, p.15.

<sup>2</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, “An Unnecessary War,” *Foreign Policy*, January-February, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Roberts, Brad, “NBC-Armed Rogues: Is There a Moral Case for Preemption?” in Elliott Abrams, ed., *Close Calls: Intervention, Terrorism, Missile Defense, and “Just War” Today* (Washington: Ethics & Public Policy Center, 1998).

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