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Bioethics and Armed Conflict: Moral Dilemmas of Medicine and War

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by a keen observation, one that is rarely mentioned in more critical examinations and that forces us to take fresh stock of such missions: “The most astonishing thing,” he writes, “is that the UN Charter contains absolutely no mention of the word peacekeeping and offers no guidelines as to this form of collective action.” This will be news to many.

The greatest effect of this worthwhile volume is the appreciation one gains for the great complexity of the United Nations and, more to the point, of the tasks it faces. Kennedy also shows the institution to be worthy of a bit more sympathy than many are currently inclined to give it.

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Gross, Michael L. *Bioethics and Armed Conflict: Moral Dilemmas of Medicine and War*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006. 384pp. \$26

Debate rages today in Congress and amid the public on the tolerable limits of coercive interrogation and torture associated with armed conflict, and the alleged complicity of military health care professionals in these purportedly nefarious activities. These allegations make this tome of ethical analysis a pertinent starting point for academics interested in contemporary issues affecting the practice of military medicine during war.

The author is neither a professional soldier nor physician but a former conscript in the Israel Defense Forces, and currently professor of applied and professional ethics in international relations at the University of Haifa. The book confronts multiple subjects of practical relevance, among them such

issues as what patient rights caregivers must respect; how best to distribute scarce material and health manpower resources; which among the wounded should receive priority within the triage process (and the related question of what military utility should be assigned to certain casualties); changed priorities of informed consent and confidentiality among soldiers; the dilemma of torture, ill treatment, and the role of physicians; the legitimacy of physician contribution to the development of chemical and biological weapons; physician civil disobedience and assistance in draft evasion; and the widely presumed but equally debatable status of medical neutrality, impartiality, and immunity during war.

Michael Gross argues that medical ethics in times of armed conflict are not identical to medical ethics in times of peace. Military necessity, reasons of state, and the war effort impinge upon moral decision making and often overwhelm the axioms that animate medical ethics during peacetime. He repeatedly emphasizes that during war the everyday principles of biomedical ethics must compete with equally relevant and conflicting principles anchored in military necessity and national security, where the welfare of the individual has far less importance than the welfare of the state and the political community. During armed conflict, military necessity trumps the right to life, self-determination, and patient welfare. Physicians care for sick and wounded soldiers for reasons different from those applicable to other patients: soldiers are treated to preserve manpower and to protect the vitality of a collective fighting force. In fact, the entire range of moral decision making changes under the exigencies of war. Collective interests overwhelm individual

welfare, and this extends even to the moral authority of the military to enforce its regulations regarding administration of such agents as Anthrax vaccine to military forces, or to new but not yet fully recognized scientific discoveries. Equally provocative is the thesis that medical contributions to interrogational torture may be morally defensible under conditions that offer the possibility of preventing egregious harm to others.

As a treatise addressing contemporary ethical issues in military medicine, this is a useful contribution. Unfortunately, the writer's style at times intermixes elements of the arcane phraseology of the professional academic ethics community. "The uninitiated" must read and reread some passages if they are motivated to comprehend fully the ethical dilemmas being debated and dissected.

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Vego, Milan. *The Battle for Leyte, 1944: Allied and Japanese Plans, Preparations, and Execution*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2006. 479pp. \$55

There have been many books published about the battle for Leyte Gulf. This book, however, is unique, because it is not only a narrative but also a critical analysis of the planning, preparation, and execution of that famous battle as viewed by both the Americans and the Japanese. Milan Vego, professor of military operations at the Naval War College and author of a textbook on operational warfare, is also a former merchant marine officer. He has tackled the subject of this work with much

vigor and depicts the battle with clarity and in great depth.

The book is organized into eleven chapters. Chapters 1 through 5 show how both sides planned and organized for the battle, and chapter 6 discusses the background and operations just before the engagement. However, the heart and soul of the book are in the final section that depicts the battle itself.

Vego begins by noting that in the early days of the Pacific War the Americans split their command arrangements, with General Douglas MacArthur in charge of the South West Pacific Area (SWPA) and Admiral Chester Nimitz commanding the Pacific Ocean Area (POA). This scheme worked well enough until the Leyte operation, when it produced much confusion over command relationships, leading to problems between Fleet Admiral William F. Halsey and Vice Admiral Thomas Kinkaid, Commander Allied Naval Forces that almost lost them the battle. Vego is critical of the delays in communications between various American components. He concludes that the Americans relied too much on Japanese intentions—as interpreted via information gleaned from the MAGIC intercepts—and less on actual capability. He believes that the Americans' strength was in their operational-logistic plans and programs.

However, Vego argues, the Japanese were even worse in comparable ways. Parochial competition between the army and navy cost them dearly. The Japanese had little intelligence that could compare with that of the Americans, and they had serious logistical problems that were never properly resolved.