



Amoral and Acontextual Analysis in an Increasingly Inhumane World

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SYNOPSIS

Much commentary on the war on Iran appears amoral and acontextual. This could normalise a war without clear objectives, along with the resulting death and destruction. That style of analysis is inadequate for the present moment. As Pope Leo has implored of journalists, the focus on war should be through the eyes of the victims.

COMMENTARY

In recent weeks, we have seen many commentaries on the war on Iran, which speculated on military strategy, described the strengths and weaknesses of various weapon systems, and took at face value the dubious claims about concerns for human rights. What has been missing is more than a brief acknowledgement of the real human costs of war.

One could argue that there is a time and place for cold, hard, emotionally distant analysis and a completely different time and place to raise attention to uncomfortable questions, such as deceit and injustice. Students of international relations and strategic studies are traditionally trained to set aside questions of normativity and instead demonstrate in their writing an ability to grapple with events independent of any moral compass. The problem is that this is a false dichotomy, and a deeply impoverishing one.

The rapid and largely uncritical adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) across industries, which poses a real threat to analysts' jobs, is another impetus to focus on what makes us different as human beings. Moral clarity, as part of human intuition, is one of the things that makes us different, and it is a part of our intelligence that we must

prioritise. To merely [restate](#) confused war objectives or count drones is to do something that AI can do and miss the point of why the matters at hand matter at all.

This is not to suggest that everyone's sense of what is right and wrong, justifiable and unjustifiable, or relevant and irrelevant, is the same. The point is that we should be aware of our [positionality](#) and be upfront about it. We should hold our values close and be transparent about them. In situations where a writer is unable to highlight human suffering and inexcusable violence during a war, they should draw attention to complicating facts and inconsistencies. If we merely rehearse a protagonist's talking points in a non-judgemental way, we cause harm by normalising foreign military interventions.

Humanitarian Cost of the War on Iran

The present war on Iran, started by the United States with Israel on 28 February 2026, and since 2 March, involving Lebanon, has highlighted the moral vacuity of most commentaries on international affairs.

In the opening hours of the war, a Tomahawk missile, likely guided by outdated AI, struck the Shajareh Tayyebbeh girls' school in Minab at 10.45 am, killing at least 170. As of March 14, 2026, more than 1,200 Iranian civilians are [reported](#) to have been killed, over 10,000 wounded, and up to 3.2 million temporarily displaced. In Lebanon, 773 people are reported to have been killed, with 830,000 people displaced. This reflects the harsh humanitarian situation faced on the ground.

If one were to write about the potential costs of disruptions to shipping caused by Iran's blockading of the Strait of Hormuz but fail to acknowledge the humanitarian costs that victims of the war have already incurred, the message may ring hollow for many readers. Similarly, to downplay the 87 sailors killed onboard the IRIS Dena, which the US torpedoed off the coast of Sri Lanka on 4 March, and to focus solely on implications for US-India security co-operation, would overlook the human aspect.

Confused Objectives

The stakes are too high for ordinary people, especially those living in smaller or less powerful states, to write about conflict in ways that normalise military interventions by more powerful states. Nothing more than the place of birth separates those of us enjoying peace from those of us losing loved ones to cruise missiles.

Normalisation of the war on Iran happens gradually when commentators fail to remind readers that the war was entirely avoidable and that, remarkably – if not surprisingly – clear and consistent objectives are still yet to be articulated by US President Donald Trump or his Secretary of War, Pete Hegseth. This is a vital context that should accompany the analysis of current events.

Moral Clarity

In the contemporary and fragmenting world, there is a role for religious voices to remind us to put humanity first. That is, religious voices that are truly oriented towards

the well-being of all, regardless of worldview, rather than towards the accumulation of [power](#). On March 16, 2026, Pope Leo XIV rightly [condemned](#) portrayals of war that “transform it into a video game”, urging journalists instead to “show the sufferings that war always brings to people”. He also stated that “the media must guard against the risk of becoming propaganda” by merely platforming those in power. Pope Leo’s comments would equally apply to all global conflicts.

Pope Leo has become a voice of moral clarity in relation to wars in the Middle East and the persecution of vulnerable people there and beyond. Perhaps the perspectives of religious leaders who are consistently drawn to consider those in need and who are somewhat insulated from the pressures of geopolitics will prove invaluable in correcting the consistently amoral and acontextual analysis of international affairs.

Similarly, the World Council of Churches issued a [statement](#) reminding political leaders that “violence will not secure the future of the region; only justice, accountability, and sustained diplomatic engagement can lay the foundations for lasting peace”. As for interreligious bodies, the Secretary General of Religions for Peace Asia urged, “we must end the fighting at once and prioritise the protection and rescue of human lives above all else”.

Analysts can certainly take a steer from Pope Leo and other humane voices without detracting from their own professional expertise. After all, we do not represent nation-states. It would help us to make our work relatable to both policymakers and ordinary people.

Conclusion

If one consistently writes as if one is indifferent to the fate of human beings, then one should not be surprised if a lack of empathy is presumed and ordinary people outside of a small circle of foreign policy watchers gradually tune out. Analysts should keep in mind the value they can provide as human interpreters, beyond the capabilities of AI.

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