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“War” often leaves the mouths of politicians as a game- a combination of cold deadlines and strategies. An expansion of power. A threat vanquished. An acquisition of territory. It is after war that we emerge victorious, elevated by our bravery and our nobility. But Eisenhower's words remind us of the basic definition of war, one that does not include strategy and national lines: to wage war is to assault another nation. And to assault another nation is to assault its innocents.

As much as we may target exclusively the evils of a country, the violent regime that actively threatens American security, it is the poorest, the youngest, and the most vulnerable that will ultimately suffer from our plans. When a country is under attack, its infrastructure begins to unravel; its resources are either destroyed or redirected to the military. Those already living in the most desperate circumstances are stripped of the few hopes they may have previously clung to; even when a stable government attempts to take over, society remains chaotic and dangerous, an environment that does not provide mercy or charity. But above all, we can never reconcile the civilian deaths that will inevitably result from an armed conflict. The very intention of a weapon is to injure- it is created to cause pain. Over 95,000 Iraqi civilians are estimated to have died conflict-related deaths since American involvement in the country in 2003. Clearly, no matter what cause a war is fought for, no matter which side fires the blow, this pain will always spill over, flood-like, to those who are neither soldiers nor terrorists, but innocents trapped in the wrong place and time by their own poverty.

But the thievery Eisenhower spoke of exists beyond the boundaries of faraway, lesser developed nations. In the United States, whose homefront appears so often attached from the battlefield, our own citizens have been robbed by war. Amidst the current economic crisis, defense spending remains a priority, while social programs are the first to be drastically cut, including those programs providing proper nutrition and heating for the disadvantaged- quite literally taking from those who are hungry and cold. But war misproportions more than just our money. When we imagine the creativity and intelligence and labor involved in building the atomic bomb, can we also imagine what those same resources could have accomplished towards poverty? To disease? To education?

War is fundamentally a crime, an act of “theft,” because all humans are fundamentally given certain rights- the right to be free of violence, to be free of want. But when we begin to militarize and prepare for conflict, we gamble with those rights. We turn away from the path of creation, of bringing the possibility of a better world into reality. We move backward, toward destruction and the ignorance of the human condition. Wars are not ours to wage, because human rights are not ours to compromise.