

War, Duties to Protect, and Military Abolitionism

Cécile Fabre* 

Just war theorists who argue that war is morally justified under certain circumstances implicitly assume that establishing the military institutions needed to wage it is also morally justified. The unspoken and unquestioned consensus, both within and outside academia, is very much in favor of a standing military establishment, or SME.

In this paper, I mount a case in favor of a SME. I argue that to wage a morally justified war is often to fulfill, through lethal force, a duty to protect third parties from violations of their fundamental rights. Once we properly consider this fact about war, the burden of proof rests with those who wish to abolish the SME. I begin by setting out and defending an account of war killings as killings in defense of others, in the light of which there is a strong case for setting up and supporting a SME. I then buttress this case by dealing with objections drawn from Ned Dobos's recent book *Ethics, Security, and the War-Machine*.¹

IN DEFENSE OF ARMED FORCES

To wage war is to authorize and commit acts of killing against scores of other human beings. Citizenries are morally permitted to do so only in response to a military aggression infringing on their fundamental rights or on the fundamental rights of others, provided that their war meets the requirements of last resort, reasonable chance of success, proportionality, and discrimination.

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Cécile Fabre, All Souls College, Oxford, United Kingdom; University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom (cecile.fabre@all-souls.ox.ac.uk).

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Consider, first, wars of humanitarian intervention. I take it for granted that there is a duty to protect victims of mass atrocities. Now, international *civilian* peacekeepers (the alternative to a SME) might sometimes be able to stem acts of violence in such conflicts, and thus help to fulfill that duty, notably by acting as shields. It is not likely, however, that they will be able to do so in large-scale internal conflicts. This is not to deny that those nonfighting peacekeeping forces have a role to play: for example, they might be able to minimize violence in some areas or to bear witness to what they see, thereby placing pressure on all parties to bring an end to hostilities. But it is unduly optimistic to suppose that they could operate alone in deep and violent conflicts such as those witnessed in recent years in places such as Syria, Yemen, and Afghanistan.² In those cases, the duty to help necessarily takes the form of a duty to authorize and provide means for the use of *military* force.

Next, consider wars of collective self-defense. Ostensibly, these wars are fought in defense of citizens' collective rights to political self-determination and territorial integrity. However, these interests in political self-determination and territorial integrity are important enough to be protected by rights because, and to the extent that, they are constitutive parts of, or a means to promote, *individual* citizens' autonomy and well-being.³ For example, suppose that our powerful neighbor has long claimed that swathes of our territory in fact rightfully belong to its people. It mounts a military aggression against us and threatens to advance on our capital city and seize power—subjecting us to a foreign military occupation—unless we surrender the territory under dispute. Attempts to resist, even nonviolently, will be met by lethal force. Admittedly, it may be that faced with our systematic nonviolent refusal to cooperate, our neighbor-turned-occupier will decide that the long-term costs of its occupation outweigh whatever benefits it may bring. In the short term, however, some of us will die. To say that we would be justified in waging war is not merely to imply that we each may justifiably defend our collective rights to political self-determination and territorial integrity as a means of defending our individual rights to these things; it is also to imply that we may justifiably do so for the sake of our fellow citizens.

To be clear: violations of the rights to political self-determination and territorial integrity do not always justify the resort to war. A *purely bloodless* invasion, where invaders not only do not threaten to kill us if we resist but, moreover, would not subject us to lethal threats once they occupy our territory, would not provide us with a just cause for war.⁴ In the world as we know it, however, wars are not

bloodless. Large-scale attacks on these two rights are almost always backed by lethal threats. By implication, when our soldiers kill, they do so not merely to protect themselves individually from enemy soldiers' attacks on their lives. They do so to defend each other as well as, crucially, to defend us. When we authorize them to fight on our behalf, we authorize them to fight in our own defense and in defense of our compatriots.

The question, then, is whether we each individually owe it to our fellow citizens to defend them regardless of the fact that, in so doing, we also individually protect ourselves. On some views, we are under a *pro tanto* duty to do so by dint of the fact that the relationship of citizenship grounds associative duties of protection. On other views, wars of so-called collective self-defense are in fact wars waged in defense of our loved ones, to whom we have special protective obligations. On other views still, we are under a duty to our fellow citizens to protect them, not *qua* fellow citizens but *qua* individuals at risk of severe harm. I shall not defend a particular account here. I shall merely say that we sometimes are under a duty to kill, and, *a fortiori*, to support acts of killing, in defense of others.⁵

Suppose, thus, that we are under a *pro tanto* duty to wage war in defense of our compatriots and fellow residents at home, or to protect distant victims of mass atrocities abroad. The next question is whether we are under a duty to take such steps as necessary to ensure that, should those circumstances obtain, we will be in a position to wage war. I believe so.

In a recent article, Chiara Cordelli mounts an illuminating defense of what she calls "prospective duties," on which I draw here.⁶ Suppose that at time t_2 , a child is at risk of drowning in a deep pond and I am the only person on the shore. If the costs I would incur in the rescue are reasonable, I am under a duty to rescue the child. Suppose, however, that I cannot swim. By dint of the principle that "ought" implies "can," I am not under a duty to rescue the child. Now suppose that at time t_1 , I could have foreseen that there would be a reasonably high chance that I would be faced with such a situation *and* I could easily have learned how to swim. Under those circumstances, even though I am not under a duty to save the child at t_2 , my failure at t_1 to prepare for such an eventuality is wrongful. The general principle is this: if I am under a duty to do x at t_2 , and if I can reasonably be expected to assume at t_1 that such an eventuality will arise, I am under a prospective duty at t_1 to ensure that I will be in a position to do x if and when the eventuality does arise.

This might seem an unduly demanding view. Yet, when applied to collective protective endeavors, it offers an apt construal of many of the institutions that we hold

dear—indeed, that many of us regard as the key institutions of a just society. For example, the duties to set up and maintain rescue services and the welfare state can be construed both as duties to help those in need here and now, and as prospective duties to make it possible to help those who will need our help in the future. Moreover, construed as prospective duties, they can take reparative and nonreparative forms. A nonreparative prospective duty is a duty to take steps so as to be in a position to help someone whose future predicament is not the result of our own wrongful acts or omissions. A reparative prospective duty is a duty to take steps so as to be in a position to help someone whose future predicament we wrongfully cause or fail to prevent.⁷ Suppose that we have very good reasons to believe that some of our current (at t_1) policies are likely to cause wrongful harms to some people at t_2 , such that we will then be under a duty to take reparative measures. Suppose further that we either are not willing to change course at t_1 or have overriding moral reasons not to do so. Under these conditions, we ought to take steps at t_1 to ensure that we will be in a position to fulfill reparative duties at t_2 .

Our prospective duties—be they reparative or not—are subject to a no-excessive-cost proviso: If the costs of my taking steps at t_1 to ensure that I can fulfill my protective duties at t_2 are in excess of what I may reasonably be expected to do, then I am not under a prospective duty to take those steps. Furthermore, if my taking the relevant steps at t_1 imposes costs on third parties that *they* may not reasonably be expected to incur, I am not morally permitted to take these steps and, a fortiori, am not under a duty to do so. Those costs include economic costs, the time and effort needed to take those steps, and harms that may befall me or others in doing so.

By parity of reasoning, then, suppose that we can reasonably be expected to foresee at t_1 that there is a reasonably high chance that third parties will be subject at t_2 to severe rights violations backed by lethal military force. For example, this part of the world has a recent history of civil wars, and we have good intelligence from our reliable human sources and geosatellite imagery that one faction is preparing to attack another.⁸ Suppose further that, should such eventuality arise, we would be under a duty to protect innocent victims in that conflict by means of war if we are able to do so. Subject to the no-excessive-cost proviso, we are under a prospective duty at t_1 to take the steps that will make it possible for us to fulfill our duty to protect at t_2 . Insofar as we will not be able to wage war at t_2 unless we have a standing army, we are under a cost-sensitive prospective duty at t_1 to set up and maintain it.

The claim is particularly salient when the duty to go to war in defense of distant strangers is a reparative duty. If we support, or fail to oppose, our government's wrongful decision to sell arms to a dictatorial regime with a track record of committing atrocities against its people, we *can* reasonably be expected to anticipate that we might have to intervene militarily in ensuing civil conflicts in fulfillment of a reparative duty to help, and we are thus under a prospective duty to ensure that we are in a position to do so. Importantly, it stands to reason that we can reasonably be expected to incur greater costs in fulfillment of a reparative duty than in fulfillment of a nonreparative one, and our prospective duty to set up a standing army is accordingly more stringent in reparative cases.

In fact, once we bring into view the fact that waging a just war is, quite often, fulfilling a duty to protect third parties from violations—backed by lethal threats—of their fundamental rights, the burden of proof, far from shifting away from military abolitionists, in fact rests firmly on their shoulders. Suppose I see a child at risk of drowning in a pond known for being very dangerous, and yet I stand still. It behooves me to account for my decision not to rescue him: it is not up to the child, or his parents, or third parties, to show that I ought to rescue him. If I then say that I was not able to swim, it behooves me to explain why I lack such a skill: it is not up to the child, his parents, or third parties to show why I ought to have learned it. The same point applies to war.

THE CULTURAL AND MORAL HARMS OF A SME

In his recent and thought-provoking book *Ethics, Security, and the War-Machine*, Ned Dobos mounts a powerful argument against SMEs. Dobos is no pacifist: he accepts that war can sometimes be morally justified on grounds not dissimilar to those I sketched out above.⁹ But he identifies five cultural and moral harms that accrue from SMEs (in addition to the economic and social harms of diverting resources away from civilian society): (1) the harms done to soldiers who have to be desensitized to violence in order to kill; (2) the heightened risk of coups at the hands of our own armed forces; (3) the heightened risk of military aggressions at the hands of foreign powers; (4) the harms accruing from the deployment of armed forces to unjust war ends; and (5) the harms resulting from the encroachment of military norms into the civilian sphere. Taken together, these harms are such that setting up a SME likely falls foul of the no-excessive-cost proviso.

Dobos's case against a SME is the best one to date. In this section, I discuss four of his objections. I show that their force partly depends on the broader political, social, and institutional context in which armed forces operate, and I then sketch out ways to mitigate them. I do not discuss his own proposal in favor of a civil defense system.¹⁰

The Problem of Moral Injury

Dobos's first objection to a SME concerns the moral injuries sustained by soldiers. By setting up and maintaining a SME, we entrust soldiers with the task of discharging our duty to protect third parties, by lethal means, from severe harms. However, most people experience profound psychological repugnance at the prospect of killing another human being, and acute remorse or regret *ex post*, even if they believe that they were all things considered justified in so doing. We do not think that it is generally wrong, or misguided, to experience those feelings. On the contrary, we tend to think that there is something psychologically and morally wrong with individuals who do not have this reaction (we tend to brand them as psychopaths, in fact). Yet, much of the point of military training—Dobos plausibly shows—consists in drilling these reactions out of soldiers.¹¹ Military training thus inflicts on soldiers a particularly grave *moral injury*—the injury of impairing their fundamental disposition for morally apt reactions to killing another human being. Even if a soldier is eventually able to regain her aversion to killing, the costs of getting herself to that point are not costs that she is under a reasonable duty to incur; it is therefore impermissible to set up institutions—in the form of military academies and armed forces—that require her to incur them.

I agree that the costs attendant on moral injury are in excess of what we may reasonably expect of one another. Note, however, that although the objection works against the conscription of unwilling recruits into combat units, it does not undermine consensual enlistment. To be sure, in the same way as we owe it to soldiers who fight on our behalf to mitigate *ex ante* or to remedy *ex post*, as much as is feasible, the physical and psychological harms they incur in the line of duty, so we owe it to them to “deprogram” their moral desensitization. Dobos rightly notes that there are no such programs. There are also legitimate concerns about the extent to which young and impressionable recruits can validly consent to incur the moral costs of their military training. Nevertheless, the lesson to draw is not that we should dismantle the SME but, rather, that we are permitted to set it up so long as we also set up such programs and rigorously assess enlistees’

ability to consent. If we can fulfill those conditions, the moral injury objection loses its force, and the prospective duty to set up and maintain a SME stands.

The Problem of Coups d'État

Dobos's second objection concerns the risk of coups d'état. Powerful militaries are likely to see and set themselves apart from the civil society that they are supposed to protect—physically (by living on secure military bases), morally (by endorsing values that they believe are antithetical to civilian values), and institutionally (by developing skills that are not easily transferable to the civilian sector). It is often tempting for a military establishment so structured to regard civilians as enemies and to seize power. Societies with a powerful SME are thus vulnerable to military coups d'état. Although stable liberal democracies are less coup prone than dictatorships, they are not coup proof—as recent examples in Honduras, Mali, Thailand, and Turkey demonstrate.

Dobos is right to alert us to these risks.¹² Indeed, throughout the last few months of the 2020 U.S. presidential campaign, many wondered whether the U.S. military would support then-president and commander in chief Donald Trump if he were defeated and attempted to overturn the outcome of the election. In the end, those fears did not come to pass: senior military figures—not least the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff himself—emphatically and repeatedly stated that the armed forces had no role whatsoever to play in elections. Nevertheless, on Dobos's view (which I share), the fact that it took the military itself to issue such reassurance is a warning not to take the resilience of democratic institutions for granted, even in as seemingly stable a democracy as the United States.

However, those considerations need to be balanced against the risks of not being able to discharge our duty to protect. In less militarized political communities, the remedy seems to lie in appropriate institutional and cultural safeguards against military overreach. In fact, liberal democracies with a history of recent failed coups, such as France and Spain—where the armed forces were brought to heel by civilian leaders and where civil society is not particularly militarized—have fewer reasons still to dismantle their SME for fear of a coup: these citizenries are sensitive to any sign that soldiers might (to put it colloquially) refuse to stay in their barracks. By implication, of course, fears of coups should weigh very heavily against a SME in political communities that are coup prone. The force of the

objection, and thus the case for abolitionism, is contingent on broader political, institutional, social, and cultural features.

The Problem of Foreign Military Aggression

One often mooted argument in favor of setting up and maintaining a SME is that having one in place deters foreign powers from attacking us. The deterrence argument differs from, but shares the same premise as, the duty argument I sketched out earlier. The premise is that citizens are under a cost-sensitive duty to take the steps necessary for the protection of one another's fundamental rights. According to the duty argument, setting up a SME at t_1 will enable citizens to discharge their duty at t_2 . According to the deterrence argument, one way to discharge one's duty to protect another party from serious harm is to ensure that the harm does not materialize in the first place by deterring putative wrongdoers.

In this vein, Dobos raises a third objection to SME on the grounds that, far from deterring foreign powers from attacking us, an SME might in fact encourage a pre-emptive attack.¹³ Although governments use the language of defense (as in: "national defense," "ministry of defense," and so on), armed forces have offensive capacities, which are meant to be used if necessary. Given that foreign powers cannot know for sure whether we intend to attack them, they might decide to attack us before we can attack them. It is true—as Dobos also notes—that preventive wars are far less frequent nowadays than they used to be. Nevertheless, it is also true that the norm against waging such wars has lost some of its potency in the last two decades—essentially since 9/11. This does not bode well for international peace.

Are the costs of having a SME to fulfill future duties to protect too high a price to pay if they include a heightened risk that we will be attacked? It might seem so: setting up a SME risks fulfilling the very prophecy (that of a foreign aggression) against which the SME is meant to act as a bulwark. However, this point alone does not impugn the case for a SME: the success of the objection depends on the likelihood, first, that we will be attacked in general and, second, of the likelihood that we will be attacked *because* we have a SME. I suspect that, for many countries (stable Western democracies or powerful military authoritarian regimes), the likelihood is pretty low (as Dobos himself acknowledges). Consequently, this particular objection to SMEs has less bite in those cases.

In this and the previous subsection, I reviewed two kinds of harm that, according to Dobos, accrue to citizens as a result of having a SME. I suggested that the

prospective duty to have a SME as a necessary step toward fulfilling a duty to protect does not always fall foul of the no-excessive-cost proviso. The proviso applies both to reparative and nonreparative duties. As I noted above, however, we can reasonably be expected to incur greater costs in fulfillment of a reparative duty than in fulfillment of a nonreparative one. By implication, the risks of coups d'état and foreign aggression weigh less heavily in reparative than in nonreparative cases.

The Problem of Unjust Wars

Suppose that the first three harms are not so grievous as to dictate against the prospective duty to set up and maintain a SME. Even so, Dobos's fourth objection concerns the fact that there is no guarantee that armed forces will be deployed only in prosecuting just wars. And the problem is not confined to regimes intent on waging wars of conquest or slaughtering their own populations—though it is worth noting the following implication of the objection. Some of the main contributors to UN peacekeeping forces are also some of the most militarized and/or conflict-prone countries in the world. If they are prime candidates for military abolitionism in the light of this particular objection, this might severely limit the UN's ability to discharge, on behalf of all of us, the humanitarian duty to protect civilians from severe harm.¹⁴

Setting those cases aside, Dobos convincingly argues that morally well-intentioned leaders and militaries, who share our propensity to biased and erroneous judgments, are likely to make the following costly moral mistakes: overestimating their chances of victory; overestimating their ability to minimize the number of battlefield casualties; and overattributing to enemy civilians responsibility for the conflict and, as a result, applying too heavy a discount on their lives when considering whether war is a proportionate response. With those depressing facts in hand, Dobos concludes that we must work on the assumption that any war we would be tempted to fight is in some way unjust, including, presumably, wars that we fight in fulfillment of our duty to protect.¹⁵

I agree with his conclusion. However, the risks of waging unjust wars must be balanced against the risks of unjustly rendering ourselves unable to fulfill our duty to protect by military means. I lack the space here to discuss this question in full. But here are some of the relevant considerations. Suppose, first, that the risk that we will impose wrongful harms on third parties if we set up and maintain a SME is the same as the risk that, if we opt for military abolitionism, we will fail in our duty to protect *different* third parties from severe harm. I take it for granted that,

other things equal, subjecting someone to a risk of wrongful harm is morally worse than subjecting another party to a risk of being wrongfully allowed to die. Other things equal, then, we ought to opt for abolitionism.

Suppose next that (as is likely to happen) the set of individuals at risk of being wrongfully harmed by our military actions (say, civilians whom our armed forces might kill unwarrantedly) partly overlaps with the set of individuals at risk of being wrongfully denied military assistance. It is not clear in this case that we must opt for abolitionism: perhaps we should be guided by what we can reasonably assume those individuals would consent to.¹⁶ Moreover, things are generally not equal. In particular, the number of individuals whom we would subject to the risk of wrongful severe harms might be considerably smaller than the number of individuals whom we would subject to the risk of being wrongfully denied protection from similar harms. If so, again, we might have good reasons to preserve our SME. Finally, in some cases, our special obligations to protect some individuals from severe harm—whether they are grounded in special relationships or whether they flow from our duty to make reparations for our past wrongdoings—might outweigh our general obligations not to impose wrongful harm on third parties. While these moves do not decisively speak against military abolitionism, they provide reasons to resist it, at least in some cases.

CONCLUSION

Nonpacifists need to show that the aforementioned costs of a SME are not so high as to dictate firmly in favor of nonviolent defense—particularly when combined with the SME's financial costs. They must also more seriously consider nonviolent alternatives to fighting military aggression and protecting foreigners from gross abuse at the hands of their regime, as well as the implications of having a SME for other non-war-related policy measures. (For example, increases in military expenditures might mean a diminished budget for healthcare.) Nothing I have said in this essay implies that we—citizens of Western-style liberal democracies—must not decrease the size of our militaries. However, in light of the view that war can often be a means of fulfilling a duty to protect third parties from very severe harm, the justificatory burden rests with those who wish to dismantle the means by which we are able to fulfill that duty. In light of the undoubted harms that a SME occasions, the right response is not necessarily and always to dismantle it: in some cases, it is to mitigate those harms.

NOTES

- ¹ Ned Dobos, *Ethics, Security, and the War-Machine: The True Cost of the Military* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).
- ² See James Pattison, “Unarmed Bodyguards to the Rescue? The Ethics of Nonviolent Intervention,” in Michael L. Gross and Tamar Meisels, eds., *Soft War: The Ethics of Unarmed Conflict* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
- ³ This is a rough summary of a large and sophisticated body of literature. See, e.g., Avery Kolers, *Land, Conflict, and Justice: A Political Theory of Territory* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Margaret Moore, *A Political Theory of Territory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Anna Stilz, *Territorial Sovereignty: A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); and David Miller, *On Nationality*, Oxford Political Theory series (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).
- ⁴ Cécile Fabre, “Cosmopolitanism and Wars of Self-Defence,” in Cécile Fabre and Seth Lazar, eds., *The Morality of Defensive War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- ⁵ On war and associative duties, see Seth Lazar, “Associative Duties and the Ethics of Killing in War,” *Journal of Practical Ethics* 1, no. 1 (2013), pp. 3–48. Elsewhere, I defend the view that we are sometimes under a duty to kill in defense of others and that the ethics of the defensive killing of others is a central component of the ethics of war. See, Cécile Fabre, “Mandatory Rescue Killings,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 15, no. 4 (2007), pp. 363–84 and Cécile Fabre, *Cosmopolitan War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- ⁶ Chiara Cordelli, “Prospective Duties and the Demands of Beneficence,” *Ethics* 128, no. 2 (2018), pp. 373–401.
- ⁷ Some people believe that the fact that we benefit from a wrongdoing, though have not caused it, also imposes reparative obligations on us. This is a controversial view, which I lack the space to explore here. Suffice it to say that reparative duties to pay for wrongful benefits can take a prospective form too. My defense of a SME extends to those cases.
- ⁸ More needs to be said—and more than I can do in this paper—on (a) what counts as reliable evidence in the context of foreign policy, (b) whether there is a duty to procure such evidence, and (c) if so, by what means. For what it is worth, I believe and argue elsewhere that there is a duty to carry out espionage activities, partly on the protective grounds I outline here. If this is correct, there is a prospective duty to set up intelligence agencies. See Cécile Fabre, *Spying through a Glass Darkly: The Ethics of Espionage and Counter-Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2022). See also, for example, Ross W. Bellaby, *The Ethics of Intelligence: A New Framework* (London: Routledge, 2014); and David Omand and Mark Phythian, *Principled Spying: The Ethics of Secret Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
- ⁹ Ned Dobos, “Is U.N. Security Council Authorisation for Armed Humanitarian Intervention Morally Necessary?,” *Philosophia* 38, no. 3 (2010), pp. 499–515; and Ned Dobos, *Insurrection and Intervention: The Two Faces of Sovereignty* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2012), ch. 5. As Neta Crawford reminds us in her contribution to this symposium, “Democracy and the Preparation and Conduct of War,” there can be high democratic costs to having a SME above and beyond the risk of coups d’état. Moreover, as David Rodin points out in his contribution, “Justice between Wars,” Dobos’s objections have far-reaching implications for peacetime military policy in general.
- ¹⁰ Dobos’s fifth objection, which I do not discuss, points to the costs accruing from the encroachment of military norms on civilian societies, for which he proposes a civil defense system. His account is somewhat specific to the United States. While it is important in that context, it translates less well to others. (See also Cheyney Ryan, “Nation-States, Empires, Wars, Hostilities,” *Ethics & International Affairs* [Fall 2021], pp. 367–379). For a persuasive critique of the civil defense system, see Christopher J. Finlay, “Deconstructing Nonviolence and the War Machine: Unarmed Coups, Nonviolent Power, and Armed Resistance,” *Ethics & International Affairs* (Fall 2021), pp. 421–433.
- ¹¹ Dobos, *Ethics, Security, and the War-Machine*, ch. 2.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, ch. 3.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, ch. 4.
- ¹⁴ For recent statistics on contributions to UN peacekeeping forces, see the United Nations Peacekeeping section of the UN’s website at peacekeeping.un.org.
- ¹⁵ Dobos, *Ethics, Security, and the War-Machine*, ch. 5. On the dangers of overconfidence on the part of civilian and military leaders, see, in particular, Dominic D. P. Johnson, *Overconfidence and War: The Havoc and Glory of Positive Illusions* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).
- ¹⁶ Needless to say, there is a hornet’s nest of difficulties here. See, for example, Jonathan Parry, “Defensive Harm, Consent, and Intervention,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 45, no. 4 (Fall 2017), pp. 356–96.

Abstract: Just war theorists who argue that war is morally justified under certain circumstances infer implicitly that establishing the military institutions needed to wage war is also morally justified. In this paper, I mount a case in favor of a standing military establishment: to the extent that going to war is a way to discharge duties to protect fellow citizens and distant strangers from grievous harms, we have a duty to set up the institutions that enable us to discharge that duty. I then respond to four objections drawn from Ned Dobos's recent book *Ethics, Security, and the War-Machine*.

Keywords: duty to protect, humanitarian intervention, military abolitionism, moral injury, national defense, pacifism, wars of aggression