**Does the 2003 American invasion and ensuing occupation of Iraq qualify as a** "**just war**"**?**

*In 2004, Michael Walzer—one of America’s leading political philosophers—gave a talk at Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs entitled “*[*Arguing About War*](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/studio/multimedia/20041013-arguing-about-war-2004)*.” In the following excerpt, Walzer gives examples of how he saw the George W. Bush administration misusing the Just War theory in order to justify intervention in Iraq.* ***The excerpt below has been modified for the classroom.***

**First**, [President Bush himself in his speech at West Point in 2002](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html) systematically confused preventive and preemptive wars. …A real preemptive war begins with a decision to attack an enemy that we know is about to attack us. The attack is literally on its way; we see it coming. We move to strike first so as to avoid the dangers of waiting to be hit. The classic example is [Israel in 1967](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Six-Day_War).

Preventive war aims to ward off a much more distant threat, a speculative threat, that may or may not materialize somewhere down the road, and which might be dealt with through deterrence or alliance or diplomacy…The classic example is the balance of power. There is a balance. Suddenly, the new technology developed by country X or a mobilization of its forces or a new alliance with some powerful neighbor endangers the balance. We worry that if we don't act now, some time in the future we will be at the mercy of country X; and, if we let the situation get too unbalanced, we will not be able to respond when the threat is actual—now it is only potential—and so we launch a preventive war.

**Second**, spokesmen for the [Bush] administration have sometimes attempted to pass the war off as an example of humanitarian intervention. It wasn't that…Saddam's regime was brutal and oppressive, but at the time of our invasion [2003] it was not engaged in mass murder. A military intervention in 1991, after the first Gulf War, to stop the massacre of Shiites and marsh Arabs in the south might have been justified...It is only massacre or ethnic cleansing or mass enslavement in progress that justifies marching an army into someone else's country. That is what humanitarian intervention is, and that is not what the Iraq war was.

Nor was it, **third**, a necessary engagement in the war against terror. In Afghanistan we overthrew a regime that was not merely harboring the terrorists who had attacked us, but was in active partnership with them, for the Taliban provided al-Qaeda with all the benefits of sovereignty: most importantly with a territorial base where they could bring recruits, open training camps, and prepare these recruits for action around the world.  Iraq, by contrast, was a political supporter of some terrorist groups, most importantly in Palestine, but it was not a partner and it was not providing terrorism with a territorial base.

1. According to Walzer, what is the difference between a preemptive and preventative war? Do you consider either of these "just" causes for starting a war?
2. Do you agree with Walzer's argument that humanitarian intervention is only justified in extreme cases? Why or why not?
3. Do you think Walzer would see the 2001 U.S. invasion of Afghanistan as an act of a "just war"? Explain.