

Waiting to be attacked first is costly

The perspective by George Weigel on June 21 contains a very important point about pre-emptive attacks when waging a just war: "... a crucial moral point: faced with certain aggression, responsible public authorities need not wait for the aggressor's first blow to fall." Weigel is entirely correct about this; no teaching of the Catholic Church about just wars ever said that you must wait until attacked.

Think how much less would have been the carnage of the 1940s if our side had attacked Hitler in 1935. Those who were committed to a defense-only theory wasted time negotiating while Hitler built a war machine, and "peace in our time" (Munich, 1938) only lasted about another year.

Our custom throughout the 20th century was to let the other guy strike first, but it has been costly, in many different theaters. And with hindsight, had we attacked Osama Bin Ladin after his many provocations during the 1990s, there might not have been a September 11 terrorist attack upon America.

In contemporary America, nearly everyone thinks well of the first President Bush for driving the aggressor Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait in 1991, but many people criticize the second President Bush for attacking Saddam in 2003. When asserting that "he never attacked us," and wishfully thinking that he was not striving toward weapons of mass destruction, Saddam's violation of 14 U.N. resolutions is too easily forgotten. Negotiations had totally failed well before 2003.

The ugly reality of the world is that some very bad people perceive America's preference to negotiate as a sign of weakness. In our present lengthy war against terrorism, currently focused in Iraq and Afghanistan, that is the enemy we confront. Just-war theory fully permits taking the fight to them, attacking them on our terms, not merely responding to their initiatives.

It will be interesting to see how long Iran can string us along with "peace in our time"-type negotiations.