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Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Good morning. I'm pleased to welcome you to the inaugural Deo et Patriae Dialogue, in which Regis brings together diverse alumni voices in a conversation rooted in our mission of devotion to God and Country, and service to others.

I can't think of a more important topic — or better guests — to begin this series.

About today's topic, Andrew Sullivan recently wrote the following:

“One of the great privileges of being a Catholic is that it's a cheat sheet. You inherit — simply by virtue of having some water poured over your head — a vast canon of moral and theological thinking, honed over two millennia, that you can apply to almost anything. You might disagree with it, of course, but its rules can help clarify why and where you might disagree.”

At the center of that thinking is the Church's teaching on when, if ever, war can be justified, also known as the Just War Theory.

So today, we ask: does the current U.S. conflict with Iran — Operation Epic Fury — meet the criteria of a just war?

Just War Theory does not encourage war — it sets strict conditions under which war may be morally permissible. In fact, the Church consistently favors peace and nonviolence, grounded in a belief in the dignity of every human person. We see these principles embodied in the life and teaching of Jesus, especially on display in the gospels of this Holy Week which we have begun to celebrate.

Yet the Church also recognizes the reality of human brokenness and the need, at times, to defend innocent life. Even then, any use of force must be restrained and undertaken with great care, especially to avoid harm to civilians.

Over the past weeks, many Church leaders — including bishops, cardinals, and Pope Leo — have raised serious concerns about whether this conflict meets the standards of the Just War.

So what are those standards?

The decision to initiate and wage a Just War requires seven rather stringent criteria:

First, a just war must be declared by a legitimate authority — for example, a democratically-elected government.

Second, it must have a just cause — such as defending against aggression or protecting innocent life.

Third, it must be fought with “right intention”: to advance good, avoid evil, and ultimately restore peace — not to seek revenge or pursue violence for its own sake.

Fourth, it must be a last resort, after all other options have been exhausted. Here some include whether the enemy presents an “imminent threat.”

Fifth, there must be a reasonable chance of success — so that lives are not lost in a futile cause.

Sixth, there must be discrimination. Civilians should not be directly targeted or intentionally attacked.

Seventh, there must be proportion; that is, there must be a balance between the good achieved versus the harm done.

Whether a war is just is not simply an abstract debate.

War carries real human consequences. It affects the vulnerable most of all. In this war, thousands have been killed — 230 among those killed are children. Families have been displaced. Entire communities have been disrupted.

This war has placed young Americans in our volunteer military in harm’s way. You may know some among your relatives or neighbors.

And yet, we also face serious threats — from a repressive regime that violates human rights, murders thousands of its own people, pursues nuclear weapons, and destabilizes regions.

These tensions make moral clarity both more difficult and more necessary.

To help us think through these questions, we are joined by two distinguished Regis alumni.

Fr. Gerald Murray, Class of 1976, is a Catholic priest, canon lawyer, and respected commentator on moral and social issues. He also served as a chaplain in the US Naval Reserves. Fr. Murray has argued that the Iran conflict can be justified under Just War Theory.

Mr. Phil Klay, Class of 2001, is a Marine Corps veteran and National Book Award–winning author whose work explores the moral realities of war. He also teaches writing at Fairfield University. Mr. Klay has argued that this conflict fails to meet just war criteria.

Together, they bring experience, moral insight, and thoughtful disagreement to this important discussion.

Mr. DiMichele will moderate today's dialogue. His work in education, debate, and international engagement — especially in the Middle East — has long been dedicated to fostering meaningful conversation across differences.

Please join me in welcoming Mr. DiMichele, Fr. Murray, and Mr. Klay.