

TARGETED KILLINGS AND CYCLICAL CHOICES

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A peaceable holy-man has inspired a fanatical, violence-prone following. Members of his movement are in the process of organizing a violent attack upon us. Are we allowed to make him the object of a targeted killing? No, of course not.

Now suppose that we believe that his followers are going to launch their attack on the next major religious holiday, and that they will do so from a military base that is located near a holy site at which many of the country's religious leaders are going to be congregating on that occasion. If we wait and meet the attack as it is launched, or about to be launched, we will be killing a lot of innocents, most notably all of the religious leaders meeting at the holy site (including the originator of this movement). In light of this, has a targeted killing of the holy-man perhaps become permissible after all? Unlike most forbidden forbidden utilitarian tradeoffs, this one is a Pareto improvement on killings we are actually permitted to carry out.

And if it has become permissible, do things materially change if the holy-man would not in fact be among the collateral victims of our counteroffensive? Might we nevertheless be permitted to kill him preemptively? In other words, do numerically favorable tradeoffs become permissible once we are about to permissibly kill some innocents?