

Conscientious objection to specific wars sought

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [December 14, 2010](#) issue

A coalition of religious leaders and veterans has called for a reconsideration of conscientious objection to war, saying that military members should have the right to object to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan for moral reasons.

The Truth Commission on Conscience in War, issuing its report November 10 in Washington, D.C., recommended that the military revise its rules to include "selective conscientious objection" and urged religious leaders to address issues of conscience during wartime.

"Training has made it so that our soldiers are much more reflexive than they are reflective about things that happen on the battlefield," said Herman Keizer, a retired army chaplain who once oversaw chaplains in the European Command. "And when they do get an opportunity to reflect, that's when the moral issues really begin to roll."

Jake Diliberto, an evangelical Christian who cofounded the group Veterans for Rethinking Afghanistan, believes that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have become protracted and violate just war criteria.

"Today what started as Operation Enduring Freedom has turned into Operation Enduring Obligation," said Diliberto, who served with the marines in Iraq and Afghanistan. "I still remember my friends who got killed. I still remember their faces, and I remember the Iraqis who got killed."

The report noted that current rules about conscientious objection require an objection to "war in any form," creating a conflict for those who may have specific moral objections to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan but not to all wars.

"It denies freedom of religious practice and the exercise of moral conscience to those serving in the military who object to a particular war based on the moral criteria of just war, which the military itself teaches and upholds as important," the report reads.

The report says that military rules dating to the time of the Vietnam draft leave no legal basis for objection for someone who believes "participation implicates them in an immoral war or in war crimes."

Coalition members, speaking at the National Press Club the day before Veterans Day, said their calls to review conscientious objection also embody a specific opposition to the use of torture.

That issue was raised prominently when some religious leaders noted that former president George W. Bush wrote in a just-published memoir that he said "damn right" when the CIA asked for permission to use waterboarding on alleged 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. "Former President Bush should be ashamed of his decision to torture detainees," said Richard L. Killmer, executive director of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture. "His decision to allow the use of torture was both illegal and immoral."

Likewise, Michael Kinnamon, general secretary of the National Council of Churches, wrote in a guest commentary for RNS that "Bush's prideful defense of torture in his new memoir, *Decision Points*, is utterly incomprehensible to me. It is also unrecognizable to the fundamental values of this country, and of Bush's own professed Christian faith."

The Truth Commission on Conscience in War is sponsored by Faith Voices for the Common Good, a California-based progressive organization that focuses on war and peace, and Luna Productions, a company that produced a PBS documentary on issues of conscience in war. Cosponsoring organizations include the National Council of Churches, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Unitarian Universalist Association and the peace fellowships of Baptists, Buddhists and Jews. —RNS