

## **The fog of war**

### ***Prayer for the Day***

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For months now, every day has brought a new headline about the clouds of war thickening over the Gulf. From one side there is a crescendo of bellicose rhetoric; from the other increasing anguish about the horrors of war. No-one – and least of all people of faith – can stand aside from this.

So let me declare unambiguously that I am finely balanced between a ‘Maybe’ and a ‘don't know’! That is not intended as an evasion, so let me explain. Public opinion polls are not immune from the obligation to use language with clarity and precision – indeed perhaps they have a great obligation: to ensure that the question is understood, to ensure that each response is properly recorded, and to ensure that the data are honestly reported. ‘Maybe’ and ‘don't know’ are different ways of not answering, but how often are they separately recorded?

So, on the one hand, who can deny that war may sometimes be justified? We salute those who fought and fell in the long battle to defeat Hitler. Surgery is not assault – the pain is the cost of long-term good. As it is for the body, so it may be for the body politic. If tyrants, like disease, have to be stood up to, then there should be no pacifists-at-any-price.

But on the other hand, justification must depend on facts, not mere opinions. Facts do not alone determine attitudes, far less decisions, but they are a necessary prerequisite. And as to whether or not war is justified, very few are in the position to judge.

So as the world remains poised between peace and war, let us all hope and pray that those in whose hands the real decisions lie are guided by principle and not prejudice, by the truth and not by wishful thinking, and by disinterested commitment to the good of humanity.