

What Should be Done? Who is to Blame? Navigating Individual, Collective, and Institutional Responsibility in War

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Attributions of moral and legal responsibility are invoked in both calls to action and charges of transgression in the context of war. International norms pertaining to armed conflict – prohibitions against waging wars of aggression, for example, and against conduct in which civilians are intentionally targeted, or force is used disproportionately – entail responsibilities to exercise restraint. Such responsibilities may be directed at states (the US or UK, Russia or Israel), soldiers on the battlefield, military and political leaders in the war-room, and citizens like you and me when it comes to voting for – and censuring, including protesting against – the states and leaders that act in our name. Moreover, judgements of blame and culpability are voiced when these responsibilities are abrogated. Such judgements are used to justify sanctions, charges of criminality, and coercive responses (sometimes, problematically, in the language of retribution). *Where* duty and blame are assigned – whether directed towards individual human actors, distributed amongst groups of individuals (like citizens), or judged to rest at the level of an institution (such as the state) – matters profoundly. This roundtable will explore problems of responsibility attribution (and misattribution) in the context of current crises, such as the wars in Ukraine and Gaza.

Track Classification: Ethics and World Politics Working Group