

The Case for the Empire

Leia Lies: “The destruction of Alderaan is often cited as *ipso facto* proof of the Empire’s ‘evilness’ because it seems like mass murder – planeticide, even. As Tarkin prepares to fire the Death Star, Princess Leia implores him to spare the planet, saying, ‘Alderaan is peaceful. We have no weapons.’ Her plea is important, if true.

But the audience has no reason to believe that Leia is telling the truth. In Episode IV, every bit of information she gives the Empire is willfully untrue. In the opening, she tells Darth Vader that she is on a diplomatic mission of mercy, when in fact she is on a spy mission, trying to deliver schematics of the Death Star to the Rebel Alliance. When asked where the Alliance is headquartered, she lies again.

Leia’s lies are perfectly defensible – she thinks she’s serving the greater good – but they make her wholly unreliable on the question of whether or not Alderaan really is peaceful and defenseless. If anything, since Leia is a high-ranking member of the rebellion and the princess of Alderaan, it would be reasonable to suspect that Alderaan is a front for Rebel activity or at least home to many more spies and insurgents like Leia.

Whatever the case, the important thing to recognize is that the Empire is not committing random acts of terror. It is engaged in a fight for the survival of its regime against a violent group of rebels who are committed to its destruction.”

– **Jonathan V. Last, “The Case for the Empire,” Weekly Standard, Art. 2540, May 15, 2002**

Luke is a Radicalized Insurgent: “While some have put forth persuasive arguments as to why the Galactic Empire were actually the good guys and the Rebel Alliance bad, the recent online discussion tends to be on a more macro level, discussing galaxy wide events and surrounding the Empire’s struggle to restore safety and order to a star system overrun by space terrorists.

A more focused study, however, is needed to truly understand that the Star Wars films are actually the story of the radicalization of Luke Skywalker. From introducing him to us in *A New Hope* (as a simple farm boy gazing into the Tatooine sunset), to his eventual transformation into the radicalized insurgent of *Return of the Jedi* (as one who sets his own father’s corpse on fire and celebrates the successful bombing of the Death Star), each film in the original trilogy is another step in Luke’s descent into terrorism. By carefully looking for the same signs governments and scholars use to detect radicalization, we can witness Luke’s dark journey into religious fundamentalism and extremism happen before our very eyes.

When we first meet Luke Skywalker, he’s an orphaned farm boy with barely any friends, living with his Aunt and Uncle, and wanting to join the Galactic Academy like all the other guys his age. You see, Luke didn’t become a space terrorist overnight, but he did exhibit signs that would make him a prime candidate for terrorist recruiters. The process of radicalization, as described by Anthony Stahelski in the *Journal of Homeland Security*, notes terrorists tend to:

- Come from families where the father is absent (check)
- Have difficulty forming relationships outside the home (check)
- Be attracted to groups offering acceptance and comradeship (checkmate)

Luke is just the kind of isolated disaffected young man that terror recruiters seek out.

Obi Wan — a religious fanatic with a history of looking for young boys to recruit and teach an extreme interpretation of the Force — is practically salivating when he stumbles upon Luke, knowing he’s found a prime candidate for radicalization. Stahelski notes terror groups place a focus on depluralization, stripping away the recruit’s membership from all groups and isolating

them to increase their susceptibility to terrorist messaging. Within moments of meeting Luke, Obi-Wan tells Luke he must abandon his family and join him, going so far as telling a shocking lie that the Empire killed Luke's father, hoping to inspire Luke to a life of jihad.

Shocked and confused by this onslaught of terrorist brainwashing, Luke hurries home only to find the charred corpses of his aunt and uncle. The Empire's accidental harming of Luke's Aunt Beru and Uncle Owen can be directly compared to the casualties of President Obama's drone campaign, whose body count terrorists capitalize upon for recruitment. This is precisely what Obi-Wan does, preying upon Luke's emotional state to take him under his spell and towards a life of extremism.

Obi-Wan whisks Luke off to Mos Eisley using a Jedi mind trick to bypass security, knowing full well he likely appears on numerous terror no fly lists. After contracting a local drug smuggler for transportation, Obi-Wan and his newest Skywalker recruit are off. They are soon captured, however, and attempt an escape which culminates in a battle between Obi-Wan and Vader. During the fight, Obi-Wan notices Luke watching, and seeing an opportunity to fully inspire Luke to radicalize, says a Jedi prayer while committing suicide. Can you think of any other groups who try to inspire terrorism by yelling a prayer before a suicide attack?

Once Luke escapes and regroups with a terror sleeper cell, he joins them on an attack mission. As he nears his target, hearing Obi-Wan's words in his mind, Luke closes his eyes, says a prayer and bombs a space station, killing everyone aboard. Young Skywalker has proven himself a quick study in the ways of armed religious extremism."

- Comfortably Smug, "The Radicalization of Luke Skywalker: A Jedi's Path to Jihad," Decider (decider.com), December 11, 2015

Just War: "Let us accept arguendo, however, the claims of Princess Leia and her apologists that Alderaan was peaceful and had no military targets.

Even so, one could argue that the destruction of Alderaan was not inconsistent with just war theory. To be sure, many just war theorists claim that the tradition requires both discrimination between civilian and military targets and proportionality. Yet, as LTC Peter Farber, an instructor at the Academy, has written: 'there is no single, coherent just-war position. Rather, there are clusters of ideas that have waxed and waned through time, and they have not evolved into a transhistorical system of simple moral rules.' Hence, as Farber notes, theorists long defended strategic bombing within the just war tradition:

.. 1) it preserved and protected the just against the criminal (note the Augustinian emphasis here), 2) the civilians supporting their national leadership were equally responsible for the decisions made by that leadership, and 3) the vigorous prosecution of the war prevented an even greater loss of human life

While the destruction of Alderaan may be regrettable, it seems clearly defensible under this understanding of the ethics of strategic warfare. Indeed, as Tarkin noted, the very purpose of destroying Alderaan is to end the war more quickly. Hence, just as was the case with strategic bombing in earlier times, 'the vigorous prosecution of the war' could be justified as an effort to prevent 'an even greater loss of human life.'"

- Prof. Steven Bainbridge (UCLA School of Law), "Was the Alderaan Incident Consistent with Just War Theory," Steven Bainbridge's Journal of Law, Politics and Culture (blog www.professorbainbridge.com), June 6, 2005