News



Archbishop Timothy Broglio in April 2025 (RNS screencap/Catholic Diocese of Lincoln/Corbin Hubbell)



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Archbishop Timothy Broglio, who heads the Catholic Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA, said in a statement Wednesday (Dec. 3) that an order to kill survivors of an attack by U.S. forces on a boat in the Caribbean would be wrong if they posed no immediate danger to those forces.

To deliberately kill "survivors on a vessel who pose no immediate lethal threat to our armed forces," Broglio said, is "illegal and immoral." He explained that "the moral principle forbidding the intentional killing of noncombatants is inviolable."

Last week, The Washington Post reported that on Sept. 2, in the first of a wave of attacks on alleged drug traffickers, who the Trump administration says were headed towards the United States, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth ordered that all people on the boat be killed, resulting in a second strike that killed two survivors of the first strike.

Since then, the Trump administration has said that Adm. Frank Bradley, who oversaw the operation, ordered the second strike to sink the boat. Bradley is expected to appear before Congress on Thursday. Some legal experts, including a group of former military judge advocate generals, have said that if The Washington Post's reports are true, then the act was a war crime.

"No one can ever be ordered to commit an immoral act, and even those suspected of committing a crime are entitled to due process under the law," wrote Broglio.

Broglio called on political and military leaders "to respect the consciences of those who raise their right hands to defend and protect the Constitution by not asking them to engage in immoral actions." He wrote, "Show the world our respect for human dignity and the rule of law."

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He cited George Washington's desire for "chaplains with his troops to tell him the truth" in examining whether military actions are "ethical and legal."

The archbishop has been reticent to criticize the Trump administration, both in his role as shepherd for Catholic troops and as president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, a role he held until his term ended last month.

At the bishops' conference annual fall meeting in November, Broglio told Religion News Service that President Donald Trump's decision to deploy the military to support his mass deportation campaign wasn't "an immoral act," though Broglio added, " It's always a concern when our troops are engaged in domestic policing actions" because such duty is outside of their training.

In October, however, the archbishop raised concerns about the U.S. Army's decision to cancel religious support contracts for Army chapels, saying the Army was impeding "the constitutional guarantee of the free exercise of religion."

The boat strikes in the Caribbean have been one feature of the United States' increased military presence in the Caribbean, much of it directed at Venezuela. Trump has hinted that Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro's days in office are numbered.

In a news conference yesterday, Pope Leo XIV said he would urge U.S. leaders to pursue dialogue or economic pressure on Venezuela rather than a U.S. invasion. Last month, when asked by reporters about the attacks on alleged drug traffickers near Venezuela, the pope also urged the U.S. to "seek dialogue."

In Broglio's statement, he emphasized the importance of responding to the drug trafficking and the illegal use of narcotics with "coordinated efforts from all sectors of society, including prevention and education, especially for young people, drug-free schools, accessible treatment and harm reduction, better international cooperation, and evidence-based drug-policy reform," in addition to dismantling the criminal networks distributing drugs.

But, he wrote, "In the fight against drugs, the end never justifies the means, which must be moral, in accord with the principles of the just war theory, and always respectful of the dignity of each human person."

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