Martial Negligence in Game of Thrones and Beyond

I've previously argued that George R.R. Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire* is implicitly a great pacifist work. While rewatching season 2 with my younger son, I re-discovered a scene worthy of a pacifist ovation. While Talisa, the crucial pacifist character, appears only in the show, the following exchange sheds great light on the role of martial negligence in Martin's fictional universe. For context, Robb Stark is the King in the North, Talisa is a battlefield medic, and they're surrounded by the bodies of maimed and dead soldiers.

> *Talisa: That boy lost his foot on your orders.*
>
> *Robb: They killed my father.*
>
> *Talisa: That boy did?*
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> *Robb: The family he fights for.*
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> *Talisa: Do you think he's friends with King Joffrey? He's a fisherman's son that grew up near Lannisport. He probably never held a spear before they shoved one in his hands a few months ago.*
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> *Robb: I have no hatred for the lad.*
>
> *Talisa: That should help his foot grow back.*
>
> *Robb: You'd have us surrender, end all this bloodshed. I understand. The country would be at peace and life would be just under the righteous hand of good King Joffrey.*
>
> *Talisa: You're going to kill Joffrey?*
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> *Robb: If the gods give me strength.*
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> *Talisa: And then what?*
>
> *Robb: I don't know. We'll go back to Winterfell. I have no desire to sit on the Iron Throne.*

Talisa: So who will?

Robb: I don't know.

Talisa: You're fighting to overthrow a king, and yet you have no plan for what comes after?

Robb: First we have to win the war.

Notice: Rather than argue that war can never be justified, Talisa shows that Robb is unleashing the horrors of war *casually*. He has no master plan to bring great good from great evil. Instead, he has a master plan to do great evil, motivated by *vague wishes* to do great good. Proverbially, however, if you fail to plan, you plan to fail.

Is this scene an unfair caricature of the practice of moralized warfare? Hardly. U.S. leaders of both parties barely thought about what would happen after the fall of Saddam Hussein in Iraq or Muammar Qaddafi in Libya. Roosevelt's view of Stalin was mind-bogglingly naive. Wilson, a former Princeton professor, wrote his sophomoric 14 Points, then dumped most of them in a failed effort to build a sophomoric "League of Nations." *This* is what a morally serious case for just war sounds like, but don't expect to hear anything like it for as long as you live.

Why do even well-intentioned leaders so carefully plan for war, and so negligently plan for peace? Simple: Despite their self-righteousness, they're drunk with power. Well-intentioned? Don't make me laugh. Yes, with great power comes great responsibility… which politicians routinely fail to exercise in reality and Westeros alike.