

## CAN THERE EVER BE 'JUST WARS' ?

"The first rule of war is that the belligerent nation must be fairly sure that its actions will make things better. The second rule is that the belligerent nation must be more or less certain that its actions won't make things worse" (Martin Amis 2003)

War is always going to be with us because the thirst for power is always with us, so the fact remains that there are 'understandings'...tacit or explicit rules for how wars should be fought, who they should involve, and what kind of relations should apply in the aftermath.

But what is a 'just' war – can that really be covered by an 'understanding' ? Can there be such a thing as a *just* war when part of the objective is to kill people ? Is the very idea of legitimising war through ethical principles simply an inappropriate concept in itself, a cop-out ?

*So what are the conventions that might be used to establish a war as 'just' ?  
(pooled from a number of different ivory towers)*

1. A justified cause and 'right intention' which carries moral weight – eg. self-defence against an aggressor or to redress an injury. But what about humanitarian intervention in civil war; when there are human rights violations; or when we simply want to punish a regime we don't like ? Is fighting for or against an ideology a just cause (religion, democracy, communism, imperialism) ?
2. War must be declared by a legitimate authority, generally a nation-state. This doesn't therefore include terrorist groups: but the distinction between terrorists, guerillas, partisans, freedom fighters and national forces is often a fine one. And what about nations that have somehow lost their way and become rogue states within the international system; and how do we deal with nations that clearly *are* states but aren't recognised diplomatically or by UN, eg. Taiwan, Palestine ?
3. Last resort – all non-violent options must be exhausted before the use of force can be justified.
4. Net benefit, with a reasonable chance of success – deaths and injury incurred in a hopeless cause are not morally justifiable.
5. Proportionality – the violence used in the war must be proportional to the injury suffered.
6. Correct conduct – the weapons used in war must discriminate between combatants and non-combatants: the deaths of civilians are justified only if they are unavoidable victims

(collateral damage) of a deliberate attack on a military target.  
But some theorists actively disagree....

*Examples for thought*

- Russia/Ukraine.
- Crusades took place 800 years or more ago – ideological, in the name of religion and of the church, despite the general feeling then and now that there is “a Christian revulsion against war”. But can a religious bias make war ‘just’ all the same ?
- Second World War – the Allies had a presumed good intention in fighting for ‘freedom’ against fascism and the Nazis. Was the Allied approach proportional, and how was it with non-combatants ?
- Korea – ideological against communism. Did that make it ‘just’ ? Was it our business at all, and if it wasn’t our business, can there possibly have been ‘right intention’ as in para.1 ?
- Vietnam – US ‘invasion’ in 1960s nominally in support of South Vietnam, ideological against communism – did that make it ‘just’ ? And then, was it proportional, and did it protect civilians ? Was there any net benefit, as in para.4 ?
- Afghanistan: invasions by Russia in 1970s and USA in 2000s, both times for questionable reasons and both times ending with inglorious withdrawal.
- Israel/Palestine.
- Taiwan – what if ? A potential flashpoint as China regards Taiwan as part of the People’s Republic and seems likely to annex it within the next ten years or so, certainly by the centenary of the Communist Party in 2049. Leaving aside the politics in favour of the philosophy, and for the purposes of example, would Chinese annexation of Taiwan be regarded as ‘just’ by anyone other than the Chinese and their allies; and could any subsequent American intervention be regarded as ‘just’ ?

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