

JUST WAR THEORY AND ITS SEVEN COMPONENTS

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The primary thesis of this paper is that, when the following seven ethical components are present, war is a viable option to bringing about peace. The seven essential elements include just cause, just intent, last resort, legitimizing authority, limited goals, proportionality, and noncombatant immunity. The following is a synopsis of each component.

#### 1. Just Cause

The first component involved in ascertaining whether or not war is necessary is just cause. War must be looked upon as permissible only in order to resist aggression, or to defend those who are being victimized by hostility (Prov. 31:9). In other words, self-defense and protection of others who cannot adequately defend themselves are standards which must be present before engaging in combat. The Bible says, "Do not contend with a man without cause, If he has done you no harm" (Prov. 3:30). The inference is that there is, indeed, a time for contention, and it has to do with harm being done by an aggressor.

## 2. Just Intent

Second, there must be just intent. If one's goal is revenge, further conquest, or economic benefit, then war simply is not defensible. Notice that these motives are related to the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, or the pride of life (1 John 2:15-16); hence, the only acceptable motive for engaging in conflict resolution through war must be to secure justice for all involved (Ps. 72:14). If the intent of the battle is vain, or anything other than justice for all, war is indefensible.

## 3. Last Resort

Third, war should be viewed as a last resort. When all other avenues of conflict resolution have been exhausted, have been tried but failed, or have been rebuffed, refuted, or refused, war becomes an option, provided, of course, that the other criteria have been met as well. In fact, Eccles. 3:8 seems to suggest, descriptively, that there is a time for war.

## 4. Legitimizing Authority

Fourth, war must have a legitimizing authority validating it. The use of military force is not the prerogative of splinter groups, factions, individuals, or rebel gangs. The Bible states, "Where there is no guidance, the people fall, But in the

abundance of counselors there is victory" (Prov. 11:14); thus, war ought strictly to be the tool of governments which have carefully considered the consequences and criteria. Moreover, one would hope that leaders will have counseled together, and with the Lord, before declaring war. Additionally, as representatives of the people, the leaders should seek to act in the best interest of the people regarding self-defense, protection of victims, and anti-aggression measures.

#### 5. Limited Goals

Fifth, there must be the yardstick of limited goals. Since war is the last resort in the pursuit of peace, total annihilation of the enemy, his country, or his people, is not acceptable. Halting the aggression, ending the tyranny, rescuing the victims, and disarming the aggressors in order to minimize the possibility of a recurrence are limited, acceptable goals. The complete destruction of a country or people smacks of brutality and uncivilized, immeasurable goals. Killing the innocent and "over-killing" the guilty are equally reprehensible deeds which contradict a Just War.

## 6. Proportionality

Sixth, there is the factor of proportionality. This means that war is waged according to choices. Often, these choices are weighed so as to scrutinize closely the potential gains as opposed to the possible losses. If the cost in human lives to be lost is greater in proportion than the objectives to be gained, then war cannot be justified; however, when the good to be gained, such as freedom from tyranny, aggression, and cruelty, outweighs the risks involved in securing such liberties, war is justified. In fact, when indiscriminate murder, and other forms of ruthlessness and inhumane victimization are occurring, loss of life will likely continue unabated unless lives are put at risk in order to bring an end to the persecution and anguish. In a case such as this, the loss of human life, though disheartening, is well worth the gain of cessation of ruthless brutality and inhumane victimization.

## 7. Noncombatant Immunity

Seventh, and finally, there is the criterion of noncombatant immunity. No war has the right to wage conflict on civilians. Justice demands that the guilty be targeted, not the innocent (Prov. 6:17). Thus, noncombatants are virtually disqualified as viable military targets. To aim indiscriminately at any location,

regardless of the presence of civilians, is wrong. Care should be taken to eliminate, or certainly minimize, inadvertent civilian casualties too. It is likely that there are those in the countries who vehemently disagree with their nation's military aggression, and feel oppressed themselves. Military involvement may be called for in order to liberate repressed nationals in their own land. When the preceding seven components are present, war is a viable option to bringing about peace. Pray that other options prevail.