

with the lesser evil.

Many scholars of International Relations Theory believe that there is no Just War 'theory' as such and there are actually as many Just War theories as the number of the people who judge the wars. Since it is so relative a concept, according to how people justify wars, one can categorise the spectrum of just war into four categories. Those who believe no war can be justified by any means and in any situation are 'absolute pacifists'. Those who suppose some wars justly fought can be found in the history are 'dovish' and those who consider few wars in the history as unjust are 'hawkish'. In the last 'realpolitik' category *raison d'état* is what drives the realists. Consequently, any strategy in their national interest, be it war or peace, is justified.

A war is most justified when is fought against a violator of international law. Examples could be violation of the resolutions of the Security Council, violation of bilateral or multilateral treaties or other legally binding agreements protected by the international law.

A less justifiable war is that fought for humanitarian purposes. Sometimes some more powerful states take the lead in fighting those states committing crime against humanity, genocide or in brief those violating human rights. Humanitarian intervention has hardly - if ever - been the only reason to wage a war against another state and intervene in its internal affairs and since it looks good to people, has mostly been used to justify other causes for which the states usually go to war.

Some wars can be justified if proved preventive. Some diplomats justify a war against another state by reasoning that their rival would attack them should they not prevent it. A new category known as 'pre-emptive strike' has been lately added to the list and though so controversial, has been justified by some when a state fears that an adversary might be planning to attack, so it's in the former state's benefit to take the initiative by a pre-emption against the latter.

Just War Criteria

Justness of war is not black and white. By no means can one label a certain war as just or unjust. Several factors must be present in order for a war to be just. The criteria by which the justness of wars should be judged consist of three stages: Pre-war justice (*Jus ad bellum*), inwar justice (*jus in bello*), and post-war justice (*jus post bellum*).

The cause for which the war is to be waged must be just. So a state shall resort to force only when it has the right intention to start the war. In the conflict about to be turned into a war, the injustice suffered by the party waging the war must be considerably higher than that of the other party. Only the authority enjoying a certain degree of legitimacy can wage a just war. It is worth noting that what entity to be considered a legitimate authority is one of the most controversial issues among the scholars and practitioners of the

field. Some consider the United Nation as the sole legitimate authority enjoying the right to wage just wars, while some believe in states to be as legitimate. What is expected to be achieved must outweigh the destruction made. And finally a state may resort to war only when all other peaceful and diplomatic means have been tried and exhausted.

The force employed during the war must be proportionate, in other words, if the goal of the war can be achieved by a certain amount of force, no more force must be used. The war must target only those in charge of the injustice made, the elimination of which is the purpose of the war and the civilians must not be subject to harms; hence inappropriateness of the use of the weapons of mass destruction in a just war. Besides, minimum force must be used to conduct a war.

Finally, *jus post bellum* concerns the justice after a war. This includes issues like terms of peace agreements, reconstruction, war crimes trials and war compensations.

War and Peace: Bahá'í General View

Generally speaking, in the Bahá'í writings all the positive adjectives are brought into play to describe peace and conversely all the negative adjectives are applied to portray war:

This recent war has proved to the world and the people that war is destruction while Universal Peace is construction; war is death while peace is life; war is rapacity and bloodthirstiness while peace is beneficence and humaneness; war is an appurtenance of the world of nature while peace is of the foundation of the religion of God; war is darkness upon darkness while peace is heavenly light; war is the destroyer of the edifice of mankind while peace is the everlasting life of the world of humanity; war is like a devouring wolf while peace is like the angels of heaven; war is the struggle for existence while peace is mutual aid and cooperation among the peoples of the world and the cause of the good-pleasure of the True One in the heavenly realm.[1]

Similarly, in one of his talks in New York, 'Abdu'l-Bahá again explains:

Peace is light whereas war is darkness. Peace is life; war is death. Peace is guidance; war is error. Peace is the foundation of God; war is satanic institution. Peace is the illumination of the world of humanity; war is the destroyer of human foundations. When we consider outcomes in the world of existence we find that peace and fellowship are factors of upbuilding and betterment whereas war and strife are the causes of destruction and disintegration. All created things are expressions of the affinity and cohesion of elementary substances, and non-existence is the absence of their attraction and agreement. Various elements unite harmoniously in composition but when these elements become discordant, repelling each other, decomposition and non-existence result. Everything partakes of this nature and is subject to this principle, for the creative foundation in all its degrees and kingdoms is an expression or outcome of love. Consider the restlessness and agitation of the

human world today because of war. Peace is health and construction; war is disease and dissolution. When the banner of truth is raised, peace becomes the cause of the welfare and advancement of the human world. In all cycles and ages war has been a factor of derangement and discomfort whereas peace and brotherhood have brought security and consideration of human interests. This distinction is especially pronounced in the present world conditions, for warfare in former centuries had not attained the degree of savagery and destructiveness which now characterizes it. If two nations were at war in olden times, ten or twenty thousand would be sacrificed but in this century the destruction of one hundred thousand lives in a day is quite possible. So perfected has the science of killing become and so efficient the means and instruments of its accomplishment that a whole nation can be obliterated in a short time. Therefore comparison with the methods and results of ancient warfare is out of the question.[2]

However, although “the Bahá’í faith aims to eliminate all war” and its fundamental purpose is unity and the establishment of Peace[3], as soon as it comes to the social life and we shift from the general individual advices to the principles on the necessities of this changing world, we see the other side of the coin.

Just War Criteria: Update Necessary

In this era, the nature of an ever-changing, interconnected world necessitates a change in many of the fundamental concepts of international relations. The three quotes below signify three major reasons why the criteria for the justification of war should be updated. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, a former Secretary General of the United Nations, discusses one of the major concepts facing this change:

The time of absolute and exclusive sovereignty, however, is past. Its theory was never matched by reality. It is the task of leaders of states today to understand this and to find a balance between the needs of good internal governance and the requirements of an ever more interdependent world.[4]

Another concept is put forward by Javier Perez de Cuellar, another former Secretary General of the UN:

Has not a balance been established between the rights of states, as confirmed by the Charter and the right of individual, confirmed by the Universal Declaration? We are clearly witnessing what is probably an irresistible shift in public attitudes towards the belief that the defense of the oppressed in the name of morality should prevail over frontiers and legal documents.[5]

And finally the Bahá’í International Community, in a statement to the United Nations world conference on the human rights held in Vienna, explains another reason supporting an update in the just war criteria:

Despite the establishment of international standards for human rights, many nations cling to the view that respect for those rights should be granted or withheld at the discretion of national governments. This attitude ignores the

operation of forces that are drawing the world together and paving the way for the establishment of a new order based on the recognition that what happens to one member of the human family happens to us all.[6]

Later on we will study the Bahá'í system of thought, upon the foundations of which the new criteria of just war shall be drafted.

Bahá'í Faith: Absolute Pacifism?

There are some explicit explanations by the Universal House of Justice that clarify the position of the Bahá'í faith on pacifism:

Bahá'ís recognize the right and duty of governments to use force for the maintenance of law and order and to protect their people. Thus, for a Bahá'í, the shedding of blood for such a purpose is not necessarily essentially wrong. The Bahá'í Faith draws a very definite distinction between the duty of an individual to forgive and 'to be killed rather than to kill' and the duty of society to uphold justice. This matter is explained by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 'Some Answered Questions'. In the present condition of the world Bahá'ís try to keep themselves out of the internecine conflicts that are raging among their fellow men and to avoid shedding blood in struggles, but this does not mean that we are absolute pacifists.[7]

Besides, the rationale behind this justification is introduced in a two-fold reasoning:

With reference to the absolute pacifists, or conscientious objectors of war; their attitude, judged from the Bahá'í standpoint, is quite anti-social and due to its exaltation of the individual conscience leads inevitably to disorder and chaos in society. Extreme pacifists are thus very close to the anarchists, in the sense that both of these groups lay an undue emphasis on the rights and merits of the individual...

The other main objection to the conscientious objectors is that their method of establishing peace is too negative. Non-co-operation is too passive a philosophy to become an effective way for social reconstruction. Their refusal to bear arms can never establish peace. There should first be a spiritual revitalization which nothing, except the cause of God, can effectively bring to every man's heart.[8]

Just War: Bahá'í View

“War is really nothing more but the result of existing forces.”[9] So not only is war not always a bad thing necessarily, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains:

A conquest can be a praiseworthy thing, and there are times when war becomes the powerful basis of peace, and ruin the very means of reconstruction. If, for example, a high-minded sovereign marshals his troops to block the onset of the insurgent and the aggressor, or again, if he takes the field and distinguishes himself in a struggle to unify a divided state and people, if, in brief, he is 'waging war for a righteous purpose', then this seeming wrath is mercy itself, and this apparent tyranny the very substance of justice and this

warfare the cornerstone of peace. Today, the task befitting great rulers is to establish universal peace, for in this lies the freedom of all peoples.[10]

Before the first Gulf War, a US-led war against Iraq 's Saddam Hussein in 1990-91, the United States pushed for a Security Council resolution against Saddam's occupation of Kuwait , threatened Saddam Hussein and pushed him in a corner where he had no choice but non-compliance. So after the predestined American diplomacy failed, the United States started building up a coalition to go to war against Saddam. With all its deficiencies and only US as the main actor against Saddam, since this premature event was on the right track of the process of collective security, it was even tacitly approved by the Universal House of Justice:

Significantly, it was also on the initiative of a political leader of one of the Western hemisphere nations which had been addressed by Bahá'u'lláh, that His summons to collective security - first reflected in the nominal sanctions voted by the League of Nations against Fascist aggression in Ethiopia - was at long last given practical effect. In November 1956, Lester Bowles Pearson, then External Affairs Minister and later Prime Minister of Canada, secured the creation by the United Nations of its first international peacekeeping force, an achievement which won its author the Nobel Prize for Peace. The full nature of the authority contained in such a mandate would steadily emerge as a major feature of international relations during the second half of the century. Beginning with the policing of agreements worked out between hostile states, the principle of collective action in defense of peace gradually took on the form of military interventions such as that of the Gulf War, in which compliance with Security Council resolutions were imposed by force on aggressor factions and states.[11]

This reminds a theory of humanitarian intervention by Michael Walzer, a prominent scholar of ethical philosophy. He suggests when human rights are being violated somewhere, it is every state's duty to stop it. But since not all the states are capable of doing so, those powerful states should take the initiative and put an end to that crime.

We learn from Bahá'u'lláh:

Today the 'true duty' of a powerful king is to establish a universal peace; for verily it signifies the freedom of all the people of the world. Some persons who are ignorant of the world of true humanity and its high ambitions for the general good, reckon such a glorious condition of life to be very difficult, nay rather impossible to compass. But it is not so, far from it.[12]

Here a new important criterion of just war is created. Some states try to justify their war by saying it has been for a righteous purpose. Some, when threatened or attacked, say waging the war is their right. Waging war for a righteous purpose needs not a justification nor is a right. If truly for a righteous purpose, it is a duty!

'Abdu'l-Bahá practically explains in details how an 'unjust war'

should be dealt with:

The ideals of Peace must be nurtured and spread among the inhabitants of the world; they must be instructed in the school of Peace and the evils of war.

First: The financiers and bankers must desist from lending money to any government contemplating to wage an 'unjust war' upon an innocent nation.

Second: The presidents and managers of the railroads and steamship companies must refrain from transporting war ammunition, infernal engines, guns, cannons and powder from one country into another. Third: The soldiers must petition, through their representatives, the Ministers of War, the politicians, the Congressmen and the generals to put forth in a clear, intelligible language the reasons and the causes which have brought them to the brink of such a national calamity. [13]

The rest of the compilation is even more fascinating. 'Abdu'l-Bahá then suggests that the soldiers shall fight if they know their war is a 'just war':

The soldiers must demand this as one of the prerogatives. "Demonstrate to us", they must say, "that this is a just war, and we will then enter into the battlefield otherwise we will not take one step.... Come forth from your hiding-places, enter into the battlefield if you like to attack each other and tear each other to pieces if you desire to air your so-called contentions. The discord and feud are between you; why do you make us, innocent people, a party to it? If fighting and bloodshed are good things, then lead us into the fray by your presence!"[14]

Here we study some foundational concepts forming the Bahá'í ideology on which the Bahá'í theory of just war is based:

Individual and Society

As introduced earlier, when talking about individuals, the Bahá'í writings disapprove war and encourage all the people to peace and forgiveness:

When a thought of war comes, oppose it by a stronger thought of peace. A thought of hatred must be destroyed by a more powerful thought of love. Thoughts of war bring destruction to all harmony, well-being, restfulness and content.[15]

But as soon as it comes to social life, the society is ordered to justice:

The constitution of the communities depends upon justice, not upon forgiveness. Then what Christ meant by forgiveness and pardon is not that, when nations attack you, burn your homes, plunder your goods, assault your wives, children and relatives, and violate your honour, you should be submissive in the presence of these tyrannical foes and allow them to perform all their cruelties and oppressions. No, the words of Christ refer to the conduct of two individuals toward each other: if one person assaults another, the injured one should forgive him. But the communities must protect the rights of man.[16]

Reflection of Justice in the Society

The Bahá'í conception of social life is essentially based on the subordination of the individual will to that of society. It neither suppresses the individual nor does it exalt him to the point of making him an anti-social creature, a menace to society. As in everything, it follows the 'golden mean'. The only way that society can function is for the minority to follow the will of the majority...[17]

In a world of interdependent peoples and nations the advantages of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole, and...no abiding benefit can be conferred upon the component parts if the general interests of the entity itself are ignored or neglected.[18]

So not only the subordination of the member to the group necessitates justification of some wars and we must not consider it as an obstacle to peace if not bringing about it, but also we must note that our own "refusal to bear arms can never establish peace"[19] either.

Just War: The Bahá'í Model

In this all-embracing Pact the limits and frontiers of each and every nation should be clearly fixed, the principles underlying the relations of governments towards one another definitely laid down, and all international agreements and obligations ascertained. In like manner, the size of the armaments of every government should be strictly limited, for if the preparations for war and the military forces of any nation should be allowed to increase, they will arouse the suspicion of others. The fundamental principle underlying this solemn Pact should be so fixed that if any government later violate any one of its provisions, all the governments on earth should arise to reduce it to utter submission, nay the human race as a whole should resolve, with every power at its disposal, to destroy that government. Should this greatest of all remedies be applied to the sick body of the world, it will assuredly recover from its ills and will remain eternally safe and secure.[20]

Notes

[1] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith 'Abdu'l-Bahá Section, p. 231.

[2] Ibid, p. 284.

[3] Extracts from letters written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 4 July 1982 to an individual believer, p. 72.

[4] Boutros-Ghali, B., Agenda for peace.

[5] Perez de Cuellar, J., The limits to sovereignty.

[6] Bahá'í International Community, Obstacles to human rights, Vienna 14-25 June 1993.

[7] Compilations, quoted in Lights of Guidance, p. 407.

[8] Ibid.

[9] On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, May 11, 1932.

- [10] ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, 2nd ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), pp. 64-67, 70-71.
- [11] Commissioned by The Universal House of Justice, The Century of Light, p. 72.
- [12] Bahá'u'lláh, Star of the West, vol. 7, no. 14 (November 1916), p. 136.
- [13] ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, The Compilation of Compilations, vol. 2, p. 173.
- [14] Ibid.
- [15] ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 29.
- [16] ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Some answered questions, pp. 270-1.
- [17] Compilations, quoted in Lights of Guidance, p. 407.
- [18] Shoghi Effendi, The unfoldment of world civilization, The world order of Bahá'u'lláh.
- [19] Compilations, quoted in Lights of Guidance, p. 407.
- [20] ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 64.

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