

## Focus on ...

# Principles of a just war

Principles of *jus ad bellum* (just recourse to war)

- *Last resort*. All non-violent options must have been exhausted before force can be justified. This is sometimes seen as the principle of necessity.
- *Just cause*. The purpose of war is to redress a wrong that has been suffered. This is usually associated with self-defence in response to military attack, viewed as the classic justification for war.
- *Legitimate authority*. This is usually interpreted to imply the lawfully constituted government of a sovereign state, rather than a private individual or group.
- *Right intention*. War must be prosecuted on the basis of aims that are morally acceptable (which may or may not be the same as the just cause), rather than revenge or the desire to inflict harm.
- *Reasonable prospect of success*. War should not be fought in a hopeless cause, in which life is expended for no purpose or benefit.
- *Proportionality*. War should result in more good than evil, in that any response to an attack should be measured and proportionate (sometimes seen as 'macro-proportionality' to distinguish it from the

*jus in bello* principle). For example, a wholesale invasion is not a justifiable response to a border incursion.

Principles of *jus in bello* (just conduct in war)

- *Discrimination*. Force must be directed at military targets only, on the grounds that civilians or non-combatants are innocent. Death or injury to civilians is therefore only acceptable if they are the accidental and unavoidable victims of deliberate attacks on legitimate targets, sometimes seen as **collateral damage**.
- *Proportionality*. Overlapping with *jus ad bellum*, this holds that the force used must not be greater than that needed to achieve an acceptable military outcome, and must not be greater than the provoking cause.
- *Humanity*. Force must not be directed ever against enemy personnel if they are captured, wounded or under control (prisoners of war). Together with the other *jus in bello* principles, this has been formalized over time, in the so-called 'laws of war'.