



Mains Practice Question

Q. Discuss the ethical dimensions surrounding the concept of 'just war' in the contemporary geopolitical context. (150 Words)

26 Oct, 2023 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach

- Start by defining the concept of 'just war' and its historical context.
- Discuss the core principles of 'just war' theory.
- You can conclude with a thoughtful reflection on the need for ethical considerations to guide international relations and conflict resolution.

Introduction

The concept of 'just war' is **a doctrine of military ethics that aims to ensure that a war is morally justifiable** through a series of criteria, such as having a just cause, a legitimate authority, a right intention, a reasonable chance of success, and a proportionate use of force. The concept has a long history in various religious and philosophical traditions.

Body

Elements of Just War Theory:

- Just war theory is divided into three parts. These parts are:
 - **Jus Ad Bellum:** About the justice of resorting to war in the first place.
 - **Jus in Bello:** It is about justice of conduct within war.
 - **Jus Post Bellum:** This is about the justice of peace agreements and the termination phase of the war.

Several **key ethical dimensions** should be considered when discussing 'just war' in the modern world.

- **Jus Ad Bellum: Right to Wage War:** This principle focuses on the justifications for going to war. In the contemporary context, the debate often centers on issues like self-defense, the prevention of aggression, humanitarian intervention, and the responsibility to protect (R2P).
 - For instance, preemptive wars, as seen in the case of the 2003 Iraq invasion, are highly controversial, as they challenge traditional notions of self-defense.
- **Proportionality and Necessity:** An essential element of 'just war' theory is the proportionality of force and the necessity of military action. The ethical concern here is whether the level of violence is justified by the threat or the goals to be achieved. Excessive force and tactics causing civilian harm, like drone strikes and bombing, spark profound ethical dilemmas in modern warfare.
- **Non-Combatant Immunity:** One of the most critical ethical dimensions in modern warfare is the protection of non-combatants. The rise of non-state actors and asymmetrical warfare has blurred the lines between combatants and civilians. Questions of proportionality and the use of tactics like terrorism complicate the issue of safeguarding non-combatants' rights.
- **Preventive War and Preemption:** The concept of preventive war, where a state engages in military action to prevent a potential future threat, poses ethical dilemmas. The invasion of Iraq in

2003 is an example, as it was based on the anticipation of a threat that was later proven to be unfounded.

- **Human Rights and International Law:** In the contemporary geopolitical context, adherence to international law and human rights norms is crucial. The ethical dimension lies in whether nations respect international laws and agreements, such as the Geneva Conventions, and the responsibility of great powers in upholding these laws. Violations of international law, such as the use of chemical weapons, are significant ethical concerns.
- **War and Technology:** Advances in military technology, such as autonomous weapons and cyber warfare, present new ethical challenges. The use of these technologies raises questions about responsibility, proportionality, and the potential for unintended consequences in the modern battlefield.

Conclusion

In the contemporary geopolitical context with ongoing Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine war, the ethical dimensions surrounding the concept of 'just war' are as relevant as ever, with ongoing debates about interventionism, the responsibility to protect, and the balance between national security and global human rights. As warfare evolves, ethical considerations must adapt to the changing nature of conflicts and the potential consequences for the international community.

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