

## JUST WAR IN AFGHANISTAN?

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*For Jeremiah*

*Abstract:* This paper considers three questions in relation to the, primarily, U.S. war against the Taliban government and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. First, did the war meet the eight traditional criteria of what is called just war theory? Second, whether the criteria were met or not, in view of the numerous and serious objections to the traditional just war theory, isn't it best to be done with this approach to war and ethics? (Here, among other things, I indicate the utility of the theory even by pacifists adopting it hypothetically for the sake of anti-war argument in a larger public forum.) Third, even if just war criteria remain relevant, since they were designed to guide the decision to go to war and the conduct of war undertaken, aren't they largely moot now that the principal campaign is over? Taking up these questions in reverse order, I argue for a negative answer to each.

*Dulce bellum inexpertis* (war is sweet to those who know nothing of it), writes Erasmus. Many outside the nightmare of war in Afghanistan could read, hear, and see reports of some of the poorest and most wretched people on earth, reduced to eating grass after years of drought and famine, cut off from subsistence food deliveries in winter by war, maimed or blown to pieces in their towns and villages, weeping over their dead, or fleeing in terror from the bombing to camps where they and their children would freeze to death and starve in the tens of thousands. These events thrust the question of justice upon us. Though a lament might be more apt, perhaps an academic treatment, even where abstract, may lend something toward coming to terms with a great human tragedy.

To focus the discussion, we ask more precisely, did the, primarily, U.S. (and British) war<sup>1</sup> against the Taliban government and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan meet the eight traditional criteria of what is called just war theory? And whether it did or not, in view of the numerous and serious objections to the traditional just war theory (hereafter JWT), isn't it best to be done with this approach to war and ethics? Thirdly, even if just war criteria remain relevant, since they were designed to guide the decision to go to war and the conduct of war undertaken, aren't they largely moot now that the principal campaign is over? Taking up these questions in reverse order, I will argue for a negative answer to each in the discussion that follows.