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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE RELEVANCE OF THE JUST WAR THEORY IN MODERN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: A case study of the 1990-91 and 2003-03 USA-Iraqi wars

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Abstract

This study set out to critically analyze the relevance of the just war theory in explaining the modern international relations and conflict. The study sought to answer the question whether the just war theory is relevant in explaining the behavior of states in the modern war context. It further sought to explain the tension between state pursuit of national interests and the observation of international norms.

The just war theory is a theory, which was propounded and systematically developed by philosophers, theologians and scholars such as Cicero, St Thomas Aquinas and Grotius among others. The theory has to a greatly informed the modern International Law. The just war theory stipulates conditions under which a state can resort to war. It further maintains that morality and international norms can have influence in keeping war and violence at check.

This was an analytical study, which relied heavily on secondary data. A case study of USA-Iraq Gulf Wars formed the basis of the analysis of the just war theory.

The analysis of the just war vis-a-vis the case study found out that, states in the pursuit of their national interests, sometimes disregard international norms and the just war criteria. Some of the conditions stipulated by the just war theory are not applicable in the modern warfare because of the nature of modern weapons, which are

indiscriminate, and also the totality nature of the modern war. The study further found out that to a great extent, the first USA-Iraq war (1990-91) met the just war criteria unlike the second Gulf war (2002-03).

The study concluded that just war theory is relevant in explaining the modern international conflicts to the extent that it can determine whether a certain war is just or not. Further, the just war theory is a useful deterrent on modern war and can also delay the onset of war.

The study finally recommends further research on the extent to which the just war theory can explain intra state conflicts, civil war and other international conflicts such as terrorism. It further recommends scholarly discussions on the justification of modern warfare as a form of deterrence. Scholarly discussions that can lead to further development of the theory to respond to modern conflicts are also recommended.