

# Carnegie Council Lesson Plan for Ethical Issues in Peace and Security (60 minutes)

## Overview

This session explores ethical issues around peace and security. The tension between perpetual conflict and the value of human life is increasingly strained by regional wars, frozen conflicts, and the deployment of new military technologies. Students will learn about how ethics must be embedded in our security actions to protect human life and ensure just peace outcomes, specifically through the legal and ethical constraints provided by just war theory.

## Core Objectives

1. Students will learn about just war theory and how it provides moral and legal standards about the conditions in which a party can enter a war (*jus ad bellum*), the rules to which combatants in war are subject (*jus in bello*), and the rules for governing post-conflict resolution (*jus post bellum*).
2. Students will understand the way in which security goals need a greater role for ethics.

Carnegie Council principles that the lesson addresses:

- **The commitment to international cooperation** is a moral proposition because it goes to the essence of ethics—recognizing what is common for all, while managing the intrinsic and inevitable differences between and among people.
- **The defense of democracy in the U.S. and globally** requires confronting autocrats who discriminate based on ethnicity, gender, and religion, and who deny basic freedoms to their citizens.
- **Fidelity** means honesty, integrity, and a good-faith effort at serving the truth. Rhetoric certainly matters, and in an age of disinformation, leaders must fight against lies, willful deception, and deliberate misrepresentation of facts.
- **The humanitarian imperative** is the duty to save lives and alleviate suffering through humane and equal treatment. As violence and cruelty abound in conflict zones around the world, mounting effective humanitarian responses remains the essential moral imperative of our time.

## 1. Opening Ethical Provocation (10 minutes)

- **Prompt:** Is war ever justified? Is war the best way to resolve all conflicts, some conflicts, or no conflicts?
- Quick write and discussion

## 2. Overview (10 minutes)

This section relies on two resources, the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy's* page on [just war theory](#), as well as a resource from [The Ethics Centre](#).

**Just War Theory (JWT)** provides the ethical and legal framework for a just war. Many of the *jus in bello* provisions are codified in international humanitarian law, or the laws of armed conflict. It provides constraints on going to war, fighting, and how war is resolved. JWT is divided into three categories, each of which have different applicable principles.

### i. ***Jus ad bellum*: provides the conditions under which a state can go to war.**

1. Just Cause: states can use force to defend their country or to help another state
2. Right Intention: states should only go to war in defense of a just cause and not, for instance, to acquire new territory or to improve approval ratings
3. Legitimate Authority: only political leaders of a legitimate political community can initiate war
4. Reasonable Prospect of Success: a state should go to war only if there is a reasonable chance of it achieving its aims
5. Proportionality: the goals of the conflict must be valuable enough to outweigh the bads of war
6. Last Resort: all other options than war must have been exhausted to achieve the just cause

### ii. ***Jus in bello*: provides the rules under which war is to be waged**

1. Discrimination: combatants must distinguish between military objects and civilian objects, and cannot intentionally target civilians or civilian objects
2. Proportionality: states should only use the amount of force necessary to achieve an objective. If civilians are to be harmed as a side effect of attacking a military target, the attack must be necessary and use the least harmful means.

iii. ***Jus post bello***: describes what is necessary to move from war to peace. This is a less developed aspect of JWT. Some examples are:

1. Returning to the status quo before the war
2. Compensation to victims
3. Punishing war criminals
4. Fair peace treaties

### 3. Activity: Applying Just War Theory (30 minutes)

Students will break into small groups (three to four people in each group) and analyze the following scenarios to decide whether they satisfy the criteria of just war theory. For each example, students should identify the relevant JWT category and principles and decide whether the decision in question is justifiable.

**Preventative War.** Country A and Country B are neighboring countries and adversaries. Country B has invested more resources in its military and has recently built a large military installation near its shared border with Country A. While Country B denies that it is planning to attack, the politicians in Country A are under pressure from their constituents to do something about this. Would Country A be justified in attacking this new base even though Country B has not yet attacked?

**Humanitarian Intervention.** A civil war has broken out in Country C between the government and rebel forces, and the rebel forces have taken over several cities in the South part of the country. The government of Country C has begun to indiscriminately bomb these cities and seems to have no regard for civilian lives in these areas. The rebel forces have asked several regional governments to intervene militarily in this conflict. Would these countries be justified in entering the conflict?

**Targeting Suspected Terrorists.** Country D has experienced a major terrorist attack from a terrorist cell that is operating in a mountainous region located in both Countries E and F. Country D's intelligence service believes more likely than not it has identified a village in which the masterminds behind this attack are hiding, though it is unsure who else is living in this area, and it suspects the group is planning more attacks in Country D and other countries. Country D does not trust the governments of Countries E and F to apprehend this group or stop their activities. Would Country D be justified in targeting these suspected terrorists with drones and ballistic missiles?

**Targeting Infrastructure.** Country G invaded Country H because Country H wanted to acquire a valuable mineral region from Country G. Country G's military is heavily dependent upon oil imports because it has no domestic sources of fossil fuels. However, it is almost winter, and Country G's residents rely upon these imports to heat their homes. At a meeting of Country H's generals, one general has suggested that the war could be won very quickly if Country H would just destroy the oil refineries and oil pipelines that Country G relies upon. Would Country H be justified in doing so?

**Surrender.** Neighboring Countries J and K are nearing the end of a war that was provoked by Country K's unjust invasion. Country J seems to be in total control of the conflict, and has demanded that Country K surrender. However, the terms of surrender that Country J has proposed involve Country K provide a substantial reparation fund to rebuild parts of Country J that were destroyed in this attack. Country K has refused to accept these conditions. Which country has the more justified position?

After students have worked through these examples on their own, the instructor should ask the students to discuss as a class what they decided for each scenario. The discussion should also include whether any of the students found the examples ambiguous or if there was disagreement among the different groups.

#### **4. Conclusion (10 minutes)**

In the last few minutes of the class, the instructor should ask the students to consider the role played by ethics and law in war.

- Do the students believe that JWT is an important part of how a country pursues its security interests or is it a hindrance?
- How do the students view new technologies, such as AI or drone warfare? Do these make war more likely or less?
- How can states work together to make war less likely?

### **Additional Resources**

- [“The Cost of Military Primacy,”](#) Peter Harris & Kevin Maloney, *Values & Interests*, Carnegie Council, October 1, 2025 (Podcast)
- [“Re-examining our Capacity for Just Peace,”](#) *Ethics Empowered: Leadership in Practice*, Carnegie Council, December 11, 2025 (Event Recording & Transcript)
- [“New Rules for War,”](#) Joel Rosenthal, *Naval War College Review*, Summer/Autumn 2004 (Article)
- [“Review of \*How to End a War: Essays on Justice, Peace, and Repair\*,”](#) Lonneke Peperkamp, *Ethics & International Affairs*, Fall 2023 (Book Review)
- [“Is a Military Really Worth Having?,”](#) Introductory essay to symposium devoted to Ned Dobos’ book *Ethics, Security, and the War-Machine*, *Ethics & International Affairs*, October 21, 2021 (Essay)