

The Rules Of War That Trump Does Not Understand



Almost four years since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, diplomatic efforts to stop the fighting have gained momentum. U.S. President Donald Trump, who once ludicrously promised to end the war within 24 hours, has been putting intense and undue pressure on Kyiv and its European backers to cut a deal with Moscow—even if it comes at Ukraine's expense. Tellingly, no corresponding pressure has been brought to bear on Russia. After halting military aid to Ukraine earlier this year, Washington began advocating for the Kremlin's territorial and other goals last month amid reports of White House plans for lucrative business deals with the Kremlin.

One striking thing about Trump has been his phoney mediation and moral equivalency between democratic Ukraine, the clear victim and fascist Russia, the obvious perpetrator. For a "Commander-in-Chief," it is astonishing that Trump seems to have no appreciation of Just War Theory, the philosophical and ethical framework defining when war is morally permissible (jus

ad bellum) and how it should be fought (jus in bello), aiming to limit violence by setting rules for just causes (self-defense, last resort), right authority, and proper conduct (protecting civilians, proportionality). Rooted in religious and secular thought, it provides criteria to judge war's morality before, during, and after conflict, guiding leaders to use force only as a last, necessary evil for peace

Trump's various "peace plans" violate Just War Theory principles primarily because they reward aggressors, undermine core tenets of international law, and fail to secure fundamental justice for the victims of conflict. Trump completely ignores Putin's daily egregious war crimes and terrorism.

Just War Theory typically requires that a war be just in its aims (jus ad bellum) and just in its conduct (jus in bello), and that the peace resulting from the war also be just (jus post bellum). The main criticisms related to Trump's proposals across various conflicts (e.g., Ukraine, Israel-Palestine, Armenia-Azerbaijan) include:

Violations of Jus ad Bellum (Justice in the resort to war) and International Law

Rewarding Aggression: A central principle of post-WWII international law and an implicit moral requirement of a just peace is that borders cannot be changed by force. Plans that propose allowing Russia to keep captured Ukrainian territory, or redrawing Middle East boundaries to annex occupied land, are seen as rewarding the aggressor and violating the victim's right to self-defense and territorial integrity.

Undermining Sovereignty: By pressuring weaker nations (like Ukraine or Palestine) to make significant, potentially coerced, concessions, the plans are seen as overriding their legitimate sovereignty and right to self-determination.

Violations of Jus Post Bellum (Justice after the war)

Lack of Accountability: Certain proposals have included provisions for blanket amnesty for all parties' actions during the war. This directly violates international obligations to prosecute individuals for grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions, war crimes, and torture, thereby preventing true justice from being served.

Ignoring Justice for Victims: Plans for conflicts such as Nagorno-Karabakh have been criticized for ignoring the efforts of displaced populations to return safely and failing to provide justice for victims of human rights abuses, instead prioritizing economic access and political stability over reconciliation and rights.

Coerced Displacement: In the context of Gaza, the line between "voluntary exit" and forced displacement is blurred under conditions of blockade and bombardment. Critics argue this normalizes the coerced departure of a population, which is fundamentally unjust.

Prioritizing Stability Over Justice: The underlying approach often seems to aim for "stability" by entrenching existing power imbalances rather than achieving "social justice" for all parties involved, which many argue is a necessary condition for lasting peace.

In essence, Trump's "peace deal" plans bypass established international legal and moral principles for peace, instead favouring pragmatic deals that benefit stronger parties and compromise the rights and justice due to weaker or victimized populations.

Whatever agreements may be reached by Presidents Zelensky and Trump in the next short while, Canada and its Coalition of the Willing allies, partners and friends must act as if there is no legitimate peace deal with Russia because any Trump deal inherently ignores basic principles of justice and is ultimately a sham.

Canada and the Coalition of the Willing allies, partners, and friends need to sideline Trump and keep on protecting Ukraine's and their own vital security interests.