

Nigel Biggar, *In Defence of War*—A Review Essay¹

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Nigel Biggar's book In Defence of War is the most substantial, forceful and provocative Christian defence of the idea of a just war to have appeared in many years.² This article presents a summary of key arguments of the book (Part I) and briefly offers three critical observations on these arguments (Part II).

Introduction

Although the author states that 'this book comprises a series of essays, which means that each chapter is intelligible by itself and can be read independently of the others' (3), there is a clear central concern running through the whole book. The burden of *In Defence of War* is to argue that war is sometimes the justified means for correcting grave wrongdoing in international affairs. The book presents, from various angles, an extended defence of the Christian doctrine of just war, specifically its two central pillars: the right to go to war (*jus ad bellum*), and right conduct in war (*jus in bello*). From these two criteria follow several further specifications governing the decision as to whether to go to war and how to prosecute it once undertaken, *viz.*, under *jus ad bellum*: just cause, legitimate authority, right intention, last resort, proportionality and prospect of success; under *jus in bello*: proportionality and discrimination (3). These are elaborated lucidly (if belatedly) in chapter 7 as a preface to Biggar's detailed discussion of the Iraq war (251-3). These various criteria are not a 'random list of disparate criteria for judging the rightness and wrongness of belligerency'. Rather there is 'an internal logic that orders them, making some logically prior to others and imposing on the complex act of judgement a certain structure' (251).

Biggar argues forcefully that not all problems in international relations can be, or indeed should be, dealt with using pacific means; there are times when war can be the moral response to grave wrongdoing. A just war is a normative act insofar as it functions as a form of correction and punishment of wrongdoing. International relations should thus not seek peaceful coexistence at the expense of justice but should allow for and, where necessary, promote, 'fraternal correction' (166), punishing states and rulers by upholding the cause of innocent victims of grave injustice. Such an understanding of war is mostly absent from contemporary discourses on war and it is a controversial one.

Biggar's critique of pacifism, and of the 'virtual pacifism' that can follow from an overly-optimistic 'presumption against war' (7), is unsparing. He describes such positions – in what some readers will find harsh terms – as examples of the 'virus of wishful thinking' (9). Over against that he poses a threefold form of realism: an 'anthropological' realism which reckons with 'the fact of intractable human vice on the international stage' (11); a 'practical realism' which insists that its moral injunctions regarding war be 'realizable in practice' (14); and a 'moral' realism which holds that 'what is good and right is preceded by, and responsible to, a moral order that is rooted (somehow) in the nature of things – in objective reality' (11). Rejecting 'Hobbesian realism', he declares himself an adherent to an 'Augustinian realism', drawing extensively on, and developing further, the longstanding Christian tradition of just war reasoning. This threefold realism grounds the claim that a just war is not a perfect war or a holy war but is, 'on balance and all things considered', a war that can be morally justified according to the criteria of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*.

I. Overview of the book

It is not possible in the space of a short review essay to convey either the full scope or the rich complexity of the arguments in the book, and nor is it possible to explore most of the possible counter-arguments.³ In this part I

merely identify selected highlights from each chapter (except for the final one, to which I return in part 2), alluding only in passing to some of the critical questions it raises.

Chapter 1, '**Against Christian pacifism**', engages with three prominent Christian pacifists – Stanley Hauerwas, the late John Howard Yoder and Richard Hays – with a view to defending a reading of Scripture that allows for the idea of just war. While conceding that sometimes as Christians we must lay down our weapons and 'pray God to defend what we ourselves may no longer defend' (21), Biggar rejects the absolute pacifism (the complete rejection of the deliberate use of violence) of the three writers. The New Testament, he finds, does not after all contain an absolute prohibition of all uses of violence. These three pacifists fail to see this, in part because they refuse to distinguish between different kinds of violence and the different motivations that can occasion it (47-50, 59). Violent force can be compatible with Christian love and forgiveness when deployed to defend the innocent against the wicked. He rejects the Anabaptist reading of Romans 13, on the governing authority's call to bear the sword, claiming that this reading 'puts the pacifist believers in the intellectually incoherent position of contradicting in principle what they depend upon in practice, and in the morally inconsistent position of keeping their own hands clean only because others are required to get theirs dirty' (43). Pacifists, he concludes, are 'prepared to perform deliberate acts of omission, which permit innocents to die at the hands of the unjust' (30). This chapter makes uncomfortable reading for anybody with pacifist leanings. Whether it amounts to a conclusive rebuttal, readers must judge for themselves.

Chapter 2, '**Love in war**', elaborates the notion that just war is a form of 'kind harshness' intended to uphold moral order and is one of the aspects of Christian love for our enemies. Victims should certainly prefer reconciliation to 'vengeance'. Yet Biggar seeks to make a case that, when qualified by forgiveness, enacting violence on a neighbour can be an act of love; the duty to forgive and seek reconciliation does not exclude retributive punishment. There are two moments of forgiveness: forgiveness as 'compassion', which is unconditional and unilateral; and forgiveness as 'absolution', which is conditional on the perpetrator's repentance. Between these moments, resentment against the wrong done and retributive punishment may be legitimate, so long as qualified by forgiveness (60). '[P]rovided that forgiveness-as-compassion has exorcised vengeance, theology will endorse a benevolent form of retribution that aims to uphold the dignity of the injured and contradict the offense of the perpetrator' (71). Moderated resentment is a fitting response to wrongdoing and moderated violence, as distinct to vengeance, is needed for prospectively achieving a more just peace (72). In a section entitled 'Can love walk the battlefield?' Biggar seeks to show that love can qualify violence in practice and not just in theory. He defends the idea that emotions of anger, hatred and rage are a necessary part of battle, even though well-trained soldiers do not kill for sheer pleasure and are mainly driven by honourable motives. His focus, however, is on the (admittedly mixed) motivations of individual soldiers and he does not sufficiently explore here the question of whether collective agents like states and armies can express love through military action. Nor, incidentally, is there any substantial discussion in the book about wars that were clearly unjust overall.

Chapter 3, '**The principle of double effect: Can it survive combat?**' seeks to argue that not all killing is murder. The key distinction appealed to here is between intention and effect. Biggar argues thus: 'intention is not just about deliberate choice, but also about desire; not just about killing, but also about wanting. An effect that I intend, therefore, is one that I both choose and want; and an effect that I accept is one that I choose but do not want' (95). Biggar offers a careful analysis of the meaning of 'intention', allowing him to propose that soldiers in action should not 'intend the death' of enemy combatants but should (and often do) regard such death as the often-necessary consequence of the proper intention to incapacitate the enemy's military capability. He goes on to draw a further conclusion regarding the killing of noncombatants – one that some will find disturbing – that 'the deliberate [but unwanted] killing of the innocent is not wrong *as such*' if it is proportionate to achieving success in an otherwise justified war (98). Thus the principle of double effect can survive combat despite that fact that going to war to save the innocent, and knowingly, but reluctantly, killing the innocent for the sake of winning a (just) war, become part of the same moral project in a just war. He notes that the *in bello* criterion of discrimination implies a 'prohibition of intentional attacks upon non-combatants' (253). This is often termed the principle of 'non-combatant immunity', but Biggar does not use the term 'immunity' and one can see why: on his reading, *jus in bello* requires that civilian deaths not be *intended*, that they be minimised and their number be proportionate to what was militarily necessary (100), but does not rule out deliberate attacks on military targets that knowingly cause civilian deaths, possibly in large numbers.

Chapter 4 is entitled '**Proportionality: Lessons from the Somme and the First World War**'. A century after the start of WW1 there remains significant controversy over its justification, and in that debate the Somme has become for many a byword for criminally disproportionate military slaughter. Biggar argues that the criterion of proportionality is intended to function as a restraint on war. The criterion 'rules against the resort to violence that is less governed by the constructive intention of just peace than driven by the annihilating motives of revenge or hatred' (113). A war must be 'worth it' according to a reasonable judgement of the prospects for the intended just peace. Biggar defends WW1 as justified on that criterion, and claims that it succeeded in its objective of resisting aggressive German expansionism. Biggar also accepts the historical arguments of those who claimed that even the 'attrition war' seen in the Somme was acceptable (120-9). Just war seeks to restrain killing yet it can allow it 'on a very grand scale indeed' (114). He concedes that British Commander-in-Chief Sir Douglas Haig's decisions made the attritional character of the Somme disproportionate (128), but holds that 'in the real world there are only imperfect wars prosecuted by imperfect generals' (129). As he puts it, 'what is required is only that the use of violent force appear proportionate according to a judgement that seemed reasonable at the time – not that it actually was proportionate in Olympian hindsight' (112). Indeed a certain 'callous' attitude – a willingness to 'spend' one's soldiers' lives (as distinct to a careless 'wasting' of them) is a virtue for a military commander fighting a just war. Just war theory calls for 'carefulness before battle, callousness in it, and compassion after it' (118).⁴ Biggar insists that proportionality is never a matter of 'arithmetic calculation' (a 'modern technocrat's fantasy') but of conscientious judgement on the basis of a hierarchy of (often incommensurable) goods and in the face of an unpredictable future (146). He knows full well that the Allies suffered 622,000 casualties at the Somme, and Germany even more. Readers will reach their own judgements (as indeed do the historians and moral philosophers with whom he interacts) on whether this was a price worth paying.

Chapter 5, '**Against legal positivism and liberal individualism**', is an extended, rigorous response to David Rodin's sophisticated liberal critique of just war theory as failing theoretically and practically to meet the challenges of contemporary international ethics. There is no space here to summarise even the highlights of this complex exchange. Biggar's central objective is to show how Rodin's critique of just war theory may be valid as far as it goes – its targets are modern legal-positivist and Walzerian versions of the theory – but inadequate because it largely neglects the argumentative resources of the Christian tradition (153). Accordingly the chapter engages extensively with key historical Christian sources of just war theory such as Augustine, Aquinas, Vitoria, Suarez, and Grotius.⁵ Biggar also shows how Rodin's argument is vitiated by its individualism and its rejection of the objective moral claims of the common good.

Chapter 6 carries the provocative title, '**On not always giving the Devil benefit of law: Legality, morality and Kosovo**'. The chapter addresses the distinction between legality and morality in relation to the war in Kosovo. Biggar argues that the moral realism assumed by Christian just war theory holds that 'there is a universal moral order that transcends national legal systems and applies to international relations even in the absence of positive international law' (214). The inescapable conclusion of this basic claim is that, while there are very powerful *prima facie* reasons for obeying positive law, it cannot have the final word in moral deliberations about war. The conclusion he comes to from this starting-point is that NATO's intervention in Kosovo was at once 'formally illegal' and yet 'morally right': Kosovo was an occasion where positive law either ruled out or at least gave at most ambivalent support to military intervention, but where the demands of justice nevertheless mandated it. Biggar endorses the widely held view that, because there was appalling mass killing and refugees fleeing Serbian aggression, and because the UN Security Council was paralysed and powerless to act, NATO simply had to intervene to stop another ethnic cleansing taking place on Europe's soil. It was a case of 'humanitarian intervention' warranted by justice even if not clearly by international law (it was supported, he argues, by the influential, though not yet legally recognised, idea of a 'responsibility to protect'). Biggar argues that NATO members were primarily motivated by a humanitarian desire to protect a minority facing the imminent threat of genocide. The fact that they may also have been motivated by the desire to preserve the credibility of NATO does not invalidate the intervention, for not all self-interested actions are necessarily immoral. Indeed, NATO's members had a proper national interest in maintaining their 'moral integrity'; many nations 'want to believe that they are doing the right or the noble thing, and they will tolerate the cost of war – up to a point – in a just cause that looks to succeed' (232).

The final chapter, '**Constructing judgement: The case of Iraq**', offers an extended concrete test case of just war theory, the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. I discuss this chapter in part 2 and so defer an account until then.

II. Three critical observations

In this part I briefly identify three objections, each of which merits fuller statement than is possible here. The first two, I suggest, are significant lacunae in the book, rendering Biggar's defence of just war less successful than it might have been.⁶ The third is a critique of his justification of the Iraq war.

Militarism

The first lacuna is that there is no significant discussion of *militarism*. In chapter 4 pre-1914 Germany is characterised along the lines of militarism. But Biggar does not engage with the substantial literature arguing that the contemporary world has become highly militarised or take note of the compelling challenges this literature presents to his account of just war.

'Militarism' refers not simply to the inclination to fight wars but to the domination of society by military values like hierarchy, domination and force. This critique of militarism appeals to the empirical evidence of the vast increase in the amount of weapons in the world and the pervasiveness of military bases, but also argues that militarism has become a way of understanding the world. Societies defined by a culture of militarism will be marked, for example, by the promotion of children's toys, video games and films that glorify killing and violence.

World military expenditure in 2012 is estimated to have reached \$1.756 trillion. The United States has less than 5% of the world's population but accounts for over 40% of the world's expenditure on military. The United States military has between 700 – 1000 active military bases or undisclosed sites in over 150 countries across the world.⁷ Retired US Army Colonel Andrew Bacevich, in his widely-endorsed book *The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War*, speaks of an emerging military 'metaphysic' and states that militarism is the 'tendency to see international problems as military problems and to discount the likelihood of finding a solution except through military means'⁸. These authors join many others in arguing that in the United States national greatness is equated with military power, the military warrior glorified, and criticism of the military establishment muted. Many have also argued that what drives and sustains the culture of militarism in the United States is the 'military-industrial complex' (a term memorably used by President Eisenhower in 1961) that profits from war-making.

Joanna Bourke's book *An Intimate History of Killing* is another contribution to the critical exposure of militarism.⁹ Biggar quotes from it (at 79) to make the point that soldiers are motivated to kill not out of vengeance but out of love for their comrades and their families. He does note that 'once we relax the leash on the dogs of war, we should expect to be dragged where we don't want to go' (253). But Bourke's book is really about how the structure of war encourages pleasure in killing, and that perfectly ordinary, gentle human beings can become enthusiastic killers.

There may be two possible reasons for Biggar's neglect of this literature. One is that embracing these critiques of militarism may seem to lead one towards a stance of practical pacifism, whereby although war may still be seen as abstractly justifiable, its cultural and political context and deficient execution seem to rule it out for all practical purposes. Another is that the reality of militarism seems to cast doubt on a major assumption in Biggar's case, namely that advanced liberal democracies like the USA are clearly superior in moral character to those against whom they fight. There is no doubt that the USA and UK were morally superior to Iraq under Saddam Hussein. But if the states whose wars Biggar wants to justify are actually defined by militarism – if their perceptions of the world, the size and shape of their military machines, and their political values, are all significantly distorted by militarism – then they may be sufficiently clouded in their capacity to engage in objective just war reasoning that they are inherently incapable of waging just wars.

These, then, are two possible explanations for this lacuna. Whether or not they are right, the lacuna still stands out as at least requiring justification.

Just peace

A second significant lacuna is the absence of any extended discussion of the growing literature on *just peace*. Biggar speaks forthrightly of the 'evils of peace' (5-7); his defence of war rests on the key claim that, although war brings great evil, peace has its own evils too (33). Yet this claim is, at least, seriously incomplete without a much fuller engagement not only with the goods of peace as cessation of armed conflict but also with how the criterion of the

prospects for attaining a just peace ought to inform our very decisions on whether to go to war at all, as well as to how to prosecute it if we do. In the opening page of the introductory chapter Biggar admits that 'I do not have it in me to write a book about peace... it is war that captures my imagination' (1). On the one hand, he certainly recognises that the goal of just war has always been seen as none other than achieving a 'just peace' (he invokes the term frequently in the book). Indeed he has himself contributed to the literature on post-conflict reconciliation.¹⁰ But on the other, the failure to engage significantly with the numerous insights being offered today on what constitutes a normative understanding of just peace – some of which expose the narrow frame of reference of just war theory – is regrettable.

Many such contributors are now arguing that just war theory cannot rely only on the *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* criteria. For even if those criteria are met, how can a war be considered just overall if no secure peace is created – if, as in the aftermath of the Iraq war, over 130,000 civilian lives (including nearly 17,000 in 2014) have been sacrificed and the nation plunged into seemingly endless violent chaos from which it has still not emerged?¹¹ There is a growing movement, particularly after the Iraq war, for *jus post bellum* to be included as the third pillar of the just war tradition.¹² Biggar rejects this proposal, assuming that *jus post bellum* is already implied in the *jus ad bellum* criterion (3) (although he does not sufficiently spell out how). Nonetheless I propose that one of the key ways to prevent just war rhetoric from being used as a fig-leaf to lend credibility to unjust wars is to establish *jus post bellum* criteria for evaluating the justice of peace after war.

I mention just one example of this important literature. Daniel Philpott's *Just and Unjust Peace: An Ethic of Political Reconciliation* is one of the most significant recent contributions.¹³ Liberal peace theory, centred on individual rights, the rule of law and retributive punishment, has been dominant in the thinking and practice of international peacebuilding. Philpott affirms many of the norms and practices of liberal peace but argues that we must go beyond it by embracing reconciliation as an additional concept of justice, the purpose of which is 'the restoration of right relationship' (5). 'Justice is the will to bring a comprehensive repair to the relationships that injustices have ruptured so that the persons involved are once again living according to the demands of right relationship' (53). Instead of abstractly balancing legal rights and wrongs, a 'reconciling justice' will deal with wounded persons and ruptured relationships. Philpott shows cogently how such an ethic of reconciliation offers great promise for restoring political orders with a calamitous past, even though in political practice it will remain a modest, partial and incomplete goal (as Biggar also recognises¹⁴).

Two specific implications drawn out by Philpott are worth highlighting. The first is that the vision of a just peace calls for a restorative practice of justice, 'a dimension of justice...embodied in reconciliation, animated by mercy, and aiming at peace' (208). Restorative punishment seeks to heal the wounded soul not only of the victims but also of the perpetrators. It upholds the dignity of victims without banishing the possibility of restoring right relationship between victim and perpetrator. Concretely, this implies 'graduations of courts and combinations of institutions' (250) that go beyond retributive punishment and aspire towards a holistic restoration.

The second is a broader concept of forgiveness. Forgiveness is a kind of relinquishment, and 'in political contexts, the relinquishment of something owed or of prosecution rightly pursued is better thought of as judicial mercy or pardon' (259). Thus, 'forgiveness is a proactive, constructive effort on the part of the victim to view a perpetrator in a new light' (260). Forgiveness can promote reconciliation in the political sphere by allowing the perpetrator to be viewed 'as a fellow citizen in good standing, a member of a common legitimate political order' (261), thereby making possible a breaking of the cycle of violence.¹⁵

While much of the new just peace literature focuses on what to do when armed conflict has ceased, it nonetheless poses sharply the question whether the capacity of the victorious power to take on what have been called 'the responsibilities of victory' ought not to be more rigorously factored into the judgment as to whether to go to war in the first place.¹⁶ Biggar's proposals are not necessarily incompatible with this kind of account of a just peace, but in largely bypassing it his own account of just war appears at best one-sided. This is one aspect of the critique I shall now pose against his account of the Iraq war.

The Iraq war

Building on all that has gone before, in chapter 7 Biggar works systematically through all the key just war criteria in order to demonstrate that reaching moral judgement about a military intervention such as Iraq in 2003 can be

highly complex and difficult (there is a crisp summary of the multiple 'credits' and 'debits' at p317). The Iraq war was 'not so morally simple' (254). He concludes, however, that, 'All things considered... the invasion...was justified' (325).

I cannot summarise all the key claims in a dense chapter of over 70 pages but here are some examples. On the fundamental question of *jus ad bellum*, Biggar appeals to the intolerably grave injustices committed by an 'atrocious regime' (meriting punishment even after the fact and even if no longer currently committing such injustices) and to the widely-believed threat that Iraq had acquired or would soon would acquire WMD and possibly transfer it to terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda. On legitimate authority, Biggar concedes that the legal case for war was not optimal, yet not such as to make it clearly illegal (indeed it was stronger than that for Kosovo (279, 281)). Interpreted contextually, and while recognising that this is a much-disputed position, Biggar holds that UN resolutions did give member states sufficient legal grounds for an invasion in 2003 in the face of Iraq's persistent flouting of earlier ones. On right intention, after sifting much evidence he concludes that although there were major flaws in the war's public justification, planning and execution, there was no fundamental insincerity on the part of the US and UK governments in waging it (291). Their central moral justification was that 'dislodging an atrocious tyrant like Saddam Hussein and opening up the possibility of a healthier political future for the Iraqi people were good things to do' (324). Crucially, his judgement of the overall justice of the war depends on his view that the *jus ad bellum* criteria are the really decisive ones: failure to meet *in bello* criteria of proportionality and discrimination does not make a war unjust as a whole (320).

While very few have disputed the atrocity of Saddam's murderous regime, critics have nevertheless contested virtually all of the other claims Biggar advances in arguing that it met just war criteria (as well as his ranking of the criteria). Here I recall just three of the more important counter-arguments.

First, putting the conflict in longer historical perspective than Biggar does poses a serious question regarding 'right intention'. Biggar frequently and rightly mentions Saddam's atrocities as the fundamental just cause for the war (254 – 258), citing the 1988 Anfal massacre as definitive of state atrocity. Yet he neglects to point out that, in 1986, the United States was the only country to vote against a UN Security Council Resolution condemning Iraq's use of mustard gas against Iranian troops. At this time Iraq was viewed as the US's convenient ally against Iran; the US was in fact openly supportive of Saddam during the Anfal massacre. What is more, it has been shown that US companies were at that time supplying Iraq with chemical and biological weapons.¹⁷ Does this not tarnish the image Biggar seeks to paint of the US as a country with 'moral integrity', whose indignation is 'aroused by news of mass murder in foreign parts' (258)?¹⁸ In response to the general criticism that humanitarian interventions reveal a 'hypocritical inconsistency' on the part of interveners, Biggar replies that 'it is better to be inconsistently responsible than consistently irresponsible' (233). I think many will not be reassured by this in the case of US intentions in Iraq.¹⁹

Second, on the criterion of last resort, Biggar reasons that, given what we now know about the lack of WMD, the invasion was not *in fact* a last resort, but that, given the apparent failure of 'containment', the Coalition powers could not be blamed for thinking it was (300). He also makes much of the divided nature of the UN Security Council and the claim that, as a result, nations that cared about justice had to act independently to uphold UN resolutions (notably 258) and at great expense, including loss of reputation. Yet one could argue that the reason why there was no collective international will to wage war against Iraq in 2003 was not because the international community was morally indifferent to the evils of peace but precisely because those governments opposing the war genuinely believed that the regime was no longer a serious threat to international peace. Following a history of the regime's persistent flouting of UN resolutions, UN weapons inspectors returned to Iraq from November 27, 2002. But by the time they left in March 18, 2003 (with the US military mustering on the border) they had found no actual evidence that Iraq possessed chemical or biological weapons or that it had reconstituted its nuclear weapons programme.²⁰ The US and the UK rejected these findings and argued, based on their own intelligence, that Iraq did possess WMD and was a growing threat to international peace. We now know that these assertions were false. (Biggar acknowledges that the US and UK governments were thus in 'error' (263) but exonerates them from any charge of deliberate deception on the point). In 2003 Iraq was a much less atrocious regime in terms of gross violations of its own citizens' rights, and less capable of causing harm outside it, than it had been ten years earlier. Saddam was not after all the Hitler of the Middle East, as he was routinely portrayed in order to bolster support for the invasion.

Third, the terrible paucity of serious and informed post-war planning directed to achieving a truly just peace has been widely held to invalidate the Coalition's claim to have met the criteria of proportionality and prospect of success. Biggar's own critique of post-bellum planning is actually quite forceful (300-310): it was 'woefully inadequate' (301), and guilty of 'Enlightenment over-optimism, correlative impatience with human demoralization, excessive managerialist confidence in remaking the world, [...] a resultant refusal to heed expert advice or bad news', and, post-Vietnam, an aversion to assuming a counter-insurgency role (304). Earlier in the book Biggar conceded that one of the weaknesses of just war theory (upon which pacifism rightly pressed) is that 'before deciding to go to war or to embark on a particular military operation, one must judge that the evils caused will not subvert or outweigh the goods defended or promoted' (32). Biggar, however, does not allow the Coalition's monumental failure to plan for post-war security or reconstruction question his judgement as to the overall justice of the invasion. Moreover, in considering the *in bello* criteria of discrimination and proportionality, he himself endorses a probable figure of almost 200,000 violent civilian deaths (including those of civilian insurgents and their victims) by 2011 (313). Yet he adds, troublingly: 'massive civilian casualties in Iraq do not *by themselves* suffice to render the 2003 invasion unjust' (313).

Overall, he judges (citing in support the views of a group of young professional Iraqis he met in 2010) that the outcomes have, all things considered, been a net benefit to Iraq (308-310). Many, however, have deemed these to be palpable shortcomings on major criteria of just war theory, making the invasion and occupation not only catastrophic, but also grievously culpable on the part of the Coalition powers.

Biggar rightly acknowledges that human judgements regarding just war will always be speculative and morally controversial and yet dismisses as 'utterly utopian and impractical' any insistence on criteria that would be more objective and less controversial in their application than the ones we have (148). If that is so, we are left pondering the disturbing possibility that just war criteria, even as rigorously stated by Biggar, are incapable of resolving with sufficient clarity whether the most important and costly western-led military enterprise of the twenty-first century (so far) was actually justified.

Conclusion

In Defence of War book provides a bold, eloquent and erudite defence of war for the sake of justice in international relations. It may well become the defining Christian text on war and peace for years to come. It is a provocative work, fearlessly upsetting the assumptions and sensibilities of those who lean towards pacifism or who adopt a 'presumption against war'. I have pointed to three key deficiencies of the book. Yet notwithstanding these criticisms, in an age when warfare is undergoing radical changes and when threats to peace continue to overwhelm many citizens and nations in an increasingly turbulent world, this book is worthy of our careful attention and close critical scrutiny.

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¹ I am grateful to Jonathan Chaplin for his detailed comments on an earlier draft of this article. The usual disclaimer applies.

² Nigel Biggar, *In Defence of War* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 361pp. Unless otherwise indicated, page references in the text are to this book. Endorsing it, James Turner Johnson ranks it with Paul Ramsey's influential work of the 1960s.

³ For a review see John Kelsay, in *Studies in Christian Ethics* 27 (2014), 490-498; for an interview, see 'Justifying War: A conversation with Nigel Biggar', *Marginalia* (22 October 2013), <http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/justifying-war-a-conversation-with-nigel-biggar-part-one/>

⁴ Biggar goes far as to justify the possibility of Britain suffering 'even more casualties than she did, had Germany continued to fight' (144).

⁵ Unfortunately, he does not engage with Renaissance Christian humanist Erasmus's critique of early modern just war thinking.

⁶ Other lacunae include: the economics of war and the role of war-profiteers; how nationalism feeds war (apart from Germany prior to WW1); advances in military technology and weaponry (such as predator drones) and their implications for the laws of war; the relationship between just war and environmental damage.

⁷ See: <http://www.globalissues.org/article/75/world-military-spending>

⁸ Andrew Bacevic, *The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War* (Oxford University Press, 2006). See also Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (Metropolitan Books, 2004), 2; and ch. 6, 'The Empire of Bases'.

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- ⁹ Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face to Face Killing in Contemporary Warfare* (Granta Books, 2000).
- ¹⁰ Nigel Biggar, ed., *Burying the Past: making peace and doing justice after civil conflict* (Georgetown University Press, 2003).
- ¹¹ *Iraq Body Count*, <https://www.iraqbodycount.org/>, consulted December 2014.
- ¹² See Alex Bellamy, 'The Responsibilities of Victory: Jus Post Bellum and the Just War', *Review of International Studies*, 34 (2008), 601-625.
- ¹³ Daniel Philpott, *Just and Unjust Peace: An Ethic of Political Reconciliation* (Oxford University Press, 2012). Page references in the text in the next three paragraphs are to this work.
- ¹⁴ Biggar, *In Defence of War*, 76-7.
- ¹⁵ See Bethan Willis, 'Justice After Conflict', *Ethics in Brief* 20.1 (2014).
- ¹⁶ Bellamy, 'The Responsibilities of Victory'.
- ¹⁷ Research Unit for Political Economy, *Behind the Invasion of Iraq* (Monthly Review Press, 2003), 33. Biggar concedes that 'on America's historical record from 1953 to 1988 I am not competent to comment' (293).
- ¹⁸ Biggar's readiness to believe these stated views raises the question whether his book has after all fallen victim to what has been called 'Anglosphere parochialism'. His major examples are the English-speaking countries of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA and UK (US-UK relationships being the central axis of the 'Anglosphere'). See Srdjan Vucetic, *The Anglosphere: A Genealogy of a Racialized Identity in International Relations* (Stanford University Press, 2011).
- ¹⁹ Some have suggested that the invasion was, for the US, actually a vendetta war, in this case against a former ally gone rogue. Others have suggested that the US desire to protect access to Iraq's rich oil fields was another actual motivation (Biggar contests this at 293-4).
- ²⁰ It has also been shown that the supposed danger of al-Qaeda gaining access to Iraqi WMD (based on known contacts between the regime and senior operative Abu Musab al-Zarqawi) was greatly exaggerated by the USA as a way of garnering support for the invasion. See Thomas Ricks, 'Military Plays Up Role of Zarqawi', *Washington Post*, April 9, 2006. See also US diplomat Joseph Wilson's exposé of President Bush's claim in early 2003 that Iraq was seeking to purchase yellowcake uranium from Niger: 'What I Didn't Find in Africa', *New York Times*, July 6, 2003. Winter wrote that he had 'little choice but to conclude that some of the intelligence related to Iraq's nuclear weapons program was twisted to exaggerate the Iraqi threat'. But see Biggar at 270.