CONCEPT

Balance of power

The term 'balance of power' has been used in a variety of ways. As a *policy*, it refers to a deliberate attempt to promote a power equilibrium, using diplomacy, or possibly war, to prevent any state achieving a predominant position. As a *system*, the balance of power refers to a condition in which no one state predominates over others, tending to create general equilibrium and curb the hegemonic ambitions of all states. Although such a balance of power may simply be fortuitous, neorealists argue that the international system tends naturally towards equilibrium because states are particularly fearful of a would-be hegemon (see Approaches to the balance of power, p. 274).

population. For example, the USA's 'shock and awe' assault on Baghdad in the early days of the Iraq War may have led to the speedy fall of Saddam Hussein and the collapse of the Ba'athist regime, but it did not prevent the development of a protracted and highly complex counter-insurgency war. As the limitations of counter-insurgency became increasingly apparent, pressure has grown to develop new styles of warfare, not least the much wider use of **drones** and other unmanned devices (see p. 260).

JUSTIFYING WAR

While the nature of war and warfare have changed enormously over time, debates about whether, and in what circumstances, war can be justified have a much more enduring character, dating back to Ancient Rome and including medieval European philosophers such as Augustine of Hippo (354–430) and Thomas Aquinas (see p. 261). Three broad positions have been adopted on this issue. These are as follows:

- *Realpolitik* – suggesting that war, as a political act, needs no moral justification.
- Just war theory – suggesting that war can be justified only if it conforms to moral principles.
- Pacifism – suggesting that war, as an unnecessary evil, can never be justified.

Realpolitik

The defining feature of political realism, sometimes referred to as ***realpolitik***, is that matters of war and peace are beyond morality, in that they are – and should be – determined by the pursuit of national self-interest. In this view, war is accepted as a universal norm of human history; although war may be punctuated by possibly long periods of peace, peace is always temporary. For practitioners of *realpolitik*, the bias in favour of fighting and armed conflict derives usually either from innate human aggression or the aggressiveness that arises from the mismatch between unlimited human appetites and the scarce resources available to satisfy them. Either way, this implies, at best, a belief in **negative peace**, defined by the absence of its opposite, namely war or (more generally) active violence (Dower 2003).

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to portray political realists as warmongers, who are unconcerned about the death and devastation that war can wreak. Carl Schmitt (1996), for example, argued against just wars, on the grounds that wars fought for political gain tend to be limited by the fact that their protagonists operate within clear strategic objectives, whereas just wars, and especially humanitarian war, lead to total war because of their expansive goals and the moral fervour behind them. Indeed, one of the reasons why realists have criticized utopian liberal dreams about 'perpetual peace' is that they are based on fundamental misunderstandings about the nature of international politics that would, ironically, make war more likely, not less likely. For example, during the interwar period, UK and French policy-makers, deluded by the theories of liberal internationalism, failed to act to prevent the re-emergence of Germany as an expansionist power, thereby contributing to the outbreak of WWII. The essence of *realpolitik*, then, is that it is better to be 'hard-headed' than 'wrong-

● **Drone**: An unmanned aerial vehicle that may be used for surveillance or attack purposes.

● ***Realpolitik***: (German) Literally, realistic or practical politics; a form of politics or diplomacy that is guided by practical considerations, rather than by ideals, morals or principles.

● **Negative peace**: Peace defined as a period when war is neither imminent nor actually being fought, although the forces that give rise to war remain in place.

headed'. The sole reliable way of maintaining peace from this point of view is through the balance of power (see p. 262), and the recognition that only power can be a check on power. Moreover, it may also be misleading to portray *realpolitik* as amoral. Rather, it is an example of moral relativism, in that it is informed by a kind of ethical nationalism that places considerations of the national self-interest above all other moral considerations. In other words, its enemy is the notion of universal moral principles, not morality as such.

However, *realpolitik* has been subject to severe criticism. In the first place, it draws on assumptions about power politics, conflict, greed and violence that serve to legitimize war and the use of force by making them appear to be part of the 'natural order of things'. Feminist theorists, for their part, have argued that the emphasis on the national interest and military might reflect an essentially masculinist view of international politics, rooted, for example, in myths about 'man the warrior' (Elshtain 1987; Tickner 1992). Second, in view of the scope of devastation and suffering that war wreaks, the assertion that matters of war and peace are beyond morality (universal or otherwise) reflects a remarkable stunting of ethical sensibilities. Most thinking about why and when war can be justified therefore focuses on how the resort to war and its conduct can be reconciled with morality, usually through the notion of a 'just war'.

Just war theory

The idea of a '**just war**' is based on the assumption that war can be justified and should be judged on the basis of ethical criteria. As such, it stands between realism or *realpolitik*, which interprets war primarily in terms of the pursuit of power or self-interest, and **pacifism**, which denies that there ever can be a moral justification for war and violence. However, just war theory is more a field of philosophical or ethical reflection, rather than a settled doctrine. Its origins can be traced back to the Roman thinker, Cicero, but it was first developed systematically by philosophers such as Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, Francisco de Vitoria (1492–1546) and Hugo Grotius (see p. 341). Modern contributors to the tradition include Michael Walzer (see p. 265), Jean Bethke Elshtain (see p. 435) and David Rodin (2002).

Can standards of justice be applied to war, and what are the implications of doing so? Those who subscribe to the just war tradition base their thinking on two assumptions. First, human nature is composed of an unchangeable mixture of good and evil components. People may strive to be good, but they are always capable of immoral acts, and these acts include killing other human beings. War, in other words, is inevitable. Second, the suffering that war leads to can be ameliorated by subjecting warfare to moral constraints. As politicians, the armed forces and civilian populations become sensitized to the principles of a just war and the laws of war, fewer wars will occur and the harm done by warfare will be reduced. Just war theorists therefore argue that the purpose of war must be to re-establish peace and justice. But has a war ever fulfilled these high ideals? WWII is often identified as the classic example of a just war. The Nazis' record of growing aggression in the 1930s leaves little doubt about Hitler's determination to pursue bold and far-reaching expansionist goals, and possibly even world domination. The murder of 6 million Jewish people and others during the war itself demonstrates clearly the brutality and terror that Nazi domination would

● **Just war**: A war that, in its purpose and conduct, meets certain ethical standards, and so is (allegedly) morally justified.

● **Pacifism**: A commitment to peace and a rejection of war or violence in any circumstances ('pacific' derives from the Latin and means 'peace-making').