

# The Military Leadership of Napoleon Bonaparte in the Battle of Austerlitz from the Perspective of *Just War* *Theory*

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Received: Dec. 20, 2022    Accepted: Feb. 2, 2023    Published: March 7, 2023

doi:10.5296/ijssr.v11i1.20928    URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijssr.v11i1.20928>

## Abstract

The objective of the study is to analyze the moral aspects of Napoleon Bonaparte's military leadership in the Battle of Austerlitz based on Just War Theory. Napoleon's outstanding leadership is acknowledged by scholars, and this battle is lauded as one of Napoleon's notable successes in the expansion of France's empire in Europe. This research has applied a historical and textual analysis approaches by focusing on Just War Theory in analyzing Napoleon's military leadership. This philosophical theory scrutinizes the aspects of morality in a war based upon three main principles. Based on historical and textual analysis approaches, the findings reveal Napoleon's military leadership in this battle adjudged to be unethical, as one aspect of Just War Theory guidelines was exploited. The study has an impact on leadership style and political behavior as a determinant factor of the success among the army leaders, such as Napoleon Bonaparte. This study also discusses on or touch about strategic thinking of the warfare. This paper is a valuable source of information regarding current research on the historical approach in analyzing Napoleon's military leadership based on Just War Theory.

**Keywords:** military leadership, Just War Theory, Napoleon Bonaparte, The Battle of Austerlitz

## 1. Introduction

Leadership is an important component in an organization and a charismatic leadership will positively influence on the achievement of the organizational mission and vision (Alimuddin, 2011, pp. 1–3). In the armed forces, it is defined as a form of art that could influence and command the army officers to conform to certain styles in order to be compliant, loyal, confident, respectful and cooperative in executing missions meted out by their superiors. Military command is also the determinant factor of the success of an army unit, and it is regarded as the focal factor that leads to victories in the battlefields (Rahman, 1980, pp. 57–90). Among the greatest army leaders are Alexander the Great, Salahuddin al-Ayyubi, and Gerald Templer. Their triumphs are made references, and they are also distinguished as idols by military organizations. Napoleon Bonaparte was also distinguished in leading his army to greatness. However, the question that arises here is how far did the esteemed leadership of the warlords comply with the moral and ethical aspects? Hence, this research aims to investigate a new angle by analyzing both aspects of Napoleon's military leadership pertaining to Just War Theory, which is a philosophy that debates the moral and ethical aspects of the war; that is divided into three phases that are pre-war, waging (during) war and post-war periods.

Historically, Napoleon's dominant triumphs in commanding the French troops are lauded by scholars, as asserted by Fisher (1962) and Winwar (1953), who focused upon the character development of the illustrious military leader from his childhood days until the time he was installed as the French Emperor. Meanwhile, his stature as a genius war commander was thoroughly discussed by Emerson (1969) and Paul (2011), especially when he devised strategies in each battle that he commanded. However, there was no study so far that analyzes the aspects of moral and ethics of Napoleon's military leadership based on Just War Theory.

## 2. Literature

### 2.1 *Just War Theory*

Just War Theory emphasizes on the aspects of ethics during war, which serves as guidelines to determine that a war is launched not just for the sake of violence, but in the name of justice. Historically, the theory was devised by St. Augustine, an acclaimed Christian priest in the 4<sup>th</sup> century who was concerned over the Christian army's partaking in wars. He was apprehensive over the effects of war which could instigate enmity, murder, torture and brutality. He outlined that there were only two conditions which could allow a nation to declare war on another state, that are: on the basis of defending themselves, and in prosecuting certain criminals that could harm the peace of a nation (Shiller, 2015, pp. 9–10). To restrain any form of oppression, he proposed some guidelines on war so that the Christian soldiers could instill some form of morality during a war; and avoid any cruelty or killing. The guidelines were later adapted and was known as Just War Theory. The theory focuses on two major aspects that are to control or restrain any form of cruelty, and to justify any act that could lead to violence (Russell, 1975, pp. 308–310). The principle refers to the method of avoiding a battle from ensuing, but if it could not be prevented, the theory would be used as a guideline to minimize brutality. The theory is acknowledged as a war of philosophy and its main objective is to provide an avenue of guidelines for states that have plans to instigate

wars (Mertz, 2014, pp. 1–4).

Research on Just War Theory was initially put forth by Flynn (2008) who employed the theory as the foundation of his study to analyze the Sixth Days of War (1967) between Israel and an ally of Arab states. The findings showed that the attack by Israel on the ally's army camp was justified as it was in line with the principle of Just War Theory, as they were surrounded by the allies' army, which could attack them at any given time. The decision was taken to attack earlier before they were raided. Meanwhile, Frazer (2008) analyzed the battle of the American Revolutionary War (1775–1783) and found that the campaign was immoral, as it did not adhere to the last resort guideline under the principle of *jus ad bellum*. It was disclosed that no form of dialogue was proposed by the warring parties before the war commenced. Apart from that, America's invasion in Afghanistan in 2001 was also an act of indecency on the American part. Farinaccio (2001) and Coady (2011) claimed that the invasion went against all principles stipulated in Just War Theory, especially when the then President of United States of America, George W. Bush declared war on Afghanistan, simply upon the assumption that the al-Qaeda terrorist group was hiding in the territory. The attack not only destroyed a huge part of the country, but also caused the death of thousands of civilians. The nonsensical brutality on the civilians were uncalled for, Kamrany (2017) aptly described it as immoral as it went against the very principles of justice as detailed in Just War Theory. A summary of the philosophy of Just War Theory is shown in the following Figure 1.

### 2.1.1 Pre-War Phase: *Jus Ad Bellum* (Right to Go to War)

Firstly, the pre-war phase stresses upon the principle of *jus ad bellum* (right to go to war) that focuses on six main guidelines that are, just cause, legitimate authority, right intention, last resort, probability of success and proportionality (McMahan, 2004, pp. 692–694). In the first guideline, just cause stated that a war can only be sanctioned if it was initiated with the goal of defending a state; and must be based upon strong rationales to do so. These include causes such as the possibility of being attacked or invaded by enemies or sometimes known as pre-emptive strike, launched by one country upon another. It means that an attack is carried out in a situation where the enemy is fully equipped to attack and occupy the state. Meanwhile, preventive attack refers to the launch of a battle to avert a possible attack by the enemy in the future (Flynn, 2008, pp. 1–20). Another guideline which is legitimate authority states that, the declaration could only be justified by the government and leaders as they are the ones responsible for the state's sovereignty (Christopher, 1999, pp. 85–86). The third guideline, which is the right intention only renders provision for a war to be launched as the means to prevent violence from being unleashed upon a society and a nation, like the seizure of economic means, slavery and ethnic cleansing. If an attack was carried out without any justification, it would be branded as an outright violence (Estrella, 2012, p. 73).

Meanwhile, the fourth guideline, which is the last resort clarifies that a war can only be allowed to take place if both conflicting parties failed to reach a truce. The probability of success outlines that any country planning to go to war must have the conviction that they will win the war to end the conflict that plagues them in the first place (Lemennicier, 2012, pp. 1–2). The final ruling, which is proportionality reiterates that war could only be declared

if it could prove to be beneficial way beyond the damage and destruction if a war erupted (Christopher, 1999, pp. 86–87).

### 2.1.2 Waging War Phase: Jus in Bello (Right Conduct in War)

The waging war focuses on the principle of right conduct in war. To warrant that justice is upheld, there are two guidelines, which are discrimination and proportionality (Calcutt, 2011, pp. 110–111). Discrimination stresses upon the distinction between the armed forces and civilians, as only soldiers are allowed to attack one another without claiming the lives of civilians. Next, proportionality outlines that each act of war must have certain restrictions and they are not put in place merely to fulfill war objectives (Estrella, 2012, pp. 75–77). For example, to win battles, a soldier is barred from acting barbaric and slaying the weak, like children, women, the elder, and demolishing public properties intentionally.

### 2.1.3 Post-War Period: Jus Post Bellum (Dealing with the Morality of Post-War Settlement and Reconstruction)

The post-war phase, jus post bellum (dealing with the morality of post-war settlement and reconstruction) concentrates on three rules, which are, just cause for termination, public declaration and authority, and discrimination. The just cause for termination guideline means that a state could halt a war if there were sufficient grounds to believe that there were attempts to shield the rights that were eroded. If the conflicting parties agreed to the conditions of a ceasefire or surrender, the conditions should include an official apology, compensation, war crime trials, and rehabilitation as well. Apart from that, a state could also call for a ceasefire if they presumed that the main target of the war would not be realized or attained without unleashing the use of extreme forces (Peter, 2010, pp. 197–198).

The rule on public declaration and authority is a truce provision that must be highlighted by a sovereign nation and the terms must be accepted by the people of the nation that lost a war. Meanwhile, the rule on discrimination states that, the winning nation must properly distinguish between politicians, army stalwarts, cavaliers and the civilians. Any punishment meted out is limited to individuals directly responsible throughout the conflict. Thus, the code of conduct is more inclined to favor a truce and the truth rather than punishing war criminals (Peter, 2010, pp. 197–198).

## 2.2 Military Leadership

A military chief is the one entrusted to lead the soldiers under his or her stewardship in battles to accomplish a specific mission. It all depends on the chieftain's three phases of leadership, which are strategy, operation, and tactic. The strategy stage involves the high-ranking officers before a war is launched. What ensues is the operation stage, which showcases how the strategy is applied by the leader of each Corp and Division. Lastly, the tactical stage is what exactly takes place on the battle field. All the stages are the chain of command that begins from the commanders at the top to the officers in the field (Richard, 2011, pp. 1–2; Deedee, 2015, pp. 2–3). Overall, the theoretical framework will explain the connection between military leadership of Just War Theory by scrutinizing two major stages, the strategy and tactic.

### *2.3 Napoleon's Military Leadership and The Battle of Austerlitz*

Napoleon (1769–1821) was born in the Corsica Island in 1769, to an aristocrat family and his father was a lawyer. Since young, Napoleon was exposed to life in the armed forces when he was sent to attend a military academy in Brienne, France in 1778 (Winwar, 1964, pp. 14–20). Napoleon first tasted the success of winning a battle against the British Army at Toulon, a territory in southern France. His brilliance was revealed at the operating stage when he planned the artillery unit's tactics in trouncing the enemy. It led to his promotion as the Brigadier General in 1793, bypassing the Major and Colonel ranks altogether (Johnson, 2002, pp. 20–25). In 1795, he was promoted to the Major General rank, based upon his credibility and charisma in leading his troops. In 1796, he was entrusted with the task of launching the military campaign in Italy and managed to occupy the territory in just a year. It further led to Napoleon's success in expanding French occupation beyond the borders of Egypt in the Middle East in 1798 (Larson, 2014, pp. 1–10).

Apart from that, Napoleon was noted as a compassionate leader, as he was duly concerned over his soldiers' welfare. He was also humane in nature as he allowed the freedom of practicing any religion without prejudice towards the Christians or Jews. In fact, he declared France to be the nation for Jews as he sympathized with their cause as they did not have a country to call their own (Robert, 2015, pp. 1–4; Aminuddin, 2002, pp. 1–8).

Napoleon's brilliance in leading his army was apparent when he led his combatants in the mission in Egypt in 1798, known as the expeditionary force (Jensen, 2011, pp. 1–10). It was aimed at crippling British's economic expansion by controlling the trade route to India through Egypt, and at the same time trying to curb British Empire's economic standing that was regarded as a threat to France. To achieve the mission, Napoleon created a credible coalition with Egypt by protecting them from the threat of Mamluk. When they won the battle against Mamluk, the French marched to Cairo and Napoleon proclaimed that he was the protector of the Muslims and the leader of Egypt. However, the win was only temporary as the French navy were then attacked by the British navy commandeered by Admiral Nelson that resulted in the demolition of French army's vessels anchored at the Abu Qir Port in Egypt.

The attack left a huge impact on the French army, as it led to an insurgence among the Egyptians to free its nation from the clutches of France. Under the leadership of Sultan Selim III, Egypt retaliated and launched an attack on France in 1798. The strain of the revolt caused the French army to retreat to Syria, which led them to invade the town Jaffa (Zee'vi, 2004, pp. 73–94). Napoleon's determination and fighting spirit was unveiled during his march into Acre. However, they faced a setback when many of the soldiers fell prey to diseases and hunger. This led to a retreat by the French army from the region in 1799. Fresh from his campaign in Egypt, Napoleon plotted a coup in France, which overthrew the leader and catapulted himself to power. The coup in Brumaire in 1799 marked his political debut in French politics. He became the First Consul of France and founded a new legislation to replace the monarchy rule, which was well accepted by the French people, and it pinnacle with his self-appointment as the Emperor of France (Agoston, 2009, pp. 419–420).

#### *2.4 The Battle of Austerlitz*

To fulfill the research objective, the Battle of Austerlitz was chosen as the case study to analyze Napoleon's military leadership skills based on Just War Theory. It was a battle launched by Napoleon towards the European Third Coalition formed by the nations of Austria, Russia and Britain in 1805. The battle was regarded as critical as it pitted the best army strategists of the time—Napoleon from France, Francis II from Austria, and Alexander I of Russia (Dougherty, 2012, pp. 104–105). The battle was suitable to be analyzed as it was regarded as Napoleon's most brilliant accomplishment in warfare after he was installed as the French Emperor (Claude, 1956, pp. 317–318). In fact, the battle is the most referred-to battle as it divulges Napoleon as a skilled strategist in warfare tactics.

The battle began when Napoleon launched an attack on the Austrian army that was waiting for the Russian battalion in Ulm. It was his initial strategy to defeat the Third Coalition of Europe that had planned to conquer France and restrict his aims of spreading French's conquest of Europe. Even though the initial plan was to launch a raid on Britain, but after receiving evidence on the Austrian's impending attack on France, the attack was diverted to the Austrians. The espionage's accurate information had assisted Napoleon to predict the enemies' strategies. His tactics had given him a lead on the Third Coalition army as he prevented the Austrian army's march from merging with the Russian militants that could prove to be more difficult to be overcome by the French army (Fisher, 1912, pp. 109–117).

The win was also due to Napoleon's brilliant strategy in assembling his 200,000 soldiers skillfully that managed to cross the river Rhine and arrived in Ulm in just a short time. In fact, his ambush on the 60,000-strong Austrian troop commanded by General Karl Mack took them by surprise, which resulted in their surrender in 1805 (Rickard, 2012, pp. 1–4; Bonura, 2012, pp. 1–2). This inspired a renewed vigor on Napoleon and his army to march on to Austerlitz as the battleground. Napoleon had properly studied the area's geographical aspects to determine that they had a strong opportunity of winning the battle (Nathan, 2016, pp. 1–3). The French army's conviction in Napoleon's skills as a master strategist of warfare was also a huge factor that led to their commitment in the war even though they did not have large number of soldiers. He managed to convince his soldiers that he was accountable in taking care of their welfare and safety by executing effective war strategy (Emerson, 1969, pp. 46–48) that resulted in a victory over the Austrian and Russian armies (Rickard, 2012, pp. 1–4). Among the strategies unleashed were the movement of mass soldier formations, but they were somehow broken down into smaller units, that were Corp breakdowns, followed by division, regiment, battalion, and company (Andrew, 2017, pp. 1–4).

When each unit was steered by their leaders, the march became more efficient and swifter in reaching a target area. According to Darren (2017, pp. 1–3), the role played by each Corp leader was the critical winning factor. Meanwhile, on the battlefield, the emperor used the strategy of baiting the enemy in leading them to believe that they were launching an attack on a weakened French army when instead it was just a ploy by Napoleon to make them cross Pratzen Hill. The tactic worked, for the enemy did not realize that they were actually surrounded by 53,000 French troops who were lying in wait to ambush them (Jack, 2011, pp.



1–5; Clinton, 2016, pp. 1–3).

### 3. Methodology

The qualitative research is a type of social study that centers upon the manner's human interpret things and explores their logical experience, including their home surroundings (Holloway, 1997, pp. 20–35). It is a logical step towards understanding a situation based upon unique contexts and interaction skills. The study did not attempt to forecast the future, but aimed to interpret the phenomena taking place and what might take place in the future. Therefore, to fulfill the research objective, the textual and historical analysis method was employed to examine each action taken by Napoleon when he commanded his army at the Battle of Austerlitz based on Just War Theory.

### 4. Result and Discussion

#### 4.1 *An Analysis on Napoleon's Military Leadership in The Austerlitz Battle Based on Just War Theory*

This part will discuss the analysis on Napoleon's military leadership in the Battle of Austerlitz based on Just War Theory.

##### 4.1.1 Pre-War Phase: Jus Ad Bellum (Right to Go to War)

The principle in launching a war is the reason why a nation goes to war, and whether the war is morally justified. There are six guidelines that analyses the Battle of Austerlitz commanded by Napoleon.

Based on the guideline of just cause, the findings of the analysis pinpoints that Napoleon's tactic was deemed moral, as it was a pre-emptive strike by Napoleon on the Austrian army who were presumed to be waiting for the Russian army to join them in their plot to raid France. Hence, Napoleon attacked them to defend France from being conquered by the Austrian and Russian army (Bonura, 2012, p. 1). In Just War Theory, a pre-emptive strike is allowed, when the enemy is in a ready state to launch an attack. Thus, if Napoleon failed to raid the Third Coalition, his army would not have survived the onslaught. Hence, the attack was launched in Ulm, which resulted in the defeat of General Karl Mack and his 60,000 Austrian soldiers (Dougherty, 2012, p. 104).

The second guideline, which is legitimate authority stress upon the obligation of a state's leader to announce war. Referring to the Battle of Austerlitz, it was decided that Napoleon acted honorably as the proclamation was made when he was the French Emperor. From facts and historical records, Napoleon was installed as the French Emperor after he succeeded in winning the Pyramid war against the Mamluk army in Egypt in the year 1798 (Jensen, 2011, pp. 1–10). His appointment was based on his credibility in inculcating strong identities and nurturing the fighting spirit into the soldiers in all battles under his stewardship. Hence, his action was justified as it adhered to legal and authorized guidelines and was considered as decent.

The third guideline, right intention is fixated on the aim of launching a war, which is to

prevent cruelty. The exploit by Napoleon was regarded to be ethical as the army went to war as a means of preventing an attack by the enemy. It was also based on the apprehension that the European countries then were more inclined to initiate war rather than commence peace talks (Greene, 2006, pp. 107–117; Overy, 2014, pp. 65–70). The win paved the way for a truce treaty between France, Austria, Russia and Britain which was a foreign policy proposed by Napoleon. Hence, the attack by the French army on the Third Coalition of Europe was regarded as ethical and adhered to respectable intentions as recommended.

The fourth guideline, which is last resort implies upon the possibility of war if there were no pact of armistice, and the analysis found that Napoleon's actions were unethical. This is due to the fact that what Napoleon did was not the last resort, as there was a Peace Treaty of Amien in existence since 1803 between France and Britain. However, the treaty was violated when Napoleon launched a military attack upon Italy's northern territories and invaded Switzerland in 1803. The siege infuriated the British, which led them to forge the Third Coalition with the aim of repressing the French army from further invasion of Europe (Marjorie, 2016, pp. 1–3). Thus, Napoleon's last resort excuse was not justified as he had intentionally breached the treaty signed in 1803 (Overy, 2014, pp. 65–70).

The fifth rule, which is probability of success is related to the confidence of winning a war to prevent conflicts. Napoleon's feat was intended as ethical as prior to the battle, Napoleon had defeated the Austrian troops in Ulm in which General Karl Mack had surrender (Bonura, 2012, pp. 1–2). The win had instilled confidence and a strong fighting spirit among the French army that the ally of Russian and Austrian soldiers could be defeated. Among the factors of their success were the army's terrific preparation, their brilliance in understanding the geographical areas well, and the choice of a strategic location for the ensuing battle (Greene, 2006, pp. 107–117).

Lastly, proportionality relates to the benefits reaped after a war ends. The findings reveal that Napoleon's actions during the Battle of Austerlitz were regarded as ethical as the aim of the war was to consolidate France's position by expanding their colonial territory (Bonura, 2012, pp. 1–2). The advantage of the exploit was, it strengthened France's defense and protected the nation from external threats. Prior to the battle, Europe was embroiled in conflict as each nation was adamant to outdo each other in expanding their territory and empire. During the period, Napoleon had emerged as a leader with the highest caliber and had the tenacity to fortify France's sovereignty. It was what led to the formation of the Third Coalition as the mission was to restrain France's power. However, it failed to materialize as Napoleon's soldiers emerged victorious in the battle (Dougherty, 2012, pp. 104–105). Therefore, it could be inferred that the Battle of Austerlitz was ethical as there were positive outcomes after the fighting ended.

#### 4.1.2 Waging War Phase: Jus in Bello (Right Conduct in War)

The right conduct in war regulation was a waging war phase that encompasses the execution of war, when a war breaks or during the tactical stage. It stresses upon two criteria that are discrimination and proportionality.



The discrimination guideline centers on the disparity between the army and civilians in order to ensure that there should be no casualty among civilians. During the Battle of Austerlitz, it was found that Napoleon's troops acted morally as the war erupted at the Ptrezen Hill, a remote highland territory that was inhabited (Bonura, 2012, pp. 1–2).

The second guideline, proportionality emphasizes upon the measures taken to fulfill the motive of the war. The analysis upon the Austerlitz on-going battle discloses that Napoleon did not act respectably as he did not adhere to the proportionality principle. The gesture was evident when the Russian army was retreating due to their weariness and the many wounded soldiers, but Napoleon insisted on attacking them. Napoleon commanded his artillery unit to fire upon the iced lake that was being truded by the withdrawing troops. It caused the ice to collapse and drown some of the soldier and their armaments (Holland, 1902, pp. 537–539). The regulation was clearly violated, as Napoleon had unveiled an ugly side of him as he insisted on vanquishing the receding army even though it was evident that they were no longer equipped to continue the war (Emerson, 1969, pp. 42–48).

#### 4.1.3 Post-War Phase: Jus Post Bellum (Dealing with the Morality of Post-War Settlement and Reconstruction)

For the principal jus post bellum (dealing with the morality of post-war settlement and reconstruction) pertains to the post-war stage, the first guideline, which is just cause for termination highlights on the conditions that allow a nation to cease fire in an ongoing war by calling for a truce and apology. In the Battle of Austerlitz, the war ended ethically with a win by the France army, followed by a truce treaty between France and the Third Coalition of Europe. The Pressburg Treaty was France's major foreign policy in building respectable ties with European nations (Bonura, 2012, pp. 1–2). Thus, it was a decent act by Napoleon as he adhered to the guidelines. Meanwhile, the public declaration and authority principle caters to the consent of the defeated nation in accepting the conditions proposed by the winning country. In the Battle of Austerlitz, the act by Napoleon was considered ethical as the declaration was carried out by him as the France Emperor, and as the individual entrusted with the responsibility to launch the war. Napoleon also headed the delegation to the negotiation table with the Russian and Austrian leaders that ended with Pressburg Treaty where the nations declared their defeat (Dougherty, 2012, pp. 104–108). Thus, it was a righteous deed by Napoleon as he had the authority to publicly proclaim the end of war.

The final guideline, discrimination highlights the need for peace and truth. The Battle of Austerlitz ended honorably, as the win by France prompted the European coalition to admit their defeat, and conformed to the Pressburg Treaty. Each party concurred to sign the treaty with Napoleon (Alexander, 2014, pp. 8–10). Hence, the punitive measures stated in the guideline were clarified through the treaty, with conditions that must be observed by the Austrian and Russian camps.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Napoleon was a truly great commander as transpired by his triumphs in leading the France militants in the Battle of Austerlitz. Even though the French army were

outnumbered by the Third Coalition soldiers, but the enemy's faction suffered heavier casualties with the death toll exceeding three times more than the French (Alexander, 2014, pp. 8–10). However, his quest in vanquishing the adversaries did not tally with all the ethical conduct warranted by Just War Theory. Based upon the analysis on the Battle of Austerlitz, Napoleon was found to have deliberately violated the *jus ad bellum* (right to go to war) and the *jus in bello* (right conduct in war) principles, hence, the military leadership of Napoleon in this battle is regarded as partially immoral and unethical.

### Acknowledgement

The researchers wish to offer the gratitude for the opportunity extended by Ministry of High Education of Malaysia for Fundamental Research Grant Scheme 2022 (FRGS/1/2022/SS03/UPNM/02/1).

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