Case studies raised by War

The Gulf War
When Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, the UN authorised a military response. The war was swift and brutal, with over 100,000 Iraqi soldiers killed (according to the US – more according to other sources). The US claimed that smart bombs meant fewer civilian deaths, whilst others claim that only a minority of bombs hit their targets. Although there were heavy casualties during the war, far more civilians died in the following decade of sanctions – the UN estimates between 500,000 and 1.2 million children died between the two Gulf Wars due to hyper inflation, widespread poverty and malnutrition.

Iraq
The war in Iraq that began in 2003 (and finished in 2011) was far more controversial than the earlier conflict. A million people took to the streets in London to protest against plans to go to war. The UN had not made a further resolution supporting a second invasion, and weapons inspectors had failed to find conclusive proof of weapons of mass destruction. Many critics saw Iraq as a mis-judged response to 9-11, motivated by greed for oil, and certainly not the last resort. The death toll was higher than in the first conflict, with estimates between 100,000 and 1,000,000 violent deaths.

Libya
Pro-democracy protests in February 2011 led to hundreds of deaths, sparking civil war. International military intervention in March 2011 followed a UN Security Council resolution allowing “all necessary measures” to establish a no-fly zone. Col Gaddafi was killed in October, and fighting ended. Estimates of deaths range from a few thousand to 30,000. Many see the intervention as an example of the UN’s policy of “responsibility to protect”. Critics say that NATO was responsible for unnecessary deaths of civilians.

Child Soldiers
30,000 child soldiers are being used in the Congo. Many under the age of 10. 1/3 are girls. Most were abducted from their villages. Shot if they say no. Girls often end up as sex slaves. 1/3 will never be reintegrated into their communities.

Geneva convention
Guantanamo Bay – people arrested and detained without trial. Torture – Bush denied that ‘water-boarding’ is torture, but many have criticised this. Other complaints include sexual degradation, religious persecution, forced drugging, torture with broken glass, barbed wire, cigarettes.

Recruitment
Fahrenheit 9-11 showed recruiters making false and misleading claims to recruit primarily poor, black youths to join the army. Many see them as ‘cannon fodder’, and feel that the support given to veterans, the families of dead soldiers etc. is very poor.

Pacifism
Martin Luther King is an excellent example of someone who stood up against war – he advised his congregation not to support the Vietnam War. He also used peaceful methods of protest with great effect. He did not use violence even when his home was bombed. He felt you could challenge injustice effectively by standing up for what you believe in without resorting to violence.

Genocide
In Darfur, over 300,000 have died (according to the UN – most from diseases) and millions displaced. The UN called it ‘war crimes’ but without the ‘intent to commit genocide’. The problems are complex, both racial and religious tensions, as well as issues to do with oil and poverty.

Landmines
Now called IEDs (improvised explosive devices), these are anti-personnel and anti-vehicle weapons that often remain around for years after the conflict has finished. They kill indiscriminately. The Ottawa Treaty to prohibit their use has been signed by 158 nations. There are other indiscriminate devices (like cluster bombs) still widely used.

Hiroshima
The 2 atomic bombs killed 100,000s – over 400,000 names are listed on the memorials. The decision to drop the bombs was made on pragmatic grounds, as more would have died if the war had continued. Within a week of the second explosion, the Japanese surrendered. Some argue that the 1.6 million Soviet troops would have brought about a surrender.