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War Has Almost Ceased to Exist: An Assessment

JOHN MUELLER

In 1911, the eminent British historian, G.P. Gooch, concluded a book by elegiacally declaring that “we can now look forward with something like confidence to the time when war between civilized nations will be considered as antiquated as the duel, and when peacemakers shall be called the children of God.” And in that year’s edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Sir Thomas Barclay predicted, in the article on “Peace,” that “in no distant future, life among nations” would be characterized by “law, order and peace among men.”¹

During the intervening century, the world has, of course, experienced a very large amount of often hugely destructive warfare, and God, far from blessing peacemakers, appears mostly to have decided to fight “on both sides in that encouraging way He has,” as A.A. Milne put it bitterly in the interval separating the two largest of those armed conflicts. During that same period, philosopher George Santayana proclaimed, even more bitterly, “Only the dead have seen the end of war.”² Indeed, some writers have dubbed the decades after 1911 “the century of warfare,” and a very large portion of the international relations and political science literature has been focused on the causes and consequences

¹ G.P. Gooch, *History of Our Time, 1885–1911* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1911), 248–249; Thomas Barclay, “Peace” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., vol. 21, (1911), 16. As Geoffrey Blainey points out, the article on “Peace” in the next edition of that *Encyclopedia* “was a long essay on how the victors punished the vanquished at the Peace Conference of 1919.” Geoffrey Blainey, *The Causes of Wars* (New York: Free Press, 1973), 24.

² Alan Alexander Milne, *Peace with Honour* (New York: Dutton, 1935), 222; George Santayana, *Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies* (New York: Scribner, 1922), 102. Santayana’s statement has frequently been attributed to Plato, as in Colin S. Gray, *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), 19—incorrectly so, according to Bernard Suzanne, accessed at plato-dialogues.org/faq/faq008.htm, 8 April 2009.

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of war, seen, most notably perhaps, in the monumental *A Study of War*, published at the depths of the most devastating war in history by Quincy Wright.³

It may be time to revisit the visions and optimism of a century ago and to assess the massive intervening literature on war because we may be reaching a point where war—in both its international and civil varieties—ceases, or nearly ceases, to exist, a remarkable development that has attracted little notice.

This article assesses and seeks to explain this phenomenon, and it speculates about what the development, should it definitely and definitively materialize, might suggest about the various remedies and nostrums that scholars and analysts—both pessimists and optimists—have prescribed over the last century to deal with the problem of war. Most of these, it appears, have been irrelevant to the process.

DEFINITIONS

War is very commonly defined as an armed conflict between governments (in the case of international wars) or between a government and an at least somewhat organized domestic armed group (for civil wars) in which at least 1,000 people are killed each year as a direct consequence, or a fairly direct one (caught in the crossfire), of the fighting.⁴

Most of the literature on war, of course, deals with very substantial conflicts like the World Wars, the American Civil War, or the Korean or Franco-Prussian Wars, in which organized combatants have at each other, and it is surely wars like these that were of primary, even exclusive, concern to Gooch, Barclay, Milne, and Wright. In such context, a 1,000–battle death threshold could be considered to be very low, even minimalist. Indeed, the Falklands/Malvinas War of 1982 between Britain and Argentina, in which about 1,000 battle deaths were inflicted, has gone down in history almost as something of a comic opera exercise, in considerable part because of its comparatively low casualties.⁵

If an armed conflict inflicts fewer than 1,000 battle and battle-related deaths in a year, there has been a tendency to call it exactly that: an armed

³ Quincy Wright, *A Study of War* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1942).

⁴ The 1,000 battle-death threshold was proposed by J. David Singer and Melvin Small in their seminal *The Wages of War 1816-1965: A Statistical Handbook* (New York: Wiley, 1972). According to Singer, the 1,000 figure more or less fell out of the analysis when other aspects of what could be considered warfare were assembled, and the number seemed to them to be on the low side. Conversation with J. David Singer, San Diego, 24 March 2006.

⁵ The desolate, nearly-barren territory was populated by less than 2,000 souls, and an Argentine writer has characterized the conflict as “two bald men fighting over a comb.” Quoted in Helmut Norpoth, “Guns and Butter and Government Popularity in Britain,” *American Political Science Review* 81 (September 1987): 957. However, the costs of the 10-week war, proportionate to the value of the stakes, could be considered to make the war one of the most brutal in history. In the aftermath of the war, the British felt it necessary to send over a protective force larger than the civilian population, and the combined cost of the war and of the post-war defenses built up through the 1980s alone came to over \$3 million for every liberated Falklander. Lawrence Freedman, *Britain and the Falklands War*

conflict, not war.⁶ Other terms that might sometimes apply would be terrorism, coordinated riots, a high crime rate, brutal policing, or criminal predation.

There are also armed conflicts, particularly civil ones, in which combatants rarely actually fight each other, but instead primarily prey on the civilian population. Although comparatively few battle or battle-related deaths may be inflicted, considerably more—often vastly more—than 1,000 civilian deaths may result each year, consequences that often persist even after any fighting among combatants stops.⁷ Very often war, or a war-like condition, greatly facilitates such deadly activity, and sometimes civilians are massacred as part of a military strategy to defeat an insurgency by eliminating its support network.⁸ However, keeping classical definitions of war in mind, unless combatants actually fight against each other in sufficient degree, it seems sensible to use words other than “war” to characterize what is going on in these circumstances. Among these might be ethnic cleansing, genocide, mass killing, terrorism, massacre, extensive criminal predation, or simply, applying a term suggested by Peter Wallenstein, one-sided violence. For present purposes, in order to consider deadly activities warfare, they must be characterized by extensive two-sided violence. This approach generally captures what I think has traditionally been meant by “war” in the vast majority of the vast literature on the subject.

However, it should be noted that other definitions are certainly possible.⁹ For example, some analysts have focused on, and tallied, armed conflicts that inflict as few as 25 battle deaths yearly.¹⁰ Others, rather than simply focusing on the frequency of wars, have applied a measure of destructiveness, weighing costly wars more heavily than those less costly.¹¹ And still others have tallied

(Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 116. “Far from proving that aggression does not pay,” observed one American official, “Britain has only proved that resisting it can be ridiculously expensive.” Quoted in Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands* (New York: Norton, 1983), 339.

⁶ As, for example, in Nils Petter Gleditsch, Peter Wallenstein, Mikael Eriksson, Margareta Stollenberg, and Håvard Strand, “Armed Conflict 1946–2001: A New Dataset,” *Journal of Peace Research* 35 (September 2002): 615–37; Lotta Harbom and Peter Wallenstein, “Armed Conflict and Its International Dimensions, 1946–2004,” *Journal of Peace Research* 42 (2005): 623–635.

⁷ Hazem Adam Ghobarah, Paul Huth, and Bruce Russett, “Civil Wars Kill and Maim People, Long After the Fighting Stops,” *American Political Science Review* 97 (May 2003): 189–202.

⁸ Benjamin Valentino, *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the 20th Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), chap. 6.

⁹ Doyle and Sambanis contrast “negative” or “sovereign” peace with “positive” or “participatory” peace. Michael W. Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis, *Making War and Building Peace: United Nations Peace Operations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 18. For the purposes of this article, the absence of war means only that negative peace has been achieved.

¹⁰ For example, Gleditsch, Wallenstein, Eriksson, Stollenberg, and Strand, “Armed Conflict 1946–2001”; Harbom and Wallenstein, “Armed Conflict and Its International Dimensions.”

¹¹ Monty G. Marshall and Ted Robert Gurr, *Peace and Conflict, 2005: A Global Survey of Armed Conflicts, Self-Determination Movements, and Democracy* (College Park, MD: Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland, 2005).

warfare without including casualty estimates in their definitions at all.¹² Other data sets, particularly those developed over the last 20 years, have focused entirely on civil wars, applying various definitions about casualties and about the wars' beginning and ending dates.¹³ However, no matter how defined, the basic trend lines for warfare as portrayed in Figure 1—and in particular for the remarkable decline in recent years that is a central area of concern in this article—are found in all these data sets.¹⁴

TRENDS

Applying my preferred definition of war—one that is effectively used in perhaps 95 percent of the literature on the subject—Figure 1 supplies a frequency distribution for the number of civil, imperial and colonial, and international wars going on in each year in the post-World War II period. To repeat: an armed conflict is considered to be a war if at least 1,000 battle or battle-related deaths are inflicted in the indicated year.

To assess the trends, it is useful to consider four types of war: wars among developed countries, other international wars, colonial and imperial wars, and civil wars.

International War among Developed Countries: The Rise of War Aversion

As can be seen in Figure 1, international wars during the period have been quite infrequent.

However, the data so arrayed actually mask what is likely to constitute the most significant number in the history of warfare: zero (or near-zero). This is the number of wars that have taken place since 1945 between developed states (or “civilized nations” as Gooch would have it). These are conventionally taken to include the countries of Europe (both Eastern and Western), that continent's offshoots, such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, and a few other countries, such as Japan.

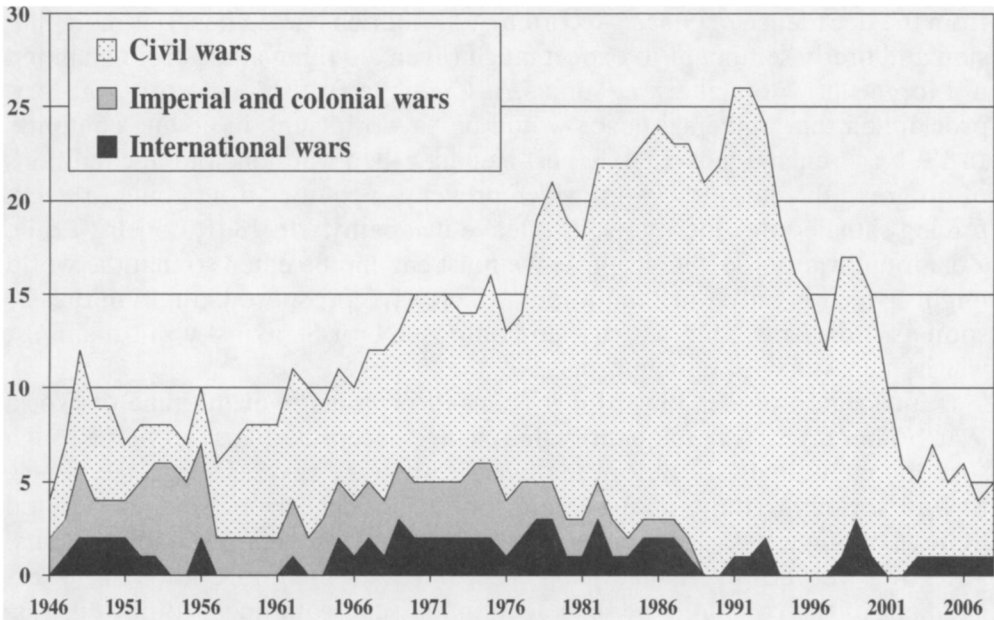
Shattering centuries of bloody practice, these counties have substantially abandoned war as a method for dealing with their disagreements. Until about a hundred years ago, war was widely accepted as a positive thing in that area: as military historian Michael Howard has observed, “Before 1914 war was

¹² Klaus Jürgen Gantzel and Torsten Schwinghammer, *Warfare Since the Second World War* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Transaction, 2000). See also Evan Luard, *War in International Society* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 7.

¹³ On this, see James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” *American Political Science Review* 97 (February 2003): 75–90; Nicholas Sambanis, “What Is A Civil War? Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48 (December 2004): 814–858.

¹⁴ For specific commentary on this, see Marshall and Gurr, *Peace and Conflict, 2005*; Andrew Mack, *Human Security Report 2005* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

FIGURE 1
Number of Ongoing Wars by Year, 1946–2008



The data are for “wars,” violent armed conflicts that resulted in at least 1,000 military and civilian battle-related deaths in the year indicated.

Sources: www.pcr.uu.se/gpdatabase/search.php; Kristian Gleditsch, “A Revised List of Wars Between and Within Independent States, 1816–2002,” *International Interactions* 30 (2004): 231–262; plus additional correspondence with Gleditsch.

almost universally considered to be an acceptable, perhaps an inevitable and for many people a desirable way of settling international differences.”¹⁵

Thus, five years before writing his treatise, *Perpetual Peace*, Immanuel Kant held that “a prolonged peace favors the predominance of a mere commercial spirit, and with it a debasing self-interest, cowardice, and effeminacy, and tends to degrade the character of the nation.” Somewhat later Alexis de Tocqueville concluded that “war almost always enlarges the mind of a people and raises their character,” and Frederick the Great observed, “War opens the most fruitful field to all virtues, for at every moment constancy, pity, magnanimity, heroism, and mercy shine forth in it.” In 1895, the distinguished American jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., told the Harvard graduating class that a world without the “divine folly of honor” would not be enduring, and the one thing he found to be “true and adorable” was “the faith... which leads a soldier to throw away his life in obedience to a blindly accepted duty, in a cause which he little

¹⁵ Michael Howard, *The Causes of Wars and Other Essays*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 9.

understands, in a plan of campaign of which he has no notion, under tactics of which he does not see the use.”

For some, it followed that periodic wars were necessary to cleanse the nation from the decadence of peace. According to Friedrich Nietzsche, “It is mere illusion and pretty sentiment to expect much (even anything at all) from mankind if it forgets how to make war,” and J.A. Cramb, a British professor of history, proclaimed that universal peace would be “a world sunk in bovine content.” In 1871, a French intellectual, Ernest Renan, called war “one of the conditions of progress, the cut of the whip which prevents a country from going to sleep, forcing satisfied mediocrity itself to leave its apathy.” In 1891, novelist Émile Zola found war to be “life itself.... We must eat and be eaten so that the world might live. It is only warlike nations which have prospered: a nation dies as soon as it disarms.” Or, as Russian composer Igor Stravinsky put it simply, war is “necessary for human progress.”¹⁶

European attitudes toward war changed profoundly at the time of World War I. There is no way to quantify this change except perhaps through a rough sort of content analysis. Before that war, it was very easy, as suggested above, to find serious writers, analysts, and politicians in Europe and the United States exalting war as desirable, inevitable, natural, progressive, and necessary. After the war, however, such people become extremely rare, though the excitement of the combat experience continued (and continues) to have its fascination for some.

This abrupt and remarkable change has often been noted by historians and political scientists. In his impressive study of wars since 1400, Evan Luard observes that “the First World War transformed traditional attitudes toward war. For the first time there was an almost universal sense that the deliberate launching of a war could now no longer be justified.” Bernard Brodie points out that “a basic historical change had taken place in the attitudes of the European (and American) peoples toward war.” Arnold Toynbee called it the end of a “span of five thousand years during which war had been one of mankind’s master institutions.”¹⁷

Obviously, this change of attitude was not enough to keep developed countries out of all wars altogether. Most disastrously, it did not prevent the

¹⁶ For sources and for many other similar quotes, see John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), chap. 2. See also Roland N. Stromberg, *Redemption by War: The Intellectuals and 1914* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1982).

¹⁷ Luard, *War in International Society*, 365; Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 30; Arnold J. Toynbee, *Experiences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 214. Attitudes toward war for people in developed states did not change, it appears, because World War I had been peculiarly destructive—there had been plenty of such wars before. Rather, it was because the war was the first before which there had been an active anti-war movement. In many respects, the war caused their point of view to become widely accepted. For an analysis, see John Mueller, *The Remnants of War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), chap. 3. See also James J. Sheehan, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone? The Transformation of Modern Europe* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), chap. 2.

war of 1939–45—although the European half of that conflagration might not have been in the cards in any sense, and was mostly the product of the machinations of a single man—or atavism—Adolf Hitler.¹⁸ In addition, developed countries, while avoiding war with each other since that cataclysm, have engaged in three other types of war: colonial wars, wars generated in peripheral areas by the Cold War of 1945–1989, and what I call “policing wars” in the post-Cold War era. These three kinds of wars are discussed separately below.

However, the existence of these wars should not be allowed to cloud an appreciation for the shift of opinion that occurred at the time of the First World War, one that was dramatically reinforced by the Second. In the process, a standard, indeed classic, variety of war—war among developed countries—has become so rare and unlikely that it could well be considered to be obsolescent, if not obsolete. Reflecting on this phenomenon, Howard mused in 1991 that it had become “quite possible that war in the sense of major, organized armed conflict between highly developed societies may not recur, and that a stable framework for international order will become firmly established.” Two years later, the military historian and analyst John Keegan concluded, in his *A History of Warfare*, that the kind of war he was principally considering could well be in terminal demise: “War, it seems to me, after a lifetime of reading about the subject, mingling with men of war, visiting the sites of war and observing its effects, may well be ceasing to commend itself to human beings as a desirable or productive, let alone rational, means of reconciling their discontents.” By the end of the century, Mary Kaldor was suggesting that “the barbarity of war between states may have become a thing of the past,” and by the beginning of the new one, Robert Jervis had concluded that war among the leading states “will not occur in the future” or, in the words of Jeffrey Record, may have “disappeared altogether.”¹⁹

Other International Wars: War Aversion Spreads?

Figure 1 also suggests that international war of any kind—not simply wars among developed countries—has become rather rare.

The Cold War of 1945–1989 generated several international wars waged between developed states and states or entities in the developing world. Of these,

¹⁸ For the argument about Hitler, see Mueller, *Remnants of War*, chap. 4.

¹⁹ Michael Howard, *The Lessons of History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 176; John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 59; Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1999), 5; Robert Jervis, “Theories of War in an Era of Leading-Power Peace,” *American Political Science Review* 96 (March 2002): 1; Jeffrey Record, “Collapsed Countries, Casualty Dread, and the New American Way of War,” *Parameters* 32 (Summer 2002): 6. See also Luard, *War in International Society*; Michael Mandelbaum, *The Ideas That Conquered the World: Peace, Democracy, and Free Markets in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Public Affairs, 2002); Andrew Mack, “Civil War: Academic Research and the Policy Community,” *Journal of Peace Research* 39 (September 2002): 515–525; Sheehan, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone?* For contrary views, see Samuel P. Huntington, “No Exit: The Errors of Endism,” *National Interest* 17 (Fall 1989): 3–11; Gray, *Another Bloody Century*.

three were particularly notable and costly—the Korean War (1950–53), the American war in Vietnam (1965–75), and the Soviet Union’s war in Afghanistan (1979–89). This kind of war died out, of course, with the Cold War.

There were also international wars outside the Cold War. Between 1948 and 1973, several were waged between Israel and its neighbors, but none since (though Israel has had armed conflicts with Arab substate groups). Nor, except perhaps for a brief, localized flare-up over Kashmir in 1999, has there been a direct war between India and Pakistan over the same span of time. Indeed, of the international wars waged since the end of the Cold War in 1989, there was only one that fits cleanly into the classic model in which two countries have it out over some issue of mutual dispute, in this case territory: the almost unnoticed, but quite costly, conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea that transpired between 1998 and 2000.

It should also be noted that there was a considerable expansion during the period in the number of independent states. When these states were colonies, they could not, by definition, engage in international war with each other. It is particularly impressive that there have been so few international wars during a period in which the number of entities capable of conducting them increased so greatly.

In addition to the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritria, the international wars tallied in Figure 1 for the post-Cold War period include aspects of the post-Communist conflicts in the Balkans and in the Caucasus region, that confrontation between India and Pakistan in 1999, and a few “policing wars,” militarized efforts by developed countries designed to bring order to civil conflicts or to deal with thuggish regimes.

Policing wars substantially emerged when the Cold War ended (though the Suez War of 1956 and the Congo intervention in the early 1960s could be seen, perhaps, to be precursors). Because developed countries came basically to see the world in much the same way and because there was little or no fear of war between them, they were left free to explore devices for managing the world. Some of these devices are diplomatic, social, or economic, but the judicious application of military force—or something that looks a great deal like war—is also potentially available.

The problem with war is not so much in the institution in the abstract—it does often settle differences—but rather in its consequences: the death and destruction that inevitably ensue. International war may be under some degree of control, but two very notable sources of artificial or human-made death and destruction continue to persist. One of these is civil war, the chief remaining form of war, as Figure 1 makes clear, and many of these have been highly destructive. For example, in the late 1990s, a semi-internationalized civil war—or set of civil wars—in the Congo resulted in the deaths, by some estimates, of three million people, mostly from the disruption and disease it caused. The second is government. In fact, over the course of the bloody twentieth century, far more people were killed by their own governments than were killed by all

wars put together.²⁰ During the 1990s, for example, the government of Rwanda systematically tried to kill off a minority group, a venture that resulted in upwards of half a million deaths; in North Korea at the same time, the regime so mismanaged and exacerbated famine conditions that hundreds of thousands of people died, with some careful estimates putting the number at over two million.

In principle, the international community is ill-prepared to deal with civil conflict and with vicious or destructively incompetent domestic governments because it is chiefly set up to confront problems that transcend international borders, not those that lurk within them. However, having substantially abandoned war and armed conflict among themselves, the developed countries can, if they so desire, expand their efforts and collaborate on international police work to deal with civil war and with vicious domestic regimes. And, indeed, the Security Council of the United Nations does appear in recent years to have developed or evolved the legal ability legitimately to authorize military intervention to police civil wars or to oust a state government deemed too incompetent or too venal to be allowed to continue to exist.²¹

In fact, since the Cold War, there have been a number of instances in which developed countries, with or without a Security Council mandate, have applied, or credibly threatened to apply, military force against other countries to seek to correct conditions they considered sufficiently unsuitable. These have included interventions in Panama in 1989, in Kuwait and Iraq in 1991, in Somalia in 1992–93, in Haiti in 1994, in Bosnia in 1995, in Kosovo and East Timor in 1999, in Sierra Leone in 2000, in Afghanistan in 2001, and in Iraq in 2003. Some of these ventures have been sufficiently costly in lives to tally as international wars in Figure 1. Except for the last two, however, the developed countries were able to engage in these ventures at remarkably little cost to themselves, particularly in casualties, and, since they were most focused on thuggish regimes or on thug-dominated civil wars, they were generally successful.²²

However, despite a degree of success, the post-Cold War phenomenon of policing wars, rather tentative at best, seems more likely to wane than to grow. There are several reasons for this, among them a lack of interest, an extremely low tolerance for casualties in military missions that are essentially humanitar-

²⁰ Rudolph Rummel, *Death by Government* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1994); Valentino, *Final Solutions*, chap. 1.

²¹ Christine Gray, *International Law and the Use of Force*, 2d ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004), 250–251; Doyle and Sambanis, *Making War and Building Peace*, 10. On this issue, see also John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 81, 93n; Kofi Annan, “Two Concepts of Sovereignty,” *The Economist*, 16 September 1999; and “A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility,” Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, United Nations, 2004, paragraph 203, accessed at <http://www.un.org/secureworld/report3.pdf>, 15 April 2009.

²² Mueller, *Remnants of War*, chaps. 6–7.

ian, and an aversion to long-term policing. The experience of the wars in Iraq and, increasingly, Afghanistan is likely to further magnify a reluctance to intervene unless the outside countries perceive a clear threat to their own interests. Thus, when depredations by government-inspired armed bands caused ethnic cleansing and tens of thousands of deaths in western Sudan, the international community, after 10 years of mea culpa breast-beating over its failure to intervene in Rwanda, responded with little more than huffing and puffing, pressure on the Sudan government, and the setting up of inadequate and underfunded refugee camps.²³ And for years, they largely stood by as Robert Mugabe's agile and destructive dictatorship progressively impoverished and brutalized the once-promising country of Zimbabwe.

Imperial and Colonial War and the Demise of Conquest: A Consequence of War Aversion

Throughout the last two centuries, there have been a large number of wars resulting from the efforts of imperial countries to gain and then to maintain their hold on distant, or sometimes attached, colonial territories. Indeed, fully 199 of the 244 wars Luard identifies as having taken place between 1789 and 1917 were wars of colonization or decolonization.²⁴ Another analysis enumerates 149 colonial and imperial wars waged between 1816 and 1992.²⁵ One of the great, if often undernoted, changes during the Cold War was the final demise of the whole idea of empire—previously one of the great epoch-defining constants in human history.²⁶ Colonialism's demise has meant, of course, an end to its attendant wars, and Figure 1 documents that phenomenon.

To a considerable degree, this remarkable development is a consequence of rising war aversion that led, essentially, to a demise in the acceptance of the idea of conquest.

Throughout history, international wars have been variously motivated, but those motivations have generally been expressed in a quest to conquer and to possess territory. Thus, suggests John Vasquez, territory is “a general underlying cause of war,” and he stresses that “of all the possible issues states can fight over, the evidence overwhelmingly indicates that issues involving territory ...

²³ Scott Straus, “Darfur and the Genocide Debate,” *Foreign Affairs* 84 (January/February 2005): 123–146.

²⁴ Luard, *War in International Society*, 52, 60.

²⁵ Hilde Ravlo, Nils Petter Gleditsch, and Han Dorussen, *Colonial War and Democratic Peace* (Oslo, Norway: International Peace Research Institute, 2001).

²⁶ See Neta C. Crawford, *Argument and Change in World Politics: Ethics, Decolonization, and Humanitarian Intervention* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002); James Lee Ray, “The Abolition of Slavery and the End of International War,” *International Organization* 43 (Summer 1989): 431–32; Lawrence H. Keeley, *War Before Civilization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 166–167.

are the main ones prone to collective violence.” And “few interstate wars are fought without any territorial issues being involved in one way or another.”²⁷

To the degree to which that is true, it would appear that a potential cure for international war would be to disallow territorial expansion by states. Accordingly, building on efforts conducted after World War I, the peacemakers of 1945 declared international boundaries to be essentially sacrosanct—that is, unalterable by the use or threat of military force—no matter how illogical or unjust some of them might seem to interested parties. And the peoples residing in the chunks of territory contained within them would be expected to establish governments that, no matter how disgusting or reprehensible, would then be dutifully admitted to the all-inclusive club of “sovereign” states known as the United Nations. Efforts to change international frontiers by force or the threat of force were pejoratively labeled “aggression” and sternly declared to be unacceptable.

Remarkably, this process has, for various reasons and for the most part, worked. Although many international borders were in dispute, although there remained vast colonial empires in which certain countries possessed certain other countries or proto-countries, and although some of the largest states quickly became increasingly enmeshed in a profound ideological and military rivalry known as the Cold War, the prohibition against territorial aggression has been astoundingly successful. In the decades since 1945, there have been many cases in which countries split through internal armed rebellion (including anti-colonial wars). Reversing the experience and patterns of all recorded history, however, there have been scarcely any extensive alterations of international boundaries through force—though, as noted above, there have been legitimized violations of sovereignty in most of the policing wars of the post-Cold War era. Indeed, the only time one United Nations member tried to conquer another to incorporate it into its own territory was when Iraq “anachronistically” (to apply Howard’s characterization) attempted to seize Kuwait in 1990, a venture that was soon reversed by military force.²⁸

The norm against conquest and its associated institutional structure stress peace, but they are not so much the cause of the desire for peace as its result. That is, the norm was specifically fabricated and developed because war-averse countries, noting that disputes over territory had been a major cause of international war in the past, were seeking to enforce and enshrine the norm. Its existence did not cause them to be war averse, but rather the reverse.

²⁷ John A. Vasquez, *The War Puzzle* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 151, 293.

²⁸ Michael Howard, *The Invention of Peace: Reflections on War and International Order* (London: Profile Books, 2000), 92. For a discussion of the process and a detailed enumeration of territorial changes since 1945, see Mark Zacher, “The Territorial Integrity Norm: International Boundaries and the Use of Force,” *International Organization* 55 (Spring 2001): 215–250. See also Martin van Creveld, “The Future of War” in Robert G. Patman, ed., *Security in a Post-Cold War World* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1999), 28–29; Gray, *International Law and the Use of Force*, 59; Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, 5.

Civil War

As Figure 1 vividly demonstrates and as noted above, civil war has been by far the most common type of war since World War II. Most civil wars have taken place in the poorest countries of the world, and many have been labeled “new war,” “ethnic conflict,” or, most grandly, “clashes of civilizations.” But, in fact, most, though certainly not all, have been more nearly opportunistic predation waged by packs—often remarkably small ones—of criminals, bandits, and thugs engaging in armed conflict either as mercenaries under hire to desperate governments or as independent or semi-independent warlord or brigand bands.²⁹

The existence and increasing frequency of civil war up until the early 1990s can be attributed to several factors. With the decolonization of the late 1950s and 1960s, a group of poorly governed societies came into being, and many found themselves having to deal with civil warfare. Moreover, as many of these civil conflicts became criminal enterprises, they tended to become longer and to accumulate in number. This pattern may have been embellished by another phenomenon, democratization, which often is accompanied by a period in which governments become weak.³⁰ Then, in the aftermath of the Cold War in the early 1990s, there was a further increase in the number of incompetent governments, as weak, confused, ill-directed, and sometimes criminal governments emerged in many of the post-Communist countries, replacing comparatively competent police states. In addition, with the end of the Cold War, the developed countries, including former colonialist France, no longer had nearly as much interest in financially propping up some third-world governments and in helping them police themselves—an effect particularly noticeable in Africa.³¹

To a very substantial degree, then, much civil warfare is essentially the result of inadequate government.³² Civil wars are least likely to occur in stable democ-

²⁹ However, sometimes such essentially criminal activity can lead to effective state building, as Charles Tilly has pointed out: “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime” in Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 169–191. See also Mueller, *Remnants of War*, chaps. 2, 6.

³⁰ On the connection between democratization and weak government, see also Paul Collier, “Doing Well Out of War: An Economic Perspective” in Mats Berdal and David M. Malone, eds., *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000), 98, 108; Håvard Hegre, Tanja Ellingsen, Scott Gates, and Nils Petter Gleditsch, “Toward a Democratic Civil Peace? Democracy, Political Change, and Civil War, 1816–1992,” *American Political Science Review* 95 (March 2001): 33–48; Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict* (New York: Norton, 2000); Bruce D. Jones, *Peacemaking in Rwanda: The Dynamics of Failure* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001), 164–165; Marshall and Gurr, *Peace and Conflict*, 2005, 17–20.

³¹ Robert H. Bates, *Prosperity and Violence: The Political Economy of Development* (New York: Norton, 2001), chap. 5; David Shearer, *Private Armies and Military Intervention* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1998, Adelphi Paper No. 316), 27–29; David Keen, *The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1998, Adelphi Paper No. 320), 23; Gray, *International Law and the Use of Force*, 215–217.

³² For an extended development of this point, see Mueller, *Remnants of War*, chap. 9.

racies and in stable autocracies—that is, in countries with effective governments and policing forces.³³ They are most common—almost by definition—in what has come to be called “failed states.” In fact, in an important sense, many civil wars have effectively been *caused* by inept governments, which tend to apply excessive and indiscriminate force to try to deal with relatively small bands of troublemakers, often turning friendly or indifferent subjects into hostile ones.

Many of these civil wars have endured for years, and the growth pattern through the early 1990s is mostly the result of a process of cumulation.³⁴ In recent years, however, this process seems to have reversed itself: many of these wars—or competitive criminal enterprises—have exhausted themselves, and new ones have failed to arise in sufficient numbers to maintain the same frequency.

A fully satisfactory explanation for this remarkable decline has yet to be developed. Exhaustion may explain why some of the wars finally ended, but that hardly explains why new wars haven’t sprung up in places previously free of them. Conceivably, the miserable experience through the mid-1990s with these disastrous wars has finally been successfully transmitted more widely, with the result that civil war, following the pattern found with international war in the developed world, is going out of style. But it is clearly far too early to be certain about anything like that, and, even if this conclusion is valid, the precise process by which this has come about would be difficult to divine.

Although the end of the Cold War tended to increase the problem of civil war, as noted above, lingering ideological civil wars inspired or enhanced by the Cold War contest died out (or became transmogrified into criminal ones) with its demise. But this can explain only a small portion of the decline in civil war.

One key may have been in the rise of competent governments that have increasingly been able to police domestic conflicts, rather than exacerbating them, as frequently happened in the past. A considerable number of countries did manage to get through the rough period and have achieved a degree of stability—especially in Latin America, post-Communist Europe, and East and Southeast Asia—and relatively effective governments have emerged in most of them. Moreover, there is some suggestive but by no means conclusive evidence that governments are becoming generally more effective, even in the poorest areas of the world, and thus that criminal warfare (and criminal

³³ Hegre, Ellingsen, Gates, and Gleditsch, “Toward a Democratic Civil Peace?” On this point, see also Bruce M. Russett and John R. Oneal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations* (New York: Norton, 2001), 70; Monty G. Marshall and Ted Robert Gurr, *Peace and Conflict, 2003: A Global Survey of Armed Conflicts, Self-Determination Movements, and Democracy* (College Park, MD: Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland, 2003), 19–20, 25; Fearon and Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” 85, 88; James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, “Neotrusteeship and the Problem of Weak States,” *International Security* 28 (Spring 2004): 21–22; Doyle and Sambanis, *Making War and Building Peace*, 19, 35.

³⁴ Fearon and Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War,” 77–78.

regimes) may, like international warfare, be in terminal decline.³⁵ Certainly the number of first-class tyrannies has diminished greatly in the last decades.

Some argue that peacekeeping efforts by international organizations have often proved effective at keeping the wars from reigniting.³⁶ International bodies and consortiums of developed countries can often be useful to broker cease-fires and peace settlements, and they can sometimes assist with humanitarian aid and economic and political development once peace has been achieved. That is, they may not be able to stop a war when the combatants are determined to continue fighting, but they can usefully seize the opportunity to stabilize a shaky peace when the combatants have become exhausted. However, it seems clear that a truly effective, long-term solution to the problems presented by civil warfare and vicious regimes does not lie in the ministrations of the international community, but rather in the establishment of competent domestic military and policing forces.

THE PRESENT CONDITION

No matter how defined, then, there has been a most notable decline in the frequency of wars over the last years. As Table 1 suggests, between 2002 and 2008, few wars really shattered the 1,000 battle or battle-related death threshold.³⁷ Beyond the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, violent flare-ups have exceeded the yearly battle death threshold during the period in Kashmir, Nepal, Colombia, Burundi, Liberia, Chechnya, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Chad, Somalia, Pakistan and Uganda. Almost all of these have just barely done so. Indeed, if the yearly threshold were raised to a not-unreasonable 3,000, almost the only war of any kind that has taken place anywhere in the world since 2001 would be the one in Iraq.

Several of these intermittent armed conflicts could potentially rise above the violence threshold in the future, though outside of Afghanistan, most of these seem to be declining in violence. Ethiopia and Eritrea continue to glare at each other, and plenty of problems remain in the Middle East, where in 2006

³⁵ Robert Rotberg, "New Breed of African Leader," *Christian Science Monitor*, 9 January 2002, 9; Peter Ford, "Twilight of the Tyrants," *Christian Science Monitor* 19 December 2003, 1.

³⁶ Mack, *Human Security Report 2005*; Virginia Page Fortna, *Where Have All the Victories Gone? War Outcomes in Historical Perspective* (New York: Saltzman Institute for War and Peace Studies, Columbia University, 2005); Fearon and Laitin "Neotrusteeship and the Problem of Weak States"; Doyle and Sambanis, *Making War and Building Peace*.

³⁷ If the numbers for the Iraq War in the table seem low, it should be remembered that only battle deaths are being counted, not civilian deaths incurred outside a battle situation (though civilians caught in the crossfire are included). In addition, for the most part, the count does not include inter-communal violence between Shia and Sunni groups because to be counted as a civil war, a conflict must have the government on one side. For a discussion of the various estimates of civilian deaths in the war, see Hannah Fischer, "Iraqi Civilian Deaths Estimates," CRS Report for Congress, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 27 August 2008, accessed at www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS22537.pdf, 31 March 2009.

TABLE 1
Battle Death Estimates for Wars, 2002–2008

2002	
Burundi	1,000
Uganda	1,032
Colombia	1,156
Sudan	2,021
India (Kashmir)	1,500–3,000
Nepal	2,500
2003	
Nepal	1,064
India (Kashmir)	1,246–1,894
Liberia	1,661
Sudan	1,999
Iraq	8,313–15,213
2004	
India (Kashmir)	1,075
Chechnya	1,141
Colombia	1,230
Nepal	1,596
Uganda	1,600
Iraq	1,987
Sudan	3,295
2005	
India (Kashmir)	1,058
Afghanistan	1,267
Colombia	1,379
Nepal	1,397
Iraq	2,299
2006	
India (Kashmir)	702–1,116
Sudan	1,002
Chad	1,249
Sri Lanka	1,969
Afghanistan	3,146
Iraq	3,537
2007	
Somalia	1,393
Iraq	1,851
Sri Lanka	2,488
Afghanistan	5,818
2008	
Somalia	1,483
Iraq	2,090
Pakistan	2,996
Afghanistan	4,489
Sri Lanka	8,396

Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Program Database at <http://www.pcr.uu.se/gpdatabase/search.php>.

and again in 2009, Israel took on a substate group based in another country, and where the Iraq conflict could have spillover effects. And, of course, new wars could emerge in other places: concerns about China and the Taiwan issue, for example, are certainly justified, and many in the developed world advocate the application of warfare as a last resort to prevent the acquisition of nuclear weapons by undesirable countries.³⁸ Moreover, there has been “intercommunal” or “substate” violence in countries like Nigeria (and Iraq) that often certainly resembles warfare, but is removed from consideration here by the definitional requirement that something labeled a “war” must have a government on at least one side.

However, war, as conventionally, even classically, understood, has, at least for the time being, become a remarkably rare phenomenon. Indeed, if civil war becomes (or remains) as uncommon as the international variety, war could be on the verge of ceasing to exist as a substantial phenomenon.

EXPLANATIONS

If this happens—and it is obviously much too early to be certain—it would constitute one of the most monumental developments in the history of the human race. As yet, however, the prospect has excited remarkably little comment or even notice. In 2004, the United Nations promulgated a press release, “10 stories the world should hear more about,” and one of these was called “The Peacekeeping Paradox,” in which it was observed that many civil wars had of late ended, providing many hopeful opportunities for international peacekeeping.³⁹ The story was picked up by the Jim Lehrer *NewsHour* program on PBS and by *Business Week*, but that was about all. Newspaper columnist Gwynne Dyer has noted the process in a few columns, and Gregg Easterbrook published a cover story, “The End of War?” in *The New Republic* in 2005 that attracted a very small amount of media attention.⁴⁰

Within the political science community, perhaps the most prominent recent notice of the phenomenon (or potential phenomenon) as it pertains to international war was registered by Robert Jervis in his Presidential Address to the American Political Science Association and in a subsequent book.⁴¹ Among scholars who have been leaders in assessing and measuring war and conflict,

³⁸ For example, Graham Allison, *Nuclear Terrorism: The Ultimate Preventable Catastrophe* (New York: Times Books, 2004), 165–171. In contrast see John Mueller, *Atomic Obsession: Nuclear Alarmism from Hiroshima to Al Qaeda* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), chap. 10–11.

³⁹ Accessed at www.un.org/events/tenstories/06/story.asp?storyID=500, 10 June 2008.

⁴⁰ For Dyer’s columns, see <http://www.gwynnedyer.com>. Gregg Easterbrook, “The End of War?” *New Republic*, 30 May 2005, 18–21. Media attention: John Tierney, “Give Peace a Chance,” *New York Times*, 28 May 2005.

⁴¹ Jervis, “Theories of War in an Era of Leading-Power Peace”; Robert Jervis, *American Foreign Policy in a New Era* (New York: Routledge, 2005). See also Robert Jervis, “Symposium,” *Perspectives on Politics* 3 (June 2005): 315–316.

Monty Marshall and Ted Gurr have produced an extensive discussion, while Canadian political scientist Andrew Mack has done so in well-received reports that prominently make use of data sets produced by Norwegian and Swedish researchers.⁴² In addition, Raimo Väyryen has edited a set of essays that speculate on the potential waning of international war, and Christopher Fettweis has investigated that issue as well.⁴³

It would seem, however, that the process should have excited more comment. Should war really prove to be in terminal demise, this would suggest that quite a few revered notions about the causes of—and antidotes to—war ought to be reexamined. And, although the notion is still speculative, it is perhaps not too soon to suggest that if war is really receding, many of the explanations for war so extensively promulgated and discussed over the last century may come to be found wanting. A brief and somewhat cursory survey may help to illustrate the point.

Biology and Psychology

As Kenneth Waltz points out, one set of explanations for war has stressed that they arise from the essential nature of the human creature.⁴⁴ “I’m not so naïve or simplistic,” proclaimed former Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, “[as] to believe we can eliminate war. We’re not going to change human nature any time soon.”⁴⁵ And on confronting the argument in 1989 that at least some kinds of war might be in the process of notable decline, Samuel Huntington deemed that to be quite implausible, due in part to the “weakness and irrationality of human nature,” not to mention the human capacity for behavior that is “stupid, selfish, cruel, and sinful.”⁴⁶

Yet war may be disappearing without much in the way of perceptible changes—or improvements—in human nature. Nor has the “aggressive drive” been noticeably attenuated. Testosterone levels seem to be as high as ever, and the thrill and exhilaration that war and combat often incite do not seem to have diminished. Nor has any sort of psychic “moral equivalent” to war—or for that matter a practical one—been fabricated.

⁴² Marshall and Gurr, *Peace and Conflict*, 2005. Mack, *Human Security Report 2005*. Andrew Mack, *Human Security Brief 2007* (Vancouver: Human Security Report Project, Simon Fraser University, 2008).

⁴³ Raimo Väyryen, ed., *The Waning of Major War: Theories and Debates* (New York: Routledge, 2006). Christopher J. Fettweis, “A Revolution in International Relations Theory?” *International Studies Review* 8 (December 2006): 677–697. See also Ted Robert Gurr, “Ethnic Warfare on the Wane,” *Foreign Affairs* 79 (May/June 2000): 52–64; Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: Free Press, 1991); Joshua S. Goldstein, “The Worldwide Lull in War,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 14 May 2002; Steven Pinker, “A History of Violence,” *New Republic*, 19 March 2007.

⁴⁴ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

⁴⁵ In the film, *The Fog of War*, Sony Picture Classics, 2003.

⁴⁶ Huntington, “No Exit,” 10.

Some observers have seen the impetus for war not so much in human nature as in the nature of political leadership. However, it does not seem likely that today's leaders are more rational or competent than the leaders of old, that they are less susceptible to bias and misperception, or that they lust less for power. Evolutionary theories about the value and persistence of war do not seem to be doing very well either, and they are likely to have little to say about the important, remarkably abrupt, and quite recent decline in civil warfare.

Resentments

Nationalism, religious extremism, ethnic tension, and social inequalities seem to be about as common as ever, and there do not appear to be notable reductions in the world's considerable store of hate, selfishness, and racism. Extrapolating from the apparently ethnically based conflict in Bosnia in the early 1990s, Huntington promulgated a notion about "clashes of civilizations."⁴⁷ However, although there is no reason to think that civilizational angst has decreased since his book appeared in 1996, civil warfare stemming from that (or any other) condition has declined remarkably. And for well over a decade now, Bosnia has managed to remain completely at peace, despite all those supposedly consequential subliminal hatreds we heard so much about in the early 1990s.

Looking at the issue from the opposite perspective, there does not seem to have been a notable surge in the amount of love, justice, harmony, cooperation, brotherhood, good will, or inner peace in the world. Yet war has declined without benefit of such developments.

Weaponry

There has been no great growth in the number of ingenious agreements to restrict arms or the arms industry—indeed, arms seem to be everywhere, and international trade in them continues to flourish. That is, the arms industry, deemed in a vast literature to be peculiarly nefarious and a source, inspiration, instigator, or facilitator of war, continues to do quite nicely, even as war itself slumps in frequency.

Moreover, although there has been some reduction in the number of nuclear weapons in the possession of major countries since the end of the Cold War, they still retain impressive arsenals. In addition, nuclear weapons continue to proliferate, albeit at a pace much slower than has often been feared. If arms races somehow lead to war, they continue in many places.

On the other hand, many analysts have argued that nuclear weapons have actually kept the world from stumbling helplessly into a repeat of World War II.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1996).

⁴⁸ On this issue, see Mueller, *Atomic Obsession*, chap. 3.

This contention holds that although the people in charge of world affairs since that event have been the same people or the intellectual heirs of the people who tried assiduously, frantically, desperately, and, as it turned out, pathetically, to prevent it, they were so obtuse, depraved, flaky, desperate, or stupid that only visions of mushroom clouds could lead them to conclude that a repeat performance of that catastrophe would be distinctly unpleasant. However, whatever value there may be in this perspective, it hardly explains the infrequency of international war in the periphery, the several instances in which nuclear countries have been directly challenged militarily (Falklands, Yom Kippur, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Iraq, Hungary), or, in particular, the remarkable decline of colonial and civil war.

Those difficulties also hold for the broader idea that war has become rare because of its rising costs.⁴⁹ A particular problem in this case is that many earlier wars were hugely destructive, and, as Alan Milward observes, measured as a proportion of the increasing gross national product of the combatants, war “has not shown any discernable long term trend towards greater costliness.”⁵⁰

Economics, Technology, Communication, Trade

If the demise of war is dependent on economic development or on the achievement of some sort of economic equality among (or within) nations, as many have postulated, there seems to be a long way to go: the earth has hardly been enveloped in prosperity, while miserable poverty and spectacular economic inequalities remain. There have been notable increases in international trade and in economic interdependence, but there clearly is a long way to go on this as well. International communications have also greatly improved, but the connection between this still rather limited development and the decline of war is difficult to divine.

However, shifting attitudes toward the desirability of war may have been notably enhanced over the last couple of centuries by economic thinking.⁵¹ Specifically, to the degree that economists have been able to get across a pair of key ideas, the result could be an enhanced desire for peace.

One of these holds that the growth of economic well-being should be a dominant goal. Historically, non-economic values have often been deemed more worthy than economic growth, and an important area in which non-economic values have usually dominated is war. For the most part, in fact, economic motivations often seem like a rationale for impulses that are actually more

⁴⁹ Carl Kaysen, “Is War Obsolete?” *International Security* 14 (Spring 1990): 42–64.

⁵⁰ Alan J. Milward, *War, Economy and Society, 1939–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 3.

⁵¹ See John Mueller, *Capitalism, Democracy, and Ralph’s Pretty Good Grocery* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), chap. 5.

nearly moral, aesthetic, emotional, or psychological.⁵² It seems likely, then, that if people with business motivations had actually been running the world, its history would have been quite a bit different (and generally better). By helping to teach the world to value economic well-being above passions that are often economically absurd, economists and their like-minded allies have made an important contribution.⁵³

Economists have also been in the lead in advancing a second idea, one holding that wealth is best achieved through exchange, not through conquest. In this regard, Richard Rosecrance cites the striking and important examples of two recent converts: “Today West Germany and Japan use international trade to acquire the very raw materials and oil that they aimed to conquer by military force in the 1930s. They have prospered in peaceful consequence.” Among “trading states” like that, Rosecrance observes, “the incentive to wage war is absent.”⁵⁴ Put another way, free trade furnishes the economic advantages of conquest without the unpleasantness of invasion and the sticky responsibility of imperial control.

Thus, war is unlikely if countries take prosperity as their chief goal *and* if they come to believe that trade is the best way to achieve that goal. Thanks in part to the success of economists, both ideas have now gained wide currency.

Although trade alone may enhance the prospects for peace, a better case could perhaps be made for the opposite causal proposition: peace often leads to, or at any rate facilitates, trade. That is, peace ought to be seen not as a dependent, but rather as an independent, variable in such considerations. The long and historically unprecedented absence of war among the nations of Western Europe, for example, has not been caused by their increasing economic harmony. Rather, economic harmony has been caused, or at least substantially facilitated, by the long and historically unprecedented peace they have enjoyed. Put the other way, international tensions and the prospect of international war have a strong dampening effect on trade, since each threatened nation has an incentive to isolate itself from the rest of the world economically in order to ensure that it can survive if international exchange is cut off by

⁵² As Quincy Wright observed after a lifetime of study on this matter, “Studies of both the direct and the indirect influence of economic factors on the causation of war indicate that they have been much less important than political ambitions, ideological convictions, technological change, legal claims, irrational psychological complexes, ignorance, and unwillingness to maintain conditions of peace in a changing world”; Quincy Wright, “War: The Study of War” in David L. Sills, ed., *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 16 (New York: Macmillan-Free Press, 1968), 463. For an extensive discussion of the varying role of economics as a motivation, or excuse, for war, see Luard, *War in International Society*.

⁵³ See also Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977); Donald McCloskey, “Bourgeois Virtue,” *American Scholar* 63 (Spring 1994): 180–182.

⁵⁴ Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Trading State: Conquest and Commerce in the Modern World* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 16, 24. See also Erik Gartzke, “The Capitalist Peace,” *American Journal of Political Science* 51 (January 2007): 166–191.

military conflict. In this respect, the Cold War could be seen in part as a huge trade barrier. With the demise of such politically derived and economically foolish constructs, trade was liberated. But it was the rise of peace that facilitated the trade, not the opposite.

Whatever application economic arguments about trade and communication may have to international war, they do not seem to have much relevance to civil conflicts, which are far more common and which are characteristically fought between groups that know each other only too well and trade with each other only too much.⁵⁵

Structure and Institutions

Many international relations scholars have rooted the causes of war in the state or in the “structure” of the state system with its permissive condition of “anarchy.” As Waltz concludes, “Force is a means of achieving the external ends of states because there exists no consistent, reliable process of reconciling the conflicts of interest that inevitably arise among similar units in a condition of anarchy.”⁵⁶

Working from this perspective, it has often been concluded that wars, particularly international wars, would persist unless effective international organizations or a world government were to be fashioned to deal decisively with them. At times, hopes for this have been placed in the United Nations and its provocatively named “Security Council.” The United Nations may deserve credit for a number of achievements over its history, but no one is likely to accuse it of having become an effective world government, and therefore “anarchy” persists. Actually, in a condition in which international war does not take place, anarchy might come to be desirable: a condition where states could peacefully go about their business without being hampered by arbitrary government regulation.⁵⁷

Similarly, coherent and effective systems of international law have hardly been developed—indeed, many prominent law schools, such as Harvard University and the University of Chicago, still do not even have people teaching the subject on their regular faculty. Effective moral prohibitions, including the legal renouncing or outlawing of war, also do not seem to have been achieved, nor has anything resembling a cohesive and enforced code of international justice enveloped the world.

In like manner, if war really is ceasing to exist, various system- and power-related explanations for war may need, to varying degrees, to be reassessed. These would include those focusing on polarity, hierarchy, hegemony, hegemonic stability, power status, power cycles, alliance patterns, border insecurities, security

⁵⁵ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 138.

⁵⁶ Waltz, *Man, the State and War*, 238.

⁵⁷ See also Fettweis, “Revolution in International Relations Theory?” 687.

dilemmas, power transitions, patterns of contiguity or proximity, capability and offense–defense balances, rivalry patterns, unequal growth, geopolitics, and processes of contagion and diffusion.⁵⁸ Moreover, almost all of these relate to international war and have little application to declines in civil and colonial war.

Nor does the essential nature of the state or of the nation-state seem to have been mellowed or modified notably. Some subsets of countries have willingly entered into what Karl Deutsch once labeled “security communities,” in which they explicitly or implicitly agree to avoid using force or the threat of force in their dealings with each other.⁵⁹ Such developments seem to be more nearly the result of the desire for peace than its cause, but, regardless, the vast majority of states remain outside such unions.

Democracy, many have argued, is conducive to peace, or at least to peace between democratic states. This notion was central to Woodrow Wilson’s quest to “make the world safe for democracy.” He and many others in Britain, France, and the United States had become convinced that, as Britain’s Lloyd George put it later, “Freedom is the only warranty of Peace.”⁶⁰ This is an important suggestion, and it has of late generated a vast literature that can hardly be fully surveyed here.

However, although there has been a considerable increase in the number of democratic countries in the world, trends in the demise of war seem, as with the case of increased trade and communications, to have considerably outrun it. That is, peace seems to be in the process of breaking out between and within all countries, not just democracies. Moreover, as Miriam Fendius Elman suggests after surveying the literature on the subject, “the important consideration” has to do with ideas, not institutions: it is not “whether a country is democratic or not, but whether its ruling coalition is committed to peaceful methods of conflict resolution.” As she further points out, the countries of Latin America and most of Africa have engaged in very few international wars even without the benefit of being democratic (for a century before its 1982 adventure,

⁵⁸ See also Fettweis, “Revolution in International Relations Theory?” 684–691. For a systematic discussion of many of these constructs, see Daniel S. Geller, “Explaining War: Empirical Patterns and Theoretical Mechanisms” in Manus I. Midlarsky, ed., *Handbook of War Studies II* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 407–449.

⁵⁹ Karl W. Deutsch, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957).

⁶⁰ William E. Rappard, *The Quest for Peace Since the World War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940), 42–44. For the contrasting argument that peace causes, or at least facilitates, democracy, see Mark E. Pietrzyk, *International Order and Individual Liberty: Effects of War and Peace on the Development of Governments* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002); James L. Payne, “Election Fraud: Democracy is an Effect, not a Cause, of Nonviolence,” *American Conservative*, 13 March 2006, 11–12; John Mueller, “Faulty Correlation, Foolish Consistency, and Fatal Consequence: Democracy, Peace, and Theory in the Middle East” in Steven H. Hook, ed., *Democratic Peace and Promotion: Critical Perspectives* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, forthcoming).

Argentina, for example, fought none at all).⁶¹ And, of course, the long peace enjoyed by developed countries since World War II includes not only the one that has prevailed between democracies, but also the even more important one between the authoritarian East and the democratic West. Even if there is some connection, whether causal or atmospheric, between democracy and peace, it cannot explain this latter phenomenon

And, as with many of the other arguments assessed above, the democracy explanation has focused almost entirely on international wars. It does not seem to be terribly helpful in explaining the remarkable decline in civil war, far the most common form of armed conflict.

RESPONSES

Many people still consider war to be normal and an inevitable part of international and domestic life. Effectively, even if they accept the trend I have outlined as genuine, they are inclined to see it simply as a readily reversible blip. As one commentator put it to me, “You may be right, but I still have faith in my fellow man.”

And of course, I have no way to be certain that the trend in warfare, particularly civil warfare, will continue on its notable, but only rather recent, downward trajectory. After all, Gooch was writing in a period when international war was quite rare and seemed to be becoming even more so, and there were other periods of comparative quiet in the century before World War I.⁶² Perhaps we have today slumped only temporarily into a similar sort of hiatus even as hideous explosions await us around the corner. Indeed, Colin Gray has recently published a book, *Another Bloody Century*, confidently asserting that war “will always be with us,” that it “is a permanent feature of the human condition,” and that “interstate war, including great power conflict, is very much alive and well.”⁶³

⁶¹ Miriam Fendius Elman, ed., *Paths to Peace: Is Democracy the Answer?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 484, 496. See also Sebastian Rosato, “The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory,” *American Political Science Review* 97 (November 2003): 585–602.

⁶² However, some of that, as Kristian Gleditsch points out, was because the number of states in the nineteenth century was considerably undercounted in some approaches. When that is corrected for, the number of wars during that time, particularly international ones, increases considerably; Kristian Gleditsch, “A Revised List of Wars Between and Within Independent States, 1816–2002,” *International Interactions* 30 (2004): 231–262. To a degree, this is an issue as well in Figure 1: during the post-World War II era, there was, as noted above, a considerable expansion in the number of independent states and therefore in the number of places in which a civil war could take place. However, the basic pattern for civil warfare shown in that figure holds even when one controls for the number of states: see Gleditsch, Wallenstein, Eriksson, Stollenberg, and Strand, “Armed Conflict 1946–2001.” Moreover, wars within countries that were not yet independent are not ignored in the figure: they are tallied, of course, in the “colonial war” category.

⁶³ Gray, *Another Bloody Century*, 24, 378, 382. On this issue, see also Peter Wallenstein, “Trends in Major War: Too Early for Waning?” in Väyrynen, *Waning of Major War*, 80–93. In 1991, Gray with

Nevertheless, the incredible, completely unprecedented, and now remarkably long-term absence, or near-absence, of international war in Europe, that once most warlike of continents, suggests that something new may indeed be afoot. Moreover, the relatively peaceful periods in Europe before 1914 were far shorter than the present one, and they were accompanied, as noted earlier, by routine and profuse fulminations about the glories and the sublime benefits of war. Also significant is the near-absence for the last few decades of international wars in which states directly go after each other in the classic manner over matters of dispute such as territory. Moreover, the frequency of civil war, far the most common form of warfare over the last half-century, has now remained at low levels for several years. Although it is obviously far too soon to be completely confident that these levels will continue, there does not seem to be a large number of countries about to descend into internal armed conflict.⁶⁴

At base, it may turn out that war is merely an idea, an institution that has been grafted onto human existence, rather than a trick of fate, a thunderbolt from hell, a natural calamity, a systemic necessity, or a desperate plot contrivance dreamed up by some sadistic puppeteer up high. And the institution may be in pronounced decline, as attitudes toward it have changed, roughly following the pattern according to which the ancient and once-formidable institution of formal, state-sponsored slavery became discredited and then obsolete. All this could conceivably come about without changing human nature; without creating an effective world government or system of international law; without modifying the nature of the state or the nation-state; without expanding international trade, interdependence, or communication; without fabricating an effective moral or practical equivalent to war; without enveloping the earth in democracy or prosperity; without devising ingenious agreements to restrict arms or the arms industry; without reducing the world's considerable store of hate, selfishness, nationalism, religious intolerance, and racism; without increasing the amount of love, justice, or inner peace in the world; without altering the international system; without establishing security communities; without improving the competence of political leaders; and without doing much of anything about nuclear weapons.

Even if war fades, however, all sorts of other calamities will persist: the decline of war hardly means that everything will be perfect. Indeed, the

similar confidence declared it "inconceivable" that Mikhail Gorbachev "could direct and oversee the transformation of the brutal, continental, multinational empire that is the USSR into something so much kinder and gentler that a truly objective basis for a structural improvement in political-security relations would be the consequence": Colin S. Gray, "Do the Changes within the Soviet Union Provide a Basis for Eased Soviet-American Relations? A Skeptical View" in Robert Jervis and Seweryn Bialer, eds., *Soviet-American Relations After the Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 61.

⁶⁴ In overall tone, however, a recent book dealing with the end of civil war in Africa is not terribly optimistic about the future: Oliver Furley and Roy May, eds., *Ending Africa's Wars: Progressing to Peace* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006).

one-sided violence committed by predatory militia bands in places like Sudan and Congo can cause more damage and suffering than many wars. But since these bands rarely fight each other—that is, they mostly manage to avoid two-sided violence—the resulting destruction does not constitute warfare by the definition applied in this article.

In addition, crime will still exist, and so will terrorism, which, like crime, can be carried out by individuals or by very small groups.⁶⁵ Indeed, if policing wars are in decline, criminals may take advantage of the situation and expand their predations; whether any such developments cumulate to the point where the situation could be considered warfare would be determined primarily by the response of governments. And, of course, there will certainly be plenty of other problems to worry about—famine, disease, malnutrition, pollution, corruption, poverty, politics, economic travail, and the potential for climate change. Moreover, violent intercommunal warfare remains, as noted, rather extensive, a costly phenomenon that is excluded from my definition of war through its requirement that a government be one of the parties in the armed conflict.

But a continuing decline in war does seem to be a fairly reasonable prospect. And it may be at least time to begin to consider not so much that we “ain’t gonna study war no more,” but rather that, as with formal dueling, as Gooch rather prematurely suggested a hundred years ago, war, as classically defined, may be in the process of becoming a matter mainly of historical interest.

⁶⁵ However, terrorism, or at least international terrorism, actually only kills a few hundred people a year worldwide, outside, of course, of 2001. For an assessment, see John Mueller, *Overblown* (New York: Free Press, 2006). See also Mack, *Human Security Brief 2007*.