



The Causes of War

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This new edition of the highly acclaimed study on the causes of war has been expanded and updated to include a complete discussion of World War II and the road towards nuclear war. Analyzing all international wars since 1700, this widely quoted work solves the riddle of why some wars are long and some are short, and demonstrates how the outbreak of peace offers insight into the outbreak of war. Proving that war and peace are alternating phases of a relationship between rival nations, it offers a crucial, new understanding of international armed conflict.

The Causes of War Details

Date : Published September 7th 1988 by Free Press (first published 1973)

ISBN : 9780029035917

Author : Geoffrey Blainey

Format : Paperback 344 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, Political Science, International Relations, War, Military Fiction, Politics

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From Reader Review The Causes of War for online ebook

Daniel Goff says

An excellent survey on the causes of war and peace, it is free of prejudice and very well written.

Nate Huston says

Central proposition: War & Peace are two sides of the same coin - the causes of war are also the causes of peace. According to Blainey, things that cause war also cause peace, so if we can figure out what is causing war, we can reverse those situations in order to bring peace.

Optimism is a significant cause of war, he says, because if you don't believe you can win, you won't fight. Causes of war include economic conditions, seasons (!), ideologies, patriotism, national languages, sense of a nation's history, miscalculation, and the prospect of 3rd party intervention.

The nugget of Blainey's idea is very intriguing, but his structure is confusing.

Among the important takeaways are that an imbalance of power will lead to peace (the "ladder" of power is clear), that war is a dispute about the measurement of power (he contends it's the best way to directly measure it), and that it takes 2 to tango - interests in conflict and dispute over measurement of power lead to a situation where there is more to gain by fighting than by negotiation.

The most interesting point is that there is often a predisposition to "blame" those who fight to change the status quo (who "started" the war?), but is a desire to change the status quo by fighting any worse than to keep it by fighting? (161, 164) The bottom line here is that there are also costs to peace - if you want it, you have to suck it up and live with what you have.

Roger says

In this book, Geoffrey Blainey conducts a remarkably thorough investigation into the specific causes of war and offers several interesting conclusions. Blainey complains that different schools of academia often investigate the causes of war with a specific angle or hypothesis in mind and that due to this subjective viewpoint, frequently find conclusions that agree exactly with their predictions. In order to fully comprehend the causes of war, Blainey states, one must also examine the causes of peace. War and peace are not two separate phenomenon, but rather two parts of an ongoing cycle. While one says, "A war broke out," one doesn't say, "peace broke out," yet the reasons behind war ceasing and peace breaking out appear to be a reversal of the reasons that peace ceases and war breaks out.

Blainey calls up the work of many previous military analysts including Clausewitz, Macfie, and Henry Thomas Buckle. He puts their findings and theories to the test by analyzing all major international wars since 1700, picking out historical examples, and searching for trends and patterns. Each chapter examines a specific theory, such as the idea that capitalism and economic ties between countries decrease the likelihood of war. He also looks at the theory of scapegoat wars, war as an accident, "surprise" attacks that allegedly

begin wars, and more. However, I found his most insightful finding to be that war commences when nations have 'contradictory optimism' about the probable outcome of the war. In other words, a decision to go to war only occurs when the decision makers believe that there is more to be gained from war than from peace. As Blainey says "War itself then provides the stinging ice of reality. At the end of a war those rival expectations, initially so far apart, are so close to one another that terms of peace can be agreed upon." I am curious to know what his opinion would be of the popular neoconservative theory that democracies will not go to war with one another.

At the end of the book, Blainey offers a list of conclusions, which nicely summarize his findings. Some of the more interesting among these are:

"The idea that one nation can be blamed for causing a war is as erroneous as the idea that one nation can be mainly praised for causing the end of the war. Most current explanations of war, however, rest on these errors."

"A formula for measuring international power is essential: ironically the most useful formula is warfare. Until the function of warfare is appreciated, the search for a more humane and more efficient way of measuring power is likely to be haphazard."

"It is doubtful whether any war since 1700 was begun with the belief, by both sides, that it would be a long war."

"No wars are unintended or 'accidental'. What is often unintended is the length and bloodiness of the war. Defeat too is unintended."

I could quote them all, but that would give away too much without an understanding of the rigorous analysis Blainey applies in order to come up with these conclusions. I highly recommend this book to all who are curious about peace & conflict resolution, military history, and world history.

David Jonson says

A broad history on the Causes of War in the modern era. Blainey's prose is excellent and it's effortless reading. Enjoyed reading it as an Army officer, but it is accessible to a wide audience. On par with the Art of War and better than On War by Clausewitz. Only downside was it was last updated in the 1980s during the Cold War, although the premise may not have changed

Alexandre says

Análise muito interessante das guerras entre 1700 e 1970, não se limitando a listar datas e nomes de personagens importantes, mas sim tentando entender as razões para a guerra e para a paz e as similaridades e diferenças entre esses vários conflitos. Nunca antes li algo neste formato e gostei muito. Fico curioso agora em qual seria a visão do autor com relação ao terrorismo baseado em diferenças religiosas, comparando a situação atual (2016) com guerras do passado distante.

Josh says

Fascinating.

Meredith says

Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey offers a theory on causes of war (and peace) based on political elites' expectations of conflict duration and conflict outcome. Exploring periods of war and peace throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, Blainey suggests that a false but systematic optimism among elites encourages states to consistently misjudge the outcomes and durations of war (p. 54-56). Due to these misperceptions, each belligerent assesses its relative strength to be greater than its rival's. Therefore, political elites engage in war unless provided with "indisputable" evidence that negates expectations of a quick victory.

Blainey also refutes common theories of peace and war that emphasize war weariness, economic interdependence, moderate peace terms and liberalism (p. 26). For example, liberalism's "web of world commerce" was not a sufficient condition for preventing World War I (p. 26). Alternatively, Blainey proposes that a state's preponderance of power decreases the likelihood of war (p. 110). Other states are less likely to overestimate their relative strength because of "indisputable" evidence of the more powerful rival. Last, Blainey offers two factors for the outbreak of war traditionally framed as safeguarding peace: economic recovery and balance of power (p. 87, p. 116). Both factors likely cause a state to overestimate its strength relative to a rival.

Scott says

read the book, a few thoughts here : <http://nursepastorfatherhusband.blogs...>

Cassie says

This is a great base to see where much of the rat. choice literature on war originated and poses some interesting questions that are still being explored.

Chuck says

The author attempts to come to grips with the question of what causes diplomatic disputes to break out into war. His conclusion, as put forth in the following sentence, seems somewhat obvious to me. "War began when two countries had contradictory ideas of their own bargaining position and therefore could not solve peacefully an issue which vitally affected them."

Marcus says

Very nice historical view of war from 1700 onwards. It's an older book, so a lot of the theory is outdated, but

the anecdotes are priceless.

Eleanore says

It is a real pleasure to pick up an author who enjoys the art of writing as much as the necessary discipline of analysis. Beginning with a chapter entitled "The Peace which Passeth Understanding," Geoffrey Blainey demonstrates his wit and his flair for historical nuance, both of which serve to illuminate and extend his simple yet controversial theory. Building upon a diverse body of historical investigation, Blainey focuses upon the insight that leaders always demonstrate optimism in making the decision for war (the subsequent conflicts always prove longer, costlier, and riskier than anticipated), Blainey makes the argument that such optimism reflects a distortion of the basic measurement of power between two nations. He observes that anything that serves to "muffle" this appreciation encourages the optimism that leads to war. Consequently, many popular beliefs and theories could, in fact, be seen as dangerously destabilizing. In particular, the traditional conception of a "balance of power" is a far less stable condition between states than a clear preponderance of power. He also argues that decisive victories produce longer and more stable periods of peace than more "moderate" victories.

Chris says

Interesting topic well explored, but it would have been better as a TED talk
