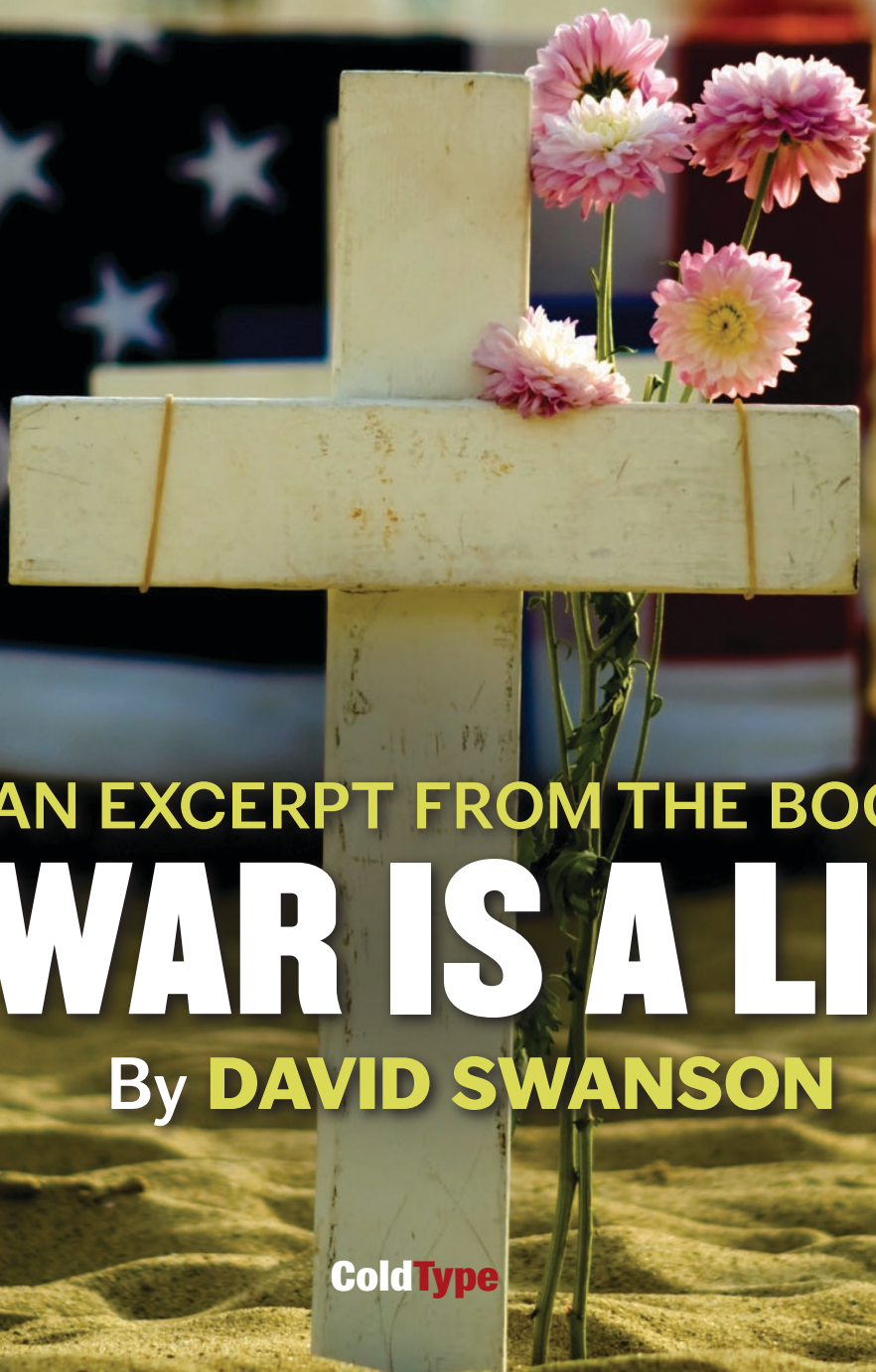


Wars are not
unavoidable



AN EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK
WAR IS A LIE

By **DAVID SWANSON**



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Wars are not unavoidable

AN EXCERPT FROM **WAR IS A LIE** By **DAVID SWANSON**

Wars are given so many glorious and righteous justifications, including the spreading of civilization and democracy around the world, that you wouldn't think it would be necessary to also claim that each war was unavoidable. Who would demand that such good deeds be avoided? And yet there has probably never been a war that hasn't been explained as an absolutely necessary, inevitable, and unavoidable last resort. That this argument always has to be used is a measure of how horrible wars actually are. Like so much else related to war, its unavoidability is a lie, each and every time. War is never the only choice and always the worst one.

But It's in Our Genes

If war is avoidable, then we can and must eliminate war. And if we can eliminate war, why have no societies done so? The short answer is that they have. But let's

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Would a medieval knight fighting on horseback recognize any kinship with a drone pilot using a joystick at a desk in Nevada to kill a suspected bad guy and nine innocent people in Pakistan?

be clear. Even if every human and pre-human society had always had war, that would be no reason why we have to have it too. Your ancestors may have always eaten meat, but if vegetarianism becomes necessary for survival on this little planet won't you choose to survive rather than insist that you must do what your ancestors did? Of course you can do what your ancestors did, and in many cases it may be the best thing to do, but you do not have to. Did they all have religion? Some people no longer do. Was animal sacrifice once central to religion? It isn't anymore.

War, too, has changed dramatically just in the past decades and centuries.

Would a medieval knight fighting on horseback recognize any kinship with a drone pilot using a joystick at a desk in Nevada to kill a suspected bad guy and nine innocent people in Pakistan? Would the knight think that the drone piloting, even once it was explained to him, was an act of war? Would the drone pilot think the knight's activities were acts of war? If

war can change into something unrecognizable, why can't it change into nothingness? As far as we know, wars involved only men for millennia. Now women take part. If women can start participating in war, why can't men stop doing so? Of course, they can. But for the weak-willed and those who have replaced religion with bad science, it is essential before people can do something to prove that they have already done it.

OK, if you insist. Anthropologists have, in fact, found dozens of human societies in all corners of the world that have not known, or have abandoned, warfare. In his excellent book *Beyond War: The Human Potential for Peace*, Douglas Fry lists 70 non-warring societies from every part of the globe. Studies have found the majority of human societies to have no warfare or a very mild form of it. (Of course all warfare prior to the past century could be re-classified as relatively very mild.) Australia did not know warfare until the Europeans came. Neither did most of the peoples of the Arctic, the Great Basin, or Northeast Mexico.

Many non-warring societies are simple, nomadic, egalitarian hunter-gatherer cultures. Some are isolated from potential enemies, which is not surprising given the likelihood that one group will take up war in defense against another that threatens it. Some are less isolated but run from other groups that make war rather than engage them. These societies are not always in places that lack major predatory animals. They are groups of people who may have to defend against animal attack and who often hunt for food. They may also witness individual acts of violence, feuding, or executions, while nonetheless avoiding war. Some cultures discourage heated emotions and aggression of any sort. They often hold all sorts of false be-



One could argue that individual killings out of jealous rage were the equivalent of war for small groups

liefs that discourage violence, such as that spanking a child will kill it. Yet these beliefs seem to produce no worse lives than, for example, the false belief that spanking benefits children.

Anthropologists have tended to imagine warfare as something that existed in some form for all the millions of years of human evolution. But “imagine” is the key word. Wounded Australopithecine bones thought to show war injuries actually show the tooth marks of leopards. The Walls of Jericho were apparently built to protect against flooding, not warfare. There is, in fact, no evidence of warfare older than 10,000 years, and there would be, because war leaves its mark in wounds and weapons. This suggests that of the 50,000 years modern *Homo sapiens* have existed, 40,000 saw no warfare, and that millions of years of prior ancestry were also war-free. Or, as an anthropologist put it, “People have lived in hunter-gatherer bands for 99.87 percent of human existence.” War arises in some, but not all, complex, sedentary societies, and tends to grow along with their complexity. This fact makes it unlikely war could be found more than 12,500 years ago.

One could argue that individual killings out of jealous rage were the equivalent of war for small groups. But they are very different from organized warfare in which violence is directed anonymously against members of another group. In the world of small non-agricultural bands, family ties on one's mother or father or spouse's side connected one to other bands. In the newer world of patrilineal clans, on the other hand, one finds the precursor to nationalism: attacks on any member of another clan that has injured any member of your own.

A more appropriate candidate for precursor to war than individual human

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violence may be group violence directed against large animals. But that, too, is very different from war as we know it. Even in our war-crazed culture, most people are very resistant to killing humans but not to killing other animals. Group hunting of ferocious animals doesn't go very far back in human history either. As Barbara Ehrenreich argues, the bulk of the time our ancestors spent evolving they spent evolving not as predators, but as prey.

So, no matter how violent chimpanzees can be, or how peaceful bonobos, imagining ancient common ancestors of primates who thirsted for war is nothing more than imagining. A search for alternatives to that story can be more concrete, given the existence today and in recorded history of hunter-gatherer societies. Some of these cultures have found a wide variety of means of avoiding and resolving disputes that do not include war. That people everywhere are skilled at cooperation and find cooperation more pleasurable than war doesn't make the news precisely because we all know it already. And yet we hear a lot about "man the warrior" and rarely see cooperation identified as a central or essential trait of our species.

Warfare as we have known it in recent millennia has developed alongside other societal changes. But did most relatively recent people in complex and stable societies engage in something resembling warfare or not? Some ancient societies have not been shown to have engaged in warfare, so it is likely they lived without it. And, of course, most of us, even in the most militaristic states, live without any direct connection to war, which would seem to suggest that a whole society could do the same. The emotional drives supporting war, the collective thrill of victory and so forth, may be culturally learned, not inevitable, since some cultures appear too



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distant in outlook to appreciate them at all. Kirk Endicott recounts:

"I once asked a Batek man why their ancestors had not shot the Malay slave-raiders...with poisoned blowpipe darts [used for hunting animals]. His shocked answer was: 'Because it would kill them!'"

Everybody Does It

Anthropologists often focus on non-industrialized cultures, but can technologically advanced nations also live without war? Let's assume that Switzerland is a fluke of geopolitical strategy. There are many other nations to consider. In fact, most nations of the world, for one reason or another, including those that fight horrible lengthy wars when attacked, do not initiate warfare. Iran, that terrible demonic threat in US "news" media, has not attacked another country in centuries. The last time Sweden launched or even participated in a war was a skirmish with Norway in 1814. To his credit, Douglas Fry notes the peaceful nature of some modern nations, including Iceland which has been at peace for 700 years and Costa Rica which abolished its military after World War II.¹¹⁸

The Global Peace Index annually ranks the world's most peaceful nations, including domestic factors in the calculation as well as foreign war making. Here are the top 20 nations as of 2010:

- 1 New Zealand
- 2 Iceland
- 3 Japan
- 4 Austria
- 5 Norway
- 6 Ireland
- 7 Denmark
- 8 Luxembourg
- 9 Finland

- 10 Sweden
- 11 Slovenia
- 12 Czech Republic
- 13 Portugal
- 14 Canada
- 15 Qatar
- 16 Germany
- 17 Belgium
- 18 Switzerland
- 19 Australia
- 20 Hungary

One explanation for some nations' failure to make war is that they would like to but haven't had an opportunity to launch any wars they could plausibly win. This at least suggests a degree of rationality in war-making decisions. If all nations knew they couldn't win any wars, would there be no more wars?

Another explanation is that countries don't launch wars because they don't have to, since the cops of the world are looking out for them and maintaining a Pax Americana. Costa Rica, for example, has accepted a US military presence. This would be an even more encouraging explanation, suggesting that nations do not want to begin wars if they don't have to.

In fact, nobody can even imagine a war breaking out between nations in the European Union (the birthplace of the worst wars in world history) or between states in the United States. The change in Europe is incredible. After centuries of fighting, it has found peace. And peace within the United States is so secure it seems ludicrous even to notice it. But it should be appreciated and understood. Does Ohio refrain from attacking Indiana because the feds would punish Ohio, or because Ohio is certain that Indiana will never attack it, or because Ohioans' overpowering war-lust is satisfied by wars with places like Iraq and Afghanistan, or because



Peace within the United States is so secure it seems ludicrous even to notice it

Buckeyes actually have better things to do than engage in mass murder? The best answer, I think, is the last one, but the power of the federal government is a necessity and something we may have to create at an international level before we have secure and unquestionable international peace.

A crucial test, it seems to me, is whether nations leap at the chance to join war-bound "coalitions" dominated by the United States. If countries refrain from war purely because they can't win any, shouldn't they leap at the chance to participate as junior partners in wars against weak impoverished nations with valuable resources to plunder? Yet they do not.

In the case of the 2003 attack on Iraq, the Bush-Cheney gang bribed and threatened until 49 countries had supposedly agreed to put their names down as the "Coalition of the Willing." Many other countries, large and small, refused. Of the 49 on the list, one denied any knowledge of being on it, one had its name removed, and another refused to assist with the war in any way. Only four countries participated in the invasion, 33 in the occupation. Six of the countries in this military coalition actually had no militaries whatsoever. Many of the countries apparently joined in exchange for large amounts of foreign aid, which tells us something else about our nation's generosity when it comes to charity abroad. The 33 token participants in the occupation quickly began pulling out as carelessly as they had been careful getting in, to the point where by 2009 only the United States remained.

We also appear perfectly capable of limiting war, raising the question of why we can't limit it a bit more and a bit more until it is gone. The ancient Greeks chose not to take up the bow and arrow for 400 years after the Persians had shown them

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— in fact, made them feel — what that weapon could do. When the Portuguese brought firearms to Japan in the 1500s, the Japanese banned them, just as elite warriors did in Egypt and Italy as well. The Chinese, who had invented so-called gunpowder in the first place, had chosen not to use it for war. King Wu of Chou, the first ruler of the Zhou Dynasty, after winning a war, set free the horses, dispersed the oxen, and had the chariots and coats of mail smeared with the blood of cattle yet retained them in the arsenal to show that they would not be used again. The shields and swords were turned upside down and wrapped in tiger skins. The King disbanded the army, turned his generals into princes, and commanded them to seal up their bows and arrows in their quivers.

After poisonous gases became weapons during World War I, the world mostly banned them. Nuclear bombs were shown to be wonderful tools from the perspective of war making 65 years ago, but they have not been used since, except in depleted uranium. Most of the world's nations have banned land mines and cluster bombs, even though the United States has refused to join them.

Do deep drives urge us toward war? In some human cultures they certainly do, but there's no reason those cultures cannot be changed. The changes just might need to be deeper and broader than an amendment to the Constitution.

If It Looks Avoidable and Sounds Avoidable...

Another reason to doubt that any particular war is unavoidable is the history of accidents, stupid mistakes, petty rivalries, scheming bureaucrats, and tragic-comic errors through which we blunder into



Most of the world's nations have banned land mines and cluster bombs, even though the United States has refused to join them

each war, while on other occasions stumbling right up to the edge without going over. It's hard to discern rational competition among imperial nations — or, for that matter, ineluctable forces of overpopulation and innate aggression — when looking at how wars actually come to be. As we'll see in chapter six, war makers deal in financial interests, industry pressures, electoral calculations, and pure ignorance, all factors that appear susceptible to change or elimination.

War may dominate human history, and certainly our history books pretend there's been nothing but war, but warfare has not been constant. It's ebbed and flowed. Germany and Japan, such eager war makers 75 years ago, are now far more interested in peace than is the United States. The Viking nations of Scandinavia don't seem interested in waging war on anyone. Groups like the Amish within the United States avoid participation in war, and their members have done so at great cost when forced to resist drafts into non-combat service, as during World War II. Seventh Day Adventists have refused to participate in war, and have been used in tests of nuclear radiation instead. If we can avoid wars sometimes, and if some of us can avoid wars all the time, why can't we collectively do better?

Peaceful societies use wise forms of conflict resolution that repair, restore, and respect, rather than just punishing. Diplomacy, aid, and friendship are proven alternatives to war in the modern world. In December 1916 and January 1917, President Woodrow Wilson did something very appropriate. He asked the Germans and the Allies to clear the air by stating their aims and interests. He proposed to serve as a mediator, a proposal the British and the Austro-Hungarians accepted. The Germans did not accept Wilson as

an honest mediator, for the understandable reason that he had been assisting the British war effort. Imagine for a minute, however, if things had gone only a little differently, if diplomacy had been used successfully a few years earlier, and war had been avoided, sparing some 16 million lives. Our genetic makeup wouldn't have been altered. We'd still have been the same creatures we are, capable of war or peace, whichever we chose.

War may not have been the first and only option President Wilson considered in 1916, but that doesn't mean he saved it for last. In many cases governments claim that war will only be a last resort, even while secretly planning to launch a war. President George W. Bush planned to attack Iraq for many months while pretending that war would only be a last resort and was something he was working hard to avoid. Bush kept up that pretense at a press conference on January 31, 2003, the same day on which he had just proposed to Prime Minister Tony Blair that one way they could gin up an excuse for war might be to paint planes with U.N. colors and try to get them shot at. For years, as the War on Iraq went on, pundits urged the necessity of swiftly launching a war against Iran as well. For several years, such a war was not launched, and yet no dire consequences seemed to follow from that restraint.

An earlier instance of restraint toward Iraq had also avoided, rather than created, disaster. In November 1998, President Clinton scheduled air attacks against Iraq, but then Saddam Hussein promised complete cooperation with U.N. weapons inspectors. Clinton called off the assault. Media pundits, as Norman Solomon recounts, were quite disappointed, denouncing Clinton's refusal to go to war simply because the justification for the war had



World War II was was not fought to save the Jews, and it did not save them. Refugees were turned away and abandoned. Plans to ship Jews out of Germany were frustrated by Britain's blockade

been taken away — a mistake Clinton's successor would not make. If Clinton had gone to war his actions would not have been unavoidable; they would have been criminal.

The Good War

Any argument against any war for the past few decades has been met with the following rebuttal: If you oppose this war, you must oppose all wars; if you oppose all wars you must oppose World War II; World War II was a good war; therefore you are wrong; and if you are wrong this current war must be right. (The phrase "the good war" really caught on as a description of World War II during the War on Vietnam, not during World War II itself.) This argument is made not only in the United States but also in Britain and Russia. The glaring fallaciousness of this rebuttal is no deterrent to its use. Demonstrating that World War II was not a good war might be. The essence of World War II's goodness has always included its necessity. World War II, we've all been told, simply could not have been avoided.

But World War II was not a good war, not even from the perspective of the Allies or that of the United States. As we saw in chapter one, it was not fought to save the Jews, and it did not save them. Refugees were turned away and abandoned. Plans to ship Jews out of Germany were frustrated by Britain's blockade. As we saw in chapter two, this war was not fought in self-defense. It was also not fought with any restraint or concern for civilian life. It was not fought against racism by a nation imprisoning Japanese-Americans and segregating African American soldiers. It was not fought against imperialism by the world's leading and most up-and-coming imperialists. Britain fought because Ger-

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many invaded Poland. The United States fought in Europe because Britain was at war with Germany, although the United States did not fully enter the war until its fleet was attacked by the Japanese in the Pacific. That Japanese attack was, as we have seen, perfectly avoidable and aggressively provoked. The war with Germany that arrived immediately after meant a full commitment to a war in which the United States had long been assisting England and China.

The more months and years and decades we imagine going back in time to fix the problem, the simpler and easier we can imagine it would have been to prevent Germany from attacking Poland. Even most supporters of World War II as a “good war” agree that the Allies’ actions following World War I helped bring on the second war. On September 22, 1933, David Lloyd George, who had been the prime minister of England during World War I, gave a speech counseling against the overthrow of Nazism in Germany, because the result might be something worse: “extreme communism.”

In 1939, when Italy tried to open negotiations with Britain on behalf of Germany, Churchill shut them down cold: “If Ciano realises (sic) our inflexible purpose he will be less likely to toy with the idea of an Italian mediation.” Churchill’s inflexible purpose was to go to war. When Hitler, having invaded Poland, proposed peace with Britain and France and asked for their help in expelling Germany’s Jews, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain insisted on war.

Of course, Hitler was not particularly trustworthy. But what if the Jews had been spared, Poland had been occupied, and peace had been maintained between the Allies and Germany for some minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, or years? The



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war could have begun whenever it began, with no harm done and some moments of peace gained. And every moment of peace gained could have been used to attempt to negotiate a more permanent peace, as well as independence for Poland. In May 1940, Chamberlain and Lord Halifax both favored peace negotiations with Germany, but Prime Minister Churchill refused. In July 1940, Hitler gave another speech proposing peace with England. Churchill was not interested.

Even if we pretend that the Nazi invasion of Poland was truly unavoidable and assume that a Nazi attack on England was irrevocably planned, why was immediate war the answer? And once other nations had begun it, why did the United States have to join in? Napoleon had invaded lots of European countries without our president’s launching a massive PR campaign to demand that we join the fight and make the world safe for democracy, as Wilson did for World War I, and as Roosevelt reprised for World War II.

World War II killed 70 million people, and that sort of outcome could be more or less foreseen. What did we imagine was worse than that? What could we have been preventing? The United States took no interest in the holocaust and did not prevent it. And the holocaust only killed six million. There were resisters in Germany. Hitler, if he stayed in power, wasn’t going to live forever or necessarily commit suicide by imperial war if he saw other options. Aiding the people in the territories Germany had occupied would have been easy enough. Our policy was instead to blockade and starve them, which took great effort and had hideous results.

The possibility of Hitler or his heirs consolidating power, holding onto it, and attacking the United States seems extremely remote. The United States had to

go to enormous lengths to provoke Japan into attacking it. Hitler was going to be lucky to hold onto his sanity, much less a global empire. But suppose that Germany eventually had brought the war to our shores.

Is it conceivable that any American would not have then fought 20 times harder and won a truly defensive war more quickly? Or perhaps the Cold War would have been waged in opposition to Germany rather than the Soviet Union. The Soviet empire ended without war; why could a German empire not have done the same? Who knows? What we do know is the unmatched horror of what did happen.

We and our allies engaged in the indiscriminate mass-slaughter of German, French, and Japanese civilians from the air, developed the deadliest weapons anyone had ever seen, destroyed the concept of limited warfare, and transformed war into an adventure that victimizes civilians more than soldiers. In the United States we invented the idea of permanent war, gave near-total war making powers to presidents, created secret agencies with the power to engage in warfare with no oversight, and built a war economy that would require wars from which to profit.

World War II and the new practice of total war brought torture back from the Middle Ages; developed chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons for current and future use, including napalm and Agent Orange; and launched programs of human experimentation in the United States. Winston Churchill, who drove the agenda of the Allies as much as anyone else, had earlier written, “I am strongly in favor of using poisoned gas against uncivilized tribes.” Wherever you peer too closely at the goals and conduct of the “good war” that’s what you tend to see:



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Churchillian eagerness to exterminate enemies en masse.

If World War II was a good war, I’d really hate to see a bad one. If World War II was a good war, why did President Franklin Roosevelt have to lie us into it? On September 4, 1941, Roosevelt gave a “fireside chat” radio address in which he claimed that a German submarine, completely unprovoked, had attacked the United States destroyer Greer, which — despite being called a destroyer — had been harmlessly delivering mail.

Really? The Senate Naval Affairs Committee questioned Admiral Harold Stark, Chief of Naval Operations, who said the Greer had been tracking the German submarine and relaying its location to a British airplane, which had dropped depth charges on the submarine’s location without success. The Greer had continued tracking the submarine for hours before the submarine turned and fired torpedoes.

A month and a half later, Roosevelt told a similar tall tale about the USKearny. And then he really piled on. Roosevelt claimed to have in his possession a secret map produced by Hitler’s government that showed plans for a Nazi conquest of South America. The Nazi government denounced this as a lie, blaming of course a Jewish conspiracy. The map, which Roosevelt refused to show the public, in fact actually showed routes in South America flown by American airplanes, with notations in German describing the distribution of aviation fuel. It was a British forgery, and apparently of about the same quality as the forgeries President George W. Bush would later use to show that Iraq had been trying to purchase uranium.

Roosevelt also claimed to have come into possession of a secret plan produced

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by the Nazis for the replacement of all religions with Nazism:

“The clergy are to be forever silenced under penalty of the concentration camps, where even now so many fearless men are being tortured because they have placed God above Hitler.”

Such a plan sounded like something Hitler would indeed draw up had Hitler not himself been an adherent of Christianity, but Roosevelt of course had no such document.

Why were these lies necessary? Are good wars only recognizable after the fact? Do good people at the time have to be deceived into them? And if Roosevelt knew what was happening in the concentration camps, why wouldn't the truth have been sufficient?

If World War II was a good war, why did the United States have to wait until its imperial outpost in the middle of the Pacific was attacked? If the war was aimed at opposing atrocities, there had been many reported, going back to the bombing of Guernica. Innocent people were under attack in Europe. If the war had something to do with that, why did the United States' open participation have to wait until Japan attacked and Germany declared war?

If World War II was a good war, why did Americans have to be drafted to fight in it? The draft came before Pearl Harbor, and many soldiers deserted, especially when their length of “service” was extended beyond 12 months. Thousands volunteered after Pearl Harbor, but the draft was still the primary means of producing cannon fodder. During the course of the war, 21,049 soldiers were sentenced for desertion and 49 were given death sentences. Another 12,000 were classified as conscientious objectors.

If World War II was a good war, why



If World War II was a good war, why did 80 percent of the Americans who finally made it into combat choose not to fire their weapons at the enemies?

did 80 percent of the Americans who finally made it into combat choose not to fire their weapons at the enemies? Dave Grossman writes:

“Prior to World War II it had always been assumed that the average soldier would kill in combat simply because his country and his leaders had told him to do so and because it was essential to defend his own life and the lives of his friends.... US Army Brigadier General S. L. A. Marshall asked these average soldiers what it was that they did in battle. His singularly unexpected discovery was that, of every hundred men along the line of fire during the period of an encounter, an average of only 15 to 20 ‘would take any part with their ’’weapons.

There is good evidence that this was the norm in the ranks of the Germans, British, French, and so forth, and had been the norm in previous wars as well. The problem — for those who see this encouraging and life-saving characteristic as a problem — was that about 98 percent of people are very resistant to killing other human beings. You can show them how to use a gun and tell them to go shoot it, but in the moment of combat many of them will aim for the sky, drop in the dirt, assist a buddy with his weapon, or suddenly discover that an important message needs to be conveyed along the line. They're not scared of being shot. At least that's not the most powerful force at play. They're horrified of committing murder.

Coming out of World War II with the US military's new understanding of what happens in the heat of battle, training techniques changed. Soldiers would no longer be taught to fire. They would be conditioned to kill without thinking. Bull's-eye targets would be replaced with targets resembling human beings. Soldiers would be drilled to the point where, under

pressure, they would instinctively react by committing murder. Here's a chant used in basic training at the time of the War on Iraq that may have helped get US soldiers into the proper frame of mind to kill:

*"We went to the market where all the
hadji shop,
pulled out our machetes and we began to
chop,
We went to the playground where all the
hadji play,
pulled out our machine guns and we be-
gan to spray,
We went to the mosque where all the
hadji pray,
threw in a hand grenade and blew them
all away."*

These new techniques have been so successful that in the Vietnam War and other wars since, nearly all US soldiers have shot to kill, and huge numbers of them have suffered the psychological damage that comes from having done so.

The training that our children are receiving as they zap the enemy dead time after time in video games may be better war training than what Uncle Sam provided the "greatest generation." Children playing video games that simulate murder may, in fact, be being trained to become our future homeless veterans reliving their glory days on park benches.

Which brings me back to this question: If World War II was a good war, why did soldiers who hadn't been preconditioned as sociopathic lab rats not participate? Why did they just take up space, wear the uniforms, eat the grub, miss their families, and lose their limbs, but not actually do what they were there to do, not actually contribute to the cause even as much as the people who stayed home and grew tomatoes? Could it be that, for healthy well-adjusted people, even good wars are just not good?



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If World War II was a good war, why do we hide it? Shouldn't we want to look at it, if it was good? Admiral Gene Larocque recalled in 1985:

"World War II has warped our view of how we look at things today. We see things in terms of that war, which in a sense was a good war. But the twisted memory of it encourages the men of my generation to be willing, almost eager, to use military force anywhere in the world.

"For about 20 years after the war, I couldn't look at any film on World War II. It brought back memories that I didn't want to keep around. I hated to see how they glorified war. In all those films, people get blown up with their clothes and fall gracefully to the ground. You don't see anybody being blown apart."

Betty Basye Hutchinson, who cared for World War II veterans in Pasadena, Calif., as a nurse, remembers 1946:

"All my friends were still there, undergoing surgery. Especially Bill. I would walk him in downtown Pasadena — I'll never forget this. Half his face completely gone, right? Downtown Pasadena after the war was a very elite community. Nicely dressed women, absolutely staring, just standing there staring. He was aware of this terrible stare. People just looking right at you and wondering: What is this? I was going to cuss her out, but I moved him away. It's like the war hadn't come to Pasadena until we came there. Oh it had a big impact on the community. In the Pasadena paper came some letters to the editor: Why can't they be kept on their own grounds and off the streets."

Native Nazism

A few other things Americans are loathe to recall are the inspiration our own country offered to Hitler, the financial support

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our corporations offered him, and the fascist coup plotted by our own respected business leaders. If World War II was an unavoidable clash between good and evil, what are we to think of American contributions to and sympathies with the evil side?

Adolf Hitler grew up playing “cowboys and Indians.” He grew up to praise the US slaughter of native peoples, and the forced marches to reservations. Hitler’s concentration camps were at first thought of in terms of American Indian reservations, although other models for them may have included the British camps in South Africa during the 1899-1902 Boer War, or the camps used by Spain and the United States in the Philippines.

The pseudo-scientific language in which Hitler couched his racism, and the eugenic schemes for purifying a Nordic race, right down to the method of ushering undesirables into gas chambers, were also US-inspired. Edwin Black wrote in 2003:

“Eugenics was the racist pseudoscience determined to wipe away all human beings deemed ‘unfit,’ preserving only those who conformed to a Nordic stereotype. Elements of the philosophy were enshrined as national policy by forced sterilization and segregation laws, as well as marriage restrictions, enacted in twenty-seven states....Ultimately, eugenics practitioners coercively sterilized some 60,000 Americans, barred the marriage of thousands, forcibly segregated thousands in ‘colonies,’ and persecuted untold numbers in ways we are just learning....

“Eugenics would have been so much bizarre parlor talk had it not been for extensive financing by corporate philanthropies, specifically the Carnegie Institution, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Harriman railroad fortune....The Harriman railroad



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fortune paid local charities, such as the New York Bureau of Industries and Immigration, to seek out Jewish, Italian and other immigrants in New York and other crowded cities and subject them to deportation, trumped up confinement, or forced sterilization. The Rockefeller Foundation helped found the German eugenics program and even funded the program that Josef Mengele worked in before he went to Auschwitz....

“The most commonly suggested method of eugenicide in America was a ‘lethal chamber’ or public locally operated gas chambers....Eugenic breeders believed American society was not ready to implement an organized lethal solution. But many mental institutions and doctors practiced improvised medical lethality and passive euthanasia on their own.”

The US Supreme Court endorsed eugenics in a 1927 ruling in which Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote, “It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind.... Three generations of imbeciles are enough.” Nazis would quote Holmes in their own defense at the war crimes trials. Hitler, two decades earlier, in his book *Mein Kampf* praised American eugenics. Hitler even wrote a fan letter telling American eugenicist Madison Grant that he considered his book “the bible.” Rockefeller gave \$410,000, almost \$4 million in today’s money, to German eugenics “researchers.”

Britain may want to claim some credit here, as well. In 1910, Home Secretary Winston Churchill proposed sterilizing 100,000 “mental degenerates” and confining tens of thousands more in state-run labor camps. This plan, not executed, would have supposedly saved the British

from racial decline.

Following World War I, Hitler and his cronies, including propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, admired and studied George Creel's Committee on Public Information (CPI), as well as British war propaganda. They learned from the CPI's use of posters, film, and news media. One of Goebbels' favorite books on propaganda was Edward Bernays' *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, which may have helped inspire the naming of a night of anti-Jewish rioting "Kristallnacht."

Prescott Sheldon Bush's early business efforts, like those of his grandson George W. Bush, tended to fail. He married the daughter of a very rich man named George Herbert Walker who installed Prescott Bush as an executive in Thyssen and Flick. From then on, Prescott's business dealings went better, and he entered politics. The Thyssen in the firm's name was a German named Fritz Thyssen, a major financial backer of Hitler referred to in the *New York Herald-Tribune* as "Hitler's Angel."

Wall Street corporations viewed the Nazis, much as Lloyd George did, as enemies of communism. American investment in Germany increased 48.5 percent between 1929 and 1940 even as it declined sharply everywhere else in continental Europe. Major investors included Ford, General Motors, General Electric, Standard Oil, Texaco, International Harvester, ITT, and IBM. Bonds were sold in New York in the 1930s that financed the Aryaization of German companies and real estate stolen from Jews. Many companies continued doing business with Germany through the war, even if it meant benefiting from concentration-camp labor. IBM even provided the Hollerith Machines used to keep track of Jews and others to be murdered, while ITT created the Nazis'



When Cologne was leveled, its Ford plant, which provided military equipment for the Nazis, was spared and even used as an air raid shelter

communications system as well as bomb parts and then collected \$27 million from the US government for war damage to its German factories.

US pilots were instructed not to bomb factories in Germany that were owned by US companies. When Cologne was leveled, its Ford plant, which provided military equipment for the Nazis, was spared and even used as an air raid shelter. Henry Ford had been funding the Nazis' anti-Semitic propaganda since the 1920s. His German plants fired all employees with Jewish ancestry in 1935, before the Nazis required it. In 1938, Hitler awarded Ford the Grand Cross of the Supreme Order of the German Eagle, an honor only three people had previously received, one of them being Benito Mussolini. Hitler's loyal colleague and leader of the Nazi Party in Vienna, Baldur von Schirach, had an American mother and said her son had discovered anti-Semitism by reading Henry Ford's *The Eternal Jew*.

The companies Prescott Bush profited from included one engaged in mining operations in Poland using slave labor from Auschwitz. Two former slave laborers later sued the US government and Bush's heirs for \$40 billion, but the suit was dismissed by a US court on the grounds of state sovereignty.

Until the United States entered World War II it was legal for Americans to do business with Germany, but in late 1942 Prescott Bush's business interests were seized under the Trading with the Enemy Act. Among those businesses involved was the Hamburg America Lines, for which Prescott Bush served as a manager. A Congressional committee found that Hamburg America Lines had offered free passage to Germany for journalists willing to write favorably about the Nazis, and had brought Nazi sympathizers to the

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United States.

The McCormack-Dickstein Committee was established to investigate a home-grown American fascist plot hatched in 1933. The plan was to engage a half million World War I veterans, angry over not being paid their promised bonuses, to oust President Roosevelt and install a government modeled on Hitler and Mussolini's. The plotters included the owners of Heinz, Birds Eye, Goodtea, and Maxwell House, as well as our friend Prescott Bush. They made the mistake of asking Smedley Butler to lead the coup, something a reader of this book will realize Butler was unlikely to go along with. In fact, Butler rattled them out to Congress. His account was corroborated in part by a number of witnesses, and the committee concluded that the plot was real. But the names of the wealthy backers of the plot were blacked out in the committee's records, and nobody was prosecuted. President Roosevelt had reportedly cut a deal. He would refrain from prosecuting some of the wealthiest men in America for treason. They would agree to end Wall Street's opposition to his New Deal programs.

A very powerful Wall Street firm at the time, heavily invested in Germany, was Sullivan and Cromwell, home to John Foster Dulles and Allen Dulles, two brothers who boycotted their own sister's wedding because she married a Jew. John Foster would serve as Secretary of State for President Eisenhower, intensify the Cold War, and get a Washington, D.C., airport named after him. Allen, whom we encountered in chapter two, would be head of the Office of Strategic Services during the war and later the first Director of Central Intelligence from 1953 to 1961. J.F. Dulles during the pre-war period would begin his letters to German clients with the words "Heil Hitler." In 1939, he told the Economic Club



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of New York, "We have to welcome and nurture the desire of the new Germany to find for her energies a new outlet."

A. Dulles was an originator of the idea of criminal immunity for multinational corporations, which was necessitated by US corporations' aid to Nazi Germany. In September 1942, A. Dulles called the Nazi holocaust "a wild rumor, inspired by Jewish fears." A. Dulles signed off on a list of German corporate executives to be spared prosecution for their collaboration in war crimes, on the grounds that they would be helpful in rebuilding Germany. Mickey Z. in his excellent book *There Is No Good War: The Myths of World War II* calls this "Dulles' List" and contrasts it with "Schindler's List," a list of Jews one German executive sought to save from genocide, which was the focus of a 1982 book and a 1993 Hollywood movie.

None of these connections between Nazism and the United States make Nazism any less evil, or US opposition to it any less noble. Despite the efforts of some of the wealthiest in our country, the urgings of radio hosts like Father Coughlin and celebrities like Charles Lindbergh, the organizing of groups like the Ku Klux Klan, the National Gentile League, the Christian Mobilizers, the German-American Bund, the Silver Shirts, and the American Liberty League, Nazism never took hold in the United States, whereas the mission of destroying it through warfare did. But for a "good war" to truly have been unavoidable, ought we not to have been completely refraining from assisting the other side?

Well, What Would You Suggest?

The fact is that other actions by our own country and the powerful and wealthy within it, from the end of World War I

until the start of World War II could have changed the course of events. Diplomacy, aid, friendship, and honest negotiations could have prevented war. Alertness to the danger of war as a greater threat than a government leaning toward communism would have helped. Of course, greater resistance to Nazism by the German people could also have made the difference, a lesson Germany seems actually to have learned. In 2010 their president was forced out for announcing that war in Afghanistan could be economically profitable for Germany. In the United States, such comments can win you votes.

Could the German people, the German Jews, the Poles, the French, and the Brits have used nonviolent resistance? Gandhi urged them to do so, openly stating that thousands might have to die and that success would come very slowly. At what stage might what degree of such incredibly brave and selfless action have succeeded? Those who engaged in it would never have known, and we will never know. But we know that India won its independence, as Poland would later win its from the Soviet Union, as South Africa would later end apartheid and the United States end Jim Crow, as the Philippines would restore democracy and remove US bases, as El Salvador would remove a dictator in 1944, and as people would achieve large and lasting victories the world over without war and without the damaging effects of the sort that World War II left behind, from which we have yet to — and may never — recover.

We also know that the people of Denmark saved most Danish Jews from the Nazis, sabotaged Nazi war efforts, went on strike, publicly protested, and refused to submit to the German occupation. Likewise, many in the occupied Netherlands resisted. We also know that in 1943 a non-



We also know that the people of Denmark saved most Danish Jews from the Nazis, sabotaged Nazi war efforts, went on strike, publicly protested, and refused to submit to the German occupation

violent protest in Berlin led by non-Jewish women whose Jewish husbands had been imprisoned, successfully demanded their release, forced a reversal in Nazi policy, and saved their husbands' lives. A month later, the Nazis released inter-married Jews in France as well.

What if that protest in the heart of Berlin, which was being joined by Germans of all backgrounds, had grown much larger? What if wealthy Americans during the preceding decades had funded German schools of nonviolent action rather than German schools of eugenics? There is no way of knowing what was possible. One simply had to try. When a German soldier tried to tell the king of Denmark that a swastika would be raised over Amalienborg Castle, the king objected: "If this happens, a Danish soldier will go and take it down." "That Danish soldier will be shot," replied the German. "That Danish soldier will be myself," said the king. The swastika never flew.

If we begin to doubt the goodness and justness of World War II, we open ourselves up to similar doubts about all other wars. Would a Korean War have been needed if we hadn't sliced the country in half? Was the Vietnam War needed to prevent the domino-falling that did not actually happen when the United States was defeated there? And so on.

"Just war" theorists maintain that some wars are morally required — not just defensive wars, but humanitarian wars fought for good motives and with restrained tactics. Thus, a week before the 2003 assault on Baghdad, just war theorist Michael Walzer argued in the *New York Times* for tighter containment of Iraq through what he termed a "little war," which would have included extending the no-flight zones to cover the entire nation, imposing tougher sanctions, sanction-

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ing other nations that did not cooperate, sending in more inspectors, flying unannounced surveillance flights, and pressuring the French to send in troops. Indeed this plan would have been better than what was done. But it writes the Iraqis completely out of the picture, ignores their claims of not possessing weapons, ignores the French claims of not believing Bush's lies about weapons, ignores the history of the United States' sending in spies along with weapons inspectors, and appears oblivious to the likelihood that greater restrictions and suffering, in combination with a greater troop presence, could lead to a larger war. The just course of action cannot, in fact, be found by devising the most restrained form of aggressive warfare. The just course of action is whatever policy is most likely to avoid warfare.

Making war is always a choice, just as maintaining policies that make war more likely is optional and can be changed. We are told that there is no choice, that there is pressure to act immediately. We feel a sudden desire to be involved and to do something. Our options seem limited to doing something to support a war or doing nothing at all. There's an intense thrill of excitement, the romance of the crisis, and the opportunity to act collectively in a manner we're told is brave and courageous, even if the riskiest thing we do is hang up a flag at a busy intersection. Some people only understand violence, we're told. Some problems are, regrettably perhaps, past the point where anything other than massive levels of violence can do any good; no other tools exist.

This is just not so, and this belief does immense damage. War is a meme, a con-



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tagious idea, that serves its own ends. War excitement keeps war alive. It does no good for human beings.

One might argue that war has been made unavoidable by a war economy that depends on it, a communications system that favors it, and a corrupt system of government of, by, and for the war profiteers. But that is a lesser-grade unavoidability. That requires reforming our government in the manner described in my earlier book *Daybreak*, at which point war loses its status of unavoidability and becomes avoidable.

One might argue that war is unavoidable because it is not subject to rational discussion. War has always been around and always will be. Like your appendix, your earlobes, or nipples on men, it may not serve any purpose, but it is a part of us that can't be wished away. But the age of something doesn't make it permanent; it just makes it old.

"War is inevitable" is not an argument for war so much as a sigh of despair. If you were here and heaved such a sigh, I'd shake you by the shoulders, throw cold water on your face, and shout "What's the point of living if you aren't going to try to make life better?" Since you're not here, there's little I can say.

Except this: Even if you believe that war, in a general sense, simply must go on, you still have no basis not to join in the opposition to any particular war. Even if you believe some past war was justified, you still have no basis not to oppose the war being planned right here today. And one day, after we oppose every particular potential war, warfare will be over. Whether or not that was possible.

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