



# The Invention of Peace: Reflections on War and International Order

*By Michael Howard*



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Throughout history the overwhelming majority of human societies have taken war for granted and made it the basis for their legal and social structures. Not until the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century did war come to be regarded as an unmitigated evil and one that could be abolished by rational social organization, and only after the massive slaughter of the two world wars did this become the declared objective of civilized states. Nevertheless, war in one form or another continues unabated. In this elegantly written book, a preeminent military historian considers why this is so.

Is war in some sense still a necessary element in international order? Are war and peace in fact complementary? Does not peace itself breed the conditions that will ultimately lead to war? And if nuclear weapons have made war ultimately suicidal for mankind, what can be done about it? Having devoted half a century largely to studying these questions, Michael Howard offers us his reflections. Unless they can be answered, he notes, the twenty-first century is unlikely to be any more peaceful than the centuries that preceded it.



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## **The Invention of Peace: Reflections on War and International Order** By Michael Howard **Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

"War appears to be as old as mankind, but peace is a modern invention," claimed Sir Henry Maine in the middle of the 19th century. In his short, polemic book *The Invention of Peace: Reflections on War and International Order*, Michael Howard develops Maine's argument, and while not completely endorsing it, he convincingly argues that peace "is certainly a far more complex affair than war."

At just over a hundred pages, *The Invention of Peace* is more of an essay than a book, and its massive historical sweep will undoubtedly irritate some readers. Beginning in A.D. 800, when war "was recognized as an intrinsic part of the social order," it extends to 2000, when "militant nationalist movements or conspiratorial ones" suggest that in the near future "armed conflict becomes highly probable." However, Howard's credentials for writing this type of macro reflection on war and international relations are impeccable. Having fought in Italy during the Second World War, he has held several chairs of History and War Studies, and remains the president of the International Institute for Strategic Studies. His many books include *War in European History* and a translation of von Clausewitz's classic *On War*.

With such qualifications, it is hardly surprising that Howard remains tied to the beliefs of the European Enlightenment, while also acknowledging that "the peace invented by the thinkers of the Enlightenment, an international order in which war plays no part, had been a common enough aspiration for visionaries throughout history, but it has been regarded by political leaders as a practicable or indeed desirable goal only during the past two hundred years." As Howard thoughtfully picks his way through the complex negotiations throughout European history that led to the brief eruption of peace into an otherwise uninterrupted state of war, he hopes that "Kant was right, and that, whatever else may happen, 'a seed of enlightenment' will always survive." Let's hope that he's right. --Jerry Brotton, *Amazon.co.uk*

#### From Publishers Weekly

Howard, professor emeritus of military and naval history at Yale (*The Lessons of History*; etc.), reviews the history of the concept of peace, which he defines as "the order, however imperfect, that results from agreement between states, and can only be sustained by that agreement." For all its brevity, this book is extraordinarily ambitious in scope. Howard's aim is to examine Western political history from the year 800 to the present, extracting from that history the essential views of each era about the role of war among nations and the possibility of achieving peace. Because the treatment of each era is so compressed (the book is an expanded lecture), readers will have to marshal all their knowledge of history to understand the author's points. This is no introductory survey, but rather a work to turn to for a culminating synthesis of its subject. According to Howard, modern concepts of peace derive from the Enlightenment, and especially from Kant's teaching that a stable world order can arise only from forms of government in which the citizens or subjects have some effective say over the making of war. Howard traces how successive models of world order (conservative, liberal, Marxist) have competed for dominance over the past 200 years. The author convincingly demonstrates that the long struggle for stability among nations is not yet over, and that the latest new world order arising after the end of the Cold War still poses as much danger of conflict as it holds out promises of peace.

From [Booklist](#)

As astute essay on peace as an objective in international affairs, Howard's analytically sharp discourse is ultimately pessimistic. Observing that people divide into two camps about peace--those who believe it must be preserved and those who believe it must be attained--Howard inspects that dichotomy as expressed in diplomatic settlements from the Peace of Westphalia onward. Peace preservers tend to be conservatives like Metternich; peace attainers, liberals like Wilson. Regardless of statesmen's proclivities (except those of prophets of class warfare or racial empire), peace came to be conceived as an achievable outcome of a rational ordering of international politics. Yet neither balance-of-power conservatism nor liberal internationalism has, save for a few decades here and there, delivered humanity from war. With the totalitarian ideologies vanquished, Howard still handicaps liberalism's current opportunity, through international organizations and global commerce, to shape a stable world order. Noting resentment of American preeminence and visceral rejection of Western values, his cold-bath conclusion is that "it would be unwise to expect anything of the kind." A pointed big-think tract. *Gilbert Taylor*

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#### **Henry Vance:**

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