



On the Origins of War: And the Preservation of Peace

By Donald Kagan

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A brilliant and vitally important history of why states go to war, by the acclaimed, award-winning author of *The Peloponnesian War*.

War has been a fact of life for centuries. By lucidly revealing the common threads that connect the ancient confrontations between Athens and Sparta and between Rome and Carthage with the two calamitous World Wars of the twentieth century, renowned historian Donald Kagan reveals new and surprising insights into the nature of war and peace. Vivid, incisive, and accessible, Kagan's powerful narrative warns against complacency and urgently reminds us of the importance of preparedness in times of peace.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This book is best read as a counterpoint to Paul Kennedy's 1987 study, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. Kennedy emphasized the primacy of domestic politics; Kagan, professor of history and classics at Yale, focuses on international relations, pondering why states choose to go to war. He sees the determining factors as those enunciated by Thucydides: "honor, fear, and interest." War cannot be eliminated because peace is not regarded as an absolute good, yet particular conflicts can be averted, according to Kagan. He analyzes five wars, ranging across 2500 years and involving widely different kinds of governments. He begins with the Greek city-states that fought the Peloponnesian Wars and moves to the Second Punic War between Rome and Carthage, before jumping to the 20th century for the two world wars and the near-war of the Cuban missile crisis. The wide temporal gap between the ancient and the modern examples highlights Kagan's thesis that peace does not keep itself: "A persistent and repeated error through the ages has been the failure to understand that the preservation of peace requires active effort, planning, the expenditure of resources, and sacrifice, just as war does." A thoughtful review of an age-old phenomenon. Illustrations not seen by PW.

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From Library Journal

In his latest work, Kagan continues the theme of a parallel between ancient and modern history, which he brought forward in *Pericles of Athens and the Birth of Democracy* (LJ 11/15/90). Studying the international systems in place at the time of the Peloponnesian War, World War I, the Second Punic War, World War II, and the Cuban Missile and Berlin Wall crises, Kagan concludes that peace is an active process requiring constant attention; it is not merely the absence of war. Kagan's overall premise will be certain to spark discussions in academic circles, and his discussion of the events that led to a near-war in the 1960s, particularly the tacit acceptance of the construction of the Berlin Wall by the Kennedy administration, may provoke a more public controversy as well. This work deserves a place in history collections. While his style is academic, his message is of importance to all in this post-Cold War world. Highly recommended for public and academic libraries.

Stanley Planton, Ohio Univ., Chillicothe

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From [Booklist](#)

Whenever a prestigious professor distills a lifetime of erudition into a single volume, it is a significant intellectual event. An expert on Greco-Roman political history at Yale, whose eminent four-volume history of the Peloponnesian War is unmatched but by that of Thucydides himself, Kagan here refines his thoughts on hostility between world powers in five case studies: the Athens-Sparta war, the Second Punic War, World Wars I and II, and the world war that wasn't--the Cuban missile crisis. As causal factors, Kagan emphasizes a "Thucydidean triad" of honor, fear, and interest. The triad grows out of the inherently anarchical character of international systems, which are fundamentally shifting patterns of power. The problem is to ameliorate the fears of security that changing patterns generate and satisfy a state's need for the prestige power confers. Rationality does not rule, as Kagan analyzes how a revolt in Epidamnus in 431 B.C., a Carthaginian siege of Saguntum in 218 B.C., an assassination in 1914, a farrago of mistakes in the 1920s and '30s, or a few nuclear-tipped missiles in 1962--each one objectively not worth a war--degenerated into a fearsome stare down over relative power. An incisive series of stimulating studies that bears the closest attention from the foreign policy community and from libraries that attracted patrons with John Keegan's *A History of Warfare*

or Kissinger's *Diplomacy*. Gilbert Taylor

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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