

March 1, 2001 // 17.423 // Causes and Prevention of War
Van Evera, Gabbittas and Lejlic

MORE CAUSES OF WAR AND PEACE:

Culture, Gender, Language, Democracy, Social equality and social justice, Minority rights and human rights, Prosperity, Economic interdependence, Revolution, Capitalism, Imperial decline and collapse, Cultural learning, Religion, Emotional factors (revenge, contempt, honor), Polarity of the international system; Causes of civil war.

I. CULTURAL CAUSES OF WAR

"Some national cultures incline toward war. For example, harsh German child-rearing practices makes Germans belligerent." See, e.g., Leopold Bellak's op-ed in the coursenotes.

Is this explanation satisfying? What causes culture?
Is this cause of war manipulable?

II. GENDER AND WAR

"Men cause war. War would diminish with the greater empowerment of women." See the reading in the coursenotes on this subject by Joshua Goldstein.

Is this explanation valid? What evidence would test it?

Are observed correlations between gender and attitudes on war causal or spurious? That is, are women more dovish because they depend more on government services, etc.?

Does the greater dovishness of women mean they would better avoid war if they were more powerful? Perhaps they would appease their way into war.

Is this cause of war manipulable?

III. PERSONALITY DISORDER CAUSES WAR

Such disorders include narcissism, megalomania, and sociopathology. In this view these disorders are overrepresented among governing elites in many states.

Studies of this hypothesis are few--more are needed.

IV. DEMOCRACY CAUSES PEACE

"Democratic states are more peaceful, especially in their relations with each other. This is because publics are more anti-war than elites, making states ruled by the public more peaceful; and because democratic publics are infused with democratic values that clash with the notion of conquering and ruling others against their will." An argument by Imanuel Kant, Michael Doyle and others.

Is this hypothesis valid? What evidence would test it? (Strong evidence supports it.)

Is this cause of war/peace manipulable? Can democracy be conjured up and sustained in non-democratic societies?

Does democratization promote peace in multiethnic authoritarian states? Civil conflict in Sri Lanka, Congo Brazzaville and Indonesia warns that democratization can cause war in such settings.

V. SOCIAL EQUALITY, SOCIAL JUSTICE

"Social inequity causes war by creating social conflict that elites defuse by pursuing conflict with other states. Social inequity also spurs elites to sow war-causing nationalist myths in order to defuse demands from below."

Is this cause of war manipulable? Not easily!

VI. MINORITY RIGHTS; OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS

"Minorities that are treated fairly are less likely to pursue secession by force. This dampens the risk of civil war."

The U.S. government has acted to protect minority rights in Eastern Europe under this hypothesis. But minority rights are often hard to nurture.

VII. PROSPERITY

"Prosperity gives people more to lose in war, so they avoid war more carefully. Prosperity also promotes democracy, which independently promotes peace."

Prosperity may cause peace indirectly, by promoting democracy, which in turn causes less nationalism and more equality. But it seems to have little direct effect on the risk of war.

Also, prosperity is hard to foster from abroad.

VIII. ECONOMIC INTERDEPENDENCE

"Economic interdependence raises the cost of cutting economic ties between states. This dampens the risk of war by raising its costs." An argument by Imanuel Kant among others.

The opposite may also occur. States that depend on foreign materials or imports may fear being strangled by embargo or blockade and therefore use force to establish direct control over these resources, as Germany and Japan did in World War II.

IX. MASS REVOLUTION

"Regimes that seize power by mass revolution are more warlike because they are infused with myths of their own enormous goodness, leading to a messianic expansionism. They also exaggerate the ease of overthrowing regimes, since their own experience of revolutionary success makes overthrows seem easier than they are. This leads them to recklessly attempt to overthrow neighboring regimes, and also to be unreasonably fearful of being overthrown by counterrevolution--leading to foreign campaigns against counterrevolutionary regimes." An argument made by Stephen Walt in a book and an article on the subject.

This theory seems well-supported by evidence. But the world's mass revolutions seem largely behind us; and mass revolution is hard to influence.

X. COMMUNISM

"Communist regimes are infused with a revolutionary messianism that leads them into foreign wars."

This is basically a variant of the previous proposition, "Mass Revolution."

XI. CAPITALISM

"Capitalist states must conquer the markets that their economies require to avoid recessions and depressions. This leads to wars over colonies and wars against colonies." A favorite Marxist argument.

This hypotheses fits some wars during 1890-1918, but not more recent wars. And it points to a cause that is not manipulable.

XII. IMPERIAL DECLINE AND COLLAPSE

"The collapse of empires leaves the zone of imperial retraction without settled borders and leaves nearby powers unsure of their rights and responsibilities in this zone. Conflict is the result."

Evidence supports this hypothesis but it points to a largely defunct and non-manipulable cause of war.

XIII. CULTURAL LEARNING

"War is being delegitimated as a human practice, just as slavery and duelling were earlier delegitimated." An hypothesis from John Mueller.

Is this hypothesis valid? What about World War II, Korea and Vietnam? The civil wars in Angola and Sudan?

XIV. RELIGION

"Religion is a cause of war. Religious believers are led by their belief to kill one another in the name of God."

"Religion is a cause of peace. Most of the world's great religions proscribe killing and emphasize the value of human life; this inhibits war."

These important hypotheses are under-studied.

Can the content of religions be manipulated in peaceful directions?

XV. EMOTIONS

"Emotions like honor, desire for vengeance, pride, and displays of contempt can trigger war; apology and displays of contrition can bolster peace."

XVI. POLARITY OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

"A bipolar international order is more peaceful and a multipolar order, because false optimism is less likely. States can't have illusions about how many allies will join their side in the next war because there are no major nonaligned states in the system." An idea from Kenneth Waltz.

Is this hypothesis valid? Does it point to a manipulable cause?

XVII. CAUSES OF CIVIL WAR

See Michael Brown reading in coursenotes.