

Chapter 7

Freedom is A Solution To War

There has never been a clear case of democracies making war on each other. Given the number of democracies, the odds of this occurring by chance is well beyond millions to one. Besides, there are very good theoretical reasons for this absence of war, and why democratic freedom is the path to perpetual peace.
----This web site

July 1 had finally come. Now, at 7:25 AM, an incredible all-out bombardment was ending the weeklong shelling of German trenches in a deafening roar of continuous explosions. Fountains of rocks and soil, and sometimes whole tree trunks, blasted into the air. No bushes survived, and what few trees remained were little more than shredded, and whittled trunks.

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Some 50,000 British and French artillery gunners had shot 1,500,000 shells--comprising 21,000 tons of explosive material of all descriptions--onto the Germans. They even fired some gas shells at them, such that a cloud of gas could seep downward into the German trenches and reach the lowest bunkers. The British and French commanding generals were confident that this shelling would leave few of the enemy capable of fighting in their front trenches, and that the shelling would destroy much of the difficult barbed wire protecting them.

The noise had been deafening, but reassuring to the young British volunteers waiting in their trenches to attack the Germans. Fresh from home and hardly trained, they were apprehensive, nervous, some sweating, most feeling the suspense after waiting over a week for the battle. They had prayed, made out their wills, written home, and shaken hands with their friends. Some were slightly intoxicated; some drunk from the rum the army gave them.

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Once a tree lined road

Above all, they were optimistic. They knew they were going to win a great victory. After all, they were the volunteer regiments; the British "Pals" who had enthusiastically enlisted with their friends, fellow workers, and

neighbors, all formed into the same regiments. Clerks and workers from a single commercial company composed whole platoons. And their officers had told them how easy it would be. In any case, they had been hearing the thunderous shelling from their own artillery for seven days, and watching the stupendous explosions just a thousand or more yards in front of them

Finally, it was 7:30 a.m. and the shelling stopped. Utter silence engulfed the front. Suddenly the British officers blew their whistles, waved their polished sticks--many thought it beneath them to carry guns or to personally kill--and yelled for their troops to follow them. Along a front 20 miles long, nearly 100,000 young men, in the first wave of this mighty offensive, crowded up the trench ladders and across the parapet. Shoulder to shoulder they walked in clear light toward what remained of the German trenches, redoubts, and fortified villages. They could not run if they wanted to, since each carried 66 to 90 pounds of ammunition and equipment. Besides, several days of heavy rain had turned the deep clay into slippery mud; in some areas, it was marshland.



Zero Hour--the attack

In many places along the line, these soldiers were preceded by a walking barrage of friendly shells timed to keep German troops hunkered down in their trenches. Since the gunners had a strict rate of advance for their shells, however, the barrages were often too far ahead of the men.

These soldiers did not know they were in a deadly race across 1,000 to 2,000 yards to reach the parapet of the German trenches. The Germans had been surviving deep within their trenches, sometimes thirty of forty feet down, within well-fortified dugouts, some actually concrete bunkers. Moreover, few of the shells that exploded above or around them was the type of heavy artillery that could reach or bury their fortifications.

Once the shelling stopped and the Germans heard the British whistles, they scrambled for what remained of the parapet of their trenches. True, the Germans were physically in sad shape. They had been under the rain of shells



Up and over

German soldiers opened fire with their rifles. Machine gunners triggered the lethal chatter of their guns, not aiming but simply moving their barrels left to right, right to left, spraying bullets back and forth into the line of on coming men. Then the German artillery opened up. They knew weeks before that an attack was coming, though they had thought because the preparations were so clearly visible from the high ground they held, it could only be a British or French diversion and not a full scale attack. So German headquarters had not reinforced them. Nonetheless, they had sighted their artillery beforehand, and now their shells fell among the advancing British soldiers. The explosions flattened many, threw them violently aside, or heaved them up in the air in a fountain of mud--full bodies here, parts of bodies there.

The air was a maelstrom of whizzing bullets, buzzing shrapnel, exploding shells. British officers could not make their commands heard above the noise, nor could their men even hear the yells or cries of pain of a friend three feet away. Some miraculously reached the wire in front of German trenches, but shelling had done little to destroy it. Those that tried to go over it were caught in the barbs, easy targets for the Germans only feet away. Soon, bodies of British soldiers hanging at all angles along miles of wire formed a grotesque line.

Other British soldiers found the few openings the shelling had cut in the wire, but as they funneled through it the Germans found a concentrated target, and slaughtered them. Some of the attackers who did reach the German trenches were burned to death with flame-throwers

Within minutes no-man's land was a dead man's land of human bodies, body parts, pieces of uniforms, helmets, destroyed equipment, metal fragments, shrapnel, shredded wood, and shell holes. Before the morning was over, the bodies of British soldiers had mounted to nearly 20,000 dead and 38,000 wounded or missing. Nor was this the end of it for the wounded. Since the German soldiers could not risk someone crawling up to throw a grenade in their trench, they shot any wounded that moved. Enemy shelling had partly buried some British wounded in the mud, and some had fallen or been blown into slippery-sided shell holes, soon to die of their wounds or to drown in the muddy sludge at the bottom. Many bodies were so deeply buried in the mud, or so badly disintegrated as to never be found.

continuously. Day after day, they faced the prospect of being blown up or entombed in their trenches. They had little sleep, were mentally exhausted by the bombardment and a week's wait, and scared. They knew they were going to be attacked and possibly shot or bayoneted. Still, many were first to the top, with time to set up their machine guns and arrange themselves along the parapet. What they saw then was unbelievable. Walking toward them shoulder to shoulder were thousands of British men, often with their unarmed officers in front.



The walking advance across no man's land



Crossing the wire

At 10:00 a.m., despite the carnage, the general order came down from British Army Headquarters to continue the attack. This only threw many more lives away. By noon, the trenches from which the British soldiers had launched the offensive were in chaos. They were full of dead, wounded, and the terrified and exhausted men of the first waves who had miraculously made it back to the trenches. Mixed in were the fresh but horror-stricken soldiers from the rear, ordered forward by their officers. But there was a blessing to this confusion: further efforts to breach the German trenches died away as local officers became increasingly reluctant to send more men to their deaths.

Meanwhile, the British soldier's initial exuberance and confidence had sunk to a dull expectation of death. At best they hoped for a wound that would take them to the rear: a shot through a hand, a shredded leg, even a lost arm would do, if they could then escape the almost certain death of no man's land. Some even wounded themselves to avoid battle. Some--but not as many as one would think--tried to run away. The British army had positioned soldiers behind front trenches for just this possibility, and these "battle police" either turned these men around to return to battle and probable death, or shot them then and there.



Wounded in the trench

Reported British Lieutenant Alfred Bundy on his part in leading this first day's attack:

Went over top at 7.30 a.m. after what seemed an interminable period of terrible apprehension. Our artillery seemed to increase in intensity and the German guns opened up on No Man's Land. The din was deafening, the fumes choking and visibility limited owing to the dust and clouds caused by exploding shells. It was a veritable inferno. I was momentarily expecting to be blown to pieces. My platoon continued to advance in good order without many casualties and until we had reached nearly half way to the [German] front line. I saw no sign of life there. Suddenly however an appalling rifle and machine-gun fire opened against us and my men commenced to fall. I shouted "down" but most of those that were still not hit had already taken what cover they could find. I dropped in a shell hole and occasionally attempted to move to my right and left but bullets were forming an impenetrable barrier and exposure of the head meant certain death. None of our men was visible but in all directions came pitiful groans and cries of pain....I finally decided to wait till dusk and about 9.30 I started to crawl flat on my stomach. At times I made short wild dashes and finally came to our wire. The [Germans] were still traversing our front line trenches and as I lay waiting for strength to rush the final few yards sparks flew from the wire continuously as it was struck by bullets. At last the firing ceased and after tearing my clothes and flesh on the wire I reached the parapet and fell over in our trench now full of dead and wounded. I found a few of my men but the majority were still out and most were dead. Came across my Company Commander Hunt who was almost insane. Took charge of 'C' company of about 30 men.¹

Throughout the night, the cries and groans of the British wounded never stopped. Sometimes someone would cry for his mother. The wounded, along with those such as Lt. Bundy who were not, managed to walk or crawl back to their trenches, and stretcher-bearers brought in what casualties they could find. In the rear medical stations, nurses made the wounded that were sure to die as comfortable as possible, while those standing a chance of survival and in need of immediate treatment were rushed to hospitals in the rear.

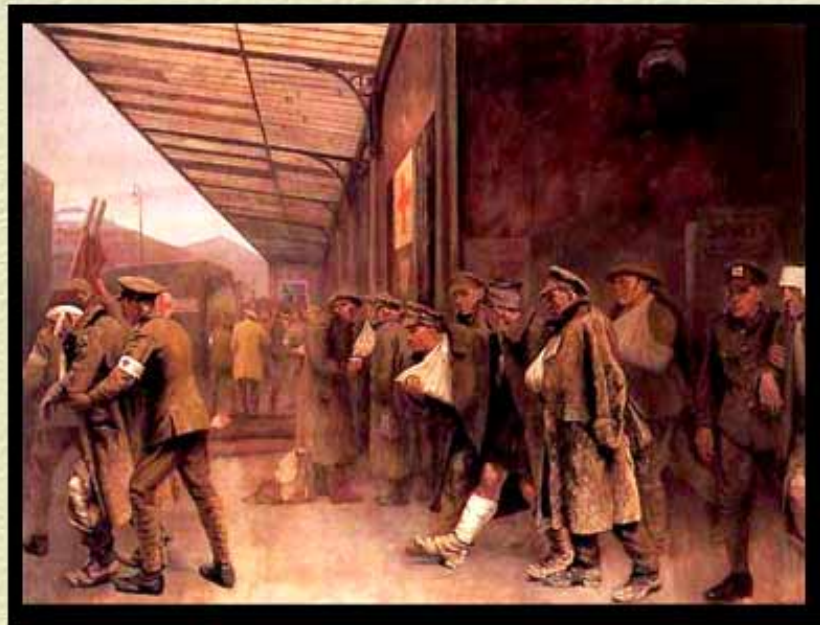
Clare Tisdall, who worked as a British nurse at a Casualty Clearing Station during the battle, described her experience.

[W]e practically never stopped. I was up for seventeen nights before I had a night in bed. A lot of the boys had legs blown off, or hastily amputated at the front-line. These boys were the ones who were in the greatest pain, and I very often used to have to hold the stump up in the ambulance for the whole journey, so that it wouldn't bump on the stretcher.

The worse case I saw--and it still haunts me--was of a man being carried past us. It was at night, and in the dim light I thought that his face was covered with a black cloth. But as he came nearer, I was horrified to realize that the whole lower half of his face had been completely blown off and what had appeared to be a black cloth was a huge gaping hole. It was the only time I nearly fainted. [2](#)

This was war, and luck, and the natural variations in geography, leadership, weapons, and experience assured different outcomes from one part of the front to another. In a few places, German trenches were overrun, in other places the British bombardment destroyed German trenches--yet attacking the second line of trenches, however, was often no less deadly than attacking the first line been in other places.

Why did the British commanding generals order these men to walk across no man's land toward the higher German trenches, in full daylight, for five to six minutes in easy range of machine gunners, snipers and riflemen, and artillery? Simple: since British Pal battalions of "citizen soldiers" were little-trained and lacked combat experience, the battle plan gave them the easiest and strictest of commands: go up the ladder, stand up, hold your rifle across your breast pointed at the sky (so that no one would be accidentally shot), walk in a line abreast to the German's trenches, shoot or bayonet any Germans in the trench, and occupy it. They gave no room for initiative: the battle plan was rigid and finely detailed in pages of orders given to the front line officers.



Haydn Reynolds Mackey (Official War Artist) "British Red Cross Society and Order of St. John workers attending wounded on their arrival at Boulogne"

Above all, the British commanding generals believed in the ability of massed artillery to conquer infantry. They thought the artillery would more than compensate for the lack of surprise and the apparent vulnerability of their men. They had planned on a massive six-day bombardment, extended to seven days because of rain, which would be so devastating it would destroy the German trenches and fortifications and cut his frontal barbed wire. Then the British soldiers need only stroll to the German's wrecked trenches and occupy them. In other words, these generals

did not understand the limits of their artillery and the resources of the Germans to strengthen their trenches against the rain of shells. Not only did they spread the shelling evenly across the whole front, despite the variation in fortifications their soldiers faced, they did not understand the killing power of the machine gun; and did they have any contingency plans for failure.

Nor did the first day's military and human catastrophe deter the British generals. They saw it as only a setback, not a defeat. After all, their reasoning went, the offensive had weakened the Germans. So they turned the battle into one of attrition, intending to make the Germans lose so many lives and so much material they must finally retreat. No matter the dead, the British launched offensive after offensive and chewed up more human lives. Four months later, the British finally ended the battle after an unbelievable 1,120,000 casualties: 620,000 on their side, and 500,000 of them Germans. And the winnings? The offensives had gained at most 16 miles of moonscape littered with the debris of battle, all of which in later battles the German soon recovered anyway.

Casualties in Major Battles 1914-1918		
Tannenberg	Aug-14	58,000
Gallipoli	April-Dec. 1915	500,000
Verdun	Feb.-Dec. 1916	510,000
Somme	July-Nov. 1916	1,200,000
Passchendael	July-Nov. 1917	558,000
German Spring Offensive	Mar.-Apr. 1918	504,000

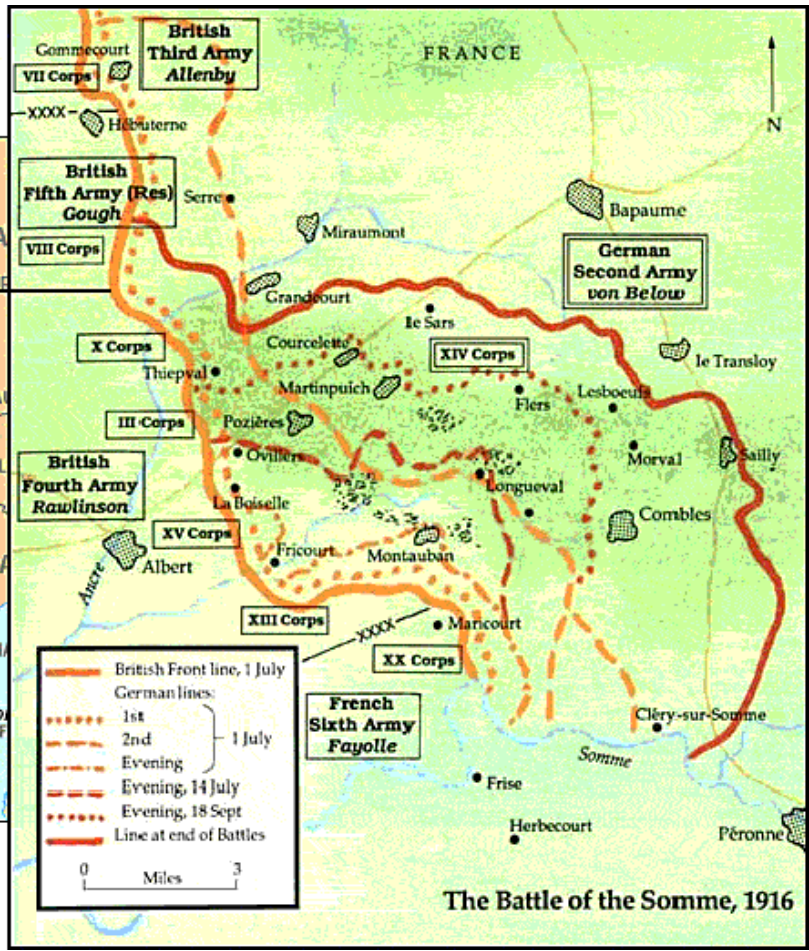
As to those British soldiers who day after day would climb the trench ladder and, as though moving against a hard wind or rain, walk toward the Germans and into a hail of bullets and shells, one might wonder how they could do this. The usual characterizations come to mind. Patriotism, duty, hatred of the enemy, all surely played a role. Mostly, however, it was loyalty to fellow soldiers, mutual friendship, the desire not to let anyone down--even the inspiring heroism of their British officers. The latter were often the first up and over the parapet, standing up fearlessly and unarmed, knowing they would likely die, and still leading their men onward.

Then why did the British officers do what they did? Unlike their men, who had just joined the service and were from the working classes, the officers had attended the finest schools, and had usually been acculturated into a military role that they accepted without question. They were "gentlemen." They looked after their men, helped them with their problems, and showed them compassion--but also tough discipline. Their job was to lead men into battle and to win the objective, and to do so calmly and fearlessly. As a result, their life expectancy was no more than a few weeks, compared to a few months for their men.

This battle was the Battle of the Somme in World War I (see [map](#), and [world map](#)), an engagement named after a French river that flowed to the south. The British Expeditionary Force in France launched this battle in 1916 against the German front lines. The French, far more experienced and much better trained for this type of warfare, manned the southern part of the front. By making better use of their artillery, the French largely achieved their first day's objectives against weaker German fortifications.

The French Commander-in-Chief, Joseph Jacques C  saire Joffre, conceived of the offensive, which Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, newly appointed commander of the British Expeditionary Force, then put into action. Joffre hoped the offensive would break through German defenses, create chaos in the rear, and enable the encircling of the Germans in northern France. At the very least, Joffre wanted to take German pressure off French troops holding fast against the German offensive at Verdun 150 miles away; but by the time the Battle of the Somme was launched, the German's had already been defeated at Verdun. The latter was another bloody meat grinder, creating some 1,200,000 casualties for the two sides before it ended.

Not only was the Battle of the Somme a military failure and human disaster, but also not launching it could have saved Russia from defeat. Had the British and French transferred the guns and ammunition used in the Somme to help the Russians, they might have defeated the Germans and thereby forestalled or prevented the Russian



The Battle of the Somme, 1916

Revolution that turned Russia into a communist state in 1917, which then withdrew from the war.

Ever since the Battle of the Somme, British home front support for war has not been as robust and enthusiastic as before the toll and nature of this battle became public. Those killed in just the first day of this battle exceeded that of any other day of war in British history, before or since. Even during the first day of the D-Day invasion of Normandy 28 years later, the English and Canadians suffered only 4,000 casualties, compared to the 58,000 for the first day of the Somme offensive. Since the British army kept those enlisting from a neighborhood or town together, whole communities were devastated by the death of most of their young men. In the first hours of the offensive, for example, the Ulster division from Northern Ireland lost 5,600 men, all from a relatively small community. For the British, this battle became symbolic of the horrors and uselessness of war, and decades later, when the threat of Hitler was clear, the British people and especially British intellectuals recoiled from the thought of rearmament and another war. No one could forget the useless death of Britain's best and brightest in the Battle of the Somme.



Yet, as bloody and stupid as this battle was, it was only one in the war. From its beginning in 1914 to its end in 1918, World War I combat ate up about 5,500 lives per day; to total by its end at least 9,000,000 men and women combat dead.

Of all the soldier's correspondence I have read, one exchange touched me most deeply, and shows the misery and horror of war not only for the soldiers in combat, but for their loved ones as well. This letter is from Private William Martin to his fiancée Emily Chitticks, written while he was fighting in France with the Devonshire Regiment. It is dated March 24, 1917.

My dearest Emily

Just a few lines dear to tell you I am still in the land of the living and keeping well, trusting you are the same dear. I have just received your letter dear and was very pleased to get it. It came rather more punctual this time for it only took five days. We are not in the same place dear, in fact we don't stay in the same place very long....we are having very nice weather at present dear and I hope it continues.... Fondest love and kisses from your loving Sweetheart

Will

Martin was killed in action three days after writing it. Unaware of this, Emily continued to write, even when receiving no reply. Finally, the Army returned five of her letters with "killed in action" marked on them. This is one of those returned.

March 29, 1917

My Dearest Will

I was so delighted to get your letter this morning and know you are quite alright. I am pleased to say I am alright myself and hope dear this will find you the same. I was so pleased to hear darling that you had such a nice enjoyable evening, It was quite a treat I am sure. I don't suppose you do get much amusement.

I am glad you are getting my letters dear, I am not waiting until I get your letters dear now before I write because it would make it so long for you to wait for a letter, and I guess you are pleased to get as many as possible.

I can understand darling your not being able to write as frequently. I shall get used to waiting for your letters soon I guess, but at first it seems so strange after being used to having them so regularly.

Well darling I don't know any more to say now and I am feeling sleepy. Oh I wish you were here darling, but its no good wishing. Fondest love and lots of kisses from your ever-loving little girl Emily.³

William Martin's grave was never found. Emily was so heartbroken by his death that she never married. When she died in 1974 Martin's letters were buried with her, as she requested.

What can we do about war?
Most wars, like World War I, should never have been fought. It was a result of flagrant political and diplomatic errors. The lesson so many learned from this war, however, was not to avoid such errors in future conflicts, but that we must never fight another war, and that armaments and arms races cause wars. This was the wrong lesson, and it led to World War II. When Great Britain and France could have been stopped Hitler cheaply--when a strong military showing by them would have avoided World War II--the awful



Nazis shooting those still alive.

memory of the bloody cost of the battles of the Somme and Verdun proved too strong. Finally, Great Britain and France drew the line against Hitler in Poland in 1939, but it was too late to avoid a war. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and Hitler's declaration of war on the United States made this war global.

As hellish and bloody as war is, I believe that we had to fight this war. Just think of what it would mean in lives and misery if the Nazis had controlled all of Europe, including Great Britain and Russia. Add to this the control by the Japanese military of all of Asia and the Western Pacific. The butchery that these murderers therefore would

unleash on both sides of the world would doubtlessly far exceed the human cost of World War II. Even before their defeat in 1945, the Nazis already had murdered about 21,000,000 people (see [Table 1.1](#) from [Democide: Nazi Genocide and Mass Murder](#))--many more than the 16,000,000 killed in battle in all World War II for all countries involved. The Japanese militarists murdered an additional some 6,000,000 people (see [Table 8.1](#) and [Statistics of Democide](#)). Remember from the [last chapter](#) that dictators of all kinds have killed several times more people than has combat in all the wars, foreign and domestic. As horrible as it was, as described in the last chapter, *the Hutu rulers of Rwanda killed more people in four months than did the Battle of the Somme during the same length of time.* And this was only one murderous government in a fairly small country.

All proposals to prevent war have suffered from this defect: they ignore how dictators differ from democratic leaders. There have always been those who when they inherit or seize power, forcefully fill their army with unwilling soldiers, and then grind them to death in a war to grab more power and control over others. The rogues' gallery of these murderers and aggressors is long, and as listed in [Table 1.4](#) of my [Death By Government](#), surely at the top would include for the twentieth century alone Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Vladimir Illich Lenin, Mao Tse-tung, Chiang Kai-shek, Tojo Hideki, and Pol Pot. When you have such people controlling large armies, the solutions to war, such as pacifism, unilateral disarmament, or disarmament treaties, do not work. They make the world safe only for such tyrants.



Japanese soldiers bayonetting Chinese prisoners

Now, finally, we have the proven knowledge to avoid both wars and the aggression of dictators. This solution was proposed in the latter part of the eighteenth century and recent social science research has shown it so. In his *Perpetual Peace*, written in 1795, the great German Philosopher Immanuel Kant argued that the way to universal peace lay in creating republics, or what today we would call representative democracies. Kant wrote that:

The republican constitution, besides the purity of its origin (having sprung from the pure source of the concept of law), also gives a favorable prospect for the desired consequence, i.e., perpetual peace. The reason is this: if the consent of the citizens is required in order to decide that war should be declared (and in this constitution it cannot but be the case), nothing is more natural than that they would be very cautious in commencing such a poor game, decreeing for themselves all the calamities of war.⁴



Note two things about this solution. First is that where people have equal rights and freely participate in their governance, they will be unlikely to promote war in which they or their loved ones might die and their property destroyed. And second, where leaders are responsible to their people as voters, they will be unwilling to fight. Then when both leaders of two nations are so restrained, war between them should not occur.

The idea that democracies are therefore inherently peaceful was not lost to others. It became part of a more general philosophy of governance that Kant shared with liberals of the time, a system of belief we now call *classical liberalism*, which I dealt with in [Chapter 3](#) with regard to the free market. Adam Smith, John Stewart Mill, and John Locke, among



Immanuel Kant 1724-1804

other influential thinkers of the time, argued for the maximum freedom of the individual. They believed in minimal government. They also supported free trade between nations and, as I noted, a free market within. Such freedom, they argued, would create a harmony among nations, and promote peace. As Thomas Paine--who like most of America's Founding Fathers was a classical liberal--wrote in his influential *Rights of Man* in 1791-1792,

Government on the old system is an assumption of power, for the aggrandizement of itself; on the new [republican form of government as just established in the United States], a delegation of power for the common benefit of society. The former supports itself by keeping up a system of war; the latter promises a system of peace, as the true means of enriching a nation.⁵

Full proof of this point had to wait, however, until scientists like Bruce Russett, Zeev Maoz, James Lee Ray, and myself, could develop research methods to document it (under "democracy and war," see the [links](#) to such work on the internet--for my work, see the "[democratic peace](#)" page on this site). We did related research throughout the 1970s, thanks in part to the growth of new statistical models made possible by the advent of the computer, and in the 1980s we, and scholars who followed our lead, proved Kant correct. By then we had collected data on all wars that had occurred over the last several centuries, and by applying various statistical analyses to these data, we established that there never has been a war between well-established democracies. Moreover, through these techniques we also proved that there was not a hidden factor accounting for this, such as a lack of common borders, or geographic distance between democracies. Nor was this democratic peace attributable to the wealth of democracies; or their international power, education levels, technology, resources, religion, or population density. Our findings are straightforward:

Well-established democracies do not make war on each other.

Table 7.1 provides some evidence on this.⁶ It gives a simple count of wars between democracies, democracies and nondemocracies, and between nondemocracies from 1816 to 1991. As the table shows, among all the wars during this period, 353 nations fought each other. The numbers refer to pairs of nations (dyads) violently engaged in war against each other. For example, in the brief 1979 war between Cambodia and Vietnam there was only one pair of nations at war. In the Six Day War of 1967, Israel fought Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, thus making it three pairs at war (Israel vs. Egypt, Israel vs. Jordan, and Israel vs. Syria). The table presents the result of adding all pairs at war for all wars 1816 to 1991. In no case did a democracy fight another democracy, which is also true since 1991. There never has been a Battle of the Somme between free people. No battle even close. In fact there had been no lethal military action between *liberal*

TABLE 7.1
Democratic Versus
Nondemocratic Wars 1816-1991

DYADS [1]	WARS [2]
democracies vs. democracies	0
democracies vs. nondemocracies	155
nondemocracies vs nondemocracies	198
TOTAL	353

1. Stable democracies. This only excludes the war between an ephemeral republican France and republican Rome in 1849.
2. Defined as any military action in which at least 1,000 are killed.
From Small and Singer 1976, updated to 1980 based on Small and Singer (1982); more recent estimates from the author.

democracies, as defined in [Chapter 3](#), ever.

But, you might still ask whether this is owed to chance. Since in the 20th Century democracies were a minority among nations, and in previous centuries there were only a handful of democracies at any given time, is not it likely that this lack of war is by chance--luck? Statistical analysis enables us to calculate the probability of such events taking place. True, statistics can be misused and have been, but this is true of any scientific method. Virtually all the medical drugs one takes today are based on statistical tests, not unlike those used to test whether democracies do not make war on each other is a chance occurrence. If one is going to be cynical about statistics, then one should also be very wary of taking any modern drugs for an illness or disease. This issue is really not statistics but how well they have been applied and whether the data meet the assumptions of the statistical model used.

For example of how statistics can be applied, aside from creating the power of Table 7.1, I will calculate the statistical significance of democracies not making war on each other through the binomial theorem. For this, one requires several statistics: the number of nondemocratic pairs and democratic pairs of states in the world for the period during which the wars between these types of pairs occurred, and the number of wars between each type. The problem has not been in determining the number of democratic pairs, but how many nondemocratic pairs there are for some period of time. This has been confronted in the literature, and for those periods in which this number could be defined the zero wars between democracies has been very significant (usually much less than a probability of .01 that this zero was by chance).

To do this now for the years 1946-1986, there then were 45 states that had a democratic regime; 109 that did not. There were thus 6,876 possible pairs (dyads) these nations could form (such as Bolivia-Chile), of which 990 were democratic-democratic pairs, and none of which fought each other. Thirty-two nondemocratic pairs engaged in war. Thus the probability of any dyad engaging in war 1946-1986 was $32/6876 = .0047$; of not engaging in war was .9953. Now, what was the probability of the 990 dyads not engaging in war during this period? Using the binomial theorem, it is .9953 to the 990th power = .0099, or rounded off, .01. This is highly significant. The odds of this lack of war between democracies being by chance are virtually 100 to 1.

One should not take this result in isolation, since the lack of war has been tested in different ways for other periods, definitions of democracy, and ways of defining war, and in each case has been significant. Thus, the overall significance is really a multiple (or function, if some of these studies are not independent) of these different significant probabilities, which would make the overall probability (subjectively estimated) of the results being by chance alone surely at least a million to one.

You may have many other questions about this lack of relationship between democracy and war, often called the *democratic peace*. I have tried to answer a number of them in an [Appendix](#) to my book [Power Kills](#), and for the papers, articles, tables, etc., on this site relevant to the democratic peace, see the aforementioned ["The Wonder That is Freedom"](#) page, and the page of [links](#). Elsewhere on this site I also have tried to clarify the meaning of the term ["democratic peace"](#).

Why is it that free and democratic peoples not make war on each other? Remember Immanuel Kant's hypothesis that since you would not want to bear the cost of wars, you would, if you could, restrain your leaders. On the surface, this seems a good explanation, and it does help to explain why democracies do not make war on each other. Yet democratic people have also been jingoistic. They have favored war and encouraged their leaders to fight. For instance, the public outcry over the explosion aboard the American battleship *Maine* in a Cuban harbor and its sinking with a loss of 260 men in 1898 pressured Congress and President McKinley into intervening militarily in Cuba. Spain then reluctantly declared war on the United States. American public opinion also strongly favored President Truman's commitment of American troops to the defense of South Korea against the North Korean invasion in 1950; and similarly favored President Johnson's request to Congress for a blank check--the Tonkin Gulf resolution of 1964--to come to the defense of South Vietnam, then near collapse under the weight of North Vietnam's aggression.

Clearly, then, there is something much deeper than simply your fear of death and destruction at work in preventing wars among democracies. This peacekeeping factor is analogous to what inhibits democratic nations from internal political violence, as I described it in [Chapter 5](#). Where democratic freedom flourishes in two countries, where there are free markets, and freedom of religion, association, ideas, and speech, then societies of mutual interest like corporations, partnerships, associations, societies, churches, schools, and clubs proliferate in and between the countries. Examples of these are the Catholic and Protestant Churches, Coca Cola, Disney, the Red Cross, the Boy Scouts, and the Association of Tennis Professionals. These cross-national groups become separate pyramids of power, competing with each other and with governments. As a result, both democratic nations then really comprise one society, one crosscut by these multifold groups, with multiple bonds between them.

Moreover, between democratic governments there are many official and unofficial connections and linkages made to achieve similar functions and satisfy mutual interests. Their militaries freely coordinate strategies, and may even share equipment in line with their mutual defense arrangements and perceived common dangers. An example is nuclear weapons and military equipment shared by Great Britain and the United States. Intelligence services will share some secrets and even sometimes agents. Health services will coordinate their studies, undertake common projects, and provide health supplies when needed. Multiple shared and cross-pressured interests sew democratic societies together.

Politicians, leaders, and groups, therefore, have a common interest in keeping the peace. And where conflict might escalate into violence, as over some trade issue or fishing rights, interests are so cross-pressured by different groups and ties that the depth of feeling and single-minded devotion to the interest at stake is simply not there. Keep in mind that for democratic leaders to choose to make the huge jump to war against another country, there must be almost fanatical dedication to the interests--the stakes--involved, almost to the exclusion of all else.

There is also something about democracies that is even more important than these links, bonds, and cross pressures. This is their democratic culture. Democratic peoples see one another as willing to compromise and negotiate issues rather than to fight violently over them. More important, they see one another as the same kind--part of one's in-group, one's moral universe. They each share not only socially, in overlapping groups, functions, and linkages, but also in political culture. Americans and Canadians, for example, have no expectation of fighting each other over trade restrictions and disputes. Both see each other as similarly free, democratic, and willing to bargain. And therefore, they have a totally unarmed 5,525-mile border between them. Similarly, with the development of a solid liberal democracy in Japan since the end of World War II, there is now no expectation of war between Japan and any other democracy, including the United States and democratic South Korea.

Finally, credit should be given to the ideology of democratic liberalism itself. Democratic liberals believe in the right of people to make their voices heard, to have a role in government, and to be free. Such liberals, who in domestic policy may be conservative, progressive, social democrat, Democrat, or Republican, greatly oppose any violence against other democracies. Even if those in power would consider such actions, democratic liberals--who compose the vast majority of intellectuals, journalists, and politicians--would arouse a storm of protest against them.

To summarize, there is no war between democracies because their people are free. This freedom creates a multitude of groups that produce diverse linkages across borders, cross-pressured interests, and make for an exchange culture of negotiation and compromise. Free people see each other as of the same kind, as morally similar, as negotiators instead of aggressors, and therefore have no expectation of war; and there is a prevalent ideology of democratic liberalism that believes in democratic freedom and opposes violence between democracies.

Then why do nondemocracies--or rather, the dictators who control them, since by definition the people have little to say--make war on each other? Do not they see each other as of the same kind, sharing the same coercive culture? Yes, and that is exactly the problem for them. They live by coercion and force. Their guns keep them in power. They depend on a controlled populace manipulated through propaganda, deceit, and terror. Commands and decrees are the working routine of dictators; negotiations are a battleground in which one wins through lies, subterfuge, misinformation, stalling, and manipulation. A dictator's international relations are no different. They see them as war fought by other means. They will only truly negotiate in the face of bigger and better guns, and they will only keep to their promises as long as these guns remain pointed at them. This is also how one dictator sees another--and,

incidentally, how they see democracies.

This is not to say that war necessarily *will* happen between two countries if one or both is not democratic. They may be too far away from each other, too weak, or too inhibited by the greater power of a third country. It is only to say that the governments of such countries lack the social and cultural inhibitions that would prevent armed conflict between them, and that their dictatorial governments inherently encourage war. War may not happen, but it can, and the more undemocratic the governments, the more likely it will.

There are two beliefs about democracy as a possible solution to war that I should address. One is the belief that what we have always done throughout our history is an inevitable force of our nature. Since we always have had war, we always will. Note, however, that down through the ages almost all the world lived under absolute monarchs, be they kings, queens, emperors, czars, or whatever. Monarchs inherited their rule and commanded without question. There were exceptions for historically brief periods, such as in the classical Greek city-states, ancient Rome, and Switzerland during the Middle Ages. So dominant was monarchism that just three centuries ago in most of the world it would have seemed natural to our species, unchangeable. Now, absolute hereditary rule only exists in a few small countries such as [Saudi Arabia](#), and should be gone entirely within in a generation or so.

Another example of an institution that once seemed inevitable was the ownership of slaves. This slavery was even more universally accepted and practiced than absolute monarchies. Yet now it is virtually ended except in some small backwater countries like Sudan, and there only as an adjunct to its civil war. As a species we may kill and murder each other, but also as a species we have the mental freedom, will, and creativity to eliminate that which we collectively despise or which endangers us. We need only the knowledge to do so, and we now have this about war.

The second belief that inhibits accepting freedom as a solution to war is its simplicity. My social science colleagues often rave about this. "The social world is too complex," they say, unaware that this statement itself is not a proven truth, but only a hypothesis. They go on, "You can't reduce human behavior to one variable like this. War must be the result of many factors interacting in complex ways, diplomatic, political, military, social, cultural, and so on. I cannot believe you would simply reduce all this to freedom. How can you ignore the balance of power, historical grievances, religious conflict, territorial conflicts, and the like?" I do not. In relations between democratic and nondemocratic nations, or among nondemocratic nations themselves, all these complex factors beloved of the historian and political scientist may indeed cause war. It is just that the less freedom the people of these countries have, the more likely war will result. Only between democracies does freedom create the conditions to override these factors.



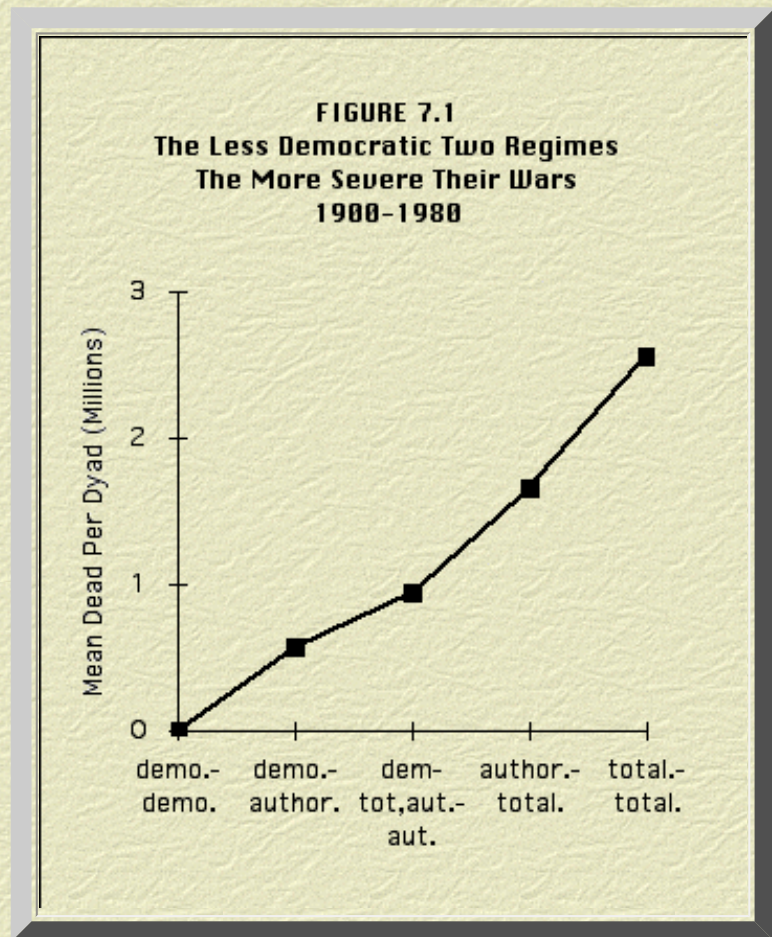
Pre-Civil War American slaves

It is not just a free, democratic populace that inhibits war, but also the *degree* to which people are free. To understand this, you now have to stop thinking about war as a single event that happens or does not happen. Rather, think of war as embodying different amounts of killing, just as a yardstick embodies different degrees of length. A war may be as vast in scope as World War I or World War II, in which the fighting between Germany and the Soviet Union alone took more than 7,500,000 lives. But the severity of a war may only be in hundreds killed, not millions--as was the war between India and China in 1962, in which each lost around 500 dead, or the Gulf War, when the United States lost 148 people from battle and 35 from friendly fire. All are wars, but the relevant distinction among them here is one of magnitude.

Then imagine a yardstick of freedom, where at one end you place democracies like Canada, New Zealand, and

Sweden; and at the other end you put the least free countries, like North Korea, Sudan, Burma, Cuba, and Laos. Toward the middle would be such authoritarian countries as Egypt, Bangladesh, and Malaysia. Then for any two countries, the closer the government of each is to the democratic end of the yardstick, the more likely fewer will be killed in any war between them. Thus we can establish a correlation between the degree of freedom and the degree of intensity in war.

Figure 7.1 graphs this correlation for governments divided into democratic, authoritarian (people are partly free), and totalitarian (no freedom) subgroups.⁷ Then when measuring the international war dead between two governments, we find a near perfect correlation between freedom and war dead over the years 1900-1980. At one end of this correlation we have two nations that are both democratically (labeled "demo" in the figure) free and fought no wars and have, if any violence at all, very minor violence between the most marginal (electoral) democracies of them. At the other end, we have nations in which there are no civil rights and political liberties, and a dictator commands all politically relevant activity and groups. Such totalitarian governments (labeled "tot" or "total"), as the figure illustrates, are most likely to have the bloodiest wars. That part of World War II involving totalitarian Germany and the Soviet Union is a case in point. In fighting against each other, the Soviet Union lost 7,500,000 in battle, and Nazi Germany lost most of its 3,500,000 battle dead. No two nations have ever before or since inflicted such massive bloodshed on each other.



Authoritarian nations (labeled "aut" or "author") are between democratic and totalitarian ones in their degree of freedom; and, as should be true empirically, their violence is more or less, depending on whether it is with democracies or totalitarian nations.

To the iron law that democracies do not make war on each other, we can now add:

The less democratically free any two nations are, the more likely is severe violence between them.

There are many other kinds of international violence than war. There is violence short of war, such as American jets shooting down Iraqi fighter planes that violate the United Nations defined no-fly zone over southern Iraq; the blowing up of a South Korean passenger jet by North Korean agents; military action by Cuban forces against Somalia during the Ethiopia-Somalia War over the Ogaden (1976-1983). And despite this absence of violence *between* democracies, democracies overall could be as violent in international affairs as nondemocracies. *Democracies would just direct great violence at nondemocracies*

However, when you consider the explanation for why democracies are peaceful--that democratic peoples are acculturated into negotiation and compromise over violence--you should expect that democracies overall would

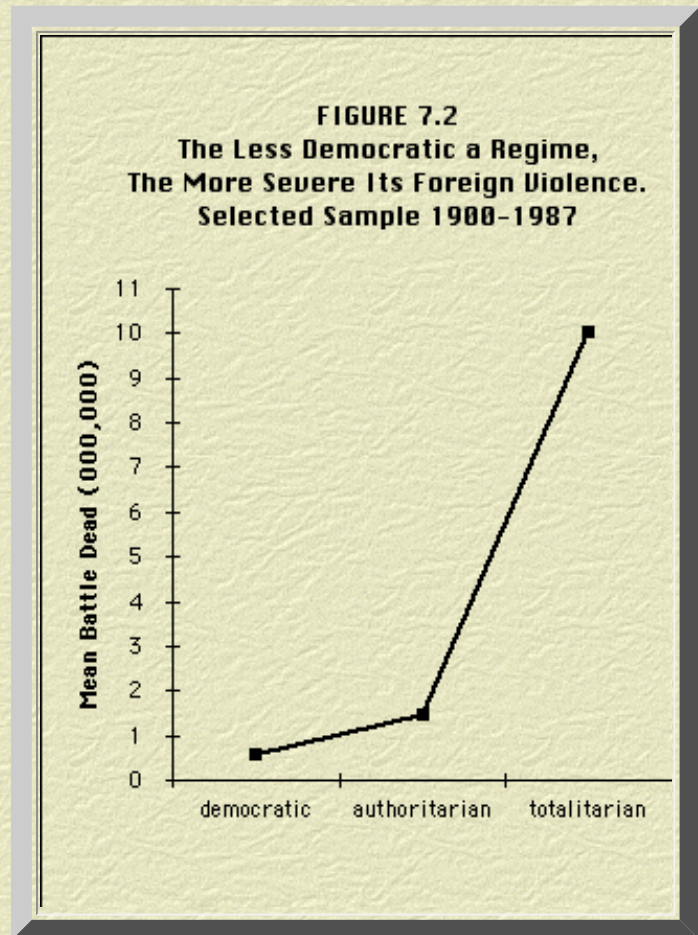
have the least severe foreign violence and war--the least dead in all their violence fighting other countries. Another way of putting this is that the more freedom a nation has, the less its leaders squander the lives of their people in foreign violence and war. And this is true, as I show in Figure 7.2. ⁸ The facts are clear:

the less democratic a country is, the more intense its foreign violence.

This is not to say that democracies are generally pacifist. They have engaged in bloody wars, usually to fight aggression and defend themselves and other democracies. And certainly democracies have also been the aggressors, as was the United States in the Spanish-American War, the Philippine-American War of 1899-1902, and the Grenada and Panama interventions. On the average, however, democratic leaders are more careful about the lives of their citizens and, therefore, they fight less severe wars.

There also are exceptions to this, as in the Battle of the Somme during which the British commanding generals continued to throw troops into battle even after its bloody losses and lack of success. However, it should be pointed out again that the repercussions of this on British public opinion were so great as to make British foreign policy naively pacifist for a full generation. Totalitarian regimes have no such negative feedback. Their dictators can time after time, in war after war, use their people as mass instruments of war, like bullets and shells, throwing them at the enemy in human waves, for whatever purpose.

As a species, we have been killing ourselves by the millions in war after war throughout history. Now, finally, we have the power of knowledge to end forever, or at the very least drastically reduce, all this human slaughter. Freedom gives us the answer. Foster democratic freedom for all humanity to end this bloody scourge. And until we achieve this, foster at least some freedom where none exist to lessen the mass killing by war. War is an evil, and the fact that it has had to be fought by free people to preserve their freedom makes it no less so. What would eliminate this evil must be a moral good. And this is therefore another moral good of freedom.



NOTES

* Written for this web site. I am indebted to Judson Knight for his careful editing and helpful comments on this chapter.

1. Malcolm Brown, *The Imperial War Museum Book Of The Somme*. Trans-Atlantic Publications, 1997.

2. From the "History on Line" [web site](#).

3. From an October 1998 British Broadcasting Corporation Special Report on World War I.

4. Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace*. Translated by Lewis White Beck. New York: The Library of Liberal Arts, Bobbs-Merrill,

1957, pp. 12-13.

5. Howard, Michael. *War And The Liberal Conscious*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1978, p. 29.

6. This is Table 1.1 in my *Death By Government*.

7. This is from Figure 3.1 in my [Power Kills](#).

8. This is from Figure 4.2 in my [Power Kills](#).
