
Reinventing the World Peace Foundation

ALEX DE WAAL

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In the early months of 1933, using funds bequeathed by Austin Barclay Fletcher for the purpose, Tufts established “a school to prepare men for the diplomatic service and to teach such matters as come within the scope of foreign relations [which] embraces within it as a fundamental and thorough knowledge of the principles of international law upon which diplomacy is founded.”¹ The idea that diplomacy might be founded on international law rather than the brute realities of force took a decided turn for the worse that year, with the Nazi Party taking power in Germany and Chancellor Adolf Hitler embarking on his program of territorial annexation and population liquidation. The first Fletcher alumni might have wondered if they had taken an unduly idealistic career path.

Eighty years after the Fletcher School opened its doors there is also an occasion to reflect on another anniversary—the upcoming centenary of the death of Edwin Ginn, in January 1914. Ginn was a Tufts alumnus (class of 1862), and a strong influence on a later generation of students including those who established the Fletcher School. In June 1910 he established the World Peace Foundation (WPF), and in his will he endowed it with \$1 million and specified that the fund be managed by trustees independent of the WPF. Anticipating that “at some time, and I hope in the not far-distant

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future,” the cause of international peace would achieve “such success as to make it unnecessary or unwise” to continue supporting the WPF,² he provided that the trustees should determine every year whether this point had been reached. At this point, the Ginn Trust would transfer its largesse to the residual legatee, the Charlesbank Homes that Ginn himself had built to provide comfortable living quarters for working women and students.

Within months of Ginn’s death, such optimism seemed implausibly idealistic. World peace took a decided turn for the worse in 1914, and remained out of favor for the remainder of what the historian Eric Hobsbawm has called “the short 20th century.”³ Indeed, the WPF’s sibling

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organizations, such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), tend not to speak about world peace as such. Carnegie has subsumed “peace” within an agenda that links peace in particular places with international security, and the WILPF is a membership organization that engages with a broad range of peace and social justice issues. “World peace” is a phrase that usually belongs in the script for beauty pageant contestants;

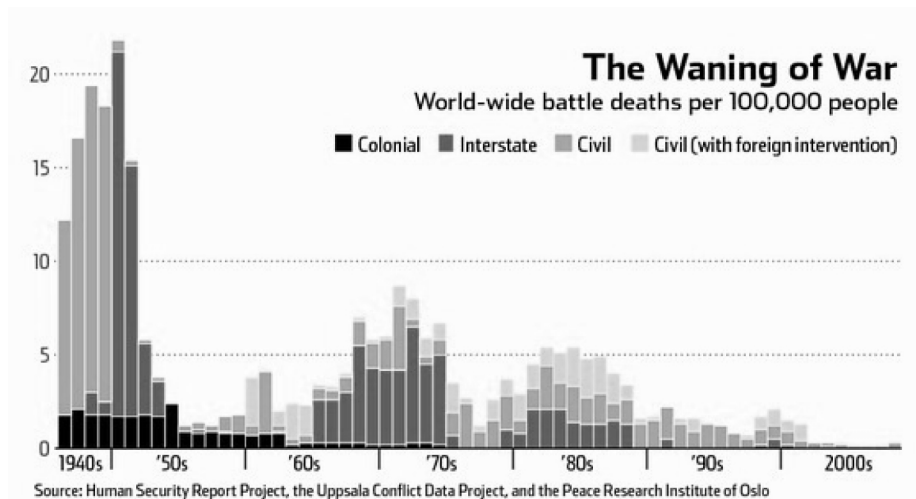
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Polite ridicule is an occupational hazard for the director of the World Peace Foundation. The stature of international lawyers and diplomats is higher than those who work under the banner of world peace, but they are also in the shadow of soldiers who are widely assumed to be the most credible servants of the national interest. General David Petraeus famously called Ambassador Richard Holbrooke “my diplomatic wingman;” even more extraordinary than the subordination of diplomacy to warfighting is the fact that Petraeus intended his remark as a compliment.⁴ However, it is the advocates for peace, international law and diplomacy who are being stealthily vindicated by history. One hundred years after the establishment of the WPF and eighty years after the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy opened its doors to the Class of 1935, the aspirations of their respective founders appear not only farsighted but soberly realistic too.

While the half century following the outbreak of World War I was humanity’s bloodiest ever in terms of absolute numbers of people killed,

wars overall have actually not become more lethal on a per capita basis. Moreover, the last half century has perhaps been humankind's most peaceable. The number of international wars has dwindled almost to zero, the number of civil wars has massively declined, and the numbers of people killed in conflict and massacre has also decreased hugely. This is not simply a decline in violence organized by states and political parties, but in every form of measured violence—crime, vigilantism, police brutality, child abuse, rape, and cruelty to animals. The decline is uneven across the world and unsteady over time, but must count as one of the most significant facts of human society in modern history.

Figure 1, Peace Research Institute Oslo



If the judgment of fifty years ago was that world peace was utopian, the verdict of today's historians is increasingly that the First World War was a gargantuan mistake—and by implication so too were its sequelae, World War II and the Cold War. The eminent historian and champion of imperialism, Niall Ferguson, closes his book, *The Pity of War*, with the following words: “The First World War was...something worse than a tragedy, which is something we are taught by the theatre to regard as ultimately unavoidable. It was nothing less than the greatest *error* of modern history.”⁵ On the political left, Gabriel Kolko excoriates the myopia and illusions of the men who led Europe at that time, blaming their failures on a martial political culture. He writes, “When Europe's rulers embarked so casually upon war [in 1914], few among them even remotely imagined the compounding difficulties and challenges they would encounter.”⁶ Barbara Tuchman entitled her study of governments' stubborn persistence

in pursuing war despite clear evidence that they had little or no prospect of success, *The March of Folly*.⁷ If indeed the disastrous wars of the twentieth century were the product of human stupidity, we should perhaps be more generous to those—such as Ginn—who perceived them as such at the time, and those—such as Fletcher—who believed in alternative instruments for managing international affairs.

In his magisterial book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*,⁸ the psychologist Steven Pinker outlines five main historical forces that have supported this trend. The first is the Leviathan: the state that outlaws internal violence other than its own. Given states have inflicted massive violence, human life is still more violent without them. The second is economic incentives for cooperation—“gentle commerce.” These two have been the focus of an enormous effort of scholarship over the years. The third is feminization: among other things, the greater participation of women in public life is contributing to reducing the prominence of martial values. Feminist scholarship is exploring this area. The fourth is an “expanding circle” of empathy, in which we can identify common human feelings in an ever-wider group of people, and the last is “the escalator of reason”—the growth in rationality, associated with education and communication.

A notable element of the last three is that they are all intimately associated with social values and education. However, political scientists who study conflict and peace have paid little attention to psychology and early childhood development. They have tended to see peace education and its ilk as an issue of concern to well-meaning people who have yet to be schooled in the real world of politics and hard-nosed political analysis. This oversight may belatedly be rectified, at least in the field of scholarship. This year, two major initiatives are addressing children’s experience of violence and its relation to peace. The Early Childhood and Peace Consortium, headed by UNICEF, seeks to bring together a diverse group of academic and policy organizations in this field. In parallel, the Global Learning Initiative for the Prevention of Violence against Children, also headed by UNICEF in collaboration with a coalition of philanthropic organizations, emphasizes an evidence-based, policy advocacy approach to interpersonal violence. Children’s experience of violence is undoubtedly a major issue, but it is also—according to Pinker’s data—in decline around the world. As Pinker observes, for instance, with regard to the campaign against the lynching of African Americans, “in one of those paradoxes of timing that we have often stumbled upon, the conspicuous protest emerged at a time when the crime had already long been in decline.”⁹ This observation should not dampen our ardor in addressing the abuse, but should rather stand as

testament to our heightened intolerance of such violations. Possibly it is because the enormous levels of killing associated with major international wars and the colonial subjugation of vast parts of the world are passing into history that other pervasive manifestations of violence come into focus and become the target of our outrage. State-sponsored violence that killed 50,000 people and caused four or five times that number of deaths were unremarkable in the first three quarters of the last century, but such a level of killing in Darfur, Sudan ten years ago elicited a huge campaign using the label “genocide.” But it is equally possible that it is our growing intolerance of violence at the personal level that has been the driving force in the reduction of mega-violence.

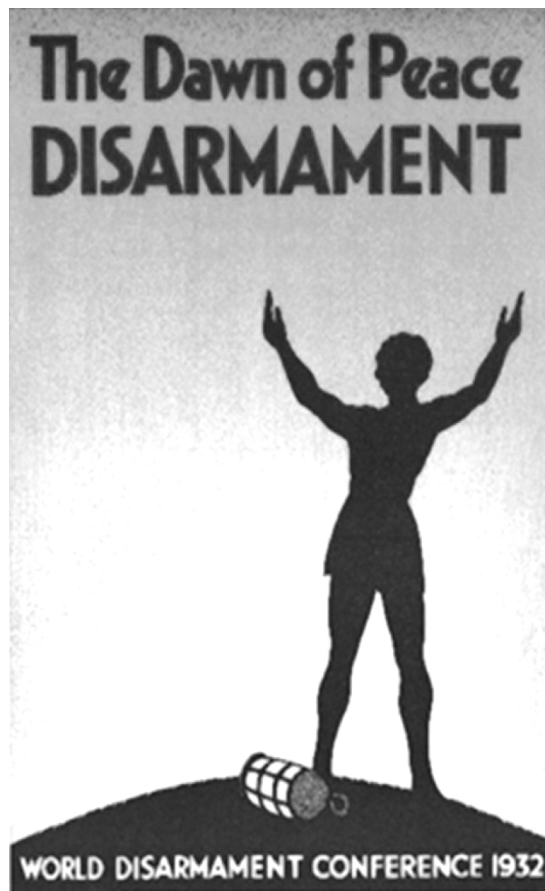
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Meanwhile, the decline in war has paradoxical effects on our policymaking. Until the last two generations, young men in America and Europe expected to be exposed personally to massive lethal violence—to the trauma of killing and the risk of dying. That is not so now: our society is far more sensitive to death and injury among our own citizens. The draft has been discontinued and we have an all-volunteer army. But at the same time, we are more than ever exposed, through the media and advocacy organizations, to violence elsewhere in the world, and more than ever our governments’ international policies are designed to manage or resolve such violence, while reducing casualties on our side to near zero. The direct experience of war has become other people’s problem, not ours—and as a result, we may fail to recognize the dangers of our own militarization. It is tempting for our leaders to use lethal force, outside the ambit of citizens’ concern and scrutiny, as a first resort, with as-yet-unrealized implications for American moral and political standing around the world.

In May, the WPF convened a seminar of experts in arms production and trade, co-convened by Andrew Feinstein, the former South African member of parliament who helped expose a corrupt arms deal in that country and later became a prominent researcher on the topic.¹⁰ Current debates on arms are focused on nuclear and chemical weapons, controlling the flows of small arms to countries in conflict, and the Arms Trade Treaty that seeks greater regulation of conventional weapons transfers. But the issue of the massive arms production in developed countries—particularly the United States, which accounts for forty-two percent of the world’s

spending on weapons—is rarely tackled. In fact, there is something akin to a conspiracy of silence among the manufacturers, the military, U.S. Treasury Department and Congress over the colossal inefficiency and waste involved in the business.

Figure 2, World Peace Foundation Archives



Our arms specialists, feeling themselves a beleaguered minority, were agreeably surprised to find the WPF office walls adorned with posters relating to the campaign for international disarmament of the 1920s and early 1930s which culminated in the 1932 World Disarmament Conference and the 1934 Senate hearings on U.S. arms production. There is a legacy to this issue. As the WPF itself was being formed, Germany and Britain were locking themselves into a naval arms race, each fearing the worst of the other in what would contribute to a self-fulfilling fear. A line attributed to Winston Churchill in 1910 encapsulates the peculiar logic of arms spending: “The Admiralty demanded six Dreadnoughts, the Treasury

offered four, and Parliament compromised on eight.” (Churchill himself advocated just four, arguing the money was better spent elsewhere.) At that time, the United States stayed aloof from the manipulative and martial politics of Europe. Indeed, several generations of American political leaders were profoundly distrustful of the utility of an arms buildup, and of the potentially pernicious effects of the weapons industry on political life. Franklin D. Roosevelt sent a message to the 1932 conference that today seems astonishingly optimistic: “If all nations will agree wholly to eliminate from possession and use the weapons which make possible a successful attack, defenses automatically will become impregnable and the frontiers and independence of every nation will become secure.”¹¹

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Two years later, Senator Gerald Nye (R-North Dakota) opened what became two years of hearings by the Special Committee on Investigation of the Munitions Industry. Senator Nye tried to argue that the United States was in danger of manufacturing weapons far beyond the country’s real defense needs at the instigation of the armaments industry and its search for profit, and that this risked needlessly entangling America in foreign wars. Restricting defense spending became discredited by the aggression of the Nazis and Japanese and World War II, but none other than a man formerly the United States’s highest-ranking soldier, President Dwight Eisenhower, famously warned in his farewell address to the nation, “In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.”¹²

Fifty years on, over decades in which wars have become rarer and less deadly, the United States accounts for forty-two percent of global military spending, and possesses an extraordinary lead in technological capabilities—including whole new categories of surveillance systems and precision weaponized robots. The U.S. government uses drones as an instrument of remote airborne sniping—a form of extra-judicial execution—to kill terrorist suspects in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen, justifying this by referring to the gravity of the terrorist threat and the fact that unmanned aircraft do not put Americans at direct risk. Analysts of the

politics of the countries in the crosshairs confirm what is readily concluded by anyone who can empathize with a population subject to living in a state of unremitting fear: the drone campaign is generating greater anger towards the United States, and is probably generating conscripts for al Qaeda affiliates.

Yet never has there been less debate over the privileged position in public life enjoyed by the armed forces and their suppliers, or—perhaps equally accurately—the armaments industry and its patrons and consumers.

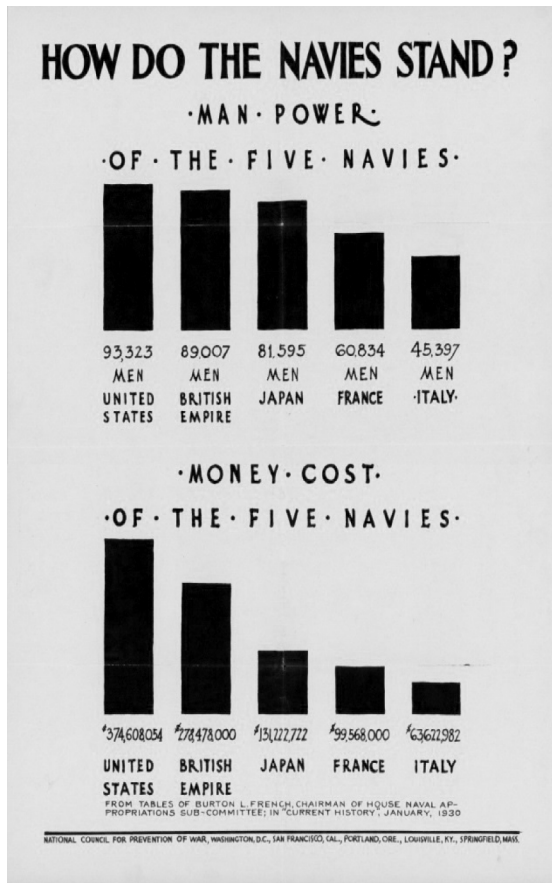
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At a time of chronic fiscal crisis and political deadlock in Washington, the one appropriations bill that Congress is sure to pass is defense. Not only does defense spending rise while other spending is frozen or cut, but the military attracts to it a host of other activities traditionally conducted by diplomats and aid workers. Not only special envoys and ambassadors, but also aid workers, are becoming generals' "wingmen," indicating that the Department of Defense is coming to dominate the activities of government, threatening to reverse the military theoretician Carl von Clausewitz's dictum that "war is politics conducted by other means." Meanwhile, the central question in the policy debate on ending mass atrocities is when and how to deploy troops, with remarkably little reflection on the implications of reducing diplomacy to an ancillary function for military intervention.

Before founding the WPF, Edwin Ginn made his fortune in publishing school textbooks, and he was a strong believer in the power of education as a force for social good. The founding objective of the WPF was, and still is, "educating the peoples of all nations to the waste and destructiveness of war and of preparation for war." Twenty years later, it was the WPF collection, sold to the Fletcher School for a nominal sum, which became the core of the school's new library, named after Ginn. When the WPF moved to the Fletcher School in 2011, the Foundation provided its portrait of Ginn to the library on indefinite loan, so that Ginn's portrait hangs, next to Austin Barclay Fletcher, in the library that bears his name.

The WPF has come a long way over a hundred years, as has the cause of peace. But in many important respects, faced with new forms of violence that threaten world peace—including our own arms technologies—the work of peace is at a similar point to where Ginn's foundation started off a century ago. *f*

Figure 3, *World Peace Foundation Archives*



ENDNOTES

- 1 "About," The Fletcher School, <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/About/Fletcher-History>.
- 2 Robert Rberg, *A Leadership for Peace: How Edwin Ginn Tried to Change the World* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).
- 3 Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994).
- 4 See: Vali Nasr, *The Dispensable Nation: American Foreign Policy in Retreat* (New York: Doubleday, 2013).
- 5 Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War One* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 462.
- 6 Gabriel Kolko, *Century of War: Politics, Conflict and Society Since 1914* (New York: The New Press, 2004), 106.
- 7 Barbara Tuchman, *The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam* (London: Michael Joseph, 1984).
- 8 Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence has Declined* (New York: Penguin, 2011).
- 9 Pinker, 385. Lynchings declined from about 150 per year in the 1880s and 1890s to

less than 20 per year in the 1930s, when a photograph of two men hanging from a tree in Indiana sparked a nation-wide campaign, and the famous protest poem of Abel Meeropol, "Southern trees bear strange fruit."

- 10 Andrew Feinstein, *The Shadow World: Inside the Global Arms Trade* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).
- 11 Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Appeal for World Peace by Disarmament and for Relief from Economic Chaos" (speech, May 16, 1933), The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=14643>.
- 12 Evan Thomas, *Ike's Bluff: President Eisenhower's Secret Battle to Save the World* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2012), 3-4.