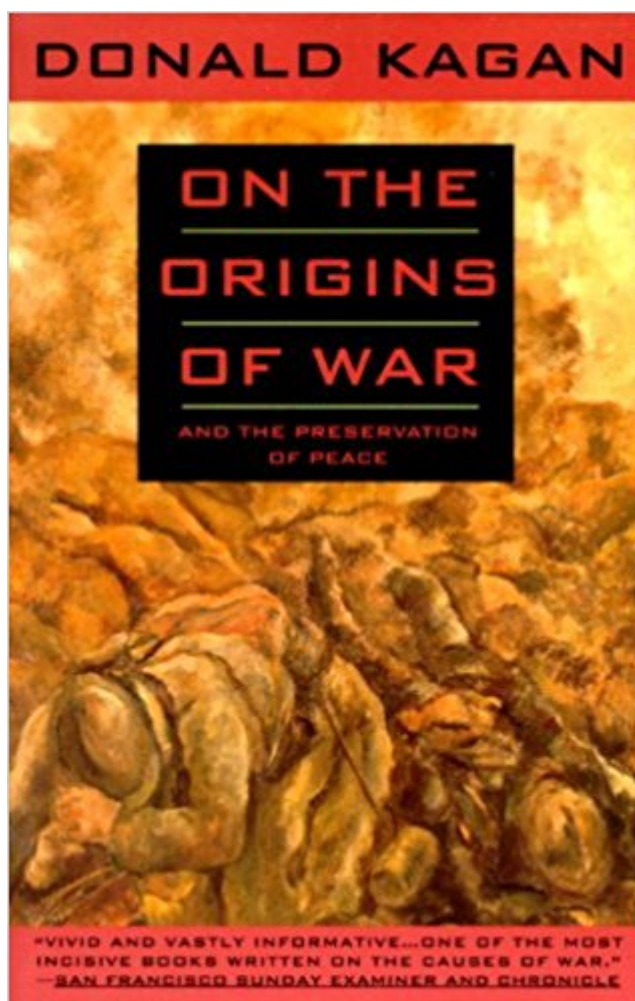


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# On The Origins Of War: And The Preservation Of Peace



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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.

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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 Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A thoughtful well written piece of historical analysis. The author use five case studies on wars that started or in the case of the Cuban missile crisis did not start as the basis of his study. He also provides a short introduction to each case study for those unfamiliar with the historical event. If you are rushed for time his intro and conclusion do a good job of presenting his conclusions, basically peace is not free and one must work at it to allow peace to continue. Dr Kagan does not play favorites and even such modern day hero's as Churchill and such ancient ones as Pericles (and my personal favorite Alcibiades) come in for some share of criticism. He wrote late enough that many of the "secret" files from the Cuban missile crisis were in the public domain and we get a chance to see early on the falsehoods presented to Congress and the American people by the likes of McNamara and Rusk. A good example that even with all the supposed elements of power to maintain peace lousy leaders can make a difference. I read the paperback version of this book and there were a couple of printing errors (a small portion of one page was blanked out) Also I like a lot of maps and found myself following along on internet maps at times during the reading. For those of you who have attended military schools you will find the format very much like that used at the

academies and war colleges. The book is well worth the time to read (as are Dr Kagan's works on the Peloponnesian War).

If you are at all interested in international relations, politics, or war as subjects for study, why haven't you read this book? Kagan, without ever pressing home some pet thesis, lays out in detail the events leading up to four wars that were and one that wasn't. Aside from learning many lessons from these individual histories - states and individuals almost never truly want war, "honor" construed as a potential or actual presence in international affairs (deference, prestige, etc.) often winds up being crucial in triggering a conflict, wishful and idealistic thinking or a failure to recognize a threat to a rival nation's security or honor have often contributed mightily to growing conflicts, and many others - one will also get a vivid, in-depth account of some critical moments, accounts that are likely to stick in your mind better than a more general history. While some of Kagan's points may seem to lean toward the trivial when taken out of context and looked at in the clear light of day, it is the very fact that over many years and many events, a slow buildup toward war involves these very things - that at the time are much harder to see clearly - that contribute to movements that end in war. To see the many missteps in detail in these cases is fascinating. With the exceptions of Chamberlain and some of his cronies, and especially Kennedy, very few of the men in this book come off as anything approximating downright foolish; nevertheless, in these pages you will find many men, through many small mistakes, leading their nations to war.

Easy to read but very insightful on military and diplomatic history as well as human nature. I'll be keeping this book for my own collection.

I really respect the author Prof. Kagan and feel he is one of the best modern historians in regards to the ancient classical world. The book is generally very good and I learned a lot from reading it. The book first juxtaposes the Peloponnesian War between Sparta and Athens to the more recent conflict of World War 1 comparing Britain and Germany. This is not a linear comparison where one nation is like a corresponding one from the other conflict, but instead how aspects of the conflict make the modern nations comparable to one of the nations in certain aspects and to the other in other aspects. The book then juxtaposes the Second Punic War to the Second World War. Here the comparison is a little more linear, but still not a straight forward one modern nation is analogous to one ancient nation. The book then discusses the Cuban missile crisis and uses ideas discussed from the other sections of the book to explain why the events took the course they did. Overall a

good book. However there are two faults: 1. The sections become way out of balance when the ancient wars get kind of a quick overview and then the text becomes bogged down in the fine details of the modern war. A little more info on the ancient and a little more discussion comparing the ancient and modern conflicts would have helped. 2. The book feels a little incomplete from its overall ending conclusion. You can definitely draw conclusions from it, I just wish the author discussed his philosophical views and reasons for them a little bit more.

"On the Origins of War" is not a historical book. It discusses four great wars and a near miss but these examples, bolstered as always by Kagan's excellence as a historian, are used as mere evidence. All to answer a greater question. Why did these wars happen and could they have been prevented?

I had read the book before, bought as a gift. Probably the best book available to understand, if that's possible, wars.

THANK YOU!

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