

MICHAEL HOWARD

# THE INVENTION OF PEACE



MICHAEL HOWARD

THE INVENTION  
OF PEACE

REFLECTIONS ON  
WAR AND  
INTERNATIONAL  
ORDER

---

YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
NEW HAVEN & LONDON

First published in Great Britain in 2000 by Profile Books Ltd.  
Published in the United States in 2000 by Yale University Press.

Copyright © 2000 by Michael Howard. All rights reserved. This book may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, including illustrations, in any form (beyond that copying permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law and except by reviewers for the public press), without written permission from the publishers.

Printed in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Howard, Michael Eliot, 1922–

The invention of peace : reflections on war and international order /  
Michael Howard.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-300-08866-3 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Peace. 2. Security, International. 3. Disarmament. I. Title.

CB481 .H68 2001

327.1'72—dc21 00-043599

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

The paper in this book meets the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council on Library Resources.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

## PREFACE

This essay was written at the request of Professor David Cannadine, the Director of the Institute for Historical Research, of the University of London. It is an extended version of the plenary lecture which inaugurates the Anglo-American Conference on War and Peace being held at the Institute in July 2000. Much of its contents will be familiar to anyone who has read my books *War in European History* and *War and the Liberal Conscience*, but the topic is important enough to bear constant revisiting. No man, as Heraclitus put it, can step into the same river twice.

I have to make two apologies. One is to the innumerable friends and colleagues whose ideas I have consciously or unconsciously pillaged. The other is for my political incorrectness. Stubbornly I continue to write about 'man', 'men' and 'mankind'. I hope that half my readers will forgive me. And I am profoundly indebted to Mark James, who not only sternly criticized my text, but repeatedly salvaged it from oblivion in the word processor.

Michael Howard  
Eastbury, Berkshire  
March 2000

# CONTENTS

	Preface	ix
I	Introduction	1
II	Priests and Princes: 800-1789	7
III	Peoples and Nations: 1789-1918	33
IV	Idealists and Ideologues: 1918-89	61
V	Tomahawks and Kalashnikovs: AD 2000	91

# I

## INTRODUCTION

'War appears to be as old as mankind, but peace is a modern invention.' So wrote the jurist Sir Henry Maine in the middle of the nineteenth century. There is little to suggest that he was wrong. Archaeological, anthropological, as well as all surviving documentary evidence indicates that war, armed conflict between organized political groups, has been the universal norm in human history. It is hardly necessary to explore whether this was the result of innate aggression, or whether aggressiveness arose from the necessity of fighting for such scarce resources as water or land. Rousseau may have been right in suggesting that men in a mythical state of nature were timid, and only became warlike when they entered into social relations; but social relations were necessary for survival. What Kant termed man's 'asocial sociability' automatically created conflict as well as co-operation.

Peace may or may not be 'a modern invention' but it is

certainly a far more complex affair than war. Hobbes bleakly defined it as a period when war was neither imminent nor actually being fought, but this definition is hardly comprehensive. At best this is what is usually described as negative peace. Often it is the best that people can get, and they are duly thankful for it. But peace as generally understood today involves much more than this. Positive peace implies a social and political ordering of society that is generally accepted as just. The creation of such an order may take generations to achieve, and social dynamics may then destroy it within a few decades. Paradoxically, war may be an intrinsic part of that order, as we shall see. Indeed throughout most of human history it has been accepted as such. The peace invented by the thinkers of the Enlightenment, an international order in which war plays no part, had been a common enough aspiration for visionaries throughout history, but it has been regarded by political leaders as a practicable or indeed desirable goal only during the past two hundred years.

Some societies have certainly been more warlike than others, probably from necessity. In some, war may have originated as religious ritual, or as a rite of passage for adolescents, or as a form of play, like football matches, for adult males in which death was risked but not necessarily in-

flicted; but ultimately it became a more serious matter for the reason pithily stated by Clausewitz, that if one combatant is prepared to use extreme measures his antagonist has to follow suit. When fighting is necessary for physical survival those who are good at it will predominate. If they pass on their genes to their offspring they will found ruling dynasties. They and their companions become warrior elites whose interests and attitudes determine the nature of their culture, including religion, literature and the arts. They create a social and political order, which initially may have no justification but its own strength, but for which utility, prescription and, above all, religious sanction ultimately provide legitimacy. Legitimized order produces domestic peace, and also legitimizes the conduct of war. Success in war further reinforces legitimacy. Failure results either in subjection and the imposition of an exogenous elite whose rule in turn becomes legitimized by prescription, or the eventual emergence of another indigenous elite more successful than its predecessors.

The greater the effectiveness of a military elite, the greater will be its capacity for extending its power and creating hegemonies. Warriors may go off on their own, as did the Nor(se)mans in the tenth and the Spaniards in the fifteenth century, and establish an imperial hegemony over



alien populations. The viability of their rule will initially depend on their continuing military power and will to use it – a will probably, though not invariably, based on a sense of moral superiority derived from religion, race and general culture. But, ultimately, if their dominance is to survive, it must be legitimized: by their success in converting their subjects to their own system of beliefs, by the co-operation of indigenous elites, and above all by their ability to maintain economic and political stability in the societies they govern.

This last is the most important condition of all, and perhaps explains the longevity of such hegemonies as the Ottoman empire and the successive dynasties in China. Change is the greatest enemy of stability and so, in consequence, of peace. In rural societies which change little over centuries if not millennia, prescription ultimately makes any rule acceptable. The main variable lies in the harvests. Bad harvests make it impossible to pay otherwise acceptable taxes and create peasant unrest; but other things being equal, this is usually isolated and suppressible. If other things are not equal, such suppression triggers wider disorders, as it did in Germany in the sixteenth, or the Balkans in the nineteenth, century. This in itself indicated that, for whatever reason, society was no longer stable, and that

order could be preserved or restored ultimately only by adjustment to new conditions.

War, it has rightly been said, starts in the minds of men, but so does peace. For some people – perhaps for most – any order is acceptable so long as their expectations are met, and for most of human history these expectations have been very basic. This majority will be little concerned about injustice to others, if indeed they ever hear about it. For them peace is what they have got, and they want to preserve it. There will always be a minority, however small, aware of the imperfections of their societies as measured by standards of divine or natural justice, but such awareness usually demands an exceptional degree of education, leisure and independence. In warrior societies such people were normally either born or co-opted into a priesthood which, whatever absolute standards of behaviour it might advocate, was nonetheless dedicated to the legitimization of the existing order. When the increasing complexity of such societies resulted in a class of educated laity, it was from among their ranks that critics of the social order naturally emerged. Francis Bacon noted at the end of the sixteenth century that one of the causes of sedition in a state was ‘breeding more scholars than preferment can take off’. For such critics the oppressions and shortcomings of the

existing order rendered it so unjust and illegitimate that both internal rebellion and external war against it was justified. For them, peace could come about only through the creation of a new order. Throughout human history mankind has been divided between those who believe that peace must be preserved, and those who believe that it must be attained.

As we shall see, the medieval order, as it developed in Europe between the eighth and the eighteenth centuries, was largely a matter of a successful symbiosis between the ruling warrior class that provided order and the clerisy that legitimized it. Eventually critics emerged from within that clerisy who denied the essential legitimacy of their rulers on the grounds that war was not a necessary part of the natural or divine order, but a derogation of it. It was then that peace, the visualization of a social order from which war had been abolished, could be said to have been invented; an order, that is, resulting not from some millennial divine intervention that would persuade the lion to lie down with the lamb, but from the forethought of rational human beings who had taken matters into their own hands. The significance of that invention, and the difficulties mankind has found in implementing it, provide the subject matter for the following essay.

## II

### PRIESTS AND PRINCES:

800-1789

The history of Europe is certainly not typical of world history, and I shall be quite properly taken to task for focusing on it. I do so for two reasons. First, European history is the only field in which I can claim any kind of expertise, and any comments I had to make on other regions would be pretentious, superficial and probably wrong. My second and more serious excuse is that it was in Europe, and its overflow in North America, that there developed the thinking about war and peace that now constitutes the bulk of global discourse about the topic. We still think about peace and how to establish it in terms originating in the European Enlightenment and often little changed since then; about war in categories developed by Clausewitz and Western practice over the past five hundred years; and

about the relation between the two in terms to be found in the teaching of Christian churches over two thousand years and Western lawyers over the past four hundred. Any contribution from neither classical nor European sources has been so deeply internalized that I am afraid very few of us are aware that it even exists.

European society during the millennium between the eighth and eighteenth centuries was probably exceptionally bellicose, and that bellicosity does much to explain its eventual global dominance. But it had to be bellicose if it was to survive at all. After the end of the Roman hegemonial peace in the fifth century there came the conflicts consequent on the *Völkerwanderung*, as successive tribes from the East invaded Western Europe, settling and displacing existing populations. Over centuries of fighting, warrior leaders emerged who provided local protection and whose families became the nuclei of a society whose structure was predicated on the assumption of permanent war. Their power was stabilized and legitimized, not only by the ever-present threat posed by invading Moslems, Magyars or Vikings, but by the co-operation of a church that provided both a divine sanction for the existing order, and an educated class to provide the sinews of administration.

The church had to solve the problem of reconciling a

doctrine of a divine order, in which all differences were reconciled and to which the concept of peace was basic, with the reality of a war-torn world in which its very survival depended on the protection and favour of successful warlords. The solution had been found by St Augustine in the fourth century. War, he taught, had to be accepted as part of the fallen condition of man, who was simultaneously a citizen of the City of God and of a worldly kingdom which, with all its imperfections, played an essential part in the divine purpose and could therefore rightly impose its own obligations. War against the enemies of Christendom itself was entirely justifiable – the Old Testament provided plentiful justification and guidance as to how to wage it – and even intramural war within Christendom had to be accepted as part of mankind's fallen condition. The latter, however, was intrinsically sinful, and clear limitations were imposed on its conduct. These limitations were refined down the centuries. War had to be waged under a proper authority and as a last resort; to right a wrong; and do no more damage than was essential to the achievement of its purpose. Basically, war had the function of upholding or restoring the secular order sanctified by the Church; an order that provided peace, justice and protection for all Christians. Those who fought were serving God's purpose.

no less than those who prayed and those who worked – a threefold hierarchy of estates which persisted until the leaders of the French revolution replaced it with the concept of a homogenous nation represented only by the third estate and from which the other two were by implication excluded.

War was thus recognized as an intrinsic part of the social and political order, and the warrior was accepted as a servant of God, his sword as a symbol of the Cross. A culture of chivalry developed around the role and activities of the knight, that had little to do with the brute realities of war, and nothing whatsoever with wars against the infidel which could be, and were, fought with unrestrained brutality. This assimilation between warrior and priest was underpinned by the concordat between the most powerful family in Western Europe, the Carolingian dynasty, and the surviving Christian church in the West, which was sealed by the coronation in AD 800 of Charlemagne as Holy Roman Emperor. Legitimized both as the heir of the vanished but still respected hegemony of Rome and as the instrument of the church, Charlemagne did not have the power to sustain this notional hegemony beyond his own generation and it was to be repeatedly devolved and divided. Nonetheless, the concept of the Holy Roman

Empire remained one of enormous importance until the Westphalian settlement of 1648, if not until its ultimate demise in 1803. It was the first of the many new world orders, whose somewhat melancholy succession is recorded in the following pages.

\*

It is important to understand why the hegemony of the Holy Roman Empire remained from the beginning very largely notional. Mobile forces were necessary to defend its widespread frontiers and enforce authority within them, but the mounted men-at-arms who provided those forces were very expensive to raise, train and maintain. In an economy still deprived of specie, land was the only way of paying for their upkeep, and once land was alienated it was very difficult to get it back again. Whatever oaths of allegiance might be sworn, the land bestowed on tenants-in-chief became a basis for their independent power which could be protected by castles, the reduction of which demanded expensive forces of specialists and prolonged campaigns. So as the tides of the eighth- and ninth-century invaders – Moslem, Magyar, Viking – ebbed or were absorbed, they left a Europe parcelled out between thousands of lords, each with his own power base, owing allegiance to



a notional overlord whose authority was effective only so far as he could enforce it. Once there was no external threat to unite them they were free to engage in endless disputes over property rights. War was no longer a struggle for survival but a form of litigation, limited, like all litigation, by the resources of the litigants. In these conflicts there were more losers than winners. A dozen or so families rose to dominance, but the rest of the warrior caste gradually became impoverished and *désœuvré*, except in so far as the crusades were able to distract them and provide job satisfaction. By the fourteenth century this militant aristocracy had become a source of disorder rather than order, but its members remained socially and culturally dominant long after they had lost political power. Peace they regarded as a brief interval between wars, to be filled with such warlike activities as tournaments, jousting and, increasingly, hunting, to keep them fit for the next serious conflict: a habit that has survived into our own day in the upper-class obsession with hunting and field sports. Nevertheless, this culture had its positive side: a society that disdained such qualities as nobility, honour, loyalty, and indeed chivalry, however much these may have been abused by those who claimed to possess them, would be a sadly impoverished one.