

# Blunder and Plunder: The History of War

By [John Kozy](#)

Theme: [History](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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Edmund Burke (1729-1797) claimed that “Those who don’t know history are destined to repeat it.” Perhaps. But more serious are those who know history but learn nothing from it.

Victor Davis Hanson is a Distinguished Fellow in History at Hillsdale College, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, and a columnist for National Review Online—all institutions with admittedly right wing views. He writes about war but has never fought in one. He is a historian whose views of history are based on his biases, not the evidence.

The problem with people writing about war who have never fought in one is that the war written about is sanitized. The stench of death has never been smelled. The screams of the wounded and the moans of the dying have never been heard. The disembodied body parts and the gore have never been seen. The fear has never been felt. The vomit has never been tasted, and the sadness over the loss of comrades has never been experienced. The war these people write about, advocate, promote, and declare is not the war that happens. The war that happens is down and dirty. But authentic history is about the real, not the ideal, and conclusions drawn from the one can’t be drawn from the other.

Hanson [writes](#), “human nature will not change. And if human nature will not change ... then war will always be with us.” But he never asks whether war results from human nature or from human institutions developed by the few and imposed upon the many. He writes, “non-Western nations now have leverage, given how global economies work today, through large quantities of strategic materials that Western societies need.” But this isn’t just true “today,” it has always been true. Stronger nations have always waged war to plunder the resources of weaker nations. Wars are not fought just to fight; they are not sporting events. In fact, nations that fight wars for access to natural resources engage in what would be capital crimes if citizens did it domestically. If war were the result of human nature, then internal war waged by citizens against other citizens to get what they need would be just as justifiable as wars between nations, and if the former is not justifiable, neither is the latter.

Wars to acquire access to natural resources are instruments of economic systems, and economic systems are institutions. Rewrite Hanson’s conditional claim, if human nature will not change, then war will always be with us, to read if human institutions will not change, then war will always be with us. It is then easily seen that if war is to be eliminated, human institutions must change, and although that may not be easy, it certainly is not impossible.

But there is implicit in Hanson’s piece something he never states. He writes, “Europe had a very small population and territory, and yet by 1870 the British Empire controlled 75 percent of the world.” This empire, of course, was the result of the “Western way of war.” Hanson seems to consider it to be a major accomplishment of Western Civilization. But all empires are created by killing in order to plunder. They are the result of policies conceived

to deliberately violate the Tenth Commandment; they are the result of coveting something that belongs to someone else. Yet Western Civilization was in the past referred to as Christendom. And, of course, the economic system known as Capitalism is also a coveting system.

Hanson and others apparently believe that empires make imperial nations strong. But is that true?

Consider the historical evidence. There have been empires galore: The Akkadian Empire, the Assyrian Empire, the Persian-Achaemenid Empire, the Hellenistic Empire, the Persian Empire, the Han Empire, the Mongol Empire, the Roman Empire, the Islamic Empire, the Byzantine Roman Empire, the Mongol Empire, the Holy Roman Empire, the Russian Empire, the Latin Empire, the Empire of Nicaea, the Empire of Trebizond, the Muslim Ottoman Empire, the Austrian Empire, the Mongol Empire, the Spanish-Portuguese Empire, the French Empire of Napoleon, the German Empire, the Brazilian Empire, the Sikh Empire, and the Japanese Empire, to name just the most well known. All fell!

And what of the British Empire? Yes, by 1870 the British Empire controlled 75 percent of the world, but in both 1914 and 1939 it was unable to defend itself, and after the end of World War II, even though Britain was among the so-called winners, the empire collapsed. Empire hadn't made the nation strong; it had weakened it. Why hasn't anyone learned this lesson from history?

But historians are not the only delusioned. Diplomats are equally ignorant of history's lessons. Henry Kissinger has claimed that nothing maintains peace except hegemony and the balance of power. But does it?

There have as many paxae as empires. Consider this list: Pax Assyriaca, Pax Britannica, Pax Dei, Pax Europeana, Pax Germanica, Pax Hispanica, Pax Islamica, Pax Khazarica, Pax Minoica, Pax Mongolica, Pax Nicephori, Pax Ottomana, Pax Praetoriana, Pax Romana, Pax Sinica, Pax Sumerica, and Pax Syriana. None was peaceful; all of these paxae are defined as periods of relative peace, but relative peace isn't peace.

Consider America. Since the end of World War II, America has been at war almost constantly; yet the period since the end of the Second World War is referred to as Pax Americana. Calling this period "peace" turns the meaning of that word on its head.

So what are the lessons of history that go unheeded? Hegemony weakens rather than strengthens nations and never results in peace. Seeking hegemony is a blunder in search of plunder—nothing more and nothing less.

Why would anyone believe otherwise. Revenge is clearly a common feature of human nature while war is not. Killing for plunder provokes revenge, and the plundered never forget. Indians still honor those who fought on Japan's side in the Second World War and ignore those who fought for Britain.

Although America spends a huge amount of money on weaponry, America today is a far weaker nation than it was in 1945. The economy is in shambles, the infrastructure is on the verge of collapse, the nation is bankrupt, and the weaponry has not won America many wars.

What are America's notable successes? Grenada where a non-existent army was fought and the First Gulf War where Saddam Hussein chose to fight a Western style war. But that war taught the world a lesson it is not going to forget.

Consider America's failures. The Western nations were fought to a standstill in Korea by the Chinese, the Vietnamese drove Americans out using relatively primitive weapons when compared to those used by Americans, the current enemy in Iraq has been temporarily bought off rather than defeated as the continued violence in that country demonstrates, and the enemy in Afghanistan has fought Americans to at least a standstill. Weapons alone do not win wars.

And what Iraq and Afghanistan will look like after the Americans leave is unknown. Will these nations be American friendly? Not likely. Too many Iraqis and Afghans will remember their friends and relatives the Americans killed.

America long ago lost the respect of what was called the Third World. Now it is losing the free world's respect too. When Americans ask NATO for support, all it gets is lip service and token forces. Brazil, India, South Africa, and Turkey regularly frustrate American initiatives. And in what is referred to as the non-free world, the Chinese and Russians pretend to be sympathetic but never offer concrete support. American rhetoric no longer commands the world's press. When Americans ask why people throughout the world want to harm us, the answer is because Americans have been harming them. As Ron Paul has repeatedly said, "they're over here because we're over there." It's really just as simple as that.

Hanson and others believe that war will always be with us. But I suspect that ending war is really very easy. Just force the children of those who promote war to fight it.

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