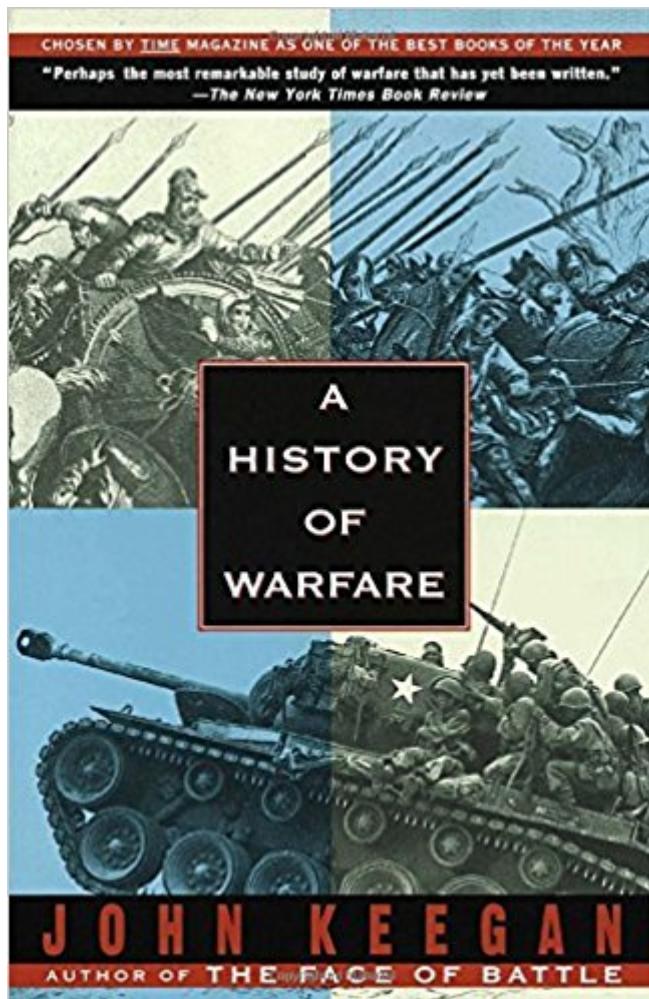


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A History Of Warfare



Synopsis

The acclaimed author and preeminent military historian John Keegan examines centuries of human conflict. From primitive man in the bronze age to the end of the cold war in the twentieth century, Keegan shows how armed conflict has been a primary preoccupation throughout the history of civilization and how deeply rooted its practice has become in our cultures. "Keegan is at once the most readable and the most original of living military historians . . . A History of Warfare is perhaps the most remarkable study of warfare that has yet been written."--The New York Times Book Review.

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Customer Reviews

In his sweeping new study, Keegan (The Face of Battle) examines the origins and nature of warfare, the ethos of the primitive and modern warrior and the development of weapons and defenses from the battle of Megiddo (1469 B.C.) into the nuclear age. Keegan offers a refreshingly original and challenging perspective. He characterizes warriors as the protectors of civilization rather than as its enemy and maintains that warfare is "entirely a masculine activity." Though warfare has become an ingrained practice over the course of 4000 years, he argues, its manifestation in the primitive world was circumscribed by ritual and ceremony that often embodied restraint, diplomacy and negotiation. Peacekeepers, he suggests, would benefit from studying primitive warmaking--especially now, "a time when the war of all against all already confronts us." A masterwork. Photos. 40,000 first printing; History Book Club main selection; BOMC alternate.

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YA-Keegan begins his comprehensive but concise survey by debunking the classical tenet that war is an inevitable result of politics. In a well-developed and relatively easy-to-follow argument, he reexamines this previously inviolate theory. By following the progress of war and warriors from primitive societies to the post-Cold War era, and by detailing the concurrent development of weapons technology, he allows readers to see that warfare need not be an all-or-nothing event. He includes many interesting details in his survey, e.g., vivid descriptions of torture, of the development of horse-warriors and charioteers, and of the arrival and consequences of the atom bomb. While leading readers to the conclusion and hope that man is not necessarily a warrior, he canvasses the spread of "civilization" and the making of nation-states as we know them today. The book includes prints, diagrams, and photographs. This title will challenge interested readers and prove useful for research papers, philosophical discussions, debates, and anthropology and sociology classes. Even dedicated militarists will find food for thought in Keegan's theories and historical perspective. Susan H. Woodcock, King's Park Library, Burke, VA
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A History of Warfare shows John Keegan's strengths as an historian, not as a mere chronicler of dates and places, but as someone who can take a step back from the details and lucidly explain broader trends in history, in this case how warfare has evolved through time. Keegan demonstrates that war has been central to human development, from the earliest primitive tribes to mechanized armies of this century and the last one. In his search for the origins of warfare, he goes back to the earliest stages of known history and elicits a picture of conflict among our ancestors and how it developed. He is particularly good at analyzing how the development of various technologies, spears, swords, guns, fighting on horseback, and lastly, tanks and airplanes, affected war, and the defenses that were drawn up to combat them. Keegan is also good at showing the different forms of combat (horseback and nomadic, and massed infantry, for example) evolved, and what happened when they clashed. Finally, although it is not really central to the history, Keegan makes a convincing case that Clausewitz's famous dictum, that war is the continuation of politics by other means, is wrong, and why war cannot be seen as simply a diplomatic and political alternative. On the last point, Keegan argues that romanticizing militarism was a contributing cause to the primary catastrophes of the 20th century, the First and Second World Wars. Keegan's conclusion is that, while conflicts may be inevitable, given the potential for mass destruction that modern armies command, and given the disastrous experiences of the last hundred years, civilian politicians must

redouble their efforts to control and limit war to avoid its terrible consequences.

Well-researched and skillfully delivered, *A History of Warfare* follows humanity's warmaking tendencies from the tribal times up to the nuclear-weapons realities of the Cold War. Keegan picks representative civilizations in each era and shows how their culture/environment shaped their concept of war and the way it was carried out (eg. the mobile cavalry of ancient steppe-nomads or the tight formations and the pitched battle to death of the classical Greeks). The approach has the downside of not offering a truly comprehensive history - for example, of all the post-ancient African civilizations, the book covers the Zulus of Shaka only. However, it succeeds in demonstrating well the author's thesis that war is the natural extension of human culture. I wish however that Keegan had focused more on developing this thesis rather than on frequently attacking von Clausewitz (~war as the extension of politics), which got a bit tiring toward the end.

The main fault of this book is its obsession with disproving Clausewitz' statement that war is an extension of politics. Unfortunately the author seems to be redefining politics in a manner which is rather esoteric and not explaining the meaning. Almost all wars between or within cultures past the "pre-state" level(which requires a definition of state; certainly Ancient Mesopotamian, Persian, and Chinese rulers had networks of professional administrators which can be called states and would be recognizably similar to those of the eighteenth century)begin for reasons involving the contest for authority over other humans. Many wars among "pre-state" cultures do as well as well as those between "pre-state" and "post-state" cultures. As said contest for authority is in fact a common definition of "politics" it is enough to say that war almost always involves politics and from the point of view of politicians it is in fact often an extension of politics. The best one can say about that point is that the counterpoint that the original political reason often gets lost in the excitement of war and war becomes its own purpose; or is it perhaps better said that the politics can change in the midst of a war? In any case this question is not the most important or interesting part of the book.What makes this book great is not its theme which is in fact rather dull. It is the exploration of the many means of different cultures for making war. It is an encyclopedic exploration of war as it relates to different human cultures including the most obscure and its descriptions are fascinating. The things we learn about humanity are amazing. The argument against Clausewitz unimportant.This is why I in fact consider this book worth five stars. Not because of its "Clausewitz was wrong" theme which was rather boring and ill-argued anyway. It is because of what we learn about warriors all around the world and the author would have been better concentrating on that. Keegan is like a lawyer

whose plea is fascinating but whose client is absolutely dull. For this reason I have wanted this book on Kindle for ages and it is indeed worth what I paid.

This book, that I read as basis for an University seminar, is really excellent in analizing the techniques, strategies and criteria utilised along the centuries by different peoples, armies and commanders. However, it doesn't fully address the crucial subject of why human beings are so prone and ready to go to war. That is, it should include chapters analizing human violence as a consequence and result of authority and, moreover, power, not from an individual but basically from a collective point of view. In this respect, it lacks a sociological approach to warfare as a human experience. Its reading is easy although solid and, many times, you enjoy it fully.

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