



War Is a Lie

David Swanson

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WAR IS A LIE is a thorough refutation of every major argument used to justify wars, drawing on evidence from numerous past wars, with a focus on those wars that have been most widely defended as just and good. This is a handbook of sorts, a manual to be used in debunking future lies before future wars have a chance to begin. For more information visit WarIsALie.org.

War Is a Lie Details

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Author : David Swanson

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From Reader Review War Is a Lie for online ebook

Reid says

This book is packed with lies! And that's a good thing. Some highlights, or lowlights:

-There is no greater evil than war. Paraphrasing one example: It's not remotely possible that Saddam Hussein would have harmed Iraq nearly as much as it was harmed in the war.

-An extreme inordinate amount of deaths from war are civilians - non-participants, innocent victims. See below.

-Governments the US has overthrown:

Hawaii, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Philippines, Nicaragua, Honduras, Iran, Guatemala, Vietnam, Chile, Grenada, Panama, Afghanistan, Iraq, Congo, Ecuador twice, Brazil twice, Dominican Republic twice, Greece twice, Bolivia twice, El Salvador, Guyana, Indonesia, Ghana, Haiti twice.

Senator William Fulbright: "Power tends to confuse itself with virtue... (as) a sign of God's favor... to remake (other nations)... in its own shining image."

-It's clear that the two nuclear bombs inflicted upon Japan "were of no material assistance" in making Japan surrender, this per General Eisenhower and the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral William Leahy, among others. Japan had already expressed its desire and need to surrender, but it was for US strategic advantage, post-war.

-Most wars are not launched in defense, they're launched in defense of our standard of living and way of life.

-The US military spending is greater than the next 14 nations combined. Europeans en-masse, have a greater standard of living than the average US citizen, including more universal education (free or inexpensive), healthcare and vacation time. The author compares European tax money and redistribution going toward benefiting its citizens, whereas all the US taxes that go toward military spending is a redistribution of a much different nature.

-Ulysses Grant said the US-Mexican war was completely and utterly unjust; 9000 US troops deserted, and many "Irish" soldiers, realizing this, fought for Mexico. (Apparently, as I ignorantly hadn't realized, this war was a sort of backdrop for McCarthy's Blood Meridian.)

-The Lusitania was packed with American war material and the US was thus warned well in advance that the ship would be attacked, and the German embassy even published a warning in newspaper/s.

-Through WWII, under direct fire, only 15-20% of soldiers fired their weapons. 98% of humans are resistant to killing people. Since WWII, training methods have gotten a little more "sophisticated."

-7 million tons of bombs were dropped on Vietnam, mostly and predominately ("70%") in an effort to "avoid a humiliating defeat." - per Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton.

-As of 2010 when this book was published, according to the author, 29 suspected terrorists were killed by drone strikes in Pakistan, versus 1150 civilians. That's more than 97% civilian deaths. Other civilian death percentages: WWII 67%, Korea 61%, Vietnam 77%.

Perhaps needless to say, this book is also packed with war crimes. Not to mention that any war not in self-defense after being attacked, per the UN Charter, is illegal. (The one exception to that is if it's UN sponsored.)

Truth be told, this is an excellent book that should be read widely.

Dimitri says

I knew I'd end up disagreeing with David Swanson. Yes, War is hell. Yes, war is a last resort ... but war CAN and WILL be necessary. Always.

He has good points and a fabulous editor to turn those points into large-font titles, so it's easy to leaf through it. But he hammers his points home with the subtlety of an elephant at a toga party. The argumentation is drawn from a narrow selection of America's 20th century military history. He definitely drops the ball on WWII. What choice was there, even if the cornerstones of our perception of "the good war" - that is, the Holocaust and anti-Nazism - took a contemporary backseat to anti-Japanese hatred and Frank Capra had to teach part of the American public "why we fight" ? Also, a prime feature of 20th century military culture is that the common soldier *has* been given a voice, an individual tribute, from a renewed interest in WWI oral history over the Facebook groups dedicated to the last of the Greatest Generation and the freakin' Vietnam War Memorial in Washington. All the way back to the Victoria Cross in the aftermath of the Crimea, to recognize (often posthumous) bravery with a more individual token than a campaign medal.

IS wasn't on the scene yet when Swanson wrote this. What alternatives could he provide to plain, cruel, Geneva-only-counts-when-CNN-is-watching warfare until the worst scourge since Nazism is fully exterminated ? He never takes into account the Chinese philosophy of war, where it's a necessary evil to restore balance to the universe.

Or, as the great American Dwight D. Eisenhower put it :

I hate war as only a soldier who has lived it can, only as one who has seen its brutality, its futility, its stupidity.

Yet he did what he had to do. I'm alive in a free Belgium because of it.

Still, in his bluntness Swanson might just get through his target American audience : some confused college students and a Bible belt warmonger or two.

Elizabeth says

Worth reading...

Vegantrav says

This is one of the best defenses of pacifism that I have ever read.

Swanson's book is very detailed and carefully researched, providing multitudes of historical examples to argue that war is, as the great protest song declares, good for absolutely nothing.

Swanson does not shy away from the tough cases: wasn't World War II justified? What about the US and NATO's military actions to stop the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia? The answers that Swanson provides, though, are not simple, but of course, we live in a world where few problems, especially the problems of war and violence, are simple in nature, and so we should not expect them to have simple solutions.

Everything that most Americans (though not, however, most people around the world, as Swanson argues) believe about war is a lie. War is almost never justified; Swanson argues that every aggressive war is illegal, and that violence is justified only as a last resort and as a defensive measure, and Swanson shows every single war in which the US has engaged in the last 150 years has been illegal. In fact, I learned something rather interesting from this book: aggressive war is actually illegal under the Kellogg-Briand Pact, a treaty to which the US is a party.

Wars are almost never really fought for the reasons that the war-makers give.

We don't have a Department of Defense: we have a Department of War. Calling it the Department of Defense is a lie that could have come straight from the pages of Orwell.

America has fought in far, far more wars than the American public realizes, many of them smaller in scale than our recent endeavors in Iraq and Afghanistan, but hardly a year has passed in the last 100 years in which the US military was not involved in some type of violent intervention, most often in Latin America, the Caribbean, or the Middle East.

Modern wars are not fought on battlefields as in ancient history and medieval times. Modern wars are largely fought in cities and towns where civilians are more likely to be killed than enemies. Our idea of soldiers on both sides lined up in battle formations against each other simply does not reflect the reality of modern warfare.

Wars are always supported by and usually even instigated by propaganda lies.

By and large, much of the horror and atrocity of war is either explicitly lied about or completely covered up, and the media is largely complicit in this. When, for example, was the last time that a major American media outlet ran a story on civilian casualties in Iraq or Afghanistan?

War is not, as some are wont to assert, good for the economy. In fact, the most recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been the primary causes of the ballooning of the national debt under George W. Bush, and President Obama has shown no signs of any commitment to decreasing military expenditures.

The victors in wars prosecute the losers for war crimes and then lie about and try to cover up the very same types of war crimes that they, the victors, have committed themselves.

In wars, we lie to ourselves about how we view our troops: we applaud them as heroes and defenders of freedom when we send them off to fight, but when they return home (if they do return home), we fail to help them cope with the psychological and physical scars that we have created.

We even lie about who has won the wars: the US certainly didn't win the Korean War or the Vietnam War, and it's really even hard to say what winning the war in Iraq or Afghanistan would really mean. If, for

example, winning the war in Iraq was all about overthrowing the Hussein regime, then why, years later, are we still fighting in Iraq? We also lie about our own role in wars: the US fought in only the last year and a half of World War I, and it is likely that the Nazis had sealed their own doom in invading the Soviet Union so that the Allies would have defeated the Nazis without the intervention of the US.

Swanson also points out that President Obama and the Democrats are no better than the Republicans when it comes to their approach to war. This book really serves to remind us that there is no real political left in the US and that there is no real representation for pacifism in our government save for a very small handful of individuals, among them Swanson's former boss Dennis Kucinich and Vermont's Socialist senator, Bernie Sanders.

War does not liberate people. Honestly, are the people (those civilians, that is, who haven't been killed as collateral damage) of Iraq and Afghanistan any more free or even better off now than they were under Hussein and the Taliban? The general understanding of war that most Americans have is completely false: war is a lie.

On a personal note, this book has reinvigorated my own pacifist beliefs and my own commitment to doing everything that I can to advocate for nonviolence, for an end to my own country's (the US's) execution of any and all wars, for the destruction of all nuclear weapons, and for major cuts to the US's military expenditures.

Thank you, David Swanson, for this fantastic defense of peace!

Jonathon P says

This book is terrible. What sort of PhD recipient uses blatant accusations of stupidity against a rhetorical opponent, much less a concept - war - which has theoretical roots as far back as our recorded history? Although there is much truth to what is written, it lacks academic depth. It's a rehash of all modern liberal education, and the zingers he frequently builds up to are about as insightful as a Twitter post. With a title that challenges the entire concept of warfare, I was disappointed to find so little substance.

Bakari says

War Is a Lie is a very well-written and thought out analysis and argument for how we have been constantly lied into war. Even if you don't agree with all the author's arguments, he definitely provides insight into how we need to stop viewing war as a solution to economic and political conflict.

Brian Carnell says

Based on some of the reviews on Amazon, I was looking forward to a well written critique of war propaganda. Instead, "War Is A Lie" is a disjointed, practically stream of consciousness rant that is as poorly sourced and ridiculously reasoned as the pro-war propaganda it is devoted to debunking.

Book was a complete waste of time.

Dave/Maggie Bean says

Four stars for the first ten chapters (even if too many of the quotes for my liking originate on blogs and websites).

One star for the last four.

Donald Linnemeyer says

In spite of the overly shrill rhetoric, Swanson does deliver on one thing: a wealth of damning, and at times disturbing, examples of objectionable war rhetoric, practices, and propaganda. The testimonies from soldiers in the Iraq War were particularly haunting. There was also a specific example of WWI propaganda that stuck with me: an image of Jesus in soldier's clothing aiming a rifle.

Worth reading if you're looking for a few handfuls of quotations and footnotes. But expect it to try your patience at times, especially if you try to make it all the way through in a short period of time.

David Swanson says

I'm not going to rate it because I wrote it -- in English, not Hungarian. And I am the same person as "David Swanson" who wrote "Daybreak," not a distinct "David Cn Swanson."

Paul Brogan says

It took me over a year to read this book. It wasn't poorly written, it wasn't wrong, and it wasn't impenetrable. It was just long, too long, like an extended Facebook post detailing a litany of war lies and war crimes from God-knows-when, in order to what? To persuade? If so, then the unfortunate thing is that I'm already persuaded that war rarely, if ever, has a workable defence. A more bellicose soul may struggle to begin, let alone to finish or be convinced by, this lecture by David Swanson.

Which is a pity. In a polarized world, and especially in a divided country like the USA (which I guess was the target audience), it takes a special, once-in-a-lifetime orator to do more than just preach to the choir.

Still, perhaps there are some — not me, though — sitting in these pews who will cross the street with Swanson's book to wage successfully against the warmongers. Certainly, his book contains an enormous amount of ammunition. All we need now are personnel, especially in the political ranks.

N. Jr. says

At first, I thought I probably knew much of the material in the book, but I was surprised to find out how ignorant I was about not only the US wars in Mexico and the Philippines, but also about World War II. In that sense alone it is worth reading, as it provides the opportunity to enlighten the reader with the details of history that have been whitewashed out of the textbooks. It is so informative, that a second read is well worth it.

Many of us now feel that war is a destructive enterprise that benefits no one except the war profiteers, but this sentiment is argued so eloquently that the reader is deeply moved. It continues where Smedley Butler's 'War is a Racket', leaves off. The irony is that from the title, only those already predisposed to argue against war would be interested in picking it up, yet it is a book every American should read.

Vane Lashua says

Just like the intro says, it's a refutation of the reasons for our pursuit of war AND the incredible and illogical addiction that we, our neighbors, "enemies", corporations, legislators and executives have for it. It stimulates thinking about the awful waste and ignorance we abide as citizens, eg,

How to stop the Afghan War: If we BOUGHT all the poppy/opium crop directly from Afghani farmers (costing us about

~\$60,000,000,000 / YEAR == \$175,000,000 / DAY)

would take 2/3rds of the world's heroin supply off the market and infuse the Afghan economy with an enormous supply of money. It would increase the market price of street heroin world-wide. Demand would create an enormous increase in price and become highly visible to world-wide law enforcement and make heroin virtually inaccessible to the street addict. IT WOULD ALSO ADDICT THE AFGHAN PEOPLE AND GOVERNMENT to the US wallet rather than fear of the US gun. It would be much easier to sell legally than to pay off thugs.

US war spending is about

~\$500,000,000 / DAY

right now on our operations, support of our troops, our troops, and fuel in Afghanistan. That's money that can't be spent on education, health care, research, social services and "infrastructure" here in the US, let alone for humanitarian work elsewhere in the world.

John Rachel says

When we look at the current mindset of America, its obsession with terror, its political gridlock, its exceptionalist view of itself, its imperial view of the rest of the world, its immersion in violence and militarism, it's hard to grasp and embrace the overall premise of this book. Yet for reasons which range from survival to basic human decency we must.

When the Nobel Peace Prize is prematurely awarded to a warmonger like President Obama, and an author

like David Swanson doesn't even make the shortlist, one is tempted to conclude that corruption is pervasive and absolute, that all hope is lost.

Yet it is with visionaries like Mr. Swanson which rest the only hope that 7 billion and counting of us will make it through the next few decades without destroying civilization and ending the human race.

"War Is A Lie" should be required reading in junior high and high school, then made the textbook for any number of required university courses. It is not preachy, idealistic fluff. It is the hard core, fundamental guide to turning around millennia of savagery, self-destruction, senseless and horrifying carnage. It is our charter to take humankind to a new level of moral, social and political evolution, to adopt an entirely new mindset and achieve dignity that seems all but lost in the cries for more bombing, killing, revenge, and inglorious victory on the battlefields of our countless conflicts.

Rob Granniss says

David Swanson takes aim at popular myths/lies used to excuse invasions in strategically important (and sometimes unimportant) nations. He attacks not only specific examples but the overall use of war as a solution to any problem. There's a fairly sizable section at the end of the book on ideas on how to work for peace, though like most in its genre it's sadly a bit thin.
