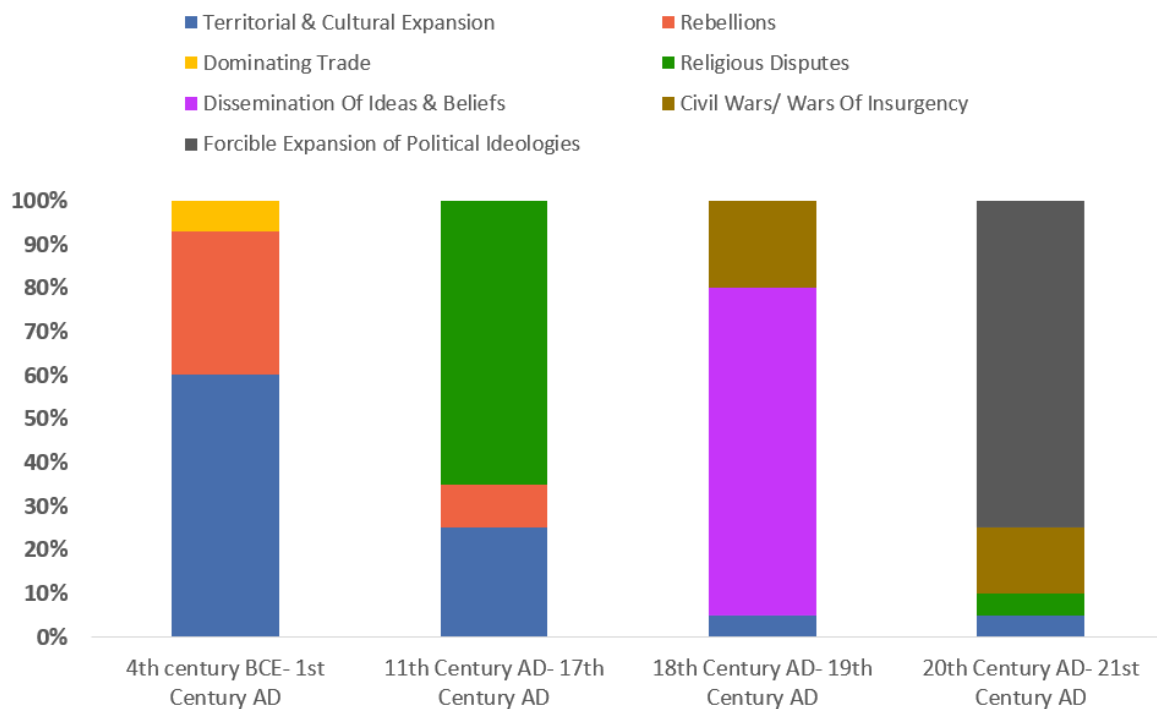


What Are The Main Causes Of War?

War is endemic to humanity; the human race has only been at peace for 8% of recorded history.¹

However, the causes behind conflicts have evolved over time. In this essay, I will prove that competing ideas, alongside the roles of key individuals, have been the cornerstones of warfare over millennia.

The Main Causes Of War Throughout Various Periods Of History



Between the 4th century BCE-1st century AD, the most prominent causes of conflict were expansion of territorial borders and subsequent rebellions. This can be attributed to the plethora of competing and coexisting empires, such as the Roman and Persian Empires.² The conquering of land and people

¹ Hedges C. *What Every Person Should Know about War*. (Anfuso D, ed.). Turtleback Books; 2003.

² Wasson DL. The extent of the Roman empire. *Ancient History Encyclopedia*. Published online 2016. Accessed December 31, 2020. <https://www.ancient.eu/article/851/the-extent-of-the-roman-empire/>

were common practices to these Empires, as they provided access to natural resources and labour,³ whilst also protecting trade routes.⁴ This is typified by the “Wars of Alexander the Great,” which led to the downfall of the Persian Empire and prompted the expansion of Alexander’s Hellenistic Empire that aimed to diffuse Greek culture.⁵ These brutal campaigns deprived many populations, inducing desperation that eventually catalysed uprisings- as seen in the “Battle of Megalopolis” where independence-seeking Spartan-led forces rebelled against the Macedonian Empire.⁶ Therefore, Empires’ insatiable hunger for resources and labour were the primary instigators of conflict during this period.

A novel cause of conflict that appeared between the 11th-17th centuries was religion. The Catholic Church aspired to dominate a larger regional sphere through reclaiming the *Holy Lands*, igniting the *Crusades*.⁷ As the influence of the papacy burgeoned, European monarchs began to sense a threat to their supremacy.⁸ Therefore, they attempted to challenge the Church – hence the 16th century’s wars surrounding reformation and counter-reformation, which culminated with the growth of Protestantism.⁹ All factions of the religious divide felt spiritually obliged to circulate their views, sparking conflicts such as *The 30 year’s war*.¹⁰ Thus, religio-centrism, in addition to the sovereignty of monarchs, were principal components of dispute throughout these epochs.

³ National Geographic Society. Why Conquer? Nationalgeographic.org. Published April 28, 2020. Accessed December 31, 2020. <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/article/why-conquer/>

⁴ Expanding empires, expanding trade. Unesco.org. Accessed December 31, 2020. <https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/knowledge-bank/expanding-empires-expanding-trade>

⁵ History.com Editors. Alexander the Great. HISTORY. Published November 9, 2009. Accessed December 31, 2020. <https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/alexander-the-great>

⁶ Britannica.com. Accessed December 31, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Agis-III>

⁷ Crusades. In: *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

⁸ Cornwall, Robert D. “Divine Right Monarchy, Henry Dodwell's Critique of the Reformation and Defense of the Deprived Nonjurors Bishops.” *Anglican and Episcopal History*, vol. 68, no. 1, 1999, pp. 37–66. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/42612000. Accessed 31 Dec. 2020.

⁹ Britannica.com. Accessed December 31, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Europe/Reformation-and-Counter-Reformation>

¹⁰ Thirty Years War. Britannica.com. Accessed December 31, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Thirty-Years-War>

The conflicts of the 18th-19th centuries were primarily driven by the desire to expand revolutionary doctrines (economic and ideological).¹¹ Chief amongst these was *The Enlightenment*, which encouraged ideas of liberty and fraternity. Undermining the monarchy and religion, these doctrines paved way for numerous political uprisings, such as the *American war of Independence* and the *French Revolutions*.¹² From these upheavals, Napoleon Bonaparte, reminiscent of Alexander the Great, played a significant role in directing French expansionism. Utilizing sophisticated tactics, Napoleon acquired sovereignty over many nations, consequently evoking the *Napoleonic wars*.¹³

The 20th and 21st centuries witnessed drastic shifts in the political and ideological incentives of war. Specifically, the ideologies of the far-left and far-right were main causes of conflict.¹⁴ This is epitomized by the *Spanish Civil War*, *WWII*, and the *Cold War*. Menaced by revolutionary doctrines, world powers attempted to exterminate growing threats to the political status quo.¹⁵ The *Spanish Civil War* was also fought between two sides of the political spectrum.¹⁶ The ideologies of *Nazism* and *Fascism*, which sought to emulate the Roman Empire (with a racial twist), were right-wing reactions to communist gains.¹⁷ Within these, the roles of individuals, such as Hitler and Mussolini, cannot be underplayed. Ergo, the principal instigator of conflict was the antipathy of various political ideologies.

¹¹ Jarus O. What was the Enlightenment? Live Science. Published September 12, 2019. Accessed December 31, 2020. <https://www.livescience.com/55327-the-enlightenment.html>

¹² The Enlightenment influence on the American Revolution. Ukessays.com. Accessed December 31, 2020. <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/politics/the-enlightenment-on-the-american-revolution-politics-essay.php>

¹³ Napoleonic Wars. Britannica.com. Accessed December 31, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Napoleonic-Wars>

¹⁴ mxw_admin. The 21st century ideological battle. Cipe.org. Published November 12, 2009. Accessed December 31, 2020. <https://www.cipe.org/blog/2009/11/12/the-21st-century-ideological-battle/>

¹⁵ History.com Editors. Communism Timeline. HISTORY. Published December 14, 2018. Accessed December 31, 2020. <https://www.history.com/topics/russia/communism-timeline>

¹⁶ Spanish Civil War. Britannica.com. Accessed December 31, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Spanish-Civil-War>

¹⁷ How great an influence did Roman society have on Nazi ideology? Lithub.com. Published August 13, 2020. Accessed December 31, 2020. <https://lithub.com/how-great-an-influence-did-roman-society-have-on-nazi-ideology/>

In conclusion, conflict is comparable to a bonfire: the wood is unrelenting economic inequality, differences in ethnicities and religions are the gasoline, and the sparks needed to ignite the fire are the reckless actions of self-interested individuals.