



Downloaded from www.bbc.co.uk/radio4

THE ATTACHED TRANSCRIPT WAS TYPED FROM A RECORDING AND NOT COPIED FROM AN ORIGINAL SCRIPT. BECAUSE OF THE RISK OF MISHEARING AND THE DIFFICULTY IN SOME CASES OF IDENTIFYING INDIVIDUAL SPEAKERS, THE BBC CANNOT VOUCH FOR ITS COMPLETE ACCURACY.

THE REITH LECTURES 2018: THE MARK OF CAIN

TX: 26.06.2018 0900-0945

Reith Lecturer: Margaret MacMillan

Lecture 1

(AUDIENCE APPLAUSE)

ANITA ANAND: Is war an essential part of being human? Are we destined always to fight each other? These are the central questions of this year's Reith Lectures. The series is called *The Mark of Cain* and in it we're going to be exploring the tangled history of war and our very complicated reactions and feelings towards it and also the people who fight.

We begin our series of five lectures here in London at BBC's Radio Theatre at Old Broadcasting House, and it sort of feels fitting actually to do that here because this was a place that was very badly damaged during World War Two by falling bombs. You're going to hear more about that in the lecture, but let me right now tell you a bit more about our lecturer.

Canadian by birth, she is one of the most eminent historians working in the world today. She is the author of a series of critically acclaimed books and until recently she was the Head of St. Anthony's College at Oxford University. I can't wait for you to meet her. Please give a very warm welcome to Margaret MacMillan.

(AUDIENCE APPLAUSE)

ANITA ANAND: So Margaret, I don't know about you but it feels to me as if we've never been in a more precarious situation; we sort of feel as if we're one tweet away from Armageddon all the time. Are we in a more of a dangerous situation than we ever have been in history or is this just because we talk about it a lot more?

MARGARET MACMILLAN: Oh I think it's very difficult to compare because I think people must have felt in a very dangerous situation in 1939, and certainly 1914, and there were terrible moments during the Cold War when we thought we'd all had it. So it's very difficult to tell about your own times, but it does seem to me it's rather more precarious than it has been for some time. We have different power centres, we have different regional rivalries, we have low grade wars running on and on which don't seem to be coming to an end any time soon, so I think there's rather a lot to be pessimistic about.

ANITA ANAND: Now historians like yourself. I mean often when people talk about academics, they say they're dealing with explosive subjects, oh it's a very dangerous arena that they're going into. I mean you actually dealt with explosives. Little Margaret played with grenades. Tell us about this actually true story.

MARGARET MACMILLAN: Well I didn't realise it was a grenade at the time and my brothers and sisters and I all played with it. My grandparents, Canadian grandparents, had a curio cabinet. In it was this round metal object a little bit like a pomegranate which my grandfather, who was a Canadian doctor in the Western Front in the First World War, had brought back from Germany, and so we - from France - we played with it; we rolled it around on the floor. And as we grew up, I started doing history at university and I noticed the pin was still in it (*laughter*) and so I said to my elders and betters, "I think perhaps that grenade is still live", and so the grenade was removed and buried. The trouble is none of us can remember where it was buried. (*laughter*)

ANITA ANAND: One day we're going to find out, aren't we Margaret?

MARGARET MACMILLAN: I'm afraid so.

ANITA ANAND: Okay. (*laughs*) The other thing that I've sort of been dying to ask you is that this is an arena talking about the history of war. It is very - I'm trying to think of the right way to put it - pale and male. Do you ever have people turning round to you and saying, "Look lady, don't worry your pretty little head about such things"?

MARGARET MACMILLAN: It used to happen to me when I was younger. Now that I'm older and tougher, it doesn't happen quite so much. And my answer always is war is something we should all think about. It has affected all of us in various ways - sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly - and women are every much part of society and part of being affected by war as men are.

ANITA ANAND: Well I cannot wait to hear what you are going to say. The first lecture is about war and humanity. Margaret MacMillan.

MARGARET MACMILLAN: Thank you.

AUDIENCE APPLAUSE

MARGARET MACMILLAN: We've all come here today with of course different histories, but also we've made different journeys to get here today. Some of us might have come to Waterloo Station, through Trafalgar Square, named after – of course – victories. Some might have come to Paddington Station and walked by the bronze statue of the World War One soldier reading a letter. Some of you might have come into Victoria Station where so many soldiers in the First World War went off to war and of course fewer came back.

You've walked past often in London and elsewhere monuments, cenotaphs, our place names, statues of admirals, statues of generals who we no longer remember. Every small town in Europe and every small village has a war memorial because there have been many wars fought in Europe and there are memorials of wars of course elsewhere in the world. War even affects our language. In English, if you want to say something rude, you tend to use the word 'Dutch' or 'French' and that refers back of course to times when the Dutch and the British or the French and the British were enemies.

We use war as metaphors: we talk about wars on poverty, wars on drugs. I once was on a book jury in Canada and one of the books that was submitted was called *My War on my Husband's Cholesterol*. (audience laughter) Given the recipes that were part of that war, I think the poor man would rather have had the cholesterol. (audience laughter)

The physical remnants of war of course still surface. In 2002, outside the city of Vilnius thousands of corpses were discovered in a mass grave. They were still dressed in blue uniforms, one had a tricolour cockade on his helmet. They were soldiers from Napoleon's retreat from Moscow.

I grew up in a very peaceful Canada, but my father and one of my uncles fought in the Second World War and my ... both my grandfathers fought in the First World War. And I grew up as well with children's books with titles like *The Boy Allies*. I read the Henty books written to encourage little English schoolboys before the First World War to become good soldiers. We read comic books from the Second World War. In Brownies we sang songs which came from the First World War in what I have now learnt was a very much cleaned up version. (audience laughter)

We I think are puzzled by war. Even if we haven't lived through it, we find it disturbing. We sometimes find it appealing. And I think that is one of the complicated things in our reaction to war – that it is something that we both fear but we sometimes also admire – and that is something I want to explore.

We are I think as a society fascinated by war. If you go into any bookshop near here you will see shelf after shelf of books on war. The most popular video games in the United States at the start of 2018, just to take one example, were one called *Master Hunter*, which is a type of warfare; the second was called *Dragon Ball* and the third was *Call of Duty* about the Second World War; and I think games indicate something of our fascination with war.

Why we admire war, why we fear it is of course a very difficult question, but I think on the admiration side is the fact that we find in war qualities which we don't always find in civilian

life. We find people prepared to sacrifice themselves, prepared to die for ideals or prepared to die for others; and although we may disapprove of the goals of war and the objects of war, we do find sometimes the qualities that war brings out admirable.

Most of us have been fairly fortunate and have not lived through wars, but it wasn't that long ago that this city and this theatre were the objects of war. The building was bombed - in which we are - was bombed in 1940 and it was deliberately targeted by the Luftwaffe because Hitler and his advisors realised just how important the BBC was.

This building was targeted and in October 1940 it was hit twice by German bombs. Seven staff members were killed trying to remove the first bomb. The fire department came and the BBC carried on. The newsreader for the 9 o'clock news paused briefly and then kept going. The next day scaffolding went up and the rubble was cleared. And that seems to me to show something also about the nature of war – that it requires a great deal of organisation. Nazi Germany had to make the bomb, had to develop the means of delivering it, had to get it over here and drop it on the BBC, and Britain and the BBC had to absorb the damage, had to organise ways around dealing with it and to keep on fighting.

And so my second major theme is going to be the relationship between war and the organisation of human society. Now, it's very difficult to think that war has something to do with peaceful and organised societies, but I would argue that it does. War is something that requires a good deal of organisation. It's the application of organised violence. It's not one-on-one violence; it's the application of organised violence. It requires discipline, it requires support, it requires equipment, it requires leadership, and of course it requires followers. And that requires, of course, as war becomes more and more complicated, a great deal of organisation.

Now there's a lot of debate among archaeologists, anthropologists and historians about when this level of organisation that made fighting war possible became part of human society. It is generally assumed that in hunter gatherer societies there was not all that much organisation because it wasn't necessary - why bother to have tight political and social organisation when you can always move to a new hunting or grazing ground? And so it *seems* – and I say seems because of course the evidence is very, very difficult to gather it was so long ago – that if there was violence in hunter gatherer societies, it tended to be one-on-one rather than anything more organised.

(11.47) It was with the development of agriculture that human societies began to become more complex and they began to become more settled; and once you're settled, once you have farms, once you have an investment in a particular part of the world, then you become prey for others and you have to defend it. It seems – and it's very difficult to say one came first and one came second – but it seems that the organisation of human society, once we became settled into agricultural peoples, went step by step with preparing to defend yourself or preparing to attack others to take from them what they wanted.

Paradoxically – and I think there are many paradoxes about war – the very organisation that made it possible for societies to fight wars and to defend themselves against attack also brought benefits. And so to see war as something that is always totally destructive and doesn't lead to

any improvement in the human condition again I think is wrong. We would like to say surely there must be some other way of bringing advances, surely there must be some other way of improving human society, but so far we don't seem to be very good at finding one.

Steven Pinker, the psychologist from Harvard, and others argue that we as a species are getting less violent, that we are becoming less likely to settle our differences by violence, and they produce statistics which seem to indicate that even with the great bloodshed of the two world wars in the 20th century, the 20th century and now the 21st century were proportionately less violent than centuries that came before them.

Somehow that doesn't always seem very consoling because while we're here in a peaceful part of the world, we have to remember how many violent and deadly and destructive conflicts there have been since 1945 whether in Indo-China, large parts of the Middle East, the Great Lakes district of Africa – some of these parts of the world where such conflicts still go on.

Perhaps because we do live in such a peaceful zone, this is not true of us all but I think true of many of us – we tend I think to regard war as an aberration, as an absence of peace, as something that happens when normal society breaks down, and again I would argue this is not really a very helpful way of looking at war. I think we need to see war in its intimate relationship with society. War is not necessarily just the absence of peace. War is something that human societies often do purposefully and often, alas, do very well.

I think there's a tendency, understandable, to turn our eyes away from war and say it's distasteful, it's something that is barbaric, it's something we don't want to do ever again. I think we need to understand it. I think we need to consider it because it has played such an important part in human history and I think unless we look at it, it will go on playing a part of human history. And so I think as historians and as citizens, we need to be aware of what war can mean.

My own approach of course is that of a Canadian. We are a peaceful country. We like peacekeeping, we identify ourselves by peacekeeping and we talk a lot about peace. We sometimes forget there's another side to us. All I need to say to you is watch a Canadian ice hockey game one day. (*audience laughter*) But I also come to this as an historian who is interested in the evolution of human society, interested in how things happened the way they did, and I'm interested in why people make decisions for war or peace because these are among the most consequential decisions that you can make. Why the policymakers in 1914 decide that war was a reasonable option? What did they think they were doing? What did they think they would achieve? What was it that moved them?

Well one starting point to try and understand war is to ask if it's part of being human. And this is one of these very awkward questions and, if I can use the military metaphor, there is a battle of theories going on here and I'm not going to give you any firm answer because I can't, but just simply to raise this with you. In fact I sometimes think that the series, the title for this whole series should have had a question mark – *The Mark of Cain?*, question mark: *Are we condemned by our biology to fight?*

Now there are those who would say that we are, that it is simply part of being human, that the normal state of human affairs is to want to fight; and then there are those who would say on the

other side no, that is not true, we're not condemned - either biology or by culture or by being human or by anything else - to fighting.

Very, very briefly, I think the differences can be summed up as those between Rousseau and Hobbes. Rousseau believed that men and women existed peaceably in early societies; that before societies became organised, there was no conflict, there was no violence; that it was only with the development of organised societies, with the development of organised property that people began to become violent. And Hobbes of course, as you will know, saw it very differently. As he described the state of nature, it was not idyllic at all. It was "nasty, brutish and short".

Now, as far as the evidence goes, it seems to be closer to Hobbes; that even in hunter gatherer societies people were still killing each other. There is now I think increasing evidence for this. I was recently in the very, very attractive town of Bolzano in the Tyrol – a very attractive Italian town, both Italian and German – and I saw line-ups for a museum. And I said to someone you know what's the big attraction in the museum, and the big attraction was the Iceman whom some of you may have heard of. This was a frozen corpse that was discovered in 1991. He had been frozen since he died sometime around 3300 BC and presumably came, by his dress and by what he was carrying, from a hunting society. It was assumed initially that he'd simply got lost and had died in a snowstorm and had remained buried in a glacier until that glacier began to melt, but scans and new biochemical testing techniques found that he had an arrowhead embedded in an armpit and then later tests found that he had wounds showing that he'd been attacked at least twice. And so this sort of evidence and other examples from around the world, often graves dating back millennia, seem to indicate that even before human society became very organised, we were already killing each other.

And you could argue, and Steven Pinker and others have argued, that in fact it was the development of organised human society which yes, made it more possible to fight each other on a more organised scale and inflict more damage, but also made it possible for us to stop violence, to stop us fighting each other within a particular political unit. The development of what Hobbes calls "Leviathan", a powerful government with an monopoly of force, was (at least in such thinking) a positive good because for all its faults what it did is provide a minimum of law and order. It provided a framework within which people, they may not have had much of what we would consider freedoms but within which people could go about their business, could trade, could work with each other. And the evidence seems to be that within the Roman Empire, for example, people were living longer, eating better, not because the Romans themselves were benevolent and wanted to bring this about, but they simply imposed law and order and made it possible for other activities to take place within that framework.

So over time the development of larger political units seems to have helped even though that may not have been the purpose of those who created them. The need to maintain a monopoly of force and the need to maintain the larger political unit to defend itself from enemies from outside or from within also has led through history to more organisation, and not to just more organisation but to governments having more control over society and over its resources.

Britain's rise to power in the late 17th and early 18th centuries was partly because it built a highly efficient Navy, and that meant managing the resources needed for the Navy, organising those

who staffed the Navy, training those who became officers in the Navy. At least in the British Navy you could not buy your position as an officer, you actually had to know how to sail, whereas in the Army you didn't have to know very much except how to sit on a horse and look good. And so the development of British power was very much tied in with the development of the British state and the organisation of the British state and the capacity of the British state to use its resources for war.

I mean we tend to think of Samuel Pepys as a wonderful diarist who told wonderful stories about life in London, but of course he was enormously important as a bureaucrat in helping to manage and set up the systems that managed the British Navy and made sure that it got the resources that it needed. And so the organisation of societies for war has also brought a mobilisation of resources, has brought government investment in science and technology, has brought governments more efficiently trying to find out what actually exists inside their borders.

The growth of statistics in the 19th century was partly so governments could actually figure out how many people they had and how many resources they had. The growth of science and technology in the 19th century and in the 20th century was partly fuelled by the needs of war. Again you wouldn't choose to do it that way, but I think we have to understand that sometimes war can bring unintended benefits. And often states would make changes which would benefit a lot of their people simply so that they could mobilise those resources better for war.

After the Crimean War, in which Russia was disastrously defeated, Alexander II abolished Serfdom in Russia, partly to reform the conscription system: he tried to modernise the bureaucracy, he invested in a justice system, he invested in education, and his government and subsequent Russian governments encouraged railway building. So this was for war, but it also brought, as I say, unintended consequences.

And so war – and again we wouldn't choose to do it this way – can bring benefits to society. It can benefit particular peoples in society. For example, it can benefit and has benefitted women. Women were, it was widely regarded before the First World War, not fitted in Britain to have the vote. It was said no point giving them the vote because they would vote the same way as their husbands told them to vote, so you'd simply have to count twice as many votes; there was no point doing it. Or women could not decide on the complicated questions that men could decide on. I mean their talents were managing their households but not dealing with the big issues that society was dealing with. And of course what happened in the course of the First World War is that women began to fill positions that they had been deemed unfit for before. They began to do the jobs that the men who were doing them had ... the men had gone off to war?? And so it was recognised by the government, even by those who deposed women's suffrage, that women were owed the vote. And even before the war ended in 1918, as the war was still going on - the government passed a bill to give women - it didn't go overboard, it was still cautious; only women over the age of 30 could vote. It was felt that those under 30 were a bit too flighty to actually vote??

And so war does, in its own unrolling, does bring benefits. It also served in the 20th century, the two world wars served to compress the gaps between the rich and the poor because when you have a war, you have to mobilise all the resources of society and you tax at rates which would be

unthinkable in peacetime. And so Walter Scheidel and Thomas Piketty and others have argued, and I find it convincing, that what they call The Great Compression between the very rich and the poor when societies became a lot more equal was from 1940 to about 1960 and very largely the result of war.

And the other question which comes up again and again is: is war more a question of biology or culture? It is true that most species – and that is true of everything from insects to birds to mammals – tends to be very territorially conscious. Different species tend to fight, defend/to fend their nest, their trees, their rocks, their small bits of land. We seem by and large as species to be very attached to particular bits of land. And certainly the species most closely related to us – the chimpanzees – do appear to mobilise themselves to defend territory or to steal desirable objects, whether it is females, from the others. Most chimpanzees do appear to be rather aggressive. However, just to give you some hope, there is a counter example. These are the bonobos. Their behaviour is not really suitable for a family audience, but let me say briefly they make love, a lot of it, and not war. And so it is possible to argue that biology is not deterministic; that biology *may* indicate that as a species we're more likely to fight and organise ourselves to fight, but it may not be determinative.

It is clear that cultural factors do matter. Fighting is often, the style of fighting is often determined by the type of society you are. The Greeks fought on foot on the plains, and that was partly by choice. They tended not to fight on horseback. The Nomads, the Mongols for example, fought on horseback because that is the world out of which they came.

While the reasons for fighting can be classified into certain main groups – material gain is one, defence is another and ideology a third and emotions perhaps a fourth, emotions everything from pride to revenge – different societies will have different reasons why they want to fight. In the Middle Ages and the early modern period countries went to war for dynastic reasons. Most people in the country weren't consulted; the war was made because a particular ruler wanted a particular war for a particular object. In the modern age, I think that has changed and we as citizens have become more involved in the sorts of wars that are fought.

The big change I think occurred in the beginning of the 19th century. Before the 19th century wars tended in the 18th century to be limited, they tended to be for very clearly defined projects, and they tended to be the wars of the rulers. They were not the wars of the ordinary people who were not consulted. Occasionally ordinary people would be impressed or conscripted to fight in the military, but they did so unwillingly, and when 18th century armies marched at night they had to have guards around them because soldiers would take every opportunity to desert. In fact most armies, if they had any sense, would not march at night at all. It was too risky, you'd lose too much of your army.

But what began to make the change was first of all the American Revolution, which introduced to the world the idea that a people has the right to choose its own government and the government has an obligation to that people, and then of course what made a huge change was the French Revolution. What the French Revolution did was help to shift in a very dramatic way the status of people living in a particular country from being that of subjects where they simply were the subject of a particular ruler to being citizens. The French Revolution opened the idea,

and other countries began to follow suit, that the French actually had a share in their own government. If you have a say in choosing your own government then of course you also have an obligation to defend it and so a very interesting shift takes place which really begins to shift the nature of the soldiers fighting.

What also happens of course as the 19th century wears on is that Europe industrialises on a mass scale, society becomes more complex, you begin to get bigger and more powerful mass organisations, and that means that wars can become – and alas do - more deadly. Europe now has the capacity and countries that follow suit around the world now has the capacity to kill itself on a much greater scale and much more efficiently. Weapons are more efficient and it is now possible, thanks to the industrial power of countries in Europe and the United States and other countries around the world, to keep armies in the field for much longer, to keep much bigger armies in the field and to keep supplying them. In the old days an army would go into winter quarters, would only be able to stay in a bit of the country for as long as there was food to feed it - and that meant basically anywhere around, foraging around - it now became possible to keep armies on the Western Front, for example on the Eastern Front for years on end.

Just to give you one idea of how much bigger war was getting: in 1812 France invaded Russia with 600,000 men; in 1870 the German confederation invaded France with 1.2 million; in 1914 Germany mobilised three million men. And so war is becoming very, very much bigger and the motivation for war is changing.

There was a warning. A general, General von Moltke the Elder who had presided over the German victory over France in 1870, warned in one of his last public statements. He said, “We have moved from cabinet wars to people’s wars”, and he said “Those will have incalculable consequences. Once you start the wars of the peoples, when the passions of the peoples are involved, it’s very hard to stop them.” He said, “Seven years, thirty years, who knows, and woe to him who sets Europe alight, who puts the first fuse to the powder keg.”

And so what we saw in the 20th century was a development of war on a massive scale. We have of course reacted to that: we’ve tried to build international institutions, we’ve tried to find ways of avoiding war. So far, I think, not with much success.

So if I’ve done anything tonight, it is to encourage all of us here to take war seriously, to try and understand it, to try and look at our own reactions to it. Only, I think, if we look at war do we have any hope of understanding how to deal with it, how to manage it, how to keep it contained, and perhaps – although this would be a long shot - how to prevent it.

Next time what I want to look at is those who actually do the fighting and, like war itself, we have very mixed feelings about them. We both admire and I think we fear the warrior and we have questions, as I’d like to suggest we have questions about war itself, about what makes them do it. Why are men and women too prepared to fight and die? These are difficult, I think, but important questions. Thank you.

AUDIENCE APPLAUSE

Q&A LECTURE

ANITA ANAND: So this is where we would love to invite you to ask questions of Margaret. Let's take a question from over here.

DAVID PASCAL: My name's David Pascal. I'm a retired air traffic controller and now I'm a bus driver. My question is: when I was growing up in the 50s and 60s in London, we were categorically told as schoolchildren that the organisation called The United Nations was going to make sure there would be no more wars; United Nations soldiers would step in at the first sign of conflict and it would be peace ever after. Do you have a view on why that hasn't happened?

MARGARET MACMILLAN: I think organisations are only as good as their members and the United Nations was really hamstrung from the beginning by the Cold War; it became a vehicle or an arena in which the Cold War tensions played out. And so the Soviet Union wouldn't support anything the United States wanted to do, and vice versa, and since each of the permanent members of the Security Council has a veto that meant that the UN found it very difficult.

I think also perhaps what has happened is as time goes by – and this is very human – we forget why we wanted the institution in the first place. You know we wanted the UN after the Second World War because we knew what had happened in the absence of anything similar. It's now seventy, eighty years on and we tend to forget. I mean it strikes me as being rather like the Europe Union. The European Union grew out initially, at least in part, of a desire to avoid the destructive nationalisms which had torn Europe apart twice in a lot of people's living memories, but time goes by and people forget. But I wouldn't like to give up, I mean I think we're going to have to keep trying, but it's hard sometimes to be optimistic.

CLARE MULLEY: My name is Clare Mulley. I'm a biographer, mainly of women in war, connected to war. My question is: in Aristophanes' comic play *Lysistrata*, the women go on sex strike as a way of ending the Peloponnesian War.

MARGARET MACMILLAN: Yeah.

CLARE MULLEY: Do you think we would be as war-like if women were in charge? (*audience laughter*)

MARGARET MACMILLAN: It's such a good question. (*audience applause*) My brief answer is no. (*audience laughter*) I think women have often been cheerleaders for war. You know the Peloponnesian War, it was the Spartan mothers who said "Come back bearing your shield or on it." And certainly in the 19th century, which I've looked at a lot, some of the most ferocious people talking about the other side were women: Bismarck's wife in the Franco-Prussian War said, "I'd like to shoot them all right down to the little babies", and this was a nice German matron. So I'm not sure that women are by nature kinder or gentler.

I mean the question we used to get when I was younger: "Wouldn't we have fewer wars if women ran the world?" So Indira Gandhi, Mrs Bandaranaike in Ceylon or Sri Lanka, Golda

Meir, Margaret Thatcher, I mean they did not seem to be any more peaceable than male leaders, so I think my answer is no.

ROBERT FOX: My name's Robert Fox. I was a journalist, still am a journalist and reporter, and I reported war for the BBC in the Falklands. So, fake news. How much has the whole debate about fake news and propaganda been a concomitant of war from the beginning? And, in that it underlines suspicion and doubt, is it a catalyst for more conflict or for suspicion and for peace, therefore, today?

MARGARET MACMILLAN: Oh that's a nice little question you've just asked. I mean I think information has always been important in war, knowing what the enemy is up to and deceiving the enemy. I mean Napoleon was a master at that; I mean he never let his enemy know where he was about to march or about to pounce. But I think what we're seeing today is a distortion increasingly of truth, and an increasing unwillingness to believe that there's anything called truth at all, and that I find very corrosive and very dangerous. I mean I find the series of explanations that the Russian government has given after the attempted assassination here in Salisbury, they don't even seem to want to be believed; there just seems to one fantastical story after another, I mean rather like the shooting down of the Dutch airliner over the Ukraine. And so I do think it's a dangerous moment for us all.

ANITA ANAND: Let me just go back to Robert. As somebody who's sort of been in it and now is looking in at it, is the fog of war getting denser do you think?

ROBERT FOX: I think it's as I was stating and Margaret stated. I think it's the absence of consensus now about what truth is.

MARGARET MACMILLAN: Yeah.

(4.28) ROBERT FOX: You know, 'What is the Truth said jesting Pilate; and would not stay for answer.'" I think the Skripal and the Duma chlorine case in Syria, I agree, have absolutely pointed it out. You can go through the Twitter sphere, you can go through online, and the conspiracy theories abound. The fact is that the democracies, the liberal democracies that we espouse, we support are based on consensus. Actually the fight over fake news, so-called, is a battle of dissent and controversy and I am still ... I'm really not convinced whether it leads to further conflict or we will not believe authority, therefore we will not go to war. But that is not necessarily a pitch for peace. I think it could be a pitch for anarchy.

ANTONIA LEE Hi, my name's Antonia Lee and I'm an anthropology student. And the question I would just like to bring up is what you brought up earlier about Pinker and this idea that we're less violent and, as modern society kind of develops from hunter gatherers or whatever, that we're somehow less violent and less engaged in warfare. But my question is: how do you reconcile this idea of progress with the sort of incremental and slow forms of violence and warfare that we still come into contact with now? So say, for example, the genocide of indigenous people in the Americas, which was a very slow process but was the result of civil warfare ...

ANITA ANAND: Right...

MARGARET MACMILLAN: I think probably I'm agreeing with you. I think Pinker is very persuasive but too optimistic and of course in all these things it's how you define violence and there are different levels of violence and different levels of attacks and different ways of attacking peoples. I think I was looking mainly at organised war, organised violence, but the slow movement of American settlers, for example, which did sometimes involve pitched battles for example at Wounded Knee, between indigenous Native Americans and American forces, but there were also the slow encroachments on land which was meant to be, for example, for the Lakota but which was bit by bit chopped away and their culture was destroyed. So I think if you take violence on a much more general scale, I think you can see all sorts of kinds of violence and I think it's hard to say that it's gone away. If you're looking at organised warfare, I think possibly we are seeing less, but that may only be a blip. Human history is very long and just because we've had seventy years without major wars, and we have actually had some pretty big wars, doesn't mean we're not still going to have a lot of war.

ANITA ANAND: Question over here. Yes.

EDWARD STRINGER: Edward Stringer from the Royal Airforce. How do you think nuclear weapons have altered the calculations that you spoke about in how people decide to go or not go to war?

MARGARET MACMILLAN: Well I'd like to think – and it's a very good question – I'd like to think what was often the view in the Cold War - that nuclear weapons provided the stability, that Mutually Assured Destruction with that wonderful acronym MAD did actually prevent either side from attacking each other, so that nuclear weapons did help to bring peace and they were this extraordinary type of weapon which was designed not to be used or so it appeared during the Cold War. What worries me about any sort of weapon is sooner or later someone's going to want to use it and they're going to think of ways in which they can use it, and I think one of the things we should be worried about is the proliferation of nuclear weapons and not just of the big types of nuclear weapons but the smaller types nuclear shells, for example, and sooner or later someone's going to say this is a usable weapon. You know it was the same thing with poison gas before the First World War. It was outlawed at I think one of the Hague conventions and people said we'll never use it, it's so appalling, but once you get into a wartime situation then you'll say well we've got to use everything, we've got to throw everything at it. Sooner or later someone's going to see it as something that they can use.

ANITA ANAND: I mean since – this is a question for both of you really – I mean since you're talking about nuclear weapons – that is you know the absolute height of destruction – but tech in war is becoming more and more sophisticated. It's becoming smaller - I mean that's the very huge thing - but you've got drone warfare, you've got people developing robots for war. There is no longer that connection with the warrior and the vanquished. Is that not more of a worry than the actual pressing of the red button?

MARGARET MACMILLAN: Well, think we've had for a long time long distance war - I mean the majority of soldiers in the First World War were killed by artillery, not killed face to

face by bayonets - but I think what we're getting now is two kinds of war which don't seem to have that much connection. You've got the kind of war that goes on the ground... I mean a lot of the people who were killed in Rwanda were killed by hoes and machetes in the terrible slaughters that took place there. And, you're right, we're getting much higher tech weapons. I mean if you all want to have a really nightmarish evening, go home and watch... there's a little YouTube video on killer robots which are the size of a pea and will go zipping around knocking us all off in two seconds. And the fact that drones and I suppose presumably killer robots can be manipulated from somewhere in Texas you know to kill someone around on the other side of the world, I think we are perhaps losing the appreciation which soldiers have tended to have – perhaps sailors less but soldiers have always had – that if you kill someone, it is pretty awful. You know even in the First World War, if they didn't actually kill most of the enemy with bayonets or were shooting them point blank, they saw the effect of artillery on the human body, and I think increasingly people are killing without seeing the effects of that.

ANITA ANAND: Well let's also get our friend from the Airforce to comment.

EDWARD STRINGER: I can see the argument, but I would say, having dealt a lot with our drone pilots, they are absolutely emotionally engaged and I think it's too easy to say it's a videogame. Go and talk to the people who've been doing this for years and we actively manage with the stress of being involved in that sort of conflict.

MARGARET MACMILLAN: *(over)* Okay, yeah.

EDWARD STRINGER: So I don't think people do get ... do get removed from it. And I would say if you look at the history of warfare and weapons everything that's put a bit of range into it has been dismissed as being somehow unchivalrous whether it was a submarine or you know the longbow.

MARGARET MACMILLAN: Yeah.

EDWARD STRINGER: I think what really worries me is the price of entry, the cost of entry. And, linking to Robert's comment about information wars linking to cyber, it's becoming very cheap to do and it's becoming easy to deny that the state has done it, and I think those are two very destabilising tendencies that we should worry about.

ANITA ANAND: We have time for one more question. The young woman over there please.

MARGOT DAHINDEN: My name is Margot Dahinden. I'm an anthropology student at UCL. My question's quite simple: what do you think of the power or importance of dehumanisation as something that could possibly exacerbate or lead to war?

MARGARET MACMILLAN: I think dehumanisation is absolutely critical in how people behave in war and often will lead them to war. I mean one of the things that was so striking in the period before 1939 was the way in which, for example, Nazi Germany was using words like 'vermin' and 'scum' and viruses to dehumanise its opponents. You know once you begin to categorise your opponents as somehow less human than you or you talk about them as a disease

in the body politic then you are actually doing good work when you cleanse them, when you eliminate them, when you exterminate them.

I mean it goes back partly to what we were saying about propaganda earlier on, the use of propaganda to portray those who are your neighbours. Suddenly they're no longer your neighbours - they're not like you, they are your enemies - and you turn them into something that is less than human. And that's happened, but certainly not just in the 20th century; it's happened at other times as well. And it probably makes it easier to kill other people because you don't feel you're killing someone like you. You're killing something that's alien, you're actually helping to cure the body politic by getting rid of this person. And I think the use of such language and such thinking is enormously powerful and helps to prepare people to do dreadful things to each other. It think it's very, very powerful.

ANITA ANAND: Unfortunately that is all that we have time for. Next time we're going to be in York in the North of England, close to the bloodiest battle ever fought on English soil, and we're going to be considering the role of the warrior.

And if you'd like to know more, then please do go and visit the website, the Radio 4 website, and look at the Reith pages. We've got archive, we've got film, we've got pictures. We have pictures, we spoil you. But till then, my thanks to you, the audience, and please join with me in thanking our Reith Lecturer for 2018: Margaret Macmillan.

AUDIENCE APPLAUSE