If you want peace, prepare for war.

Humans have been fighting since the dawn of history. Just like natural competition makes living creatures compete for resources, humans fought for rights to own land, food, water, and other forms of energy and wealth. Essentially, competition is natural and even imperative in our world. Therefore, peace is unnatural and impossible. Plants and animals follow the simple rule “to live or to die.” Humans, however, developed a complex institution of war. Since war was inescapable, they tried to morally justify it.

At first, small groups, such as tribes, fought against each other. It was a primitive way to increase one’s wealth. Then, as population increased, larger groups like states and nations began to attack each other. Although the scale was much larger comparing to tribal wars, the motives were still the same. People were fighting for a better life, that is, more food, more land, and more labourers.

Now, there is one thing that we must consider at this point. The term “people” is too vague for our discussion. We must define who is the person responsible for making decisions about the future of his tribe, state, or nation. Let us call him “the ruler”. The ruler analyses the situation of his domain and plans the steps for improving the life of his subjects, increasing the wealth, and protecting the resources owned. He is the one who makes all of the decisions regarding war, too. From common soldiers’ perspective, “at some table a document is signed by some persons whom none of [them] know” (Remarque 194). But it is all done for the good of the nation. To avoid confusion, from now on, let us focus on the third aspect of the ruler’s job, protecting the resources owned.

First, let us imagine a following situation. It is 55 BC. You are a ruler of Britain. You own some land, some mines, some waterways, and other valuable resources. You have a relatively large population. Your country is successful both agriculturally and economically. Now, suppose the ruler of Rome, Caesar, declares war to you. He wants to take the resources of your country and make your population work for him. What can you do?

You could take the stance of the pacifist. We define pacifism as follows: a belief that violence of any kind is unjustifiable and that one should not participate in war “because war is evil, therefore all who engage in war, whether for offense or defense, are equally blameworthy, and to be condemned” (Bridgeman 256). You try to settle the dispute by arbitration.

Now, suppose that negotiation fails. Caesar is desperate to take over your country and won’t listen. In this situation, it becomes clear that pacifism “is not only unreasonable, it is inexcusably unjust” (Bridgeman 256). Would you give up and let Caesar rule your country? Or would you fight back to protect your land? Even though killing may appear immoral, refusing to fight would signify the end of your nation. For example, in his book All Quiet on the Western Front, Erich Maria Remarque not only depicted the lives of ordinary soldiers but also explained the logic behind killing enemies during the combat. He was himself in the combat during World War I and this is what he said regarding the enemies: “If we don’t destroy them, they will destroy us” (115). According to Thomas C. Foster, an expert in
analysing literature, every literary work is a "political" writing in some way. So the quote by Remarque addresses "the political reality of the time" (Foster 122). In Remarque’s opinion, soldiers "do not fight, [they] defend [themselves] against annihilation…[they] destroy and kill, to save [themselves]...and to be revenged" (Remarque 113). Many ancient thinkers expressed similar thoughts on war. Vegetius, for instance, wrote in his De Re Militari, “He...who desires peace, should prepare for war” (Book III).

As a ruler of Britain, the only option left is to get ready to fight in defence. You still try to settle the dispute by arbitration, but you make sure your country’s men are prepared to get their weapons and stand up to protect their families from slavery, their lives from economic ruin. You concentrate all of your efforts in preparation to win this war in order to save your country and your people. You fight or you die, there's no other way. Baron de Montesquieu considered that “the life of governments is like that of man. The latter has a right to kill in case of natural defence: the former have a right to wage war for their own preservation...The right of war, therefore, is derived from necessity” (Book X, Chapter IV). War is just if you are defending your homeland.

So if you want peace, prepare for war.

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Works Cited