HANDOUT #3: "Making War: Centuries of conflict," by Jimmy Carter
From *Talking Peace*, (Dutton Children's Books).

[W]ar has been a fundamental force in human history…. The history of conflict is as old as humanity itself.

On the most basic level, conflict occurs when interests differ. As soon as two or more groups exist in a situation, there are two or more points of view- and two or more sets of ambitions as well. While sometimes each group can pursue its own ambitions without interfering with the others, quite often conflicts will arise…

Conflicting views do not necessarily lead to fighting. War is merely one form of resolving conflict, a violent form. Nonviolent alternatives include negotiation and mediation to reach compromises and passive civil disobedience to emphasize and publicize the absence of agreement. This was how the American civil rights movement forced an end to legalized racial discrimination. But for various reasons at different times, hundreds of leaders in the history of the world have felt that war was an appropriate and justified means to resolve a conflict.

The reasons for going to war are many and varied. Battles may occur because a piece of land that has long been related to one group is taken over or controlled by another. Nations struggle over natural resources, including access to seas and oceans. Historically, ideas also have led to war. When one group has no tolerance for the religious opinions, race, or ethnicity of its neighbors, violent conflict can erupt. A change in the politics of a government that harms the average citizen's quality of life may inspire war. An oppressive regime's abuse of the people may eventually incite protest or outright rebellion.

In 1775, American colonial leaders chose armed resistance to the British monarchy in order to protect what they considered to be their rights of self-government. When the British government refused to yield, the conflict became a war for independence. Shortly before the battle at Lexington, which began the American Revolution, Patrick Henry made his famous statement of resolve, "I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!" Another advocate of the Revolution, Thomas Paine, later said, "It is the object only of a war that makes it honorable. And if there was ever a just war since the world began, it is this in which America is now engaged." Few Americans today would criticize the military actions our forefathers took to liberate America from British rule and to support democratic ideals for all people.

Though it is often obvious why one country would want to escape another's domination, it is sometimes harder to explain why citizens of a single country begin fighting among themselves in a civil war. It would seem that two peoples living close together would be more sympathetic toward each other and less likely to go to war. Time and time again, civil wars have erupted, proving that this theory is not true.

Almost ninety years after the revolution against the British, we Americans experienced our own civil war, as states and even members of the same families fought against one another. The causes of this tragic War Between the States were complicated. Among them was the struggle to abolish slavery, the assertion by certain states of their right to withdraw from the Union, and the domination of the northern states' industrial economy over the South's traditional agricultural way of life. After four years of bloody conflict and tragic loss, slavery was abolished and the Union was preserved. But as with most wars, the question remains: Could these goals have been reached peacefully?

There is no way to rewrite history, but who knows what would have happened if negotiation between distinguished and respected leaders has resolved the basic differences between North and South concerning the abolition of slavery and the elimination of what the South considered to be unfair economic discrimination against its region. Was there some peaceful alternative to the war's destruction and the hundreds of thousands of battlefield deaths? Although we will never know, we can apply the same kinds of questions to modern-day threats to peace.

Historians who study why leaders are willing to risk battle have found that usually one of two conditions exist: Either the leaders are highly confident that they will win, or they are more concerned about what will happen to them if they do *not* fight than if they do. Since the invention of massively destructive nuclear weapons earlier in this century, many people felt that no leader would ever consider the risks of war to be worth it again. Yet smaller wars continue to explode all over the globe. This is in part because our human history of thousands of past wars sets a strong precedent.

It would be very difficult to explore all of the history of war…but it is important to remember that as the nature of warfare itself has changed, opinions on the morality and advisability of war have also changed.

Despite the promise of the Hebrew prophet Isaiah some twenty-seven hundred years ago that a time would come when "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore, " few nations have abandoned war as a means of advancing their interest. In the ancient world, few moral limits were placed on the conduct of war. When an army of Egypt, Assyria, Rome, or the ancient Israelites conquered a city, the soldiers believed the gods gave them the right to loot the city and to kill or enslave their captives.

Nations did develop ways of avoiding war through diplomacy, however. The Greek city-states, especially, cultivated the arts of negotiation and arbitration, usually to form beneficial alliances, Also, rules of warfare evolved. In Christian Europe during the Middle Ages, knights followed the customs of chivalry when they fought among themselves. However, their rules on how to treat their rival knights were not observed when they fought against people of different religions, such as the Muslims.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, advances in knowledge and science brought changes to the conduct of war and to attitudes about war. Weapons grew more destructive as the technology for using gunpowder improved. Nations began to see the military as a job for professionals who could apply scientific knowledge to make war efficient. At the same time, new ideas were in the air about the responsibilities and rights of human beings and of nation-states.

Some nations in western Europe were coming to the conclusion that limits needed to be placed on war. They considered it criminal to murder or enslave the civilian population of an occupied territory…

Early in the twentieth century, the leading nations of Europe became embroiled in World War I, which proved to be more costly and destructive than any previous war in history. The military strategists were slow to adjust to the more powerful weapons at their disposal. Soldiers were slaughtered by the thousands as they attempted frontal assaults against the exploding shells and rapid-fire weapons of their entrenched enemies. Even though the nations engaged in the war recognized that civilians should be treated differently than soldiers, some of the new weapons made it difficult to follow the rules of war that had developed. The submarine is one example. When a surface naval warship caught an unarmed or lightly armed enemy merchant ship, it was required to give the merchant ship the opportunity to surrender. But when a submarine caught an enemy ship, it had to rely on a surprise attack for effectiveness. The merchant ship might be able to outrun the submarine if able to detect it. The outrage caused by German submarine attacks on American and British merchant ships with American civilian passengers on board ultimately helped bring the United States into the war against Germany.

The danger to civilian populations increased even more with the outbreak of World War II. Airplanes sent to bomb military targets often hit civilians as well. Both sides in the war conducted deliberate air raids on the cities of their enemies, and the Germans also launched missiles at Great Britain strictly to terrorize the British people. German treatment of Jewish civilian populations in Germany and in occupied territories included mass murders and enslavement in labor camps. After the war, some German leaders were convicted of war crimes. High civilian casualties were inevitable when the United States dropped the atomic bomb on Japan…President Harry Truman explained that many more (people) would have perished with prolonged conventional bombing and a military invasion of Japan.

The terrible threat of nuclear weapons may be the most important reason that no other world wars have occurred since 1945. The hope of many of the world's people was that the United Nations would prevent war. Its charter, created in 1945, prescribes that "all members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations." Unfortunately, soon after its establishment, increasing hostility developed between the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union.

The building up of nuclear arsenals by the superpowers and the three other permanent members of the Security Council (China, Great Britain, and France) made the organization incapable of fulfilling its potential. Under the UN charter, any decision of the Security Council can be blocked by the veto of just one of these five.   Since practically all important issues affect one of these major powers or its allies, the United Nations became relatively ineffective in making or implementing decisions. The United States and its allies, and the Soviet Union and its allies, engaged in a cold war. They saw each other as the enemy and threatened massive retaliation if the other dared to strike first.

Until the cold war, the globe had never before been split so neatly between the influences of two powers. According to some analysts, the superpowers' arms race and rhetoric succeeded in deterring a major war because there was always relative equality between the two countries militarily and economically. At no point did either feel truly confident in its ability to win a war against the other…

The end of Communist domination of the government, freedom of speech, economic reforms, a reduction of Soviet influence in neighboring countries, and the eventual breakup of the Soviet Union into more than a dozen independent countries brought an end to the cold war by 1990.

The cold war definitely had a major impact on the rest of the world, whether or not it was the only way the two superpowers could have saved themselves from mutual destruction…

It is important to remember how powerful an impact young people can have on the policies of our nation…[T}ens of thousands of students helped to end racial discrimination with their lunch counter sit-ins. The environmental movement was given great impetus when young Americans organized Earth Day…

Almost all American families have been touched by the tragedy of war at one point in their history, or at least have had members who served in the military during a time of national crisis. Families who have recently emigrated to America often come with experiences of war in other countries…We have been very fortunate that except for the bombing of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on the morning December 7, 1941, Americans have not seen combat on our own soil since the Civil War…Other nations have not been so fortunate.

-Jimmy Carter, *Talking Peace*