

*C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la science:  
The Scientific Study of War and Peace*

*The Scientific Study of Peace and War: A Text Reader*  
*John A. Vasquez and Marie T. Henehan*  
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John A. Vasquez's and Marie T. Henehan's *The Scientific Study of Peace and War: A Text Reader* is an interesting compilation of the scientific data on war and peace from the Correlates of War (COW) project at the University of Michigan. This work does exactly what the authors set out for it to do: it presents important articles written on war and peace from a scientific perspective and puts them into perspective. It is designed for students unfamiliar with statistical methodology or political science jargon, and through its attached "learning package" it presents a tutorial on the subject that enables the book to stand on its own. This work does *not* add notably to the scholarship in the field, however, as Henehan and Vasquez are far more concerned with summary than with criticism or judgment; as such they do not support or attack individual conclusions, instead leaving such academic responses to the other authors whose articles they cite. (343) Ultimately, *The Scientific Study of Peace and War* poses two important questions: first, how effective, useful, and accurate are the individual studies or is the overall research and what are the merits or problems with this particular work? Second, what are the merits with or problems of examining war and peace in this way? This second question is further broken down into the question of whether these sorts of studies are truly "scientific" and whether these sorts of studies are trustworthy.

Both the great strength and the basic weakness of this work lie in Vasquez's and Henehan's simultaneous desires to summarize rather than criticize and also to reach some final conclusions about the causes and effects of war. Vasquez and Henehan structure their work around a series of high-level articles categorized under four broad headings: Onset, Expansion, Peace, and Termination. At the beginning of each article there is an editorial introduction and at the end of each article there are two editorial summaries, the first of which addresses the theoretical and empirical conclusions of the article in question and the second of which analyzes

and criticizes the methodologies employed by the authors. It is quite clear that this work is intended to be used by students; as such it is designed for readers who perhaps have less background in this material than professional academics. They are attempting to present some of the academic debate that has taken place between scholars using the COW data. In so attempting Vasquez and Henahan perform a valuable function, and produce a work that has a very definite place in the classroom.

The problem with this work is that Vasquez and Henahan try to make it more of a “final say” than it should be given their desire to summarize various academic debates on warfare. Vasquez presents a “conclusions” chapter in which, according to his wife, he “finds that wars between major states tend to be preceded by the making of alliances, military buildups, the use of realpolitik bargaining that becomes increasingly coercive, and a series of crises, one of which eventually interrupts into war.”<sup>369</sup> This conclusion is startlingly unconnected to any of the material that Vasquez and Henahan have summarized in their work to this point; it does not build upon other arguments, but instead takes an entirely new tack. “Vasquez’s article is an exercise in inductive scientific theory construction,” Henahan admits. “it has yet to be tested.” (370) “There is not,” she adds, “as much integration of the findings as one might expect.” *The Scientific Study of Peace and War* cannot be both a compilation of articles *and* a cohesive argument on the nature, causes, and correlations of war and peace. In attempting to make it such, Vasquez and Henahan have essentially taken on too ambitious of a project.

In addition to the problems with this particular work, there are major general problems with examining war and peace in this way. First, are these studies truly “scientific?” Does it matter? Vasquez and Henahan entitle their work *The Scientific Study of Peace and War*; there is no doubt that the various researchers whose works are included in this book *believe* that they are

producing “scientific” studies. The articles in this book certainly *look* like scientific articles: there are lots of graphs, mathematical equations, and discussions of Yule’s Q and Regression Lines – but is this sort of analysis “science”? It seems that one of the key features of “science” MUST be the ability to recreate the data set – i.e. to run the experiment again to test whether we will get the same results. In the case of the COW data, researchers cannot recreate events. Because COW data is compiled from presumably objective observations (how many deaths were there in war X?) of past events, while analyses can be run repeatedly using the same data, the “experiment” (the wars) itself can never be replicated. Acknowledging that this analysis damns a good deal of political science research, I think we must conclude that *The Scientific Study of Peace and War* is far less “scientific” than the authors would have us believe.

The second question posed by the methodology employed in this work is whether these sorts of studies are trustworthy. Vasquez and Henehan obviously believe that studies done in this manner can reach trustworthy conclusions as long as the scholars doing the analysis are honest and objective in studying the data. “Counting, of course, involves statistics,” writes Henehan, “and there is a popular prejudice against statistics. Some even argue that anything can be proved with statistics or that statistics lie. Of course, statistics do not lie; people lie, and they can use either statistics or words to do so.” (xxi) If Vasquez and Henehan are right in their assumption that statistics can reveal objective truths and facts and that variation arises only from individuals “lying,” then these *sorts* of studies are trustworthy; if, however, they are wrong in their assumption than these studies lose much of their credibility.

The problem here is that different authors, all seemingly with the best of intentions, can come to different conclusions about *how* they wish to use statistics in their analyses. The Paul Diehl-Michael Wallace (chapters 3 and 4) controversy demonstrates one clear way in which how

scholars define their variables drastically alters the results of analyses from the data sets. To summarize: Wallace identifies a clear correlation between arms-races and warfare. His predictive lesson is therefore that nations that engage in arms races should understand that they are likely to get into a war. Diehl argues that Wallace's data set is biased, partially because Diehl counts World War II as *six* separate conflicts rather than one. While we can suspect that both Diehl and Wallace have a political stake in this game, neither is necessarily right in his use of the COW data and neither is necessarily "lying": on the one hand, World War II was one conflict, but on the other, it was characterized by different countries fighting each other in different ways and so can be seen as consisting of several conflicts. Even if Henehan is right, then, and "statistics don't lie, people lie," it is quite clear that without having malicious intent, simply by altering slightly the data sets scholars use they might get enormously different results. Such a conclusion suggests that these sorts of studies are not conclusive and totally trustworthy; our results depend entirely on tweaking the numbers.

*The Scientific Study of Peace and War* represents an interesting and important collection of research performed using the COW data set, but it does not represent the final and ultimate word on correlates of war. It is a valuable work for the classroom, but on its own should not be seen as an important step forward in the literature.