



Useful Enemies: When Waging Wars is More Important Than Winning Them

By David Keen

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There are currently dozens of ongoing violent conflicts across the globe, from Colombia to Somalia, including civil wars that have lasted for decades. At a global level the Cold War has been succeeded by a war on terror that continues to rage more than a decade after 9/11. Why has war been so persistent, when we know how destructive it is in both human and economic terms? And why do the efforts of aid organizations and international diplomats so often founder?

In this eye-opening book, David Keen investigates why conflicts are so prevalent and so intractable - even when one side has much greater military resources. From collusion between rebels and government forces in Sierra Leone, to brutal civil war in Sri Lanka and the NATO quagmire in Afghanistan, he analyses current and recent conflicts worldwide, arguing that powerful interests - in less developed countries and also in the West - may see endemic disorder and a state of permanent emergency as more useful than peace.

Drawing on many years of research, Keen asks who benefits from wars. It is a disturbing story that takes in government officials siphoning off aid, militias ejecting civilians from oil-rich areas, companies looking for markets for arms and security products, and politicians reinforcing their power-base by defining any opponent as the enemy. As this fascinating and disturbing expose makes clear, unless we have a genuine understanding of the complex vested interests that shape contemporary wars, we are unlikely ever to achieve lasting peace.

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About the Author

David Keen is professor of complex emergencies at the London School of Economics. He lives in Oxford, UK.

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