

Can the Pursuit of “Efficiency” Ever Be Wrong?

When the machine gun gained popularity in the 1890s, people were so horrified by its power that some hoped its very existence would prevent wars. Only a short time later the machine gun would be used to kill millions in World War I.

As a piece in [The Atlantic](#) explains, Hiram Maxim built the first working machine gun in 1884, and it soon gained popularity:

“By the late 1890s, Maxim was manufacturing his guns in England, Germany, France, Sweden, and Spain. He traveled across Europe to demonstrate his gun for military officials, who ordered them in huge quantities. At one weapons demonstration, in Switzerland, an officer pulled Maxim aside to express his disbelief: ‘No gun has ever been made in the world that could kill so many men and horses in so short a time.’ A field marshal in the Austrian military told Maxim that his gun was ‘too fast.’

‘It is the most dreadful instrument that I have ever seen or imagined,’ Maxim recalled the man as having said.”?

Horrified by the weapon’s efficiency, the *New York Times* wrote that the mere threat of the machine gun would cause countries to solve their problems diplomatically:

“These are the instruments that have revolutionized the methods of warfare, and because of their devastating effects, have made nations and rulers give greater thought to the outcome of war before entering... ” the Times [wrote](#) in 1897. “They are peace-producing and peace-retaining terrors.”

Unfortunately, this hope proved false. WWI would be known as

the “machine gun war.”



(Image: John Warwick Brooke/Imperial War Museums)

The age that saw the invention of the machine gun—much like our own age—associated technological progress with the achievement of greater efficiency. Moreover, “efficiency” has become synonymous with “good,” and indeed, is considered one of the highest goods by modern man.

But perhaps that’s more problematic than initially assumed. Can the never-ending quest for greater efficiency be a bad thing, not only when it comes to weapons, but with other things, as well?

—

Dear Readers,

Big Tech is suppressing our reach, refusing to let us advertise and squelching our ability to serve up a steady diet of truth and ideas. Help us fight back by [becoming a member](#) for just \$5 a month and then join the discussion on Parler [@CharlemagneInstitute!](#)