

Redwoods are the tallest trees in the world. They grow to be as high as 380 feet. Compare that to an American football field, which is 300 feet long. A redwood would impress you if you stood near one. But why do they grow so tall?

It's hard to see from the ground, but the redwoods are competing. They are fighting with each other to get the most sunlight. The trees that get the most sunlight grow taller. Trees that get stuck under other trees do not get as much light. They lose the opportunity to grow taller. So redwoods must grow taller to compete or they will get trapped on the bottom.

Growing so tall is risky. The wind is more threatening to a tall tree. It is also hard to grow so much. Redwoods use all their energy to grow tall. The trees might be better off if they didn't have to grow so tall to survive. Their lives would be safer and easier. But there is no way for them to coordinate. They cannot agree to stop growing as tall as possible. So they compete their whole lives.

People face similar challenges. For example, nations spend a lot of money to protect themselves from other nations. The US spends more than half its budget on defense. Most

other nations spend 10-30% of theirs on arms and armies. That's a lot of money.

We could spend that money on schools, roads, and parks. We could spend it on feeding hungry people or helping the environment. We could spend it on advancing art, philosophy, or science. So why don't we?

The problem is that if a nation has no military, then they face the risk of invasion. A nation with a mighty army may take their resources and destroy them on a whim.

Like the redwoods, which grow taller to their own detriment, we are locked in a harmful race. Most people agree that world peace is better than an arms race. In a peaceful world, we could use all our resources to make our lives better.

That sounds nice, but what if one nation broke the agreement? What if they built an army in secret? What if they used their secret army to destroy us? Can we afford to take that risk?

Most nations decide that they cannot. Rather, they choose to spend a lot of money on defense programs.