

Games Without Frontiers

The American People, that uneducated, unruly mass, are asking for the impossible again. They want the U. S. military to throw its weight around as the world's policeman and change other nations through force, without injury to any of our men.

War without casualties is practically impossible. It's nearly inconceivable that two powers can come to blows with the destructive power of modern armies and one side remains unharmed. The destruction wrought by war two generations ago in Europe is still healing, and the lives on all sides were irrevocably altered. It's just not possible to use force and not pay a human cost.

The only flaw in that argument is that the U. S. is doing just that - for the second time in a decade. If the 1960's were the time of Free Love, the 1990's are the Age of Free War.

People are killed, both in the opposing force and in the civilian population, but the propaganda machine works to dehumanize them. If you get all your news from the network news, it's easy to believe that no human being has lost their lives due to American action in Kosovo or Iraq. Now there's an example of desensitizing kids to violence.

Propaganda aside, it remains remarkable that there have been essentially no American casualties in either the Kosovo bombing or the Gulf "war." Even the 3 P.O.W.s were returned unharmed for the price of a Jesse Jackson photo opportunity. If we only vaguely believe that the Bad Guys got hurt, and know none of the Good Guys did, war has become less a scourge than a sport.

Most importantly, if few Americans are harmed, the electorate doesn't viscerally feel that lives have been lost. The negative feedback that discourages wasting lives never gets rolling.

What does this mean for American foreign policy? The people are coming to believe that we can apply military force without putting our sons and daughters at risk. Our leaders must be more tempted to strike at countries before all diplomatic options are exhausted. They know the public is unlikely to oppose an action where no Americans are in danger. Mass protests don't form if the masses are largely unaffected by the situation.

It is perhaps fortunate that for all the damage done to other nations, their policies remain basically unchanged. Strange days indeed, when the best argument against militarily engaging a foreign power isn't the human cost, but the price/performance ratio.

Recklessness is another danger of the Age of Free War. Interventionism is a dangerous policy, and it only becomes more so if the interventionist believes that they are invulnerable. There are nations that can kill U. S. servicemen in conflict. Even if our forces are unstoppable conventionally, and I don't believe that they are, China and Russia may not be opposed to using a tactical nuclear weapon if they are frustrated enough. There's a lot of margin for error with that big a bat.

I don't think that the protesters will be so hard to rally if U. S. servicemen are being nuked for questionable reasons, and that's just where the Age of Free War could lead us. Let's hope we have the sense to elect leaders that won't force us to learn that lesson.