

● Battleship America

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Most Americans, like most people in the world for the past hundred years, have lived with the threat of war hanging over them, or have been in actual combat.

For my generation in the home of the brave, which grew up in the shadow of the mushroom cloud, there has never been a time when our country was not either directly at war (aka "police action") or funding client nations to use made-in-America bombs and other weapons to do our dirty work for us.

Like many kids, I grew up playing war games that idealized mayhem and mass destruction. Brainwashed by the glory projected by John Wayne images of the "greatest generation," we were ripe for the Cold War propaganda coming from Washington and Wall St.

When I was eleven or twelve, with the Berlin Airlift fresh in memory and the Korean War just underway, some friends and I, on summer vacation from grade school where we had been drilled in taking cover (totally useless, as we later learned) on our knees, under our desks, hands over the backs of our heads, convinced that freedom and liberty depended on us, deciding that it was up to us to defend Toledo from the imminent Communist invasion, dug a 50-foot long, three foot wide, four foot deep trench in the empty lot across the street from my house, covered it with old doors and dirt, leaving slots for observation and gunports, and there took up our daily stand, dressed in surplus WW II outfits we bought from the army surplus store with our allowances.

A few years later, about to graduate from high school and turn eighteen and eligible for the draft, having by then gotten to know some of the GIs who had returned from Korea and were getting their high school diplomas on the GI bill, and having some idea that there might be more to life than the glory of blood and guts, some new friends and I started making plans for which underground routes we would take north when our letters from the Draft Board arrived.

I was lucky: mine never did arrive, and I went on to college and marriage until, at the height of the Vietnam debacle, I dropped out of both, increasingly involved in The Resistance and in search of a life that would embody my more complex understanding of patriotism--a love of country that was not based on the death of others, that found my enemies not in people of color in foreign nations or in this one but in arms merchants and other war profiteers, in Presidents and presidential candidates who lied about life and death matters, in business-minded civilians who relentlessly carried out the ruthless war on our natural environment, our real estate, in what was obviously the flip side of the coin.

It was in the 80s and 90s, lobbying for environmental protection in Washington, that I came hard up against the firm control that Congressional hawks and Pentagon operatives had over legislative and regulatory programs and budgets. It was that I realized for the first time how completely American politics, like the American economy, like America's self-image, is based on war--not only on production of bombs and fighter jets and other weapons of destruction, but on

twisted notions of American exceptionalism, on inflated ideas of America as the world's policeman, on free trade protectionism and fantasies of eternal economic growth.

Following our trail of atrocities in Central America, our path of environmental mayhem from tropical forest to melting icecaps, for the past quarter century we've been playing out our king of the mountain war games in the Middle East. The land of blood and oil.

The land where US presidents with faltering ratings in the polls, with egos in need of bolstering, resort to shock and awe and the same old same old blood and guts jingoism, war economy stimulus, and corporate profits. The land where our tweeter-in-chief, like his predecessors, is set to affirm his hold on the oval office, the office that history teaches us deserves more respect than the man.