

Why We Seek War: Why is America in so Many Wars?

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America is “a nation that seeks war” and if it doesn’t change it could end up destroying itself, a law school dean warns.

Given all the wars the United States has waged, “It is preposterous but true that we do not see ourselves as a nation that seeks war,” writes Lawrence Velvel, dean of the Massachusetts School of Law at Andover. “We see ourselves as a peace loving nation” and that message is constantly drummed into the public by government and media.

Since World War Two, an indisputably necessary conflict, Velvel points out the U.S. has fought the Korean War, the Viet Nam War, secret wars in Laos and Cambodia, the First Gulf War, Afghanistan, and the Second Gulf War in Iraq. It has also invaded, bombed or “quarantined” Panama, Grenada, Cuba, Haiti, Somalia, the Sudan, Bosnia, Kosovo, Serbia and Libya, and has “declared” a global war on terrorists.

“If the United States were a man instead of a country, we would say he must be schizophrenic, or at minimum deeply mentally disturbed, to believe he is peace loving in the face of a record like this,” Velvel writes in “The Long Term View,” a journal of informed opinion published by his law school.

Velvel further notes the U.S. today spends more on military than perhaps all the rest of the world put together and definitely more than the next 21 highest-spending nations combined, including China, Russia, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and Israel.

Not only do Americans always appear to be at war but they believe they fight only in good causes, he writes. “We believe we at all times fight only to do God’s work, and that we therefore have to fight or democracy, freedom, and economic affluence will be lost,” Velvel writes. He says truth cannot be permitted to intrude “because it would destroy our self image.”

“Certainly much of the rest of the world—probably most of the rest of the world—does not see us as peaceloving.” Gulf War II, Velvel notes, is having the opposite impact on public opinion the U.S. intended. “It has caused Muslims—the Arab ‘street,’ in particular—to hate our guts even more than they already did.”

Among the reasons USA fights so often, Velvel writes, are economic imperialism, a desire to remain preeminent, the glorification of war by the media, hubris, the stupidity of the nation’s leaders and the failure to prosecute them for their war crimes, and the inability to learn from past errors.

Writing of economic imperialism, Velvel reminds that in 1898 Americans realized the nation's capacity to produce had outrun the domestic market's capacity to consume and that a vibrant economy required overseas markets and coaling stations for the Navy warships that would protect overseas trade. "Nothing has really changed, except that today we call it globalization and defend it as bringing wealth to all when in fact it has worsened the dire poverty of many."

Gulf War I, he writes, "was fought for oil, not to stop tyranny despite President Bush 1's lying efforts to portray it as a fight for freedom in Kuwait—which is at best an autocracy."

Velvel judges that many, if not most, Americans "are loathe to admit that we are an imperialist power, but it inarguably has been true since 1898. (Year of the Spanish-American War.)"

He goes on to warn that, "It is only we, not any enemy, who are going to end up crippling our own country through constant warfare if we do not get off the warmongering kick we have been on for at least 100 years." Velvel quotes President Lincoln's words on the subject that, "If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide."

Author Velvel says the idea that the U.S. favors war too much and engages in military action too much does not mean that he is a pacifist. "It (this article) is based not on a view that we must never kill anyone, but rather on the view that we too often choose to kill people—far too many people—and that we do so for insufficient reasons, with far too few good results and, too often, very bad results."

The Massachusetts School of Law at Andover is a non-profit law school purposefully dedicated to the education of students from minority, immigrant, and low-income households who would otherwise not have the opportunity to obtain a legal education.

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