

Goodbye War...?

A few brief comments to help put “Goodbye War” in context:

This video was made in the 1980’s, prior to the demise of the USSR as the one major nuclear threat to the free world. Since the breakup of that totalitarian regime during the tumultuous years, 1989-1991, the United States has emerged as the world’s single superpower. Initially, then, it may appear that this video is outdated. But in the last decade we have seen the emergence of new nation states and so-called “rogue regimes” which have or are about to have some kind of weapons of mass destruction – and the capability to deliver those weapons over significant distances. (The nuclear countries currently include the U.S., Russia, Great Britain, France, India, Pakistan, and possibly Israel, China, North Korea, and Iran.) Thus there has been a shift in the equation – from a past in which two superpowers were in a tense oppositional standoff, threatening one another with such massive nuclear destruction that neither side was willing to risk open warfare, to a present in which smaller, but equally lethal weapons of mass destruction are more widely distributed among nation-states, “peoples,” and terrorist groups of varying instability and unpredictability. These groups may be much more likely to threaten the use of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction – and since their use might be considered less massive and more contained, they may actually become actively used as instruments of foreign policy – or war – or terrorism.

Thus it turns out that this video, which may have been seen as *passé* during the 1990’s, has most unfortunately become even more relevant today.

We are seeing this video for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that some of the past events you will be witnessing are eerily and perhaps alarmingly too reminiscent of events which currently are unfolding before our eyes on a daily basis, right now.

A word or two about some of the people interviewed, in order to provide some basis for assigning validity or weight to their views:

- Paul Fussell, professor of English, author of a number of books about war including *The Great War and Modern Memory* (considered a classic analysis of the First World War), *Thank God for the Atomic Bomb and Other Essays*, and *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War*.

- William Manchester, professor of history, author of several books about war including *American Caesar* (a biography of General MacArthur) and *Goodbye Darkness* (a memoir of his experience as a U.S. Marine in the Second World War).

- General Sir Arthur “Bomber” Harris, the controversial British Air Marshal and Commander-in-Chief of the RAF’s Bomber Command in World War Two who devised the technique of saturation or area bombing of German cities.

Things to Think About & Mull Over

What is a nation?

What is a people?

What does it mean to be an American?

What does it mean to have a “homeland?” Prior to 9/11/01 did you think of yourself as having a homeland?

The President of the United States is required by law to be an American citizen — that is why he (or she) has to be an American. But should the President have to be an American? And if so, why? (The distinction we are working with here is between the legal imperative and a moral or social imperative.)

What is sovereignty (i.e., what does it consist of)?

What portion of your individual or primary group sovereignties are you willing to give up? To whom are you willing to give them up, and under what conditions?

Where do you (as an individual) stop and somebody else begins? In other words, where do you draw a line around yourself?

Where do “we” (as a group) stop and everyone else begin? (Likewise.)

What should be those boundaries where I or we stop and something/everything else begins?

How should those boundaries be established and maintained?

Which of the readings — or portion of the readings — raises questions for you or brings you up short or that disturbs some opinion that you hold in regard to nationality or nationalism. Think about that selection and your responses to it. Why does it attract your attention? What does it make you think about? How open are you to moving around that topic and tentatively thinking differently about it? Where do you come out in your musings...?