

War and responsibility

I continue to be enthralled with Fred Reed's uncommon good sense regarding the complex interplay between the military and civilian mind. In his Jan. 15 column about "The people," Reed presents the most important truth of all — that each of us is personally responsible for the violence done by our leaders.

This unpalatable view is not new. The existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre accurately observed that "a community event which suddenly bursts forth and involves me in it does not come from the outside." Whether the community is national or global, our elected leaders act properly on the principle that what we do not oppose, we approve.

Reed's thesis regarding our collective "bloodthirstyness" explains why those who advocate violence as an early "solution" to vexing international problems are never called upon to account for their mistakes, while those who advocate patience, tolerance and negotiation have to justify themselves forever. The architects of the Vietnam War are still respected members of society, and Jane Fonda is still hated by millions.

We cannot avoid responsibility for the consequences of our government's actions in the world. If war results from our studied ignorance, or from our captivation by jingoistic sloganeering, we cannot argue with Sartre's conclusion: "We have the war we deserve."

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