



Around this time last year, when I was visiting the United States, I saw a glimpse of what it meant to be facing the heavy armament of the US military forces while I stood, a coloured foreigner, at the rim of the cascading waters of what is now termed "Ground Zero".

The National Guard descended to protect property and control frustrated demonstrators. I remember watching what I assume was a lieutenant's boots strike the ground as he exited a darkened windowed Humvee in the direction of a riot police line. Behind him sat several other Humvees and soldiers in full combat armour. He was around 6' 5." His face was expressionless. His little exposed skin was pale. He walked about the apocalyptic scene with a certainty I probably will never forget. It will also be a struggle to forget the sight of him quickly order his team about. Everybody in this unit moved robotically, assembling themselves along the wide road. Before anyone knew it they had completely taken the street.

Protesters in democracies acquired ground wherever there was no assault present. There has only been a couple of times in my life when I felt a sense of powerlessness, coupled with absolute clarity. This day, the sheer weight of witnessed oppression were like sandbags on my chest. National Guard Service is not particularly referenced in the likes of an evening's dose of National Nine News. They are presented as a subtle form of militarism, albeit a sanitised version.

In that moment I sunk into my thoughts and entertained what it would be like to live in an obscure third world location outside of America, and have a war machine gallop through it. I knew this was a stark reality that hundreds of thousands of people live with, in "theatres" around the world. Militarized police are one thing. But a fully equipped death battalion added a fresh cartridge of imagined trauma to my mind.

As talks of proxy-war in the Mid-East, nuclear capability of "rogue" states, and the absence of emotional intelligence put news coverage in a self-justifying bind, at least for now, I am reminded of a sub-Saharan proverb, "When elephants fight, it is the ground that suffers." And beyond anything designable in our imagination about what lies ahead for those people, we know with a surety, that the ordinary Western citizen's palate has been nurtured to appreciate a good clash of powers whenever conven-



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ient.

All the beacon of democracy needs is a character to direct its frustration or animus towards. Earlier, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, then Syria and now nuclear-equipped Korea are being positioned perfectly for this movie's plot. Whether or not it ends up being a grand box office smash hit, depends on American people as audience, purchasing the ideological tickets.

Before this year, in almost every poll the Trump following teetered at about a one third approval rating. Recently we saw airstrikes target Syria. In the designer's

# MILITARISATION: THE IMAGINED ROMANCE AND PALPABLE HORROR

pipeline we have a brewing nuclear cold-war actually being instigated through social media like Twitter. It's almost surreal to contemplate.

A victorious hubris and triumphant euphoria is what movies like American

the screens of Broadway portray an unreal depiction of what war actually involves.

They attempt to instill that all the hideousness of war are a mere afterthought, just as long as there is a formidable and vilified enemy propped up to

ously enraptured thoughts of parading lustily into the sunset, automatic rifle or AK47 in hand, country in heart.

It has been more like a bewildered spectator, sitting on the banks of a road in Pamplona too close to the running of the bulls, where at any unpre-



Sniper created for its flag-waving and adoring patrons who helped it become number one a few years ago, grossing hundreds of millions in sales. Those who direct such movies are usually household relics of all things coarsely patriotic, often depicting

misplaced heroism in foreign lands, recording "kills" somewhat akin to British civil servants in Asian and African colonies jostling for supremacy in recording the highest number of innocent wild elephants or tigers felled, with trophy heads decorating their mansion walls.

Unfortunately for the viewing public, the stories often brewed "traditional" family values, the astute love of country, varied forms of post-traumatic stress disorders that deny victims of "normal" lives, and glorified bloodshed of foreign civilians into their narratives. Movies festooning

ally against, with vigour and swelling national pride. In that environment it would not matter if budgets are pruned in health, education or social welfare schemes.

It does not even fracture gullible and bible-thumping constituencies even if their precious sons and daughters are sent to perish in foreign lands, while killing women, children, the elderly and sick who might be found in the wrong place when emotions run high. What matters is that America's ravenous appetite with "winning" and "being top dog" can to be periodically fed.

I might represent an odd minority when in this awesome country of massive buildings, gas-guzzling limousines and an appetite for the good life. I join a minority that has looked out at American military campaigns throughout its delinquent life with strained and twisted necks. War for us, whose countrymen and women weathered a separatist civil war that was fed and inflamed by assorted foreign interest groups, is not peppered with glori-

dictable moment one of the behemoth creatures can turn its murderous horns on you. For many of us from Sri Lanka there is hardly anything entertaining about endless sieges, cease-fires, peace-talks and helpless civilians being subjected to all the ignominy, denigration and destitution that war embodies. A person in my predicament, seeing the all-pervasive machinations of brute force against demonstrations only sees utility preparing for unintended blows, violently or systemically, always on the poor, disenfranchised and most vulnerable.

Two convergent energies need to be subdued in the psyche of man, to ensure our world is not eclipsed by man-made devices; they are the love of war, and the love of profitable war. It means that Americans in particular will have to look at themselves in convex mirrors and acknowledge the distortions. It requires foremost, that America acquire a taste for peace rather than the glory of power.