

For Most Americans, U.S. Defense and Foreign Affairs Take Place in a Parallel Universe

Americans have a unique advantage (or disadvantage, depending on how one looks at it) in experiencing their nation's defense and foreign affairs, namely, that for the great majority such affairs take place "over there" somewhere, often in a place they can't locate on a map and about which they know approximately nothing. They don't have to smell the smoke and the decomposing bodies. They don't have to hide in holes while their homes are demolished by bombs, rockets, and artillery. Because they have so little first-hand experience, they are vulnerable to being bamboozled by what their leaders tell them about what's going on halfway around the world.

The leaders themselves don't know much, either, notwithstanding the great sums they expend on gathering and analyzing information. Top leaders more or less ignore this intelligence and make their decisions on more personal, immediate, and political grounds. But they don't need to know much in any event, because they have great power, and even if they don't really know much about places X, Y, and Z, they can still drop bombs on those places, claim credit for protecting the American people, and hope the situation does not unravel too visibly before the next election.