

Paradigm Shift

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By David T. Jones

I. Introduction

The following essay is by David T. Jones, a retired senior US State Department foreign service officer who served as political counselor in Ottawa, Canada from 1992-1996 and foreign affairs advisor to the Army Chief of Staff from 1989-1992. Mr. Jones argues that the September 11 attacks require a fundamental paradigm shift from the emphasis on prevention of high-tech attacks to a more fundamental understanding of the attitude of suicide bombers. He maintains that the US must respond militarily to protect its society, even if that means killing innocent civilians in the process.

II. Essay By David T. Jones

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We were trapped by our paradigm. Ever since "modern " terrorism began approximately 33 years ago with the assassination of U.S. ambassador Gordon Mein, experts have been constructing programs to handle the endless sequence of hijackings and hostage taking. After briefly endorsing the "no negotiation" policy, experts determined from the psychological patterns of the hostage takers that negotiations would be more productive to resolve the crises and save lives. The hostage takers/hijackers invariably wanted something: money; prisoners released; a manifesto published; a trip to Cuba. So over the years, a "book" was devised and experts trained. Hostage takers were expected to be extremely tense, so action was designed to reassure them, avoid confrontation, even to imply sympathy. Bargains were offered: food/water, etc. for release of a few hostages. Officials sought to establish a relationship with the hostage takers that would lead them to surrender without loss of life. Apparently, some comparable pattern developed on the hijacked airliners. The premise was that the hostage takers wanted something negotiable; this time all they wanted was our lives.

It was not "high tech" but low tech that murdered our citizens. Not surface to air missiles, or nerve gas, or biological agents. But "low tech" skillfully applied with persistent planning and total

dedication throughout a large network of agents. This approach was adopted not to exploit high technology but to counter it; indeed, only our high technology has made it possible, despite the appalling intelligence failure, to begin to unravel the elements of the plot. And, incidentally, it was "high tech" that permitted passengers on the doomed jetliner to realize what was happening and stimulate their "low tech" response--to try to kill the killers before they could strike Washington again.

In World War II, American military had problems comprehending the attitude of Japanese soldiers. Although the kamikaze suicide pilots are the most memorable phenomenon, most Japanese military regarded surrender as dishonorable and suicide--particularly if killing more of the enemy was possible--a positive objective if outright victory was not possible. Japanese brutality and indifference to the lives of their subjects was legendary. They were masters of the banzai suicide attack and the false surrender. There was little room for the standard Rules of War. We learned to help Japanese along in their desire for death; in Pacific Island fighting prisoners were few. Only 50 years after the fact--when likelihood of prosecution for war crimes has declined considerably--have war memoirs begun to allude to such killing. More recently we experienced the frisson of media excitement over the revelation that former Senator Bob Kerry may have killed Vietnamese civilians while leading a clandestine nighttime raid deep into Viet Cong territory. That Vietnamese civilians died was indisputable; in question was whether they died accidentally or deliberately. Without judging the accuracy of the story, then Lt. Kerry would have jeopardized the survival of his unit had the civilians been left alive to indicate to Viet Cong cadres the direction his retreating unit had taken. Is it immoral to be more concerned about the survival of your comrades than that of enemy civilians?

We are going to have to relearn these lessons. In the coming war against terrorism, the question of who is "innocent" will be asked in many individual encounters, and the Rules of War may be more breached than honored. When terrorists come from one ethnic/religious group, it is realistic--not prejudiced or "profiling"--to investigate members of such a group more carefully than those in other ethnic/religious groups. Perhaps those who criticize such a revelation should attempt being a Christian in Afghanistan--before 11 September. The alternative to getting our hands dirty and taking the consequences is to die as a society--constantly attempting to defend against assaults while arguing that only a court of law can provide "real justice." In a fight, you use the rules indicated: Marquis of Queensbury or gutter. The U.S. would rather be impolite than see more of its citizens die.

For 45 years after the end of World War II, we faced a complex challenge. The juxtaposition of communism against free democracy engaged two powers with the potential to hideously damage if not absolutely destroy global civilization. For decades we edged toward and then away from the precipice of mutual assured destruction. To a degree our survival in freedom depended on our willingness to contemplate societal suicide rather than accept societal slavery. If this description sounds like Apocalypse, it was. American diplomats and military personnel spent careers recognizing that their personal efforts, even in tertiary theaters such as Africa or South America, could be pivotal in sustaining freedom for the United States and its friends and allies. That we not only survived but by 1991 had prevailed with minimum damage to individual freedom and liberty was an astonishing success.

We were granted 10 years off for good behavior. Consequently, most of the currently emerging generation has lived in what may ultimately be regarded as the "best of times." The past decade has seen the strongest world economy in 50 years. In the West, we enjoyed rising income levels; falling unemployment; low inflation; budget surpluses and debt/tax reduction. We interpreted a global vacation as the beginning of an endless summer. Instead, historians may view this turn of the millennium period as akin to the Edwardian era immediately prior to World War I when 19th century life styles reached a zenith of social and personal comfort.

We have just finished a three-day paroxysm of public anguish and mourning. The United States has been ministered to by grief counselors in the guise of TV talking heads. Every heartstring has been plucked; every family member willing to share emotions has had air-time to do so. Flags wave everywhere and the news media is filled with strong words. For most it has been memorably stirring, for others probably self indulgently mawkish. Our leadership has acted with calculation to develop a consensus that while it is fine to be remembered, it will be better to be revenged. Nevertheless, it is realistic rather than cynical to predict that currently high levels of domestically and internationally support will last until the Administration actually does something specific.

What comes next and when? We are barely seeing the tip of the iceberg; but it begins to look as if there will be something "quick" followed by more action, perhaps much more, "slow." Media eyes will focus on the drama of military action, but even more important will be a comprehensive restructuring of intelligence collection, immigration and visa procedures, privacy rights, access to financial information, etc. designed to make it harder for those whose hatreds will never be blunted to be limited in what their hatred can accomplish.

We need something "quick" to satisfy the immediate need for action; but we need "slow" action to accomplish something lasting. It took 6 months to build up to Desert Shield/Desert Storm, and that action was based on a larger U.S. military and substantial military reserve mobilization. There is an extended series of countries beside Afghanistan (Iraq, Sudan, Libya), where leadership is implacably opposed to the United States as well as to democracy and human rights as taken for granted in the West. Their denials of complicity in 11 September may be correct, but strike one as irrelevant. They have sponsored terrorism in the past and, if given an opportunity, will do so tomorrow.

To suggest that our response will be without loss of "innocent life" would be naive. The terrorists took fatal advantage of our welcoming and open society; they benefited from virtually endless opportunities to learn and study and travel. They employed their wealth not to assist those they claim to represent, but murder our citizens. A response that kills the innocent as well as the guilty still kills the guilty.

Our old paradigm has failed. The endless summer has ended. Getting back to "normal" has a different tone if "normal" now includes terror on the magnitude of 11 September. Or will we consider it a victory if the next team of terrorists seizes only one airliner and hits only one target? The Cold War was once characterized as a "protracted conflict" fought across time and space; the effort against state sponsored terrorism will require comparable commitment.

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