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# Our New Old Enemies

RALPH PETERS

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Our enemies of the future will be enemies out of the past. As the US armed forces put their faith and funding behind ever more sophisticated combat systems designed to remove human contact from warfare, mankind circles back to the misbehaviors of yesteryear. Technologies come and go, but the primitive endures. The last decade of this millennium has seen genocide, ethnic cleansing, the bloody rending of states, growing religious persecution, the ascendancy of international crime, an unprecedented distribution of weaponry, and the persistence of the warrior--the man of raw and selfish violence--as a human archetype. In the 1990s, our Gulf War was the sole conventional conflict of note. Both lopsided and inconclusive, it confirmed the new military paradigm: The United States is unbeatable on a traditional battlefield, but that battlefield is of declining relevance.

We have failed to ask the most basic military question: *Who is our enemy?* Our ingrained response when asked such a question is to respond with the name of a country--ten years ago it was the Soviet Union, while today China is the answer preferred by lazy analysts and defense contractors anxious to sell the unnecessary to the uncritical. We are desperate for enemies who make sense to us, who certify our choices and grant us clarity of purpose. But the age of warfare between states is waning--it may return, but it is not the preeminent military challenge of the coming decades. We must ask that question, "Who is our enemy?" on a much deeper level. We must study the minds and souls of violent men, seeking to understand them on a level our civilization has avoided for 2,000 years. We can no longer blame atrocities and the will to violence on the devil, or on mistaken ideologies, or even on childhood deprivations. None of the cherished explanations suffice. In this age of technological miracles, our military needs to study mankind.

Morally, the best among us may be those who argue for disarmament. But they are mistaken. The heart of the problem is not the weapon, but the man who builds and wields it. Were we to eliminate all weapons of mass destruction, as well as every last handgun and pocketknife, the killers among us would take up wooden clubs or rocks. The will to violence is within us--it is not merely a function of the availability of tools.

Man, not space, is the last frontier. We must explore him.

It should not surprise us that religions have done a better job of locating man's desires and impulses than have secular analysts, whether Hegel, Freud, or media critics. Religions handle the raw clay, and only those that address all of man's potential shapes survive. We are defined by the full range of our desires and behaviors, not only by those worthy of emulation. Successful religions grasp our totality (and our fears). While social orders are concerned with surface effects, religions look within. And every major religion has a prohibition against killing. There would be no need for such rules were man not a killer by nature.

In the Judeo-Christian heritage, there is a commandment believers credit directly to the writing finger of God: "Thou shalt not kill." Think about that. Overall, the Ten Commandments did a remarkable job of cataloging human frailty. As behavioral rules they are as valid for today's techno-civilization as they were for the dreary near-Orient of 3,000 years ago. Those prohibitions acknowledged the most destructive things that we humans are apt to do, and they warned us not to do them. The warning not to kill was the bluntest commandment.

For the moment, lay aside the concept of the Old Testament as a sacred book and consider it as a documentary of human behavior: It is drenched in violence, and its moral tenets arose in response to a violent world. It begins with the plight of two refugees--Adam and Eve--and moves swiftly to the fratricide of their children. In book after book, we encounter massacre, genocide, ethnic cleansing, rape, plunder, kidnapping, assassination, ineradicable hatreds, and endless warfare. The fall of civilizations is reported with a merciless eye, and cities vanish with a terse comment. It

sounds like the 20th century: Humanity is consistent.

Historians, however, are inconsistent. Today, we have moved away from our earlier view of civilization as a process of constant improvement, with Western civilization as man's crowning achievement. Yet, the most vociferous multiculturalists and anti-modernists, who imagine virtue for all that is foreign, still insist thoughtlessly that humankind is perfectible, if only we would take the latest scholarship on the mating habits of aborigines more seriously. I do not believe that Man has improved. There is no evidence for it. Are we better than Christ, the Buddha, or Mohammed, better than Socrates, Ulug Begh, Maimonides, or Saint Francis? Fashions, conveyances, medicines, communications, and the sophistication of governmental structures have all evolved. Man has not. Man is the constant. Saddam is Pharoah, and Cain will always be with us.

I have chosen religious texts and figures as examples because you know them and they resonate. Is there a more powerful cautionary myth for a military man than that of Cain and Abel? Throughout both Testaments, we encounter violent actors and soldiers. They face timeless moral dilemmas. Interestingly, their social validity is not questioned even in the Gospels. Although the New Testament is often ambivalent toward soldiers, the thrust of the texts is to improve rather than abolish the soldiery. It is assumed that soldiers are, however regrettably, *necessary*. In the Book of Luke, soldiers approach John the Baptist asking, "What shall we do?" John does not tell them to put aside their arms. Rather, he answers them, "Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages." Would that the generals and admirals involved in procurement heeded that advice today.

The Bible does not sugarcoat man's nature. Faith is not required--read it as a secular history and you will get a better picture of the very human enemies our soldiers will face in the next century than any work of contemporary scholarship or speculation provides. From child warriors to fanatics who revel in slaughter, man's future is written in man's past.

Still, if you are uneasy with the Old Testament as a catalog of human behaviors, substitute another work, the *Iliad*. It is the fountainhead of our civilization's secular literature. That epic begins with an argument over raping rights, proceeds through slaughter and betrayal, and has genocide as its goal. It is about the wreckage of Yugoslavia.

In our staff and war colleges, we still read Thucydides--not for the history, but for the immediacy. Has there been another historian since the Greek twilight who matched his wonder at man's stubborn imperfection, at his ineradicable nature?

Literature is history with the truth left in. I believe we can profit from the study of the classical texts as never before. The veneer of civilization, so recent and fragile, is being stripped from much of the world. The old problems are today's problems--and tomorrow's. If we want to know "Who is our enemy?" we must look within.

Mankind is a constant in a changing world. We love the familiar, and find change hard. The conflicts in which our military will engage in the coming years will have many topical causes; at bottom, however, there will be only two: Man's nature, and the effects of change upon him.

### **The Muezzin and the Microchip**

Whether or not we as individuals believe in a divine being, we can recognize religion as the most supple and consistently effective behavior-modification tool available to mankind. Now if you study religions--and the soldier who does not know what his enemy believes fights blindly--you will find that virtually all of them have two myths in common: a creation myth and the myth of a lost golden age. The need for a creation story to explain our origins is self-evident--it responds to the adult counterpart of the child who wants to know where his little sister came from. But the myth of a lost golden age, of the white and shining temple before the fall, is directly relevant to understanding our enemies.

We live in an age of unprecedented change. This is statistical fact. Never before has so much happened on so many levels with such breathtaking speed. Developments in a wide range of disciplines tumble over one another in a practical and psychological avalanche. Whether we speak of social structures and gender relations, medicine, communications and the utility of information, the changing nature of work and wealth, convenience and the shape of

the inhabited landscape, or the sheer revolution of choice available to our citizens, our society has undergone a greater degree of intense and layered change than has any human system in history. It is a tribute to the robustness of our civilization that we have coped so well with change thus far. Other civilizations and cultures (and some individuals everywhere) are less resilient and are not coping effectively; in fact, they are decaying. And the decay of a culture is the human equivalent of the decay of atomic particles.

We live in an age when even the most adept, confident man or woman feels the earth shifting underfoot. In the parlance of strategic theorists, change is destabilizing. In the experience of the human being enduring it, change is confusing, threatening, and often hurtful. In the great scheme of things, most change turns out to be positive for most people. But it is only rarely so perceived.

Especially as we grow older, our eyes play tricks on us--we are more likely to see that which is lost than that which is gained. How often do we hear our colleagues, friends, or relatives complain about the passing of the good old days or how much better things were under the old boss (forgetting how that boss was resented during his or her tenure)?

Experience is of two kinds: that which we undergo, and that which we remember. Those "good old days" were not better. If Man has not developed much, his (and certainly her) opportunities have. But we long for the certainty of that which we have known, suffered, and survived--especially when it lies at a safe distance. When I was a kid, a drugstore in my hometown displayed a poster showing a little boy lowering a bucket into a well. The print read, "Remember how sweet the water was from the old well? It was the leading cause of typhoid fever." I have never encountered a more succinct description of man's relationship to change. In our memories, we sweeten the waters of the past and erase the dirt and the sickness from the myths we make of our experience.

### **Men Fight for Myths, Not for Truth**

Those myths of the lost golden age are most seductive in turbulent times. In the ferocity, confusion, and competition of the moment, we *need* to believe that things were not always so hard or so unfair, that there was a time of greater kindness and justice, when man's better qualities prevailed--and that such an epoch might return, if only we take the correct actions. Whether a radicalized mullah aching to turn back the clock to the days of the great caliphs, or a weekend militiaman in the American midwest longing for the surety of a misremembered childhood, the impulse to believe that times were better once upon a time is universal.

The experience of change and the consequent impulse to gild the past is a timeless element of the human saga. I wrote above that we live in an age of unprecedented change. This is true. Yet, it is also true that men and women in past ages lived through their own times of unprecedented change. They, too, felt the earth shake beneath their feet and heard the heavens rumble. Accounts of the early days of the locomotive and telegraph are packed with wonder and warning. An early weapon of mass destruction, the crossbow, was outlawed in its time by secular authorities and by the Pope. Poets have always wept over the prosaic nature of their own ages, when the beauty of the past lay murdered by the practical. Can we imagine the shock of the arrival of bronze weapons on the people of the ancient Middle East? How the villager must have recoiled from the stench and temptation of the rising city. The first wooden cask would have excited mockery and the insistence by the old guard that wine was meant to ferment in clay pots and that was that. The potato, the most revolutionary food in modern history, terrified Europeans when it was first imported, inspiring the belief that it caused leprosy, among other diseases. The information is lost to us now, but try to imagine the shock the first laws codified by a state had upon ancient populations governed until then by custom and fear of the supernatural. For that matter, imagine the shock a legitimate, enforced code of law would have upon Russia or Mexico today.

With man's inherent fear of change, it is astonishing how intensely we have developed our civilizations, if not ourselves. We have changed the world, but all we have changed about ourselves are our table manners.

The longing for the preservation or resurrection of an old order, real or fantastic, is the key to understanding much of the world's disorder. Even when our enemies are not personally motivated by the fear of change, it is the fears of their neighbors that grant those enemies opportunity. Wrapping themselves in the cloak of this convenient cause, they exploit any rupture between the governing and the governed, any gulf between a prospering "progressive" elite and the stagnating ranks of believers or traditionalist masses. The men who guide their followers to massacre understand the power of a call to the banner of nationalism, or an appeal to tribal supremacy, or an invitation to do some god's

cleansing work with fire and sword. Demagogues capitalize on the sense of a trust betrayed and the "evil" of the new. They are geniuses of blame. All of their failures, and the failures of all of their followers, will forever be the fault of someone else.

Men will fight to the death to cling to a just-bearable past rather than embrace a less certain future, no matter its potential.

In periods of great change, human beings respond by turning to religion and resuscitating tradition. In the age of science, the frightened turn to belief. Perhaps the truest of all our clichés is that "ignorance is bliss." Men and women do not want to know. They may be pleased to learn of the misfortunes of their neighbor--confessional television shows have their roots in tribal whispers--but they do not want to know that their way of life, of belief, of organizing, learning, producing, and fighting, is a noncompetitive bust. The greatest effect of this information age is that it makes the global masses aware of their inadequacy.

At the height of the British Empire, the average imperial subject had no idea how his rulers lived. Today, the poor of the world's slums have awakened to the lifestyles of the rich and famous, courtesy of television, film, video, radio, cassettes, the self-justifications of kinsmen who have gone abroad and failed, and appalling local journalism. They do not, of course, grasp our reality. But they believe they do. The America they see is so rich and powerful it must be predatory. It *must* have robbed them to grow so rich. It has no right to be so rich. And it is unjust that they should not be so rich.

The media create instant myth. An illusion of America arrives, courtesy of lurid television serials, exaggerating Western wealth, ease, and sexuality. There is no mention of the sufferings of our ancestors on the long road to contemporary prosperity, or even of the workaday lives of average Americans today. It is as if our riches had fallen from the skies. It is an unbearable spectacle to those who have not.

At the same time, those who watch from abroad, appetites growing, find themselves less and less able to compete with the American juggernaut. Economic structures, the decline in the relative value of muscle power, educational inadequacies, social prohibitions and counterproductive customs, the ineffectiveness of civil law . . . these things and more constrict the potential of other cultures to compete with the Great West--the United States and our most culturally agile allies. Even cultures that appeared poised to break out to near-equivalence with us, such as those of Southeast Asia, hit cultural ceilings--and such ceilings are made of iron, not glass.

Most analysis of the current plight of the Asian "tigers" focuses on economic issues, but the underlying problem is cultural: the human infrastructure could not support the level of success already achieved, let alone that which was desired. The most disappointing, and worrisome, aspect of the near-collapse of Asian economies was not the financial losses but the alacrity with which the disappointed states, leaders, and people blamed foreigners for their misfortunes, when the problems were transparently homemade. Some also blamed their own minorities, especially the overseas Chinese. In Indonesia, we saw the return of ethnic pogroms. Even our South Korean allies responded to economic crisis with a tantrum of xenophobia. Hatred and revenge are always more satisfying than a sense of responsibility for one's own failure.

When nations and their underlying cultures fail to qualify in today's hyper-competitive world, they first complain. Then, if there is no turnaround, they kill. Iraq did not invade Kuwait in a burst of self-confidence, but from fear of economic decline and future inabilities. Tomorrow's enemies will be of two kinds--those who have seen their hopes disappointed, and those who have no hope. Do not worry about a successful China. Worry about a failing China.

And even a failing China is unlikely to become the threat defense charlatans would have us believe. China is culturally robust. Our most frequent opponents will rise from cultures on the rocks. In our grim century, Russia and Germany grew most dangerous after systems of cultural organization failed. Above all, this means the Islamic world will be a problem for the foreseeable future, since it is unprepared to deal with the demands and mandatory freedoms of the post-modern age. Beyond that faded, failing civilization, watch out for other change-resistant cultures, from tribes and clans to states that never shook off feudal, agrarian mentalities. None of these will threaten our homes; abroad, however, they will threaten our preferred order and the extraction of the wealth that pays for our homes.

Contrary to the myths of the old, pitiful Left, the United States did not build its new cultural-economic empire on the backs of the world's workers and peasants. But, thanks to the information age, we will expand that empire at the expense of failing cultures, since the world insists on devouring our dross. The Left understood neither the timeline nor the dynamics of history. And today's shriveled Left--hardly more than a campus entertainment--still gets one thing hugely wrong: the notion of an American determination to impoverish others. The United States prefers *prosperous* markets--starving masses don't buy much software (and they really do work on the Western conscience). But we cannot force people to be successful.

Those who fall by the wayside in global competition will have themselves, and their ancestors, to blame.

### "Sherman, Set the Wayback Machine . . . "

With the anti-modern tide of fundamentalism that has swept away regimes and verities over the past two decades, we have come to accept, once again, that religious belief can turn violent. Yet, when we analyze our opponents, we insist on a hard, Joe Friday, "just the facts" approach that focuses on numbers, hardware, and, perhaps, a few of their leaders. We maintain a mental *cordon sanitaire* around military operations, ignoring the frightening effect of belief on our enemy's will and persistence. We accept the CNN reality of "mad mullahs" and intoxicated masses, yet we do not consider belief a noteworthy factor when assessing our combat opponents. Yet, only plagues and the worst personal catastrophes excite the religious impulse in man to the extent that war does.

The interplay of religion and military violence deserves books, not just a few paragraphs. But begin with what we know. In vague outline, we are all familiar with the Great Indian Mutiny, when the British East India Company's native levees, both Muslim and Hindu, reacted to a rumor that their new cartridges had been soiled with pig fat or beef lard by rising up and slaughtering their colonial overlords. While any Marxist will tell you there were structural factors at play in the Sepoy Mutiny and that the cartridges were but a catalyst, the fact remains that the most savage experience of the Victorian era was the butchery of the Mutiny--first the atrocities committed against British men, women, and children, then the slaughter perpetrated against the native population by the British, which was crueller still.

The Great Mutiny offers only a hint of the religious violence once extant in the British Empire. London's imperial history offers an interesting study for today's problems: the overwhelming force of industry-backed regiments against native masses, the shattering of established orders, the spiritual dislocations of the defeated . . . all this is replaying around us, and will play on into the next century at fast-forward speed. Notably, Britain's most embarrassing defeats of the 19th century were dealt the empire not by other organized militaries, but by true believers--whether the Zulus of South Africa, the ferocious holy warriors of Afghanistan, or the devout Calvinist Boers. Again and again, resistance to British influence or rule rallied around a religious identity, whether following the Mahdi in the Sudan or, in our own century, the Zionists struggling to recreate Israel. Our own national introduction to imperial combat involved a Chinese revivalist order, the "Fists of Righteousness," or Boxers, while in the Philippines the impassioned Muslim Moros proved a far tougher enemy for us than the conventional Spanish military.

And what of the role of belief within armies? It is a war-movie truism that the frightened and dying turn to the chaplain, but, if we argue individual cases, we might conclude this is evidence of desperation, not of a genuine propulsion toward belief. Yet, consider our own bloodiest conflict, the Civil War. It saw a widespread religious revival in blue ranks and gray--though as the South's condition worsened, the intensity of religious fervor in the Confederate armies grew extreme. Although it is unfashionable to say so, there is ample evidence that for many on both sides, this was a holy war. Certainly, the hungry, ill-clothed men in the Army of Northern Virginia fought with the determination of martyrs. Stonewall Jackson *entered* the war a religious extremist and fought with a holy warrior's dedication. Sherman was a secular fanatic produced by an age of belief. His march from Atlanta to the sea, then northward through the Carolinas, was a crusade executed with religious fervor, if without religious rhetoric. When we examine contemporary letters and reports, it is clear that God was very much with both sides.

This is an ancient phenomenon. Return to the *Iliad*. Read differently and more closely this time. Don't skim the long passages detailing sacrifices or the name-dropper poetry about squabbling gods. Look at what Homer tells us about belief in the ranks. The book begins with Agamemnon's defiance of the ordained order of things--a middle finger

thrust up not only at Achilles but at the gods. The Greek forces suffer for it. Plague sweeps them. The Trojans briefly turn the tide. *And the Greeks respond in terms of their religion.* The first step is not a new battlefield strategy, it is a religious revival. Even the king must be called to order. Penitence is in. Sacrifices must involve real sacrifice. Certainly, the return of Achilles to the fight boosts morale, but the Greeks also experience a renewed sense that the gods are on their side. Meanwhile, in threatened Troy, an otherworldly fatalism takes hold, dark prophecies ring out, and Priam and his people search for an explanation of their impending fall in the will of the gods.

Of course, we do not read the *Iliad* that way. It is not our habit; we shy away from manifestations of faith, suspecting or ignoring them, or, at best, analyzing them in the dehydrated language of the sociologist. But if we want to understand the warriors of the world and the fury that drives them, we had better open our minds to the power of belief.

In our own Western cultural history, the fiercest military brutalities and the most savage wars were fought over faith, whether the Crusades or defensive wars against Muslims, campaigns of suppression against dissenting Christians, the great religious wars of the 16th and, especially, 17th centuries, or the 20th century's world wars between secular religions.

Now our history is playing out in other flesh. When Indonesian rioters murder Chinese merchants, or when the Sudanese Muslims who hold power butcher and enslave the Christians in their country's south, their behavior is not inhuman. On the contrary, it is timelessly human.

Beware of any enemy motivated by supernatural convictions or great moral schemes. Even when he is less skilled and ill-equipped, his fervor may simply wear you down. Our military posture could not be more skewed. We build two-billion-dollar bombers, but we cannot cope with bare-handed belief.

### **The Shaman and the Gangster**

If the intoxicated believer is one dangerous extreme in the range of our enemies, the other is the man utterly free of belief, or fear of the law, or civilizing custom. When you encounter them together--the saint and the cynic in league--you have the most dangerous combination on earth. True believers and opportunists are a dynamic match, as many a successful televangelist instructs us. You see it in a sloppy fashion with Saddam Hussein and his belated attention to Islam, but also in the alliance between the current set of Kremlin bandits and the Orthodox Church.

From Algeria's religious terrorists to politicians anywhere who align themselves with religious movements whose convictions they privately do not share, it is often difficult for us to determine where the prophet ends and the profiteer begins, how much is about faith and how much about grabbing power. In such cases, we tend to err on the side of cynicism, preferring to impute base motives to our enemies (even as we imagine that those enemies are somehow redeemable). But slighting either side of the equation, the human potential for cynicism or for belief, brings us only half-answers. In conflict, the saint and the cynic can complete each other without consciously understanding why their alliance works so well; together they combine the qualities of the cobra and the chameleon.

The most difficult thing for Americans in (and out of) uniform to face may be that even the most powerful military can, at most, briefly alter outward behaviors. We subdue belief only by killing the believer. From Somalia to Bosnia, the opportunist will bow to the threat of lethal power--until you turn your back. But no display of might will change the essence either of the man driven by God, or of the man driven by greed.

We have entered another age when empires begin to learn their limits. While America has and will maintain informational dominance, we cannot dictate which information will be accepted and acted upon by foreign populations. We can flood them with our culture, shock them into doubt, and sell them our wares, but we cannot make them behave as we would like . . . unless we are willing to commit brutalities on a scale that would destroy our own myth of ourselves.

Certainly, if sufficiently provoked, we are capable of killing plentifully and with enthusiasm. But such events are exceptional. In their balance and wisdom, the American people will fight genuine enemies, but they would not countenance the unprovoked slaughter of foreign populations over distant misbehaviors. The mark of our civilization's

greatness is a simple but rare one: at this point in our social development, we would rather do good than evil, so long as it doesn't cost too much. It is a surprisingly scarce quality.

In other regions of the globe, there is less interest in the inviolability of the individual. We face enemies whose sole motivation to refrain from killing is the fear of being killed. Nothing else moves them. It is difficult for Americans, with our lack of historical knowledge and our confused notion of the validity of all cultures, to grasp the richness of hatred in this world. For all of our alarm over crime, most Americans live in an astonishingly safe environment. We are not threatened, and we behave cooperatively and corporately. But our safety is both the result of and contributor to our insularity. We lead sheltered lives. And we imagine that the rest of the world is just like us, only less privileged.

## **Hatred**

But the rest of the world is not like us. For all of our lingering prejudices, we have done a remarkable job of subduing our hatreds. Perhaps it is only the effect of wealth bounded by law that makes us such a powerful exception to history, but our lack of domestic faction is a miracle nonetheless. We are indescribably fortunate, but our good fortune has lulled us into our primary military and diplomatic weakness: we do not understand the delicious appeal of hatred.

We cannot understand how Serbs and Kosovar Albanians, Croats and Bosnian Muslims could do that to each other. We cannot understand how Hutus and Tutsis could do that to each other. We do not understand how the Chinese could do that to the Tibetans. We do not understand how the Armenians and Azeris could do that to each other. We do not understand how the tribes of Sierra Leone or Liberia could do that to each other. We do not understand how India's Hindus and Muslims could do that to each other. We do not understand how the Russians and Chechens could do that to each other. We do not understand how Haitians, Somalis, Colombians, Mexicans, Indonesians, Sri Lankans, Congolese, Burundians, or Irish could do that to each other . . . .

Over the years, I have written about "warriors"--the non-soldiers from guerrillas to narco-traffickers--whom we encounter and fight. In the past I stressed the importance of recognizing five types of warriors: the scum of the earth, the average Joe who is drawn into the conflict as it drags on, demobilized military men, opportunists, and true believers. Now I worry about only two of these sources of conflict: the opportunists and the believers, the gangsters and the godly, the men unrestrained by morals and those whose iron morality is implacable. They are the centers of gravity. The others are swept along by the tide.

## **Man, the Killer**

Of all the notions I have advanced over the years, the only one that has met with consistent rejection is my statement that men like to kill. I do not believe that all men like to kill. At the extreme, there are those saintly beings who would sacrifice their own lives before taking the life of another. The average man will kill if compelled to, in uniform in a war, or in self-defense, but has no evident taste for it. Men react differently to the experience of killing. Some are traumatized. Others simply move on with their lives. But there is at least a minority of human beings--mostly male--who enjoy killing. That minority may be small, but it does not take many enthusiastic killers to trigger the destruction of a fragile society. Revolutions, pogroms, genocides, and civil wars are not made by majorities, but by minorities with the acquiescence of the majority. The majority may gloat, or loot, but the killing minority drives history.

Violence is addictive. Police know this. That's where the phrase "the usual suspects" comes from. In our society, the overwhelming majority of violent acts are committed by repeat offenders. Statistics would make us a violent nation; in fact, we are a peaceable people until aroused. The numbers are skewed because we have failed to deter recidivists. Spouse- and child-abusers do not do it once, they repeat. Sex offenders--and all sex crimes are crimes of violence--are notorious repeat offenders. Most barroom brawls are begun by the same old troublemakers. Even in combat, when mortal violence is legal, most enemy combatants killed in close fighting appear to be killed by a small number of "high performers" in our ranks. Throughout history, many a combat hero has had difficulty adjusting to peace.

We reject the evidence of the human enthusiasm for violence because it troubles us and undercuts the image we have created of perfectible Man. But violence has an undeniable appeal. Certainly for the otherwise disenfranchised, it is the only response left. Perhaps the psychologists are right that much violence is a cry for help. But what both of those arguments really say is that violence, however motivated, is gratifying and empowering.



Religions and civilizations may be seen as attempts to discipline mankind, to trim our worst excesses. Traditionally, religions and civilizations acknowledged mankind's propensity for violence and imposed appropriate strictures. Certainly no religion or civilization has believed it could ignore violent behavior as peripheral. Yet our contemporary American approach is to treat violence as an aberration, the product of a terrible misunderstanding. It is the mentality of the born victim, of the wife who believes every weeping apology by her abuser husband, of the social worker who believes in the mass murderer's rehabilitation. Our willful denial of the full spectrum of man's nature, from the sublime to the beastly, is a privilege of our wealth. It is not a privilege that will be extended to our soldiers.

Look at the wreckage of this decade. Can we pretend that the massacre of half a million Rwandan Tutsis by their neighbors was carried out as a laborious chore? On the contrary, reports from the scene describe murderers intoxicated by their deeds. When we consider the ingenious cruelties perpetrated daily in Algeria, can we believe that the killers are forced to commit those atrocities against their inclinations? Will we pretend that the dead of Srebrenica were the victims of reluctant hands?

A meaningful sense of humanity demands that we ask hard questions about the nature of man. Military effectiveness in the coming decades will make the same demands. It will be terribly difficult for us. Our uniquely noble elevation of the individual's worth is ill-suited to a world in which our opponents regard the masses who follow them as surplus capital.

### **The American Myth of Peace**

A corollary to the universal myth of a lost golden age is the recurring myth of the peaceable kingdom, where the lion lies down with the lamb and the spear is broken in two. This has long been a powerful myth in the American ethos, carried from Europe in the first ships that sailed for New England. In those northern colonies, many of the early settlers belonged to dissident Protestant sects out to replicate the kingdom of God on earth. Many were pacifists or had strong pacifistic inclinations. They had been oppressed and, no matter that they would become oppressors in their time, their experiences had condensed their vision of an ideal world to a diamond hardness.

Our founding parents fled Europe's dynastic struggles convinced that such wars, and by extension all wars, were ungodly. Later, they fought the Indians, then the French, then the British, then their hemispheric neighbors, then much of the world. But they never accepted war as in the order of things. War was a terrible, unnatural misfortune, perpetrated by despots and madmen, or spawned by injustice. But it was not a core human endeavor.

From that heritage we Americans have developed our historical belief that all men want peace, that all conflict can be resolved through compromise and understanding. It leads to the diplomatic equivalent of Sunday-night snake-handling--faith in the power of negotiations to allay hatred. Because we are privileged and reasonably content with our corner of the planet, we find peace desirable. There is nothing wrong with this. The problem arises when we assume that all other men, no matter how discontented, jealous, disenfranchised, and insulted, want peace as well. Our faith in man is truly a blind faith.

*Many human beings have no stake in peace.* They draw no advantage from the status quo. We even see this in our own fortunate country. A disproportionate share of crime is committed by those with the least stake in society--the excluded and marginalized with little or nothing to lose. In this age of accelerating change, we too suffer from extreme fundamentalism concentrated at the lower end of the social spectrum (though not at the bottom among the drug-wrecked *Lumpenproletariat*). Consider the crimes that trouble us most. Gang crime occurs between those with the least to gain or lose from the social order the rest of us cherish. The Oklahoma City bombing was the work of a man who felt rejected by the society around him, who felt *wronged*. The repeated bombings of abortion clinics consistently prove to be the work of low-skilled males who have turned to aggressive religious beliefs in which tolerance is intolerable. Dangerous true believers and violent opportunists are very much with us even in our own homeland.

We are, however, well positioned to moderate their excesses. Neither right-wing militias nor extreme fundamentalists are going to take over our country in the foreseeable future. But much of the world is less fortunate. Where there is less opportunity (sometimes none) and the comforting status quo begins to shrivel, human beings want validation and revenge. They cannot accept that their accustomed way of life is failing and that they are failing individually because

of the behaviors to which their culture has conditioned them. They want someone to blame, and then they want revenge on that someone. A leader, secular or religious, has only to preach the gospel of foreign devils and dark conspiracies to absolve his listeners of responsibility for their own failures--and he will find a willing audience. Humans do not want change. They want their customs validated. They want more material possessions, but they do not want to alter their accustomed patterns of behavior to get those things. This is as true in America's inner cities as it is in the slums of Karachi or Cairo.

Again, many human beings thrive on disorder. When the civil war ends, the party is over. Many of the difficulties in Bosnia today stem from warriors who built thriving black market and criminal networks during the fighting and do not want to let go of them. Often, those who do the bulk of the fighting are men ill-equipped to prosper in peace. The gun is their professional tool. When they grow convinced by, or are at least cloaked in, nationalist or fundamentalist religious beliefs, they are vulnerable only to greater force. In Russia, much of the citizenry longs for the rule of law, even the harsh law of the past. But those who have enriched themselves during Russia's new "time of troubles" like the system just the way it is. It is difficult to convince a prospering gangster that democracy and the rule of law will work to his advantage, despite professions to the contrary by our Department of State. Around the world, from Uganda to Abkhazia, it is difficult to persuade those whose only successes in life have come from the gun in their hand that they should hand over that gun. Being a warlord, or just the warlord's retainer, is a far more attractive prospect than digging a ditch for a living--or, worse, failing to find work as a ditch-digger.

We profit from peace. Our opponents profit from conflict. It is as fundamental a mismatch as the one between our forces and theirs. When they try to play by our rules whether in the military or economic sphere, we demolish them. When we are forced to play by their rules, however, especially during military interventions, the playing field is not only leveled, it often tilts in their favor.

When we drive the warriors into a corner or defeat them, they will agree to anything. When our attention is elsewhere, they will break the agreement. Their behavior, natural to them, is unthinkable to us. And then they massacre.

We pride ourselves on our rationality, while avoiding reality. If we are to function effectively as diplomats and soldiers, we need to turn a dispassionate eye on mankind. We need to study the behavior of the individual and the mass, and to do it without stricture. We cherish the fiction that technology will be the answer to all of our dilemmas, but our enemies know that flesh and blood form the irresistible answer to our technologies.

## **Troy and Jerusalem**

Another cliché with a core of truth is that Americans are the new Romans, proprietors of a near universal empire based upon engineering and codification of law. Certainly, we guard the walls of our civilization against new barbarians. But the mundane parallels are more intriguing. First, even when the Romans behaved cruelly at the height of empire, it was a measured policy. Second, their military was tiny in proportion to the range of their empire, and their legions, while rarely defeated, were often astonished by the savagery of their opponents. Third, the Romans so cherished their civilized image of themselves that it blinded them to barbarian strengths.

Fanatics brought Rome down. We associate the fall of Rome with Alaric and the Visigoths and a jumble of other warrior peoples who swept in from the north for long weekends (as German tourists do today). But Rome's decline was slow, and the empire rotted from within. Romans loved the law--even under the worst emperors, the rule of law never disappeared entirely--and they grew convinced that peace was the natural order of things. Their judges sought equity and order, and their legalisms crippled them.

Let us return to our beginning and consider the New Testament. We are made in the image of Pilate the Roman. On his fateful day, he was annoyed, briefly, by a seemingly minor case he just wanted to put behind him. He did not understand the matter and did not even believe it lay within his purview. He was baffled and annoyed by the local squabbles, failing to appreciate the social and religious complexities involved--and the greater implications. Jesus was beneath the consideration of Rome's threat analysts. Pilate simply wanted the problem to go away. Capable of insight, cruelty, and greatness on other occasions, on the most important day of his life the Roman was caught drowsing. He was the classic representative of empire, the patron saint of diplomats.

We can almost smell the heat of the day and taste the dust. Imagine Pilate's impatience with his translator and his disbelief that the shabby, battered figure before him could be the cause of such a fuss. There simply was not enough of a challenge in evidence to excite a Roman governor and gentleman of great affairs. When a perfunctory attempt at arbitration between the locals failed, Pilate washed his hands of the prisoner's fate, anxious to move on to serious business, or maybe just to lunch. He did let his soldiers do a bad day's work, but only because the Romans kept a careful monopoly on capital punishments.

Pilate was a symbol of weakening Rome and growing Roman self-doubt. He served at Rome's apogee, yet the cancer was already there. His descendants, preferring debate to decision, would be no match for the fanatics who could kill the sober and the just without blinking. Pilate stuck to the letter of the law, and the law damned him.

As empires fall--and I am not suggesting that our own empire will fall for a long time--the people of the empire return to religion, to cults, to blood ties. Christianity, a liberating mystery religion of the dreary classes, had to struggle during the heyday of empire. But when the decline became impossible to deny, the new religion, with its revolutionary rhetoric, prospered. In prospering, it further accelerated the decline of the old order. The repressions were too little too late, and they were a counterproductive tool to wield against the followers of that particular creed. Rome turned scolds into martyrs. The Roman threat analysts had failed again.

The Romans were chronically late to respond to challenges in the age of the lesser Caesars. They loved stasis and remembrance. The destruction of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem and the suppression of the Jewish kingdom were not signs of remaining imperial strength, but of weakness, frustration, and decline. In its confident years, the Roman empire had been absorptive and tolerant. For centuries, these qualities lent strength and co-opted new subjects, but ultimately core identities and commitments to the Roman idea became fatally diffuse and diluted. It was those who refused to be absorbed and who rejected toleration, from the brute German tribes to the true believers from the eastern provinces, who outlasted the greatest empire the earth knew until our own century. Rome's greatest failure was its inability to understand the changing world.

We can measure historical climates by reading the growth bands of a tree stump. We can measure the climate of a culture by noting its religious revivals or the advent of a new religion--each marks a time of great stress on the society. In 1999, we are living in the most passionately religious age in centuries. The future looks ferocious.

Leaving aside the threat from weapons of mass destruction, however, the United States appears invulnerable for the foreseeable future. Terrorists might annoy us, but we will triumph. We will, ultimately, find the strength of will to do what must be done. The problems raised in this essay affect the average, prosperous American citizen little, if at all. But it is the soldiers of our new empire, the men and women who serve in our expeditionary forces and deploy to subdue enemies we neglect to understand, who will pay the cost of our ignorance. They will still win, when allowed to do so. But more of them will suffer and die for lowered returns because of our unwillingness to face the complexity of mankind.

Come back now to Troy. Read that great poem one more time, without the prejudices we have learned. You will find that the triumphant Greeks were the devious, the barbarous, the murderous. The Trojans were the urban, civilized, and tolerant. Troy stood for learning, piety, and decency. Its mistake was to humiliate implacable barbarians, without the will to destroy them. The Trojans fought to be left alone in their comfortable world. The Greeks fought for revenge, spoils, and the pleasure of slaughter. The Greeks won. Ulysses, who finally inveigled a way through the city gates of Troy, was the first great Balkan warlord. The defeated Trojan monarch, King Priam, was a decent man who watched the war from behind his walls and had to beg for the return of his son's mangled body. He was presidential in his dignity.

We are not Trojans. We are far mightier. We rule the skies and seas, and possess the power to rule the land when we are sufficiently aroused. But we have not learned to understand, much less rule, minds and hearts and souls. The only moral we need to cull from the *Iliad* is that it is foolish to underestimate the complexity and determination of the killers from the other shore.

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