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July 4, 1776

## That Brilliant Dream

### Thursday, July 6<sup>th</sup>

#### Reflections

By

Jay B. Gaskill

As a practical matter, we comfortable Americans find it impossible to imagine the perilous State of the Union as it existed 230 years ago. Something authentically new had been born, a non-royalist, democratic republic, founded and sustained – against all odds – in the Judeo-Christian tradition and the English version of the Enlightenment.

This experiment would prove durable beyond all rational hope. But in 1861, when the Civil War began, no one knew that.

Flash forward to 1865. The young nation was dreadfully engaged in a war more brutal and costly than any before *or since*. The very survival of the United States of America was profoundly in doubt.

The President was not a popular man. The war was not going well and the vilification of Abe Lincoln in the press and among the vacillating classes was unprecedented. As a later President, John Kennedy, wryly observed, *victory has a thousand fathers but defeat is an orphan*.

In 1865, Lincoln presided over chaos and many smelled defeat.

Civilizations whose leaders and members are not rooted in the sterner part of the moral order cannot summon the will to defend themselves when challenged by a more cohesive, more fervently motivated adversary. There is a Darwinian logic at work here that favors the triumph of the religious society over the complacently hedonist culture, the “blood

sweat and tears” rally over the “make flowers not war” withdrawal, and the committed, brave heart over the timid, ambivalent soul.

As President Lincoln began his terse second Inaugural Address, he recalled:

On the occasion corresponding to this, four years ago, all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil-war. All dreaded it -- all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to saving the Union without war, insurgent agents were in the city seeking to destroy it without war -- seeking to dissolve the Union, and divide effects, by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive; and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came.

But this embattled President was able to say:

**Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether".**

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.

Flash forward to the present day. Our nation is now far more powerful than that tiny republic of 1776, and once again finds itself at war.

The 9-11-01 attacks on our federal and economic capitals were such that, had a mere nation state done these things to us, we would have promptly taken up arms against a fixed adversary with vulnerable assets and delivered a devastating response.

Instead we face a long, draining, diversified terror war, part of an unholy *jihad* whose deadly atavistic nature would have been as clear to this country's 18<sup>th</sup> century founders as it is to this country's remaining patriots.

The real purpose of this jihad is to birth a Pan-Islamic Nation, a super-power with an ideology eerily similar to that of Hitler. An Islamist superpower armed with nuclear weapons will eventually arise unless we are able – as we were not in Hitler's case – to abort the birth before the entire world is drawn into the maelstrom.

## *That Sterner Part of the Moral Order*

But the same modernity that has bequeathed us weapons of Biblical power has deprived us of Biblical wisdom. We face a psychological challenge unique to the post-modern age: When the scale of the challenge approaches that of a general war, a post-modern society either recovers its deeper, more robust moral foundations, that sterner part of the moral order, or it becomes a chapter in the book, *Failed Civilizations of Our Time*.

We are at that very place.



These were among the thoughts that flitted across my mind when I watched the annual fireworks in San Francisco Bay Tuesday. As one whose views tend to bridge the secular humanist-religion divide, I have spent some years working out the bridge between secularism and that sterner part of the moral order.

There are three essential parts to this bridge:

- (1) the conviction, whether based in theistic faith or not, that the moral order really does exist apart from culture, whim, and preference;
- (2) that it contains the basis for accountability and honor as well as love and the softer virtues;
- (3) that we, as mortal individuals, whether through a fierce integrity-commitment in this life, a sense of accountability to ultimate authority post-mortem, or some combination of these elements, *feel authentically bound by the moral imperative to oppose evil.*



And below the bridge, the battle continues apace.

Those who are so caught up in the current secular and spiritual hedonism that the whole notion of evil is demoted to a mere “cultural construct” are disarmed from the outset. And those “fundamentalists” whose view of evil is overbroad tend to exclude needed allies. They, too, have unilaterally disarmed.

We face an uncommon terror campaign, a jihad aimed at the national jugular. We may have difficulty identifying our moment of victory, but our defeat would not go unnoticed.

To define “victory” in the current struggle, we must understand why this is a war. The coordinated attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> targeted our institutions of political, economic and military power, and inflicted damage on a scale comparable to Pearl Harbor. Beyond that, the scope of the malevolent *purpose* exceeded Japan’s objectives in WWII. The real target of the 9-11 attacks was the very infrastructure of Western, secular civilization.

Purpose always matters. As Oliver Wendell Holmes once said, *even a dog knows the difference between being stumbled over and being kicked*. Islamic terrorism is a *coordinated and potentially effective series of attacks designed to destabilize, neutralize, demoralize, disrupt or destroy the support systems of the target civilization*. What we are now experiencing is a major *scale escalation* of terrorism fueled by a single ideology with the goal of destabilizing or eliminating the US as a world obstacle to the ultimate objective.

Terrorist gestation within a country or region has lead times comparable to cancers. The success metric suffers from the same uncertainty inflicted on every recovering cancer patient. Cancer “cure” rates are measured by the number of years without a recurrence.

If we are winning locally we can expect that terrorism against us will not involve major national assets and will reduce in scale, falling into the background noise of ordinary crime within the next ten years. This process will be accelerated as we achieve effective hardening of five key assets of our civilization:

1. the core communication system;
2. the core transportation system;
3. key economic assets;
4. key democratic political assets;
5. key military assets,

But we must do better than win a temporary remission of the threat locally. Our temporary peace-in-isolation would carry a terrible price. We could then witness an entire region submitting to the *ultimate goal of jihad*. Our isolationist peace would end as we faced an oil financed nightmare power, fully capable of terrorizing us at a distance with an arsenal of deliverable nuclear weapons. Yet, if the Islamist extremists are discredited in the Middle East by the emergence of viable, economically healthy, more pluralistic models of governance, their terror campaign against us and the West will die a natural death.

**Therefore, if the U.S. population ever becomes demoralized, the terrorists may win even if they are never able to accomplish another 9-11 scale attack on our soil.**

Terrorism is an opportunistic infection in the human social condition. It emerges whenever our social immune system is sufficiently weakened. Complacency, cowardice and moral neglect are ever with us. Their darker companions – fevered minds with deadly weapons – will never be far away.

There is a sixth key asset of our civilization, one fully within our power to “harden”. It will trump all the rest. When the base-line confidence of the American people in the validity and value of our civilization is strong, we can never be defeated. If we, as a people, carry but one fraction of the fervor of a typical suicide bomber in *our* devotion the survival of *our* civilization, we will win hands down.

May God save the Republic.

**Jay B. Gaskill**  
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