

The CULTURE Of GOD'S WAR

Joseph Britton

“Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. This is not a way of life at all in any true sense. Under the clouds of war, it is humanity hanging on a cross of iron.”
--President, General Dwight Eisenhower 1953 speech

Abstract

This paper will explore how within a culture of war the citizens, the society, the killing and dying, and the war itself become sanctified. The author's research is partially informed by a search to clarify the meaning of 'killing for a righteous cause.' First, we will look at first-hand accounts, through interviews, of officers talking about qualities desired in a service enlistee and, in turn, traits required of military leaders to successfully lead. Second, battlefield communications will be noted. This will be followed by an historical perspective, along with modern training techniques, that have proven to be highly effective in killing the enemy. And last, this author will analyze 2 modern day societies, Israel, and the American administration of President G.W. Bush in crafting perception through *language design* to prepare the public for the need of war, in packaging war, and in turn, sanctifying war.

Introduction

War has always been part of the human story. In the history of man, we are not aware of any time period when war was not being carried out somewhere on earth. “Man” is specifically used as it has been the male side of humans who have warred. Indeed women have fought in wars, valiantly and heroically, but for the most part, wars have been the undertakings of men. War is to be in the face of not being. It transfigures power and mutilates life. It supersedes the reality of what we construe as normal, everyday living. Behold, for within the horrors of war a terrible, transcendent beauty sleeps; the spectacular dust, light show of obliterated target re-forming, reaching, glowing heavenward, transformed by a smart bomb; the heated passions that grip the heart and flame the edges of inspired poetry; and mythological stories of courage in dark lands where all hope has died and only the hero's journey can take us home to our illumined self.

The soldiers fighting and the civilians living within the war zone enter a relationship born of circumstance. Aggressor, friend, victim, liberator, enemy, protector, and destroyer become interchangeable. Language changes as the events unfolding are imbued with new meaning. Life is brought into a focus that blinds, awakens and tears at our skin. A soldier is asked to spin the bed in which lies the man with the bulging eyes. Will Papa Death collect his due? Life will be surrendered in this drama. Soldiers will be asked to carry out supreme sacrifices that historians will bring alive again in another era.

A great deal of research was carried out in the latter part of the 20th century confirming S.L.A. Marshall's *Men Against Fire* (1978) conclusions that the vast majority of combatants through-out history, when called upon to kill, found themselves to be "conscientious objectors." Yet, within certain exclusive societies of the past and within the *special ops* forces of today the percentage of trained troops who actively engage in face to face killing of their fellow enemy, approaches nearly total participation. What makes the difference in the willingness to kill and die?

One hot and humid morning in September, at the age of 29, alone in a room by a temple in northern India, deep within my being, I stood on a wall. One side was Light, the other a valley of darkness. The valley was Death itself, and I was about to walk through it. I traveled through the landscape of my life and popped out when a doctor popped an IV into my arm. These days, in moments of stillness, so often the extraordinariness of living overcomes me. Yet, my living is also informed by those dying in war.

With Iraq War II poised to shake the earth, and wanting to soothe my soul, I went in search of society's need for war, and we do need it... right!??

"Truth perceived gives assurance.
Skill yields self-reliance.
With courage, we can defy danger.
To increase power, increase humility."

By Deng Ming-Dao

Interviews

On March 26, 2003, 7 days after the beginning of Iraq War II, I traveled to the American military base on Okinawa, home to 28,000 U.S. troops. Interviewed, were Colonel Richard C. Dunn, Asst. Chief of Staff, U.S. Marine Corps, Camp Butler; Lieutenant Commander Daniel Jaffer, Officer-in-Charge of White Beach Naval Port Facilities; and Lieutenant Zachry Riggle, U.S. Marine Corps, Camp Butler. The questions posed were an exploration into the training required for service men and women to fearlessly kill and honorably die in combat, along with the motivational requisites for officers to order their troops to destroy in the broadest sense, and possibly die so that ideological and social conformity shall live. Colonel Richard C. Dunn shall be addressed as Col. Dunn, Lieutenant Commander Daniel Jaffer as LC Jaffer, and Lieutenant Zachry Riggle as Lt. Riggle. When asked about:

1. The most important factors for instilling courage in the combatant, all 3 officers stated: "increasing their technical competency – having confidence in their skills; developing discipline - of self and for correctly carrying out orders; and bonding with their colleagues in the same group – within a specialized training environment."

2. The most important qualities of a military officer: "Technical knowledge and the ability to transfer it to the troops; along with attitude – communicating clearly and with a sense of authority; in addition to very little micro-managing – whereby the subordinate is given the order, coupled with the responsibility to carry out the mission in the most appropriate way. This allows for confidence-building and personal growth."

3. Is fear necessary in combat? All agreed that it was healthy. LC Jaffer responded, “I believe that fear is a healthy emotion. But, I am not sure that it is necessary in all combat situations. I think that most anyone will be scared in combat. I certainly have had trepidations in the combat zone flying that I have done, but there is also a calm that takes over. Perhaps it is just to mask the fear, though I am not sure. In the “scary” or “fearful” things that I have done in the military, there has always been a point where the training I have had takes over, and what you know subconsciously gets you through.”

4. Is fear talked about in training? Yes, was the common response. Not doing what you are supposed to do and thereby letting down your colleagues is a dominant source of fear, as someone may get killed. Col. Dunn, “They’re well trained, and everyone is supported. They are told to focus on the mission, not the consequences. Accomplishing the mission leaves little time to focus on fear. Acknowledge that fear exists. If they have no fear, I worry about them.”

5. Are the words *dying* and *killing* used in training? Yes, all three agreed. “‘*Kill or destroy* the enemy’ is used in training, although in public, ‘complete the mission’ is often spoken,” Lt. Riggle. LC Jaffer regarding *killing*, “That is the mission, in its simplest form.” LC Jaffer continued with the difficulty of facing and talking about *dying* and *killing*: “These words are always close at hand. *Dying, death, and killing*, as well as *destroy*, are all part of the military. They always have been. It’s what militaries are for. To prevent it from happening...if you believe that militaries and defense are conjoined... a military must threaten its use. (From one perspective) this is very sad. The key for a leader is to understand that there is a right way to interpret all of them, perhaps a noble way (?), so that they don’t consume you, and to be able to transmit that through words and deeds to your subordinates. I am not saying that I fully understand it, but I do know that depending on how you view them, they can just wear on you, or they can ultimately destroy you. There is nothing natural about it.”

Col. Dunn, in turn, presented his views: “The word *kill* is not used uniformly by branches of the Marine Corps. For instance, for the aviation community, we tend to use *accomplish the mission* when we speak of our tasks. The same can be said of some of our support elements. However, it would be common and acceptable for small unit leaders in infantry units to speak to their Marines and remind them of the nobility of their cause, the confidence in their training, and to enforce the fact that the enemy is trying to *kill* them; therefore, your job is to *kill* them before they *kill* you or your buddy on your left or right.”

6. How do you talk about loss of life? “There is an expectation you may lose your life. War is a violent business. The mission is greater than a man or woman,” Col. Dunn. LC Jaffer referred to the feelings and values that shape a service person: “Duty. Honor. Country. Family. Tragedy. Loss. All of these, but never waste or shame.”

7. From the beginning of history, military and government leaders have invoked the power and assistance of gods, God, Allah, and supreme beings. Is this an important component for troop motivation? Col. Dunn, “It’s situation dependent. If it helps to be focused, use it.” LC Jaffer was cautious, “I don’t know. Personally, I don’t believe that God is on either side during a war. I do believe that you have to have some sort of faith if

you hope to survive the mayhem. I never preach gospel in hazardous situations.”

8. When asked, “What would you say to encourage and motivate the troops prior to facing battle?” “This is the moment that we have been training for. All that time preparing, has brought us to this, and though it will seem long, its time frame will be short by comparison. Know that you are as prepared as you can be. Have faith in your training, have faith in your abilities, keep faith in your buddies, and keep faith with your country. We, together, can make this mission happen, we can make it successful. Know that we are doing what we chose to do, and know that many are proud of your choice, me included. The sooner we get it done, the sooner we can all get back. You are ready, let’s go!” LC Jaffer, U.S. Navy.

Comments from the almost front line

In support of the interview responses given by the officers based in Okinawa several quotes follow given by “war experts” at the onset of Iraq War II:

Regarding group bonding – “They’re not going to leave anyone behind. They fight for the team. They fight for each other,” General Wesley Clark, March 21, 2003, former Supreme NATO Commander. “It’s a big family matter,” Col. David Hackworth, U.S. Army (ret).

Training – “We’re trained as the best fighting force the world has ever known. It’s kind of a relief to know we are moving forward and will do what the President will tell us. Though War is about to begin there is no change in everyday training. It’s set-up this way by design,” March 18, 2003, PBS Lehrer Report, officers in Kuwait City.

Mission – “We’re not using time lines, but actions and objectives to be attained,” Brig. General Vincent Brooks, Assistant Commander of Iraq War II. “Focus on the Mission,” Gen. Wesley Clark, March 21, 2003, CNN TV.

Communicating war? from the front line

With the assistance of Foreign/national news editor, Mark Jacob of the Chicago Tribune, a list of statements made by the U.S. military in the first couple of weeks of the Iraq War II were assembled. Nouns act like verbs, adjectives become nouns, and feelings are described in mechanical terms. To sort out the exact meanings of the following would take a leap in faith of our understanding of battle strategy-talk. These are unique attempts to use precision language in describing military landscapes loaded with physical and emotional feeling:

- “We’re on plan.”
- “We are running an effects-based campaign that is partially kinetic, partially non-kinetic, partially information operations.”
- “They just artillerized that village.”
- “There were some point contacts that were very violent.”
- “We’ve got to be ready for the entire spectrum of capability.”
- “There were 26 different aim points for this single target set.”
- “It’s a great location on the southwest portion of Baghdad to allow us to posture ourselves around the city.”
- “I would not say that the future is necessarily less predictable than the past.”
- “So I just want to calibrate everybody: We are not underestimating how tough it could

be going forward.”

- “What we’re doing in the west could be called a lot of ways – called a lot of things. It might be area denial.”

- “Perhaps we may have gotten inside of the enemy’s decision-making cycle.”

- “I think if you’re in a firefight, it’s probably major to you.”

- “We had attrited both of those formations, both materially and also morally.”

Sports, politics, business, finances and war have all contributed to these military expressions. In keeping with this style of writing, it would be safe to say the above examples have all *morphed* from the English language.

Who’s fighting this war?

During and after World War II, U.S. Army Brigadier General S.L.A. Marshall led a team of historians in interviewing thousands of soldiers in more than 400 infantry companies who had been in close contact fighting the Germans and the Japanese. The results, as recorded in Marshall’s *Men Against Fire*(1978) were consistent: only 15 to 20 percent of the infantry men would fire their rifles. Astonishingly, these findings coincided with the research interviews of German and Japanese soldiers.

During the American Civil War (1860 -1865) the weapon of choice was a muzzle-loading, black-powder, rifled musket. The powder went in first followed by the bullet rammed down the barrel. The men stood up, usually from 30 to 70 meters from one another, with the regiment often standing in a line across the battle field. *On Killing*(1996) by Lt. Dave Grossman, noted recent tests having shown that a 200 man regiment could hit 120 enemy soldiers in the first volley. The Civil War infantryman was the best equipped soldier ever seen in battle. In the Civil War battles, instead of hundreds of infantrymen dying in the first minute, research has shown that only one or two men were killed per minute. Instead, the firing lasted for many hours with most of the firing to kill taking place by a handful of men. The large majority ‘assisted.’ Only a small percentage of the rifles were fired and many of those were aimed to miss. Most of this evidence came from examining rifles after the battles, many of which were multiply loaded and never fired.

With the scant amount of information available from many of the other major historical wars, the same pattern is upheld...the unwillingness of man to kill his fellow man when facing the other, even in times of war.

Following World War II, the U.S. armed forces introduced revolutionary ‘corrective’ training measures. The firing rate of 15 per cent during World War II was increased to 55 per cent during the Korean War and to 90 per cent firing during the Vietnam War.

Lt. Dave Grossman, currently the Professor of Military Science at Arkansas State University, claims that in the 1982 Lebanon-Israel battles, it was reported that Israeli psychiatric casualties were twice as high as the number of dead. Richard Gabriel in his *No More Heroes: Madness and Psychiatry in War*(1987) has noted that in wars of the 20th century, psychiatric casualties were often higher than those being killed by enemy fire. These include post traumatic stress disorders from neurotic to severely psychotic symptoms. An exhaustive study of the psychological effects of fighting in World War II was carried out by Swank and Marchand. They concluded that in war after 60 days of continuous fighting 98 per cent of the combatants will have become psychiatric casualties of one kind or another. These conditions are brought on by continual ‘fight or flight’

stress, cumulative loss of sleep, lack of substantial nutritional food, and the elements of the weather; such is the obvious as experienced in Iraq where it is often 45°C in summer and below freezing in winter. Swank and Marshall have stated in their *Archives of Neurology and Psychology*(1946) that the army has determined that the other 2 per cent who endured the fighting had a predisposition toward “aggressive psychopathic personalities.”

To kill or not

It’s interesting to note here that in my interviews with Col. Dunn and LC Jaffer, along with Lt. Col. Grossman’s following research, the biggest fear for a combatant was not death or bodily harm but ‘letting down one’s fighting companions.’ Accountability is the psychological force that drives a ‘sane’ man to kill another in battle. Accountability to the group stems from compassion and intense shared experiences; and accountability to ‘authority’, i.e. a leader or heavenly gods, is developed from the psychological warfare training of “*desensitization, conditioning, and denial defense mechanisms.*”

Desensitizing is thinking about killing the enemy who is now perceived as inhuman, indecent creatures worthy of being killed. An aspect of this is the denigrating, defamatory name calling of the enemy, e.g. *gook*, or *Kraut*. *Conditioning* is practicing killing in reality based simulated fighting situations. Here, the *targets* are continually *engaged*, i.e. the enemy are continually killed. The *target* is the *conditioned stimulus*. The immediate engaging of the target is the *target behavior*. If the *target* is *wasted* (killed) *positive reinforcement* is given by way of badges or rewards. *Denial defense mechanisms* is denying that one has actually killed another human being. Endless practicing in virtual and real life simulations provide the engrained train thought patterns that ‘I’m not really killing anyone.’ When the true life *target* goes down the mind is able to recall, create, and justify that it’s just a simulation.

Periodically, Vietnam War epics are created on film with a decidedly anti-war sentiment. The message puts forth the inhuman, indiscriminate killing and massive destruction of countries. According to Marine and Iraq War I veteran Anthony Swofford, in his raw, pithy book *Jarhead* “...actually, Vietnam War films are all pro-war, no matter what the supposed message (Stanley) Kubrick or (Francis Ford) Coppola or (Oliver) Stone intended.” Swofford claims that your average neighbor next door may watch these films and decide how disgusting war is, but the Special Operations fighter will be excited by them “because the magic brutality of the film celebrates the terrible and despicable beauty of their fighting skills.” He continues, “Films and images of death and carnage are pornography for the military man.” Your neighbor who watches the film may be antiwar but “the actual killers who know how to use the weapons are not,” and, “We are afraid, but that doesn’t mean we don’t want to fight.”

Modern day training conditioning has provided today’s armies with extraordinary killing capabilities. The overflow of these super-warriors coupled with the emergence of highly trained terrorists, insurgents and sophisticated ‘hit’ squads funded by governments, religious groups and organized crime elements has led to a flourishing growth industry, the international private security firms. Many of these security contractor firms combine the services of intelligence gathering, body guard duties and ‘soldier of fortune’ realities for their international clients. These civilian contractors come from many countries. The

work is dangerous, testosterone driven, and financially lucrative. One of the world's biggest operations is Blackwater USA. Their web site states: "Blackwater USA comprises five companies; Blackwater Training Center, Blackwater Target Systems, Blackwater Security Consulting, Blackwater Canine, and Blackwater Air (AWS). We have established a global presence and provide training and tactical solutions for the 21st century. Our clients include federal law enforcement agencies, the Department of Defense, Department of State, and Department of Transportation, local and state entities from around the country, multi-national corporations, and friendly nations from all over the globe."

As they protect the rich and the powerful, along with providing security forces and fighters in such volatile areas as Iraq (by spring time of 2004 there were an estimated 20,000 – 30,000 civilian security contractors present), Afghanistan (including guarding President Karzai), and the drug jungles of Columbia, these security firms, in turn, have become states of power carrying out orders for who lives, who dies, who is informed, and who will be in control.

There is another element though, that requires deep consideration in how the *mission* has been successfully accomplished - the unequivocal support from the *gods of war*.

War and religion

Historically, one of the most effective ways to motivate a soldier to kill or to die, for his master or country, is to infuse the military and political talk with flavorings of religion. This includes religious stories of heroism and sacrifice, metaphors alluding to religious writings, invocations to a personal god, and well-placed phrases drawn from sacred texts. In my interview with Col. Dunn of the Marine Corps, when asked if officers rally the troops through calling upon God, he responded "the combatants will look inward, making their peace with their own spiritual nature or God. At times it can help the Marine to be focused. Each has his/her own way."

I've always struggled with *righteous war*. When is it appropriate to kill and be killed? Did our ancestors answer this question that satisfied the gods above and the masses below? I suppose if I had been born in *Sparta* (8th – 4th century B.C.E.) within one of the most daunting, effective, warrior/military states the world has ever known, it would have seemed as natural as playing sports today.

Or in China, during the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.E.), when the emperor Mozi declared 'the only acceptable form of offensive invasion is that led by righteous rulers against immoral powers as an actualization of the punitive will of Heaven...the sage-king is supposed to perceive the mystical signs of Heaven, and deploy armies accordingly.'

France, for its part, under the guidance of St. Bernard of Clairvoux, went the way of the righteous soldier during the 12th and 13th centuries as the Templar Knights flourished in power and influence. The Templars were not warriors with religious leanings, but rather disciplined monks, who's austere religious practice was serving as soldiers. Their war was a penitential war, a struggle for the purity and deliverance of the soul. The suffering and hardships of warfare would ensure their seat in the Heavens. The Templars' waging of war in the name of their Lord was a form of prayer and religious obedience, and in that state of mind, their conquered enemies were apparently treated

with honor and respect. This certainly could not be said of the massive waves of Knights who set out to free the Holy Lands, yet so often left the occupied territories plundered and the conquered singled with rape and torture. Such is the way we have historically recorded these mysterious *special op forces* of the Middle Ages.

There is no country that has carried the banner of loyalty, devotion and self-sacrifice for as long, and with such ritualistic and spiritual depth, as the *Japanese*. With the outset of the Heian period (790-1185 C.E.) the samurai (warrior) class rose in stature and, out of necessity, their fidelity was pledged to the court. The beginning of the Kamakura period (from 1185 C.E.) witnessed the rise of the shogun military dictatorships. To reward the faithful and the powerful, noble estates were created and ruled by the chosen families - the *daimyos*. They were locally autonomous but bound to the shogun. The willingness of the Japanese to die for their “lord,” be it master, daimyo or earthly Shinto god – the emperor, cannot be fully understood unless one has lived as a “spiritual warrior.” Their tales of self-sacrifice, austerities, and *hara kiri*, all in the name of honor and loyalty, will be told for many centuries to come.

But one of the most intriguing stories told to justify the conceptual word-fit of *righteous* and *war* came out of *India* a couple of millennia ago in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, as part of a larger work, the *Mahabharata*. This earthly celestial drama begins with a conflict over who controls the land. Two royal families of cousins, the Pandavas, whose commander is Arjuna, and the Kauravas, led by Duryodhana. The setting is all too familiar as we have seen recently in Northern Ireland, Croatia, Kosovo, and in the Middle East with the Palestinians and Israelis, among countless other battles for territory and identity. Through a bit of deceitful dice throwing, the Kauravas win the Pandavas’ share of half the land, and force the Pandavas into exile for 13 years. Upon their return, the Pandavas want their land back. As the *Bhagavad-Gita* unfolds and the battle time is near, Arjuna and Duryodhana approach Krishna, the enlightened god-man, for his assistance. Krishna says to choose between his army of millions of troops, countless weapons, and many tens of thousands of the finest horses, or Krishna himself. Duryodhana chooses the army and weapons, and to the delight of Arjuna, Krishna, with his wisdom, becomes his charioteer. As the enemies face one another, with Arjuna at the lead of the Pandavas, he looks across the battle lines and sees many of his relatives, friends and beloved teachers. He’s frozen. He cannot fight. Krishna admonishes Arjuna telling him that he is a warrior and his destiny is to lead and fight his enemy courageously. With weapons drawn on both sides, Krishna then speaks to Arjuna of the essential teachings of Hinduism; that within each person is a Self that is unborn, undying and eternal that can never be destroyed by war or natural calamity. “Neither he who thinks that the Self causes killing, nor he who thinks that the Self is killed by someone has realized the truth, for the Self neither kills or is killed,” *Bhagavad Gita*, chapter 2, verse 19. Ignorance keeps us from understanding this essential truth and causes us to suffer and wander endlessly. Can war be *just*, or *holy*? We continually reach into our past to ease our conscience and to give meaning to killing our fellow man with whom we share this earthly land.

Today’s crusade

In returning to the use of the word *crusade*, it has been proclaimed by American leaders on several occasions over the past 200 years, and as recently as September 16, 2001 by President G. Bush, 5 days after the World Trade Center bombing. For the most

part, the implication has been to take action against a great injustice while upholding a moral righteousness. For Islamic fundamentalists today, the President of America's words provided the essential hot burning fuel to fire the crucible of ideological and armed struggle against the Western *crusade*, a *crusade* appearing to seek the conquest of Arab lands and the humiliation of Islam itself. The word has exposed the cavern separating West and East sensibilities, pitted Western materialism against Eastern spiritualism and furthered the Christianity vs. Islam conflict.

The Arab lands were subjected to 5 crusades stretching over a period beginning in 1095 C.E. and ending in the early 1300's C.E. Though there were complex political and cultural reasons for amassing tens of thousands of crusaders across Europe, the main idea was the *liberation* of ancient Christian holy lands from the Muslim infidels. Not only would the lands be in the hands of the true believers once again, but the infidels would discover a new freedom to be found in the Western Christian way. To the bitter delight of the Arabs, the crusades all eventually failed. To this day, the crusades are kept forever fresh in the Arab heart through songs, poetry and story.

The Crusade period was a time of castle building in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. Crusaders were recruited to secure valued territories and properties along with putting down threats by incendiary locals. Inspired volunteers made their way to re-populate these re-claimed holy lands. Supply lines were needed calling for shrewd businessmen with deep pockets and emotion proof skins who were willing to sacrifice assets along with their hired transporters in hope of substantial financial gain. The realities of foreign occupation almost bankrupted Europe.

These new designs for a new Jerusalem threatened the core of Islam and triggered the Muslim concept of *jihad*. Islamic scholars have often claimed that *jihad*, in its purest form, is strictly defensive in nature as stated in the Quran (2:190): "And fight in Allah's cause against those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression – for verily Allah does not love aggressors." And for those who have died defending Islam, "They rejoice because of favor from Allah and kindness and that God wasteth not the wage of Believers"(Quran 3:171).

In March 2003, the Islamic school of Al Azhar University in Cairo, representing Sunni Moslems worldwide, proclaimed America's war to be "*the new crusade*." In the context of the Crusades and present day Mid- Eastern realities perceived aggression towards the greater Islamic cause has been the key to re-activating *jihad* sentiments. Just as Bush has overlaid *crusade* with passionate religious overtones for the undaunted protection of the homeland, thereby arousing Americans to take collective action against a common enemy, so too, today's labeled Islamic extremists or terrorists, such as Bin Laden, Sadam Hussein, Hambali of Jemaah Islamiya in Indonesia have altered the sense of *jihad* to fulfill their often distorted view admonishing the protection and euphemistically the expansion of a greater Islamic kingdom.

"According to Islamic law, if the enemy steps on Muslims' land, *jihad* becomes a duty of every male and female Muslim," pronounced the Islamic Research Academy. It exhorts "Arabs and Muslims throughout the world to be ready to defend themselves and their faith," and proclaims "Our Arab and Islamic nation, and even our faith, are a main target of all these military buildups."

Often religious terms are packed with multiple layers of meaning that activate emotions of which, at times, seem to be connected to our primal nature and the

importance of why we are alive. By association, the use of religious words, phrases and stories implies truth is being spoken. Astute politicians and religious leaders sprinkle their talks with religiosity to motivate the masses to sacrifice and take action whether it's for war or filling the financial coffers to support cherished causes.

The Israel side

On February 10, 2004, this author interviewed Colonel Ami Amir, Israel's Defense Attache for Japan and Korea, based in the Israeli Embassy in Tokyo. Prior to our meeting, I was requested to provide personal and professional information to the Israeli Security Department. Several days later, I was then given a follow-up security check by phone by an Israeli agent. After a lapse of a week, I was notified that the interview was granted. Within a few days, I arrived at the Israeli Embassy. While standing before the gate, I was asked not to take a photo of the facade of the Embassy building. My mini hi-resolution camera would remain in my bag. One posed photo shot though was allowed, inside, shoulder to shoulder with Colonel Amir.

Colonel Amir has a respected career as a military strategist and planner for the Israeli Armed Forces. He was well prepared for my interview with several pages of notes before him. He began, "The military is the defining aspect of Israeli society. Israel is the 'Army of the People.' This idea originated with the philosophy of David Ben-Gurion (the architect of modern day Israel Zionism, and in turn, Israel's first Prime Minister from 1948). The Army creates a cohesion and homogeneity within our country whose existence has been dependent upon the receiving of Jews from many disparate cultures. All physically and mentally capable 18 and 19 year olds, men and women, are thereby required to serve in the military for 2 to 3 years. One's career opportunities and status among friends, family members and in the local community are determined by his/her performance in military confrontations with saboteurs, terrorists and enemies of Israel, along with the level of achievement and rank attained while in the service of the Army. Medals shining and the caliber of weapon allowed to hang at the hip signaled degrees of worthiness and one's place among others within our society."

By looking at Israel through the eyes of this very devoted career warrior I was getting a *glimpse* of an aspect of Israeli mind – a battle consciousness of defending and destroying, killing and dying, dancing and mourning, hope and despair, loving and hating, deep forgiveness and endless revenge, all ingredients in the everyday mix of a country that has never known peace.

God's on my side

"We are in a conflict between good and *evil*. And America will call *evil* by its name," Mr. Bush told West Point graduates in the June 1, 2002 commencement speech. For Bush's world vision, the setting was appropriate as West Point, being the home of many of America's finest military officers, would soon see a substantial number in this class die or sustain injuries in the upcoming battle for Iraq's destiny.

Since the September 11, 2001 attack (aka 9/11) Bush has brought evil to the home table for discussion. It has become a rallying force for Americans to fight against. *Evil*: "Wickedness, moral depravity, sin; whatever is censurable, painful, malicious, or disastrous" (*O.E.D.*). It's interesting to note that *evil* (*O.E.D.*) was also used by

Shakespeare in referring to a *lavatory*. President Bush, on occasion, has called Bin Laden an *evildoer*. *Evildoers* carry out the work of the *Evil One* – the Devil. Bin Laden, in standing his ground, has called Bush an *infidel*. *Infidel*: “An adherent of a religion other than one’s own; a pagan; a non-believer; a person who is unfaithful to a duty” (*O.E.D.*). In this regard, from an Islamic perspective, an *infidel* cannot attain the eternal reward of heaven as described in the Quran. These forsaken souls are sent to a level of Hell that befits the misdirected life they lived.

Is Bush the Constantine of our times, the war leader who sanctified the marriage of politics and Christianity? In the secular American society do we have a president donning the garb of Christianity leading his faithful disciples onward? Rev. Fritz Ritsch, a Presbyterian Pastor, though, states that Bush and his neo-conservative followers espouse not Christianity, but *triumphalism*, “Theirs is a zealous form of nationalism, baptized with Christian language.” *Triumphalists* consider the role of government as helping God to establish the Kingdom of God on Earth. Having not been privy to a National Prayer Breakfast, I unfortunately missed God’s keynote address on His Plan for me.

Triumphalism, in Christian terms, is considered a form of *redemptive* violence which Ritsch points out “posits a war between good and evil. With God on the side of good and Satan on the side of evil and the battle lines pretty clearly drawn.” Ritsch believes that in this line of thinking war is essential, “For God to win, evil needs to be defined and destroyed by God’s faithful followers, thus proving their faithfulness...it is bread and butter theology of fundamentalists, whether Muslim, Jewish or Christian.”

Ritsch argues that, “The true worldview of Judeo-Christianity is not that of *Triumphalism* but of *redemption*.” *Redemption* presupposes that all of humanity is flawed. No person is totally good, or totally evil. All of humanity is *redeemable*. For each person, God must be approached with humility and humbleness, thereby allowing God’s true work of *redemption* to be carried out. Ritsch points out that, “good and evil are secondary players.”

With America’s political right carrying the mantle of *secular theology*, endowing Bush with spiritual authority, warring against perceived world *evils*, and carrying out the work of God informed by the glory of *Triumphalism*, criticism of any form becomes unpatriotic and sacrilegious. Though sacrifices are made in lives, money and lifestyle, for many, war has become acceptable and necessary for it appeals to deep inner urgings coaxed by the imbedded evangelical religious messages coming from the White House.

Orders

Humans war. We are defined by its presence. War transforms. Extreme heat, light, sound and feelings shape our minds. War awes. The beautiful and the grotesque dance on sanctified battleground altars performing God’s perceived Will. Kill and be killed. The Hindu goddess, Kali, whose for-ever tongue licks up people and swallows them. As Joseph Campbell once said, “Life eats life.” The message has been sent out, ‘protect *our* values and *our* homeland for the beast roams the earth.’

Government leaders set the standards for value formation in our societies; these include the principles by which we live, and at times, the foundations for deciding who dies. Soldiers professionally do their business of defending...and destroying. Citizens

across the world innately hate war. Some leaders, while commanding from a chair atop the highest look-out, surrounded by flags, glory in the *mission*, the cause, and the awesomeness of power released. War as a social issue imbued with sanctity sets the course for how much light and shadow fall upon the earth.

*When the carnage of life is covered with flowers
And the blood soaked streets washed clean by the rain
The charred rubble of a once proud city
Shall rise in song and laugh again.*

Poem by Joseph Britton

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