SHERMAN'S MARCH AND THE FATE OF ISLAM

by

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It seems to be unfortunately true that the epidemic of world lawlessness is spreading. And mark this well! When an epidemic of physical disease starts to spread, the community approves and joins in a quarantine of the patients in order to protect the health of the community against the spread of the disease.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt

In his influential Quarantine Speech in 1937, Roosevelt addressed the "reign of terror and international lawlessness" confronting America and her allies in the years prior to World War II. His concern was directed toward the expansionist foreign policy of the Axis powers, but the language has a disturbingly modern ring. The words could just as easily apply to the theocratically inspired Islamic terrorists who are the scourge of our present era.

The Arabic gerund "Islam" literally means resigning. A Muslim, one who is in the constant process of submitting to the will of Allah, understands our human responsibility to be resignation to
the fate Allah has decreed. All men are equal in Allah's sight, but for some He wills riches, for others poverty. Some are called to be kings, others slaves. Men are free to disobey, but the appropriate response, whatever one's fate, is passive acquiescence. All else is idolatry. Idolatry occurs when a man deifies himself by worshipping a finite object, actively attaching to it an ultimacy which belongs to Allah alone.

Jihad, holy war, is sanctioned in the Qur’an, the "Recitation" in which Allah is believed to be speaking infallibly through His prophet Mohammed.¹ Unbelievers are legitimate objects of hatred and wrath. The fight must be carried to them until the religion of Allah prevails.²

Increasingly of late, fundamentalist Muslim jihadists have resorted to suicide attacks against civilian targets throughout the world, including the United States, the Great Satan. This nation had not been exposed to suicide warriors since the closing days of World War II, when the Samurai values embodied in the Bushido Code found expression in the sacrifice of kamikaze pilots who attacked military objectives in the name of the state. The jihadists of today, however, commonly target civilian bystanders in the name of religion.³

This is a spiritual blunder, since the Qur’an does not authorize suicide in behalf of Allah. Terrorists who base their
actions on a literal interpretation of scripture are therefore misreading the text and thus are deprived of religious justification. But the societies spawning these bombers do not police them. By failing to curb their actions, they evidently do approve of the tactic, on political grounds if not religious, so long as the attacks are not directed at the home societies themselves. The world of Islam is thereby implicated as a whole. As tall buildings collapsed in the disaster of September 11, 2001, the cameras panned to the Palestinian grandmothers and children dancing with joy in the streets as thousands of civilians, including many Muslims, perished in New York City.

The image lingers.

Islam is wedded to the Qur’an and is a conservative faith, conserving truths inherited from an earlier age. This temperament militates against change, since the future is discounted in favor of the past, and progressive thinking is discouraged. But in earlier centuries, prior to institutional hardening, the Muslims were innovators who preserved the writings of Aristotle and who pioneered in the development of universities when there were none to be found in Christendom. Moreover, in the era of the Crusades, the world of Islam was militarily competitive with the west, as the legendary field marshal Saladin proved. As the tradition stagnated, however, the Islamic world became an enclave from which the values and
achievements of other cultures are viewed with contempt.

Today the United States is seen as the chief exporter of western values. Since many of these values have no precedent in Muslim history, the fundamentalists, with the tacit support of their societies, declare holy war upon us. The war is sustained by the charge that we have invaded them by inflicting our political preferences, music, technology, and gender equality upon their culture. We can reply that no one is forcing them to watch TV or to don western fashion, but this misses the point. They see their faith eroded by such evils as rock and roll, and therefore must attack, overlooking at their mortal risk that this is the society that produced General Sherman.

I

William Tecumseh Sherman saw the clouds of war building in the South, and dreaded the onset of hostilities. He was comfortably ensconced in Louisiana, his adopted state. But when Beauregard fired upon Fort Sumter, the fatal die was cast. Sherman regretfully put cap and gown aside, resigned the presidency of LSU, and returned to his native Ohio to rejoin the Union army in which he had earlier served.

In November 1864, with the icy breath of winter in the air, Sherman evicted the residents of Atlanta into the countryside, torched the city, and began his legendary march to the sea. This
dramatic move, more than any other single event of the war, snapped the spine of the Confederacy. The will of the people to continue the long bloody struggle was broken.

Sherman's thrust was aimed at the people of the South, not the military. Yet his initiative resulted in the melting away of southern armies, as effectively as if they had been defeated on the field of honor. Herein lay his genius as a grand strategist of warfare.

Military history is replete with examples of brilliant tacticians, generals whose exploits in the field have won the respect of those who study the art of war. A few of these commanders rose to strategic heights, introducing new concepts which shaped military philosophy in subsequent generations. These were theoreticians whose insights reconfigured the conceptual foundations of combat. Examples include names such as Sun-tze, Alexander, Hannibal, and Ghengis Khan.

To this elite group of innovators, the name of Sherman must be added. His signal contribution to the philosophy of war was the discovery that a lasting peace can be more effectively achieved without having to defeat the opponent's army. European history convinced him that war can all too easily become a condition endemic in the respective societies that wage it. France and Germany, for example, had been in a constant state of war since the Treaty of
Verdun in 843, a state which persisted no matter which side had won the most recent battle. Sometimes the French were victorious, sometimes the Germans, but the war endured as a constant that was not affected by military exploits. No matter who wore the freshest medals, the war remained solidly entrenched.

The conclusion to which Sherman was ultimately drawn was that even if the rebel army were defeated in battle, the South would rise again and produce another one. But if the people could be utterly demoralized, their will to fight might evaporate. He therefore marched away from Hood's army, destroying the railroads and burning the bridges behind him, so that the Confederates could not threaten the rear of the "retreating" invaders.\(^5\)

"Never do I recall a more agreeable sensation," wrote Sherman years later, "than the sight of our camps by night, lit up by the fires of fragrant pine-knots."\(^6\)

By marching straight at the people of Georgia and of the South, Sherman was refining the concept of total war. His march was spiritually debilitating to the Confederacy. At Milledgeville, then the state capitol, a number of Union officers appropriated the state house and conducted a mock legislative session, in which they elected a speaker of the house of representatives and voted to repeal the secession. When arriving at towns on the way to the sea, the army paused to form ranks, then paraded smartly through the
communities with the regimental bands playing patriotic songs such as Dixie. The civilians, beholding these spectacles and powerless to intervene, realized their cause was hopeless. It was an assault on the soul and resulted in the termination of hostilities within five months, with no ensuing degeneration into a protracted guerrilla struggle. History has vindicated Sherman's march. A century and a half later, patriotism in the South is certainly as strong as that found in any other part of the land.

The Union, thanks to its overwhelming industrial and naval advantage, was fated from the beginning to suppress the rebellion, and there are a number of ways in which the war between the states conceivably may have ended. But the decisive factor, which brought it to its dramatic conclusion, was the initiative of Sherman. The march to the sea, away from the army and toward the populace, determined the form the outcome would finally assume.

For nearly a century the innovation pioneered by Sherman remained on the shelf, a precedent lodged in military annals, but not seen as having further application. The First World War was fought on traditional battlegrounds, at the periphery of public view. The cities of Europe escaped destruction, and the casualties for the most part consisted of the myriad of young men who lost their lives in trenches which were, at the end of the war, in the same place they were at the outset.
But history was to prove that the war did not end with the Armistice. The will of the German people to rearm had not been broken, and when hostilities resumed it was apparent to all that the Second World War was a continuation of the First. Viewed in broad perspective the Great War endured from 1914 to 1945, with a temporary truce from 1918 to 1939. The unifying theme was a failed attempt at German colonial expansion.

It had long been an axiom in continental military circles that the Civil War in America offered no features that could be adapted to European experience. The conflict, which by its nature dictated that the North assume the offensive, was fought in terrain not typically European. However, in 1935 the staff of the German war college reexamined the war and mode led the Blitzkrieg after the march to the sea. With the saturation bombing of civilian centers such as Coventry and Rotterdam, culminating in the London blitz, the Luftwaffe extended the concept to the air, and the Shermanesque tone of the war, total war, was firmly set in place.

In total war there are no ethical gradations. The time honored principles of proportionality (using the minimum force required to achieve a result) and discrimination (distinguishing between civilians and combatants) are abandoned.
The Civil War resulted from a complex of causes. A number of tributaries converged, but religion was not among them. Sherman was not a particularly religious man, and was openly disappointed later in life when his son became a Jesuit priest. The nation was devout, to be sure, and preachers on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line employed their Christian pulpits to pray fervently to one and the same God for victory.

The motives behind the war were political and economic, but not religious. No article of faith was being challenged, and no creed or denomination was favored on either side. The separation of church and state, as originally conceived by the founding fathers, was honored by all combatants, and no legislative body passed any law respecting ecclesiastical belief or polity. The belligerent parties solicited God's help, to be sure, but the war was not waged for His sake.

Nations which do fight in the name of God are theocratic in spirit, thereby blurring the distinction between religious and secular law. Theocracy has nowadays become a malady that afflicts certain nations in the Islamic world.

Political currents in those countries that fail to distinguish mosque from state are typically guided by ancient blood feuds. Tribal warfare is the historic reality, as well as the future, of
such regions. Any foreign power attempting to police them, by maintaining a presence in their lands, merely becomes another of the tribes. The inevitable casualties of war can be avoided only by withdrawing from the hostile areas.

In the Crusades the Christian armies faced formidable military opposition. Such is no longer the case. Muslim armed forces pose no hazard now. Western armies merely brush them aside like insects.

The traditional role of the military has been taken over by the jihadists, who do not form textbook ranks on battlefields and whose education in military science has been confined to the memorization of passages selected from the Qur’an.

Fundamentalist religion has become a Muslim epidemic, and the suicide warriors are its military symptoms. Jihadists fumble with terrorism, but America is genuinely proficient at it. If Sherman’s approach to warfare is directed against them, then the people of the Islamic nations harboring them are in gravest peril. If the decision is made to march through the religion in order to slay its warriors, the very survival of the societies themselves can no longer be assured. The march to the sea was a spiritual assault on a physical foe; the march to the warriors, by contrast, would be a physical assault on a spiritual foe. In the former the social body survived; in the latter it might not.

In his speech, Roosevelt was looking primarily at the growing
threat of the *Wehrmacht*. But his analogy to disease, and his prescription for a quarantine to render the larger body of humanity immune, is medically indicated in our time as well. America did not escape the German threat, nor dare we nurture the fantasy that the religious zealots of today will lose incentive. The *Qur’an* advises the believers to persevere, for Allah will ultimately deliver them to victory, though the odds be ten to one.\(^\text{14}\)

Roosevelt left the term "quarantine" undefined, which is of lingering concern, for if philosophical descendants of Sherman are authorized to define it, certain assumptions might be made which would shape the character of United States foreign policy in the Middle East and elsewhere by encouraging us to dehumanize the Muslim societies as a prelude to extermination.

An initial supposition might be that, in the world of Islamic theocracy, no inoculation against hatred of the United States can or will be discovered. We are despised on religious grounds, and there is no future in which the fundamentalists can or will enter into a constructive dialogue or seek mutual accommodation.

A second premise could be that Jeffersonian democracy is not an immunization that can be administered to theocratic nations. Elections need not be denied them, but we will never be able to control the outcomes. Whoever prevails will shout "Death to America" and will translate the slogan into terrorist action. We
have no friends in such countries, nor can we.

Third, it might be assumed, as an ethical maxim, that the economic stability of the first world is vital to our national interest, and that a higher value should be attached to the survival of western economies and a lower value to the continued existence of theocratic societies.

A final postulate may anticipate that the jihadists will eventually succeed in escalating hostilities to the next level by detonating a nuclear device on American soil.

III

Islamic nations in the medieval era were healthy and possessed robust features that were later adopted in western civilization. But those nations which have embraced theocracy have become diseased. They are no longer competitive militarily, economically, intellectually, politically, or culturally. They have not, and indeed cannot, enter the first world technologically. Their inherent conservatism, and marriage to a book from the past, will not permit it. They can only tear down what others have built, but cannot themselves build.

If suicidal terror is a symptom which fundamentalist Islam is unable to treat, the afflicted nations cannot heal themselves. So a cure, if such is possible, must stem from measures we impose. This
presupposes that we are granted the time to formulate an operational
definition of "quarantine" that isolates the diseased cells, thus
allowing the social body to regain its health before it is deemed
expedient to euthanize the host.

If we can find no way to quarantine the infection, contagion
will spread and outrages will mount until they reach apocalyptic
proportion. An atomic bomb eventually will be used against us, at
which time the political pressure on any incumbent president to
eliminate the offenders as a people will become virtually
irresistible. The retaliation cannot be directed at the terrorists
in isolation, since they are hiding behind the skirts of their
tolerant societies.

When terror is aimed at us in the name of Allah, jihad becomes
a theocratic obligation. The inability to distinguish between the
political and the religious rests on the fallacy of universalizing
a finite parochial bias, projecting it as an objective norm to which
humanity in general must kneel.

Western nations have, far more often than not, successfully
separated church and state. This has resulted in a widespread
tolerance for other faiths, an empathy for different perspectives.
Moslem fundamentalists, by contrast, fail to distinguish between
mosque and state, and are sustained by a generalized Islamic
intolerance for competing traditions.
This confusion of the sacred and the secular is an adventure in idolatry, since it is based upon a misreading of the Qur’an. The scripture announces that when our human volition is exercised without submission to Allah, catastrophe can result, for no evil befalls men except through His will.\(^{15}\) From this it follows that if the extremists cannot be quarantined, then any apocalypse engulfing their societies would be with the approval of a retributive Allah, for a "grievous Penalty" is to be inflicted upon those who betray the fate He has decreed.\(^{16}\) This would be their collective penalty for having become idolaters, confusing creed with constitution, attaching ultimacy to their finite misperception of a holy book.
NOTES

1. Qur’an, 10/37; 39/28.


3. The assault on civilians is reminiscent, qualitatively if not quantitatively, of Sherman's philosophy of war. The March to the Sea was designed deliberately to avoid confrontation with major Confederate units. The analogy quickly pales, however. Sherman's motive was in no sense religious, and his concept did not include suicide as a tactic. Homicide was more to his taste.

4. Many Muslims do not think of jihad as a call to arms so much as a spiritual obligation to be triumphant in the inner war, waged by us all, between good and evil. Clearly this is not the view shared by fundamentalist factions.

5. Sherman, Volume II, p. 152. This sentiment is nowhere more succinctly stated than in a message telegraphed to Ulysses Grant in October, 1864. In reference to Georgia, he observed that "the utter destruction of its roads, houses, and people,
will cripple their military resources." He further added, "I can make this march, and make Georgia howl!"


7. Sherman arrived at Savannah in mid-December, thereby securing a haven for supplies. He then turned north through the Carolinas. Lee, stalemated against Grant in Virginia, and now finding Sherman at his rear, was placed in an impossible dilemma. Letters from mothers to their sons in Richmond revealed the depth of humiliation and despair gripping the southern people. Morale evaporated, commanders increasingly lost control of their units, and desertions mounted.

8. The American Civil War was the first modern war, in which technology played a radical new role. Occurring in the 19th century at roughly the midpoint between the Napoleonic era and World War I, it was unique in many respects, compared with previous large-scale conflicts: on land, steam powered locomotives replaced horse drawn wagons; on the seas, the age of sail gave way to ironclad steamships; rifled bores were introduced to muskets and cannons; thanks to electricity, the telegraph supplanted couriers and semaphores, enabling instant press coverage of important events.

9. B. H. Liddell Hart, the noted British historian and biographer of Sherman, wrote a forward to Sherman's 1972 reprint of the Memoirs. In those pages (xiii-xvi) he recounts personal conversations with General von Blomberg and confirms the impact of Sherman's thought on field marshals such as Guderian and Rommel, as well as on George Patton, the American legend.


11. Reston, pp. 16, 93, 106.

12. Durkin, p 52.

13. Exceptions might include the Turkish and Persian histories, but even in these cultures there are powerful theocratic undercurrents.


15. Qur'an, 64/11.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


