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In My View

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IN MY VIEW . . .

"Arab Horsemen on White Steeds"

Sir:

I would like to commend Lt. Cdr. Paul Wrigley on his fine article, "The Impact of Religious Belief in the Theater of Operations" (*Naval War College Review*, Spring 1996, pp. 85–101). Lt. Cdr. Wrigley correctly pointed out the importance religious beliefs have in the strategy, planning, and conduct of military operations. It is an area not frequently considered and less frequently taken into consideration when undertaking military operations. As the role of today's military continues to change and evolve, religious considerations will, one hopes, play a more prominent role.

In just the last few years our military personnel have been involved in various types of operations, in Kurdish areas, Rwanda, Somalia, and Bosnia. In all of these actions the religious beliefs of our soldiers and our knowledge of the religious beliefs of the inhabitants have been important factors.

I would particularly like to comment on Lt. Cdr. Wrigley's section on DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM. He correctly points out several examples of how Saddam Hussayn attempted to use propaganda and misinformation to stir up anti-U.S. religious feelings in the region and how Saddam also used coalition sensitivities toward religious shrines to help protect his military assets. To those examples I would like to add another.

Shortly after Iraq's occupation of Kuwait, Saddam was shown on Iraqi TV dutifully praying at a mosque and later, in a speech, issuing a call to all Muslims for a *jihad* (holy war) against the United States and all the Western countries that had

come to the aid of Saudi Arabia. Saddam's call for *jihād* was certainly intended to bolster the morale of the Iraqi people in general and the Iraqi military in particular. In the West, the call for *jihād* sent shivers down the spines of policy makers and military planners. They saw visions of Arab horsemen on white steeds swooping down on the infidels and cutting off heads with their curved swords.

Picturesque to be sure, but to most Westerners the term "holy war" does conjure up these images from the Crusades, or that of hordes of Iranians marching in Tehran and burning the U.S. flag and effigies of President Carter. Many thought that Saddam's plea would unleash the fury of Islamic fundamentalism. But it didn't; and the reasons are well grounded in Islamic religious beliefs. Islamic law, or *shari'a*, clearly sets off the conditions under which *jihād* can be invoked. None of these conditions existed at the time Saddam issued his call.

A true *jihād* can only be called by the recognized leader of the Islamic world. Saddam was not recognized as a Muslim who faithfully practiced his religion, never mind the religious leader of Islam. Thus his call was an empty one. Technically, in today's Islamic world, no single leader can declare *jihād*. The schism created by the secession struggles after the Prophet Mohammad's death, over the fourteen centuries of Islamic history, eroded the legal and religious authority for any one figure to declare *jihād* for all sects of Islam.

Islamic religious law under which *jihād* can be invoked is subject to interpretation, and the various sects of Islam have each chosen to define it in their own way. The largest sect of Islam, the Sunni (Saddam's sect), has adopted the most conservative interpretation, in which *jihād* includes both temporal and spiritual efforts to defend Islam. The Sunni have identified four types of *jihād*: of the heart, the tongue, the pen, and the sword. The first three of these address challenges to Islamic values, including a personal, moral struggle of the soul. Only the fourth refers to a challenge from a non-Muslim source, which could require armed conflict.

Saddam hoped that, in addition to bolstering morale at home and among his troops in Kuwait, his call for *jihād* would have an emotional impact among all Arabs and galvanize support among Islamic fundamentalist groups for his struggle against the coalition. Arab peoples in general and Islamic fundamentalist groups in particular saw through Saddam's charade. His call went unheeded, and the coalition remained intact and as formidable as ever.

The lesson from this and Lt. Cdr. Wrigley's article is that military planners, strategists, and policymakers would be well counseled not only to take into consideration the religious beliefs of their troops but also those of the enemy.

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Nato Expansion

Sir:

As a postscript to my letter published in the Spring 1995 *Naval War College Review*, I am distressed to find repeated rumblings in the press and political journals to accept former Warsaw Pact and East bloc countries into Nato. Some of our so-called political/military experts appear to encourage the actions.

Dr. Peter Schoettle wrote in his essay entitled "Key Geostrategic Trends" (*Naval War College Review*, Winter 1995), "The magnitude of the [Russian] transformation is not to be underestimated. In the last few years the Soviet Union and now Russia have striven to manage changes that almost overwhelmed three of America's greatest presidents: Washington, in establishing the institutions of a new federal government; Lincoln, in keeping the country united; and Roosevelt, in overcoming the Depression. The Russians are grappling with all three *simultaneously*. It is only to be expected that the reform process will not go smoothly and that it will suffer reversals."

At this time we need to be particularly neutral if not supportive: certainly not provocative. It is in *our* best interests to do so.

With respect to a "what-if" exercise, does the Naval War College have computer programs that project alternative consequences of political/military behavior rather than consequences resulting solely from military alternatives?

I have the uncomfortable feeling that many Nato expansion advocates either have not considered the potential consequences of their recommended actions or that their behavior is largely self-serving.

The issue deserves, in my view, considerable attention, given the dangers inherent in a bad decision.

Bruno Gruenwald
Lebanon, Penna.

"The Changing Nature of Warfare?"

Sir:

Yes, Colin Gray (*Naval War College Review*, Spring 1996, pp. 7-22), I-war is "the new fashionable topic." And in our enthusiasm for I-war gadgetry we are coming to rely utterly on microelectronics and chips and digital displays for moving information on the battlefield, ship-to-shore, air-to-ground, etc. But the flashy new gadgets bring with them new vulnerabilities.

Remember electromagnetic-pulse (EMP) weapons? They are still around. A small-yield, nuclear EMP weapon (even too small to cause prompt casualties), employed at low altitude, could "cook" chip circuits badly enough to cause many

of our costly digital displays to fail. And of course they will fail at the worst possible moment, because the enemy will choose *when* to employ an EMP airburst.

I have no quick or easy solution to this. But we'd better be shielding our chips against irradiation and training junior leaders to fall back on old-fashioned, low-tech communications when necessary. (I'm old enough to have used hand-and-arm signals, red-filtered flashlights, and three different colors of cloth flags, as a young armor lieutenant at Fort Knox.)

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Alfred Thayer Mahan

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