

The Two Realities

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Professor Mark Shulman's article¹ advocating the adoption of Franklin D. Roosevelt's Four Freedoms as a foundation for U.S. foreign policy is a useful contribution to the contemporary political debate. Indeed, we all might wish that his policy prescriptions would lead to a new age of enlightened internationalism under U.S. influence and leadership.

Unfortunately, history does not afford us cause for optimism. In the last 100 years, twice – after both World Wars – the West has hoped for a better world free from want and fear. And yet, those hopes – for the enshrinement of the Four Freedoms in the halls of government around the world – foundered on the rocks of reality when totalitarianism was established in a resurgent Germany under Hitler and in the hegemony of Stalinist Russia during the Cold War.

Today, if history is any guide, our hopes for freedom may well founder on the reality of a virulent Islamic fundamentalism, as radicals associated with Osama bin Laden or the Taliban and empowered by modern technology wage an asymmetric struggle against Western values. Or, more accurately, our hopes will founder on Two Realities: That there are those in the world who hate Western freedoms; and that nothing we can do will change their minds or deny them the capacity to cause mayhem and destroy freedom. Making the Four Freedoms the centerpiece of a grand strategy will, I fear, have only the adverse consequence of weakening Western resolve and hastening the day when we will, once again, have to fight to preserve those very freedoms we hold so dear.

A Four Freedoms strategy presupposes rationality. It assumes that Western values of freedom of speech and religion and freedom from want and fear are universal and that a policy expressly premised on their propagation will attract adherents. And, to be fair, for many of our international interlocutors, that presupposition is credible. A foreign policy based on the Four Freedoms is likely to have strong resonance with many in the international community and may well peel off some support for the al Qaeda program.

The Freedoms played that role effectively in the battle against Germany. They were a wonderful embodiment of Western ideals,

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1. Mark R. Shulman, *The "War on Terror" Is Over – Now What? Restoring the Four Freedoms as a Foundation for Peace and Security*, 3 J. NAT'L SECURITY L & POL'Y 263 (2009).

energizing opposition to totalitarianism and giving voice to the principles of freedom. And today, by appealing to those principles, we may find allies. But the milieu in which we are advocating these principles differs greatly from World War II and the Cold War, and thus reliance on Western values of freedom will not be sufficient in the same way it was during the last century.

For there is a vital difference between the ideologies of totalitarianism in Germany and later Soviet Russia and the threats we face today. As former Secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff put it:

Yesterday's fascists and communists looked forward to a totalitarian future and tried to force the world into embracing it, but today's bin Laden vision, a vision of extreme religious totalitarianism doesn't seek to move the world into the future. It seeks to drag the world back to an oppressive past that is already rejected. Simply put, bin Laden and his fellow travelers are at war not just with America or the West, but with the values and principles, the habits and institutions of modern civilization, wherever they may be found around the world.²

Thus, Professor Shulman's attempt to reconfigure the debate, while admirable, is unlikely to succeed. Simply ceasing to use the word "war" as a description of the conflict does not change its nature. It is not a "war" in the classical sense. But it is – and is likely to remain – a clash of civilizations in the sense propounded by Samuel P. Huntington. And no amount of adherence to principle or purposeful striving to avoid the conflict will make the conflict go away. Professor Shulman believes that a soft power campaign based on the Four Freedoms will win the "hearts and minds" of opponents of Western culture. For fanatical opponents, little could be less likely.

Professor Shulman is not alone in believing that the "war" is not a war and the "clash" is not a clash. President Obama and his Administration have now joined the many who deny that there is any war.³ But bin Laden and Zawahiri think differently. They believe that we are at war, a war that will not end until a Caliphate has been created and the United States has been defeated. In his fatwa of 1998, bin Laden summoned his followers to battle. Bin Laden ended that declaration with a command "to kill the

2. Michael Chertoff, Remarks at Westminster College: The Battle for Our Future (Oct. 17, 2007), available at http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/speeches/sp_1193063865526.shtm.

3. See, e.g., *Clinton: Administration Has Stopped Using 'War on Terror' Term*, FOXNEWS.COM, Mar. 30, 2009, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/first100days/2009/03/30/clinton-administration-stopped-using-war-terror-term/>; Dana Priest, *Bush's 'War' on Terror Comes to a Sudden End*, WASH. POST, Jan. 23, 2009, at A1.

Americans and their allies – civilian and military – . . . in any country where it is possible to do it.”⁴

In the years following that declaration we have seen dozens of attacks of all forms, ranging from the September 11 assaults on American soil to assaults on U.S. embassies in Africa and bombings in Madrid, London, Mumbai, and Bali. In 2008 alone, the National Counterterrorism Center reported approximately 11,800 terrorist attacks resulting in over 54,000 deaths, injuries, and kidnappings.⁵ To be sure, this represented a decline from 2007. But that decline occurred largely because the situation improved in Iraq. In contrast, attacks more than doubled in 2008 in South Asia, where we saw the high-profile assault on Mumbai hotels, rail stations, and other buildings. Though not all of these attacks can be attributed to al Qaeda or its affiliates, we cannot doubt the continuing virulence of the problem.

The problem, then, is that al Qaeda and its adherents do not, at their core, accept even the premise of rationality that the Four Freedoms strategy requires. Because their world view differs so radically from the West’s, there is little, if any, possibility that freedom-based advocacy will win them over and cause them to lay down their weapons.

Some might say, fairly, that this is a strawman argument: The real objective of a Four Freedoms strategy is not to win over bin Laden, but to win over the uncommitted polity, and thereby deprive him a base of support (whether financial, physical, or intellectual). That, after all, was a part of the Four Freedoms objective in World War II: not only to rally our allies but also to weaken adherence to our opponents’ ideology by painting a contrasting picture of freedom. A good idea can, indeed, diminish the attractiveness of a bad one. However, changed circumstances will diminish the effectiveness of this strategy.

In the twentieth century, clashes between cultures were fueled by societal mobilization. That is why the conflicts of World War I and World War II were described as “total war.”⁶ A strategy aimed at the psyche of the populace, in that context, might well affect the culture’s capacity to

4. JAMES JAY CARAFANO & PAUL ROSENZWEIG, *WINNING THE LONG WAR: LESSONS FROM THE COLD WAR FOR DEFEATING TERRORISM AND PRESERVING FREEDOM* 253 (2005).

5. NATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM CENTER, *2008 REPORT ON TERRORISM* 10 (2009). Indeed, the assault continues to the very day this essay was completed. See Griff Witte, *Truck Bomb Kills 11, Injuries Dozens at Pakistani Hotel*, WASH. POST, June 10, 2009, at A8.

6. General Erich Ludendorff’s biography of World War I characterized it as a “total war.” See ERICH LUDENDORFF, *DER TOTALE KREIG* (1936). Churchill’s characterization of World War II was similar. See, e.g., Winston P. Churchill, *Address at the House of Commons: The Few* (Aug. 20, 1940), available at <http://www.fiftiesweb.com/usa/winston-churchill-so-few.htm> (“The whole of the warring nations are engaged, not only soldiers, but the entire population, men, women and children. The fronts are everywhere. The trenches are dug in the towns and streets. Every village is fortified. Every road is barred. The front line runs through the factories. The workmen are soldiers with different weapons but the same courage.”).

fight. Today, the equation has changed. Modern twenty-first century technology gives terrorists an amazing capacity to act with relative independence from societal support structures and an unprecedented ability to destroy and do damage. Indeed, the twenty-first century threat of asymmetric warfare from terrorists is both inevitable and unavoidable.

Why? Because really transformative technologies have something in common.⁷ They empower individuals in remarkable new ways. We can travel farther and more quickly; talk to more people; work and play on any continent; and, through computers and the Internet, have instant access to knowledge that was once available only to a handful of librarians.

Equally important, transformative new technologies lower the cost of everything by creating new specialties and new efficiencies. Thanks to cars and planes, we have nationwide markets for consumer goods. Railroads allowed the creation of city-based sports leagues; telecommunications allowed large enterprises to sell products without a store; and the Internet has created specialized markets for books and music in the “long tail,” that is, works so specialized that they are no longer in print or record stores.

But there are two stings in that long tail. Giving individuals more choices, more reach, and more power is a great thing, most of the time. However, technologies that empower ordinary individuals to improve their lives also empower Osama bin Laden. It may take a long time for the dangers to become apparent, but in the end ill-intentioned individuals can and will use technology for malevolent ends. And as the powers of technology become greater so does the capacity to cause greater destruction. We enjoyed forty-five years of commercial jet travel that allowed well-meaning individuals to travel more widely and broadly than they ever had before. We saw dangers in the technology from accidents that resulted in loss of life. We even learned that hijackers could take advantage of the confined space to make public demands. But it was not until September 11 that we learned how 19 men were able to use that technology to kill 3,000 using planes as, in effect, fueled missiles. But something like September 11 was inherent in the technology from the start.

The second sting is that, by the time we take the fall – by the time we learn the unexpected dangers of the technology – we’re no longer standing still. We’re traveling 30 miles per hour or, in the case of jet airplanes, 600 miles per hour. And at that speed, the fall is very hard. All new technologies create new dependencies (which we called efficiencies when we adopted them), and those dependencies amplify the effects of terrorism. Today, we can hardly live in Western societies without the information transfers made possible by the Internet. But just as planes can become missiles, cars can become bombs, and the Internet begets identity theft, or a cyber attack on critical national infrastructure. To cite but one example, Estonian commerce was nearly immobilized by a concerted cyber-attack

7. This analysis is developed more fully in a forthcoming book: STEWART A. BAKER, *SKATING ON STILTS: TECHNOLOGY AND TERRORISM* (forthcoming 2010).

during a confrontation with Russia because it had become so dependent on electronic means of exchange.

And so the new technology empowers those who despise the very freedoms that the technology enhances. Using these technologies, radicals affiliated with al Qaeda or the Taliban are fighting against Western values. And they do so without depending on the cultural support of their fellow citizens.

To be sure, as a means of advancing the battle, al Qaeda and its allies are fighting for and achieving control of territory in countries where they can train, plot, and impose their own vision of law and society on the local population. It is clear that al Qaeda and its allies want to reclaim Afghanistan and exercise power over the Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan. We see fighting today in Somalia and an upsurge in violence in Iraq as the U.S. occupation nears its end.⁸ But territorial control is not nearly as essential to al Qaeda's success as it was, say, to the Soviet Union. Creation of the Caliphate may, in the end, involve control over territory, but in the interim territorial occupation is a secondary means to achieving that end, not the end itself.

The Four Freedoms – bedrocks of the liberal West – are a good start, and may serve as a rallying cry for the values of democracy and freedom. But let us not fool ourselves into thinking that they are a panacea. Our extremist enemy aims to destroy our democracy, and nothing we can do will change their minds. Reliance on our values as an aspect of our public diplomacy will have an intended effect. But it may also have the unintended effect of heightening the battle by emphasizing that the freedoms that Islamic fundamentalists oppose are the grounds of our policy making. The reality is that those very freedoms are the antithesis of our opponents' beliefs, and no amount of public diplomacy can alter that fact. Those are the two hard realities of this clash.

8. See, e.g., Nada Burki, *Three US Troops, 23 Iraqis Killed in Bomb Attacks*, WASH. POST, May 22, 2009, at A10.