

violation of the moral law. Medieval Christianity was a religion of love, not of righteousness.

The Virgin Spring, while it speaks darkly to our lives and to these times when terrible crimes are commonplace, when murder and rape and the loss of innocence are routine and scarcely more than statistics, while it speaks to us directly, is also the remarkable story of a good man—a severe and strict man, true, but also a righteous and compassionate one, who overcomes his own just nature in recognizing and repenting his ethical conduct. In the end, ethics have nothing to do with it. Nor, for that matter, does his tragic repentance and promise to God. All that matters is God's gift to him, and to all mankind, shown in the spring of water. The author tells us, appropriately, that there is a spring in a churchyard in Ostergotland which has come to be taken as the spring of this legend and where people to this day come on Midsummer Eve to drink the water for its healing powers.

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AMERICAN EMPIRE

Tipping Points and Imperial Meltdown

by Joseph E. Fallon

Tipping points have occurred in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia that signal the beginning of a meltdown of the American Empire.

In war, a "tipping point" may be defined as an event so dramatic, often so unexpected, that it has a psychological impact on the momentum of the war itself. It adversely affects the morale of the troops, the political leadership, and the civilians of one of the belligerents. And it frequently portends ultimate defeat.

In the waging of three major wars over the last half of the 20th century, the U.S. government experienced the psychological impact of a "tipping point." In World War II, it was the Battle of Midway (June 4-7, 1942). It occurred six months after Pearl Harbor and took the Japanese

by surprise, destroying a significant portion of their fleet, including four of their navy's ten aircraft carriers, the principal weapons of naval warfare. It stopped further Japanese expansion in the Pacific and shifted the war's psychological momentum in America's favor.

In the Korean War, U.N. forces had been driven to Pusan in the southeast tip of Korea and faced defeat. Gen. Douglas MacArthur's dramatic arrival at Incheon on September 15, 1950, was a tipping point. By unexpectedly landing U.N. military forces behind enemy lines, MacArthur threatened communist communication and supply lines, forcing North Korean troops to retreat. This action dramatically shifted the psychological momentum of the war in favor of the Americans—albeit temporarily. Another tipping point occurred on November 26, 1950, when Red China unexpectedly intervened with her army of "volunteers," numbering 780,000. A military stalemate was the ultimate result.

In the Vietnam War, the Tet Offensive by the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong (beginning on January 30, 1968) was the tipping point. Although the U.S. military technically prevailed, the Americans "lost" the propaganda war because the Tet Offensive was so dramatic and unexpected. Since 1965, the Johnson administration had been assuring the American public that victory was in sight. Through weekly updates enumerating the body counts of enemy dead, Washington had been attempting to convince Americans that the North Vietnamese forces were being destroyed. Then, an estimated 85,000 Communist troops launched the six-month offensive throughout South Vietnam, including on her capital, Saigon. To an increasing number of Americans, Johnson lost credibility, and the war looked unwinnable. The psychological momentum, thereafter, favored the North Vietnamese.

Thirty years later, the world is a radically different place. The United States has been transformed into a global empire, through the foreign policy of the neoconservatives, many of whom are ex-Trotskyites. They lobbied Washington to pursue world hegemony, and they got it. They lobbied the U.S. government to wage war against Islam, what they called World War IV, and they got that, too. Now, we have to deal with the consequences.

The American Empire is overstretched—militarily, financially, and psychologically. In Afghanistan, the bloody riots that

engulfed the capital city of Kabul on May 29, 2006, can be seen as a tipping point in that war. Previously, the city had been secure; it was the only city, in fact, that the U.S.-installed Karzai administration actually controlled. The predominantly Tajik population had opposed the Taliban (mainly ethnic Pashtuns) and was pro-American. But when a U.S.-military convoy accidentally rammed a line of 12 cars during rush hour, killing either one Afghani (according to the U.S. embassy) or as many as eight (according to a local TV station), Kabul erupted in anti-American violence.

A growing number of angry Afghans quickly gathered at the site of the traffic accident to protest. Soon, a mob of 500 was hurling rocks at the Americans and chanting, "Death to America!" and "Death to Karzai!" In "self-defense," U.S. troops responded by opening fire either on or over the hostile crowd. At least seven Afghans were reported killed.

The shooting provoked a riot. Some Afghans marched on parliament, the presidential palace, the American and British embassies, and other Western missions to protest. Others ransacked local shops and international aid offices; burned U.S. flags, several cars, and a police station; and engaged the authorities in running gun battles, which lasted for hours. To curb the violence, a nighttime curfew was imposed. The damage, however, was already done. In addition to 20 Afghans killed and 100 wounded, there was the psychological impact of the riots. A significant portion of the population of Kabul was now openly anti-American.

This anti-Americanism expresses itself in the vocabulary of a pan-Afghan nationalism and a common Islamic identity, both of which are perceived by many Afghans to be threatened by the United States. And this vocabulary is uniting former enemies—the Tajiks of the Northern Alliance and the Pashtuns of the Taliban. The former are now accused of helping to arm the latter.

Why is this happening? The Northern Alliance represents Tajiks, the second-largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, constituting 27 percent of the total population. It was the principal military force on which the United States relied to overthrow the Taliban. Now, the Northern Alliance feels betrayed by the Bush administration. They believe the U.S. government encouraged Karzai to remove Northern Alliance members from important posts in the central government

When Incarnation Is Considered Idolatry

by Robert D. Hickson

In his trenchant 1919 Introduction to Scott Moncrieff's translation of *The Song of Roland*, G.K. Chesterton was especially stirred by the Old French epic poem's final stanza, after "Charlemagne the Christian emperor" had already victoriously fought on the Spanish March against encroaching Islam and seemed, at last, to have "established his empire in quiet." But then, the final poignant stanza surprises us, says Chesterton—namely, King Vivien's unexpected appeal to Charlemagne for help:

And there appears to him the angel of God crying aloud that his arms are needed in a new and distant land and that he must take up again the endless march of his days. And the great King tears his long white beard and cries out against his restless life. The poem ends, as it were, with a vision and vista of wars against the barbarians; and the vision is true. For that war is never ended, which defends the sanity of the world against all the stark anarchies and rending negations which rage against it for ever. That war is never finished in this world, and the grass has hardly grown on the graves of our own friends who fell in it.

In 1917, one year before his courageous brother, Cecil, died in France, Chesterton published *A Short History of England*. It was written in response to "a sort of challenge," and he calls it, with characteristic modesty, merely "a popular essay in English history."

This little work contains several profound insights, not only about the "fury of the Iconoclasts"—Jews, Muslims, and Christian heretics—but about "the inner emotions of the Crusade." That is to say, the permanent intellectual and moral resistance to those who still think that "Incarnation is itself Idolatry." (The following quotations, unless otherwise noted, are all from that work.)

Let us consider what Chesterton calls

and that Washington is behind Karzai's subjection of the Tajiks to a policy of benign neglect. International aid for reconstruction and development is allocated to other regions or siphoned off through corruption. Little of the needed funds are allocated to Tajik-inhabited regions, such as the Panjshir Valley.

Together, the Tajiks and Pashtuns make up 70 percent of the population of Afghanistan. If they continue to explore any kind of anti-American alliance, the U.S. government does not have the military capabilities in country to defeat them.

In Iraq, the U.S. government has hoped that the killing of the Jordanian-born Al Qaeda leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was a tipping point, shifting the psychological momentum to the Americans. The Bush administration is counting on a reduction in the violence of the Sunni-Shiite civil war that Zarqawi helped to foment. This civil war, though based on deep-seated religious animosities, has been inflamed by both the reality and the perception of actions undertaken by the U.S. government and the Shiite-dominated Iraqi government. Zarqawi only exploited the anger that already existed among Sunnis, which hasn't dissipated with his death.

Perhaps the alleged massacre (and subsequent cover-up) by U.S. Marines on November 19, 2005, of 15 unarmed civilians, including seven women and three children, in the city of Haditha was the real tipping point. When the results of ongoing investigations are made public, many Americans may start to view this war as having a dehumanizing effect on the troops, turning soldiers into murderers, and more will demand that they be brought home now. The psychological momentum among Americans would then shift away from maintaining a continued American presence in Iraq. If additional allegations of atrocities against civilians by U.S. troops in Iraq bear fruit, it is difficult to see how Washington will be able to retain a significant military presence in Iraq or in any other Arab state in the region.

In Somalia, the U.S. government pursued a policy that achieved the opposite of what it intended. For the last 15 years—since the collapse of the state in 1991 and the effective partition of the country and the capital, Mogadishu, among rival warlords—Somalis have lacked physical security and rudimentary social services. This deteriorating situation led to the emergence in recent years of an Islamic court system based on *sharia*, which has

been embraced by the Somalis because it provides schooling and health care.

Washington, however, opposes these Islamic courts, claiming that they are sympathetic to, if not allies of, Al Qaeda. According to the Bush administration,

The United States is concerned that in this environment al-Qa'eda may use Somalia for a base for terrorist activities around the globe. Around the world the United States will work with regional and international partners to prevent countries becoming terrorist safe havens.

Convinced that the Islamic courts had to be suppressed, the Bush administration quietly armed the warlords, who now call themselves the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-terrorism; Washington is funding their war against the Islamic courts to the tune of \$100,000 per month. Despite their violations of human rights and the fact that they had killed U.S. troops in Mogadishu in 1993, the warlords became American allies in the "War on Terror."

After months of fighting, a tipping point came on June 6, 2006, when the Union of Islamic Courts defeated the U.S.-backed warlords and seized control of Mogadishu, after many troops of the warlords had switched sides. The goal of the victors is to unify the country under *sharia*. Thus, the Union of Islamic Courts is negotiating with the U.N.-backed Somali government, which, while internationally recognized, controls little territory.

The psychological impact of this defeat for the U.S. government has reverberated throughout the Muslim world. To Muslims, Somalia reversed the trend of U.S. hegemony, and this has won new converts to Islamic "fundamentalism." And the suffering and death of Somalis at the hands of the U.S.-backed warlords swelled the ranks of potential terrorists and suicide bombers.

The continued existence of the American Empire depends on its ability to defeat any adversary, any time, anywhere. The events in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia have revealed to the world that Washington does not have that power. The imperial meltdown has begun.

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