

Spiral Dynamics Integral

"The Theory that Explains Everything"



[Click Here to Return to Essay Index](#)

The Global Great Divide

An Integral Initiative

Don Edward Beck, Ph. D.

"What if a malignant version of some fear-laced "-ism" -- this Truth is the only Truth and will prevail at any cost" -- suddenly rears its head for conquest and domination? Can the glass fiber infrastructure of the global village withstand terrorists fighting holy wars or self-righteous crusades?"

"Ancient ethnic sores are belching fire while transnational companies linked by satellites conduct their business oblivious to the feudal past below."

-- Spiral Dynamics: Mastering Values, Leadership, and Change by Don Edward Beck and Christopher C. Cowan. Blackwell Publishers, Ltd. Oxford, UK, 1996

If, indeed, we are about to launch the first war of the 21st Century, where are the battle lines? The half century spent in fighting the Cold War pitted two quite similar social/economic systems in mortal combat. Yet, they were simply alternative versions of modernity, with similar military strategies and mutual destruction capabilities. When the Berlin Wall fell only to be replaced by the Berlin Mall, that issue was resolved.

But the end of the Cold War and the meltdown of the bipolar ice sheet that covered the planet, revealed the hot ethnic cores, seething rage, and deep tributaries of violence and revenge that had been suppressed. The unspeakable horror from barbarism in the Balkans reminded us at the time we may have won the war but not the lasting peace.

And now the fuse that has been simmering for centuries in the Middle East flared in full view on the morning of September 11, revealing yet another Global Great Divide. Today we all sit on this huge fault line, one that 20th Century Dogs of War or Doves of Peace are unable to handle on their own. Heretofore acts of violence were like bacteria. We could locate the source of the infection and inject antibodies in the form of the Marines, or even smart bombs launched from on high. Terrorism is more like a virus that metastasizes, mutates, lies dormant until triggered, and flourishes when our immune systems are weak or preoccupied.

If neither Dogs nor Doves can close the great Global Divide, who can? It will require men and women with deep insights, 21st Century views, and brave hearts. Call them Visionaries. They appear in times of great crisis and seem to possess wisdom far beyond their official positions or list of professional credentials. They should be heard.

To understand this new Global Divide we will need to engage Visionary thinking that sees beyond the stereotypes of religion, culture and nationality and focus on the deeper codes and belief structures that cut across them all. These codes, like cultural "DNA" scripts, drive human emergence through layers and levels. Conflicts occur between layers (tribes vs. tribes, empires vs. empires, holy-ism vs. holy-ism, etc.) or between levels and layers, such as the ancients vs. the moderns or Thomas Friedman's Lexus vs. the Olive Tree. These themes exist in all social systems but in different ratios, and can be either healthy or unhealthy in their expressions.

On one side of the Great Divide are the ancients feudal empires, zealotry, fanaticism, "My

Truth is the only Truth” self-flagellation, chosen-people exclusiveness, jihad-like militant movements, often turbo-charged by the conviction that death in the name of the cause guarantees a ticket to Paradise. Wars are fought to protect holy sites, sacred places, the purity of genetic lineage, or the spoils from predatory empires. Not all ancients generate terrorism but here is the breeding ground for this malignancy.

The archenemy of the ancients are the moderns - the Great Satan - secular, materialistic, pragmatic, technology-rich, economically- sophisticated, win:win oriented, industrial and consumer-based with a stress on personal freedom. Moderns foster nation-states, multinational corporations, fast food restaurants, and participate in global financial arrangements. Postmoderns add explorations into personal feelings, high levels of permissiveness, and strong rejections of authoritarian religions, all of which are offensive to fanatical ancients. These sensitive and caring souls are often the first in line to get their throats cut in revolutionary times. If you don't believe what I'm saying, you are a tad naïve.

In the 21st Century the ancients and moderns are intermingled like never before. Globalization, new immigration patterns, open borders, demands for human rights and equality, and access to the Internet and CNN have illuminated all gaps and asymmetries. While we live at the same time, we exist in different historic, cultural epochs. The clash of cultures is, actually, the conflict in these deeply held codes and worldviews. Lines are being drawn for a cultural Battle of Armageddon. Everybody is doing what is right in their own eyes.

In spite of all our information gathering and intelligence capacities we have been missing the most important dynamic that is shaping these dangerous times. A militant, pervasive, wrathful, virulent strain of Arab/Islamic nationalism is rising and is blowing through archaic tribal/kingdom structures and even traditional nation-states. Israel and the United States are its archenemies; it is fueled by ancient myths of superiority and oppression and empowered by the images of a holy calling that must kill Western infidels in the name of Allah. Just as the ugly, black clouds of poison cascaded through the caverns in New York City, this blast from the Medieval past endangers civilization as we know it.

We had clear evidence this toxic tide was on the rise. The continual attack on Israel by Palestine kids throwing stones, the anti-Israel efforts at the recent UN race conference in Durban, and the creation of a series of propaganda campuses that are instilling hatred in the minds of Muslim youth, indicate such a pattern. These actions are fueled by anger and irrational xenophobia. We've seen this before in human history and such legitimate movements can be either malignant or benign.

The complex Israeli culture was formed and is sustained by a similar nationalistic movement, with radical Zionist elements on the cutting edge. What we are witnessing on the Arab side is but a historical re-enactment of what they now perceived to be the primary obstacle to their own emergence. These are sensitive issues for many, but the safest place in any crisis is always the hard truth.

What options are open to us now? For a start, consider the following:

First, **block the polarizing stereotypes by redefining the issues in terms of these underlying value systems.** Respect the differences among extremists and fanatics and healthy versions of Islam. Regard "Arab" as being a rich spectrum of experiences. Brand the Bin Laden/Taliban version of both as a virulent distortion. Assist the Arab countries in the tilt toward moderns and away from ancients. Search for ways to direct this emerging spirit of nationalism into constructive and positive channels.

The moderns in these Arab cultures will need resources and encouragement to fend off attacks from ancients within their own midst. Bin Laden exploits the tools of the moderns to promote the agenda of the ancients. He and his cadres are very skillful in moving into modern contexts to sow seeds of turmoil and fear.

The very best people to detect and snuff out this virus are the moderns who embrace Islam, live within the Arab societies, and are constantly threatened by some ancients who are driven for a multitude of reasons to attack Western society. Arab societies and Islamic believers now face an existential moment of truth. They will not be able to straddle the fence on this matter. While it seems like the real conflict is between Osama bin Laden and his

bands of terrorists and the United States, a critical skirmish in this global battle will be fought between the radicals and moderates, the ancients and moderns, within Arab communities.

This suggests we should “wage war” in the religious, cultural, humanitarian, and psychological domains while using our military power and threats as a foreboding checkmate. We should consider sending in food and medical supplies into many of the deprived areas instead of first launching cruise missiles. Consider also a series of emergency summit meetings at The Hague to “smoke out” these issues in more depth and detail. The late 20th Century models of “peace,” “democracy,” and “cultural pluralism” are no longer relevant to a world endangered by more primitive elements born of the feudal age.

We should declare Osama bin Laden an international criminal, a mortal enemy of Islam, and brand the 9/11 attack on innocent citizens as a “crime against humanity.” People from at least 40 different countries lost their lives in the towers, indicating the assault was not just on Americans, it was on the whole planet. While one can always blame the United States for the sins of its past, it makes little sense to carry the “system vs. struggle” polarity into such a complex world.

In short, we must drive a wedge between the ancients and the moderns to enable Arab/Islam and their countries to fend off the counter-attack from their ultra-conservative elements. This is a time for creativity, imagination, unexpected moves, defusing strokes, and a host of strategies all designed to deal with the deeper dynamics that produce terrorists acts as symbols of tectonic-like cultural shifts.

Second, **mobilize local and global resources to close the developmental gaps**, thus releasing millions of people who are trapped in abject poverty, restrictive governmental structures, and puritanical, repressive religions. These are the menacing breeding grounds for the dangerous viruses that are spilling out into First World environments. Enlist the cooperative efforts from foundations, think tanks, NGOs, business, religion and other sectors to focus their resources like laser-beams to clean out these cesspools, and find new ways to mesh divergent cultures who must learn to live together.

The Israeli and Palestine feud has gone on long enough and there is guilt enough to go around for the dangerous impasse. Again, it is time for fresh approaches, since what we have been doing is not working. If this means constructing a 10-year wall of separation between the combatants, combined with massive development efforts to raise levels of complexity and affluence in the “Third World” sectors in Palestine, than so be it. There might be other options to consider as well. This global sore has got to heal, one way or another. Both the Oslo Accord and Camp David initiatives were compromised by the rapidly expanding Pan- Arabian-“ism.”

Third, **identify the hot cells of violence**, take them out if necessary, isolate them when possible, and carefully monitor the growing threats from biological warfare and other forms of mass murder. Use whatever means necessary to both interdict and disrupt these forms of hideous terrorism. The entire global community must rise in unison to purge this element out of our mainstream. Life on this planet is at peril. Everybody must be vigilant; everybody must be proactive; everybody must take responsibility.

I have no doubt but that military interventions will be required to clean out some of the dangerous seed-beds and supportive infrastructures. These actions must be part of the broader “hearts and minds” initiatives that can shrink the size of “the evil,” drain the swamps, reduce “blowbacks,” and redirect emerging Arab/Islam cohesiveness onto a different track. The move out of ancients toward modernity is going to happen, one way or another. Millions of youths are desperate to escape the control by the mullahs, which means they are vulnerable to voices that offer them a quick trip to a meaningful existence, the good life, and access to the global mainstream. They need new options.

These new and turbulent times will require new thinking, innovative and integral strategies, and a host of new projects all designed to address the deeper cultural dynamics that are now erupting in surface-level violence and terrorism. No single ethnic group, nation, government, religion, or any other social grouping can prevent terrorism and close this huge global gap on their own. We can get it done with integral wisdom and renewed resolve, but it will take time, patience, and perseverance.

Make no mistake about it. What looms on the horizon are threats from biological and chemical warfare, if not nuclear attacks. No one in the 21st Century wants to hear this, but it is a reality. We have no time to lose. Finger pointing and blame-fixing aren't useful. This is a global problem, requiring a global solution.

While the Dogs and Doves will be necessary, let's also summon the Visionaries. This time of maximum danger is also resplendent with rare opportunities. The whole world system must be set right before we can conquer this horrible virus. This is our real challenge.

[Return to Top](#)

[Click Here to Return to Essay Index](#)

[Print Page](#)