

HISTORY IN PARALLEL

As the Day of Infamy (Pearl Harbor attack) nears in remembrance, one is struck metaphorically by a similar 'sneak attack' on the eleventh of September, 2001. Each attack required a fanatic dedication by participants, an aura of religious rationale -the divine Emperor of Japan, the Muslim God Allah-to sustain them, an imaginative plan, so unique that the opposition could not suspect or fathom. In the former, Japanese planners drew on Tsushima the island marking the battle between Kyushu and straits of Korea in 1904 and the defeat of Russia in a short and savage battle using massive naval force and surprise. Russia immediately sued for peace. Pearl Harbor was visualized as an overwhelming blow that would neutralize America's will and force. Like Japan's quest for space, recognition and their place in the sun, a sense of destiny was sought by the likes of Muhammed, Saladin, and the Ottomans. 9/11 seemed beset by the Muslim urge for influence and a message to the West that it was their time.

WWII -a panorama of war, destruction and death-a mosaic of patterns, platitudes and possibilities could have gone either way: ifs, ands and buts were part of the equation. If the German so dominant and successful had continued a relationship with Russia after collectively carving up Poland then quickly conquered France, and chased British troops home..then Britain?; attacked Russia earlier with total concentration on Moscow, denying forays at Leningrad and the Caucasus, other Napoleon errors.....? And what if the Japanese had chosen to forego the Pearl Harbor attack to satisfy their oil needs in the Dutch East Indies..? But what would consequences be if the Germans had won the Atomic race?

The world in flames cost an estimated 60 plus million in civilian/military deaths, 85 million served and America had 16 million in uniform. 400,000 died and Ken Burns' portrait showed valor, character and commitment in his PBS series.

Has democratic inertia and a denial of the many faces of Islam perhaps somewhat akin to our sleepwalking, the hypnosis of Shinto Japan and Nazi Germany left us vulnerable? Why so!

In the perspective of Islamic history after the death of the Prophet Muhammed, circa 632 AD historians remind of the Prophets' successor, a search for the Great Caliphate(Khalifa)-an authority figure and community leader, not a messenger of God, yet with an aura of holiness and divinity. We visit the Three Jihads: Decline of the Roman Empire, early Islamic expansion in Syria-Palestine, Persia, Arabia and Egypt through the carrot and stick rationale(conversion, no taxes or death)-until defeat by Charles Martel, father of Charlemagne in the Battle of Tours; Ottomans, a Turkish Islamic Empire from 1453 when Byzantium disappeared and Constantinople fell ending Roman hegemony until its final demise end of WWI. During this period the search for the ultimate truth of Mohammed and Islam exacerbated between Sunni and Shi-ah. More fanatic Islam appeared in Wahhabism-a total rejection and destruction of everything not associated with the Prophet; Wahhabism provided the thrust behind Shi-ah ways of Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini-the Afghani Talibani and Osama bin-laden and symbolizes the Third Jihad, today's Holy War against the West and the democratic principles we admire.

Beset by the obvious parallels of history -a tendency to rationalize-we continue to lurch along the path to Gomorrah both strategically and culturally.

