Afterword: Global Re-Imagination

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I would like to say a few words about Re-Imagination that, after thinking about the work for a few years, may be necessary to understanding, or might lessen misinterpretation.

The first is that I came to an early understanding in the writing process that attempting to give quantitative prove of my thesis would be an exercise in futility. So I chose to craft my writing along a simpler theme: what is the nature of human kind? This is something I struggle with daily, respond to badly more often than I want to say, am admittedly not the perfect example of, nor do I know how long it will take to perfect myself. Still, I cannot shake my sense that our basic nature is good, all of us, every country, every culture. I have seen too many examples not to believe this. From there, to me, it becomes, “If this is the case, where are the un-addressed elements that can be touched to cause a broad elevation of society as rapidly as possible after, and before, a conflict? I see promoting a shift of consciousness among foreign veterans through education as a practical solution. Still, my thesis cannot be proven, and yet, to me it is as believable as every advancement giving us comfort in our daily lives today. I say in the work that some will agree with the idea, some will disagree, and some will remain uncertain. I don’t think this will change for some time, but I hope we can think about it.

The original idea, what I think of now as a blending of abstract thought and direct military problem solving, came to me in three life stages whose roots reach back to my experiences as a serving Army officer observing or working with the soldiers of other armies. First, on two continents, in two decades, “Aren’t we fortunate to have the post-service benefits that we do, like education, where these others do not?” My decision to join Special Forces was based on the assurance that I would be able to get the Master’s Degree I wanted after retirement, where most officers undertake the pursuit during the early stages of their career, and I could not. Then, on another continent, in another decade, “What if I trained these few in some skill that is not only useful now, but transferable to their civilian lives? Would that not benefit their society, in some small way? Is that not nation-building?” After observing new paratroopers in a foreign battalion improving their literacy in a mandatory night school, I tested my theory in a small way by ordering the building of a timber-trestle bridge with military application and useful practical trade skills the soldiers could apply later in life. And then, on still another continent, in another decade, a great man, a professor, Willard Hurst, told me in his writings that the specific idea I formed as a young Captain was part of broader concepts valid in terms of how American elevated itself in the nineteenth century, notably leading to general economic improvement.

The problem with understanding or, more to the point applying, Hurst’s work, is that the ideas are invisible to the normal person looking for models to improve themselves: you can see what exists in America, but exactly how whatever it is you admire got there, and how you might create or adapt some aspect of it to your environment, is another matter. Further, because I was a soldier, I never saw application of my idea yielding simply the potential for improving the economy, but peace, as broadly as imagined, as graciously as can be extended or accepted. This can be achieved, I think, by tapping into a resource that is broadly overlooked in many places, veterans, and the stability of the middle classes they helped to build in our post-World War II communities once the end of war’s terrible destruction ended. I view our war-influenced post-Berlin Wall collective global consciousness as a sort of large ship plowing along at 22 knots;
when the Captain ordered “Stop!” it takes, and will take, some time for the ship to actually stop. In this model promoting veteran education might be thought of as reversing the propellers to get us all into the desired condition as quickly as possible. I will state again that this is one idea among many.

So I imbedded ideas of how this might be concretely approached in *Re-Imagination*. One is near the end of the work. While I am uncertain some form of global government should, or will, ever exist, certainly one of the top-down reasons characterizing the formation of the United Nations is worthy: create a platform in which all nations can work out their differences absent resort to war, by talking to one another. What might be improved is of the opposite nature, a bottom-up perspective. My observation is simply that in looking at the superstructure, I get the personal sense that “war, and the likelihood of war,” is the expected way of things. But what if the Education Council were elevated to the level of the Secretariat, would not that perception shift to one of “peace, and the likelihood of peace,” as the expected way of things? Along this same line, as a think piece this work required editing to get to the right sense of the proposal: the original suggestion to “extend this proposal” shifted to “promote this proposal” to ensure the basic idea would not be considered unilaterally. There are, also, very real issues with intrusions into the development of other cultures which will be situational based; self-sustaining and culturally resilient nation-building is the idea.

As a young officer I was educated in the many concepts orbiting the history and existence of our armed forces. And I believe that the American military was envisioned and is a catalyst for positive internal societal improvement. Continuing education is key to this both in-service and post-service: the very nature of our military is that not every one will advance, rather, that everyone will eventually exit the military. And when their service ends they improve society in some way by their military experience, training, and education; however that might unfold according to ability and aptitude. But I think this is an idea that is missed by many because it is too deeply buried within what is visible in us. So if any other culture begins to educate their veterans, however small the steps may be, and that spurs some sort of “education race” in their culture, we will all be better able to handle any disaster that happen beyond our control, our populations will begin stressing our resources less, ideas about how to make use of our resources more efficiently will increase, and the forces that push us toward the certain destruction of conflict will be lessened. That’s my vision.

Even though progress is expected to be slow, *Re-Imagination* is not solely about a globally inclusive veteran education strategy. Veteran education is only one idea. Encouraging small entrepreneurs is another, improving the status of women is another, protecting the environment yet another. I think veterans are important in this, but they are not the be all and end all to the challenges waiting ahead. The challenges I read about and can perceive tell me that every good idea we can come up with, and share, and promote, should not be ignored. I never perceived that a steady state veteran education strategy would be resource intensive; it can be done by one person in every embassy by simply providing ideas and advice to those who are interested. I have no idea why that foreign infantry battalion I saw made the conscious choice to independently add literacy improvement to the daily lives of its soldiers, but it did, and I suspect others do also. And their cultures, both military and civilian, will eventually be elevated by this approach, if only to have a few veterans around to assist public safety forces in times of need. I
do not need quantitative proof so say such things, I believe in the power of literacy for everyone, just like many do.

I have worried for some time that it may be perceived that the many religions involved in charitable work in developing countries may not have a place in this idea. This is not the case. Religious missions have a profound impact in many pre-conflict environments that enrich the governmental actions being taken. Such missions work to fill many voids. My hesitancy is specifically about post-conflict environments where our military is involved and our heritage asks us to ensure choice in, and respect for, the religious beliefs and cultures of others. I was trained and educated this way. This is, I believe, the peak we seek to ascend. On the other hand, because I wrote *Re-Imagination* using many voices from our cultural past, voices that exude America’s Judeo-Christian heritage, I recognize that a misperception of intent can arise with this technique that cannot be helped. I can only ask that those of other lands compare the voices I drew on from my heritage, voices speaking as no ex-Infantryman can, and ask whether you do not hear the same ideas, or very similar ones, being said in your own language. I believe this is exactly what you will hear.

A globally inclusive veteran education strategy is not a short-term idea. It is intended to take many decades, even centuries, to reach the results I believe possible. As a very personal example I, like many of my countrymen, am struggling through economic times comparable only to the Great Depression that preceded the Second World War. But my education and experience tells me that life, like sine waves has predictable peaks and valleys. So what is happening globally, nationally, to my community, to my family, and to me, is not only predictable, but can be positively influenced. I think that influence can be top-down and bottom-up simultaneously. What was absent during our Great Depression that is forcefully in play today is the technology that now shapes and improves how we interact, create, think, believe, and use daily to pull ourselves out of difficult times, and to pull others out.

That is about all I have to say by way of elaboration, except this: I am possibly the last person in the world that could, or should, suggest something so optimistic as a globally inclusive veteran education strategy because I fail daily in many ways, I know I do. But I get up, dust myself off, and try to do something positive that will improve my life and the lives of others, just like people I have met throughout my life, at all levels, wherever situated. But of the many forces driving me forward, veteran education has been a distinct influence. So we would all seem to have more choices to make, and I think the first is to slow down and consider what we can do today that is a positive step forward, however small.

I wrote this *Afterword* to explain some of the ideas that I felt needed clarification in the original work. I have not written to convince. Some will agree, some will disagree, adamantly, on both sides. *Re-Imagination* is neither a ruse, nor candy; it may well be the most difficult thing any people could undertake. Perhaps the best I can hope for with these few words is to increase the number of readers who say, “I’m not sure about what you are saying, but I’ll think about it a while.” If that leads to thinking of something to improve your life, or the lives of others, and you can take a step forward, *Re-Imagination* will have achieved its intended outcome.

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