

9/11 Vs. Pearl Harbor

I enjoyed John Correll's characteristically detailed and thought-provoking article on Pearl Harbor in the November/December issue ["Pearl Harbor Rides Again," p. 22]. Toward the end, on p. 29, one of the last paragraphs noted a poll of students from the University of New Hampshire. (Why that school was chosen was not given.) Correll [said] the poll "found limited interest and knowledge about Pearl Harbor among the millennials. To them, the 9/11 attacks were of far greater significance." This note reinforced my feeling over the years that schools are not emphasizing the importance of the world wars in the shaping of the world of the last half of the 20th century and their societies to a disinterested population that would inherit that world. However, the feeling that 9/11 was more important than Pearl Harbor is certainly worth discussing. Besides appearing almost in real time on TV, 9/11 obviously did affect us more recently and those effects are still being felt even as I write.

A few days after the attacks, I asked my mother how she felt. At the time, she was 79, born and bred in the Bronx, a 1943 graduate of Hunter College. Without a moment's hesitation, she declared the terrorists' attacks were far more important, perhaps because Hawaii and the war were distant to most of the American population at the time, and everyone had faith in President Franklin D. Roosevelt to guide the country. Like many others of her youthful generation, FDR was the

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only president—he was then into his third term—she and her friends had known. The 9/11 attacks were quickly splashed across television, magazines, and newspapers, thrusting a new, unknown enemy out to an unsuspecting America. Indeed, we all saw the towers fall as it happened. Unless we were there, we couldn't see the Japanese strafing and dropping their bombs and torpedoes as it happened.

George W. Bush had become president barely eight months before. Suddenly, we were in a world war again, a war we had generally not known was coming. The war came home to her more directly in late May 1945 as she peered from her mother's apartment window straining to catch the last glimpse of her Navy husband of 17 months, his seabag on his shoulder, headed for parts unknown, she about to give birth to their first child (me). For several months, she did not know where he was, although, in fact, he was in a top-secret specialized unit at Pearl Harbor producing invasion maps for the planned operation against Japan. She wrote to an FPO address, standing in for me to congratulate him on just making Father's Day that year.

My point is that everyone has his own collection of reference points by which he forms opinions as to the relative importance of specific events. Fifty years from now, will our grandchildren and great-grandchildren wonder what the fuss was all about after the seismic 2016 presidential election? By then, I suppose, we will have a better idea as to whether we made an 8.0 mistake, or whether we finally have met the unrelenting enemy of Sept. 11, 2001, and soundly beaten him, as we did the equally dangerous Axis countries of the 1940s. If we hadn't, I would not be here to write this letter! Hitler and his minions would have seen to that!

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The Real Offsets

When I first heard of the "Third Offset," I was disappointed in myself for not knowing of the first and second and wondered,

"Offset from what?" ["The Third Offset, August, p. 24]. As I read more, I realized it wasn't offset as in "offset bombing," so I looked up several definitions, but none fit exactly. After a little thought, I concluded it was something that acts as counterbalance—not to equilibrium, but in our favor. Most agree that it was nuclear weapons that defined the First Offset, but I believe it's broader. It's nuclear prowess. Nuclear weapons did offset a long, drawn-out end to World War II in the Pacific, and later offset the imbalance in conventional forces in Europe as compared to the Soviet Union's, but it was nuclear propulsion that allowed us to have our most secure leg of the nuclear triad.

I thought I understood the Second Offset, precision guided weapons, when I first read about it, until I just heard three speakers at a symposium all couch it differently. So I looked for commonality and concluded it is not precision, it's accuracy. Yes, guidance makes weapons more precise at striking a point, but precisely striking the wrong point is an offset of another flavor in the wrong direction. To achieve accuracy, there's more to it. The invention of the laser target designator and laser guided bomb defines the start of this era. It later included: establishing and maintaining a constellation of satellites (GPS) so our military forces and weapons know more precisely where they are; updating myriad charts/maps and digital terrain elevation data; and making advances in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) to precisely know

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where a target is relative to a common datum. When these precisions overlap, then we have the potential for the accuracy needed to consistently achieve the desired combat effects.

The Third Offset still sounds like a hodgepodge of capabilities, from hypersonic weapons and aircraft, to smart cell phones and a plethora of drones sharing data and orders on the battlefield, to networks that are self-forming and self-healing, to computers that have deep learning, to alternative positioning and timing (non-GPS), to an acquisition approach (Go Fast), and including various levels of weapon autonomy and cooperative actions among humans and networked mechanicals. As many observed, again it will be technological and operational innovation that is the key to achieving the Third Offset, whatever the boundaries of multidomain collaboration and integration. As I thought about it, trying to distill it to one concept, I could not, but I did observe that the defining characteristic of the Third Offset is speed.

When I was flying fighters, we had a phrase—born out of aerial combat—that applies now more than ever before: “Speed is life!” I laud the work on hypersonics and speed-of-light weapons (the flashy part of this offset). For millennia, warriors have won conflicts who observed, oriented, decided, and acted quicker than their enemy did/could. It will still be true in the next era,

but “warriors” will include our cyber servants that obey orders and act with some level of autonomy for two basic reasons: because decentralized execution works for us, and the alternative is battle-losing lag. For example, a swarm of unmanned air vehicles with autonomy can fly optimized formations, react to ISR refinements and attrition, and strike the target(s) in the most effective manner. Controlling such actions requires speed not available in long-range, secure communications and requires more skilled humans than available. The rest of this offset is about getting the right information, recommendations, and/or orders to the every warfighter in the time each needs, which is no trivial task. Except for some pieces of cyber hardness, high speed is involved in all that is described as part of the Third Offset.

The First Offset’s effects were four orders of magnitude larger than conventional bombs. The Second started at about two and also expanded the employment envelope to much larger than ever existed before. Assuming the analysis was done correctly to determine how much faster than our adversaries our capability needs to be for the Third Offset to be successful, one question remains. Do we have the national resolve to acquire it fast enough?

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