

# LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## Response to J. Michael Waller's "Weaponizing Ridicule"

(*Military Review*, September–October 2017)

### The Cowardice of the Mass Murderer

The occurrence of mass murders, particularly those allegedly related to religious beliefs, has become almost commonplace. Efforts to reduce the incidence of mass murders have not been successful. We can speculate as to the reasons for this lack of success—the wide variability in circumstances, in methods employed, and in attributes of perpetrators. I will suggest another approach, recognizing that there is no magic solution.

This approach focuses on the potential mass murderer, on altering implicit rewards entailed in the murderous act. Perpetrators may see themselves as heroes, as exacting justified revenge, as bearers of religious righteousness. They appear immune to negative

attributions such as "evil," or "monstrous," or "traitors." Indeed, they may expect, even gloat, when defamed. However, an attribution that is unexpected and not readily dismissed is that of COWARD, a description used by President Obama in commenting on the killings in Baton Rouge and Dallas. That label is justified because the victims of the mass murderer are defenseless. The prospect of being regarded as a coward may well have an inhibitory function for many potential murderers.

This function can be reinforced by a formal procedure in which the mass murderer's name and label of coward are inscribed in a chart maintained by a government agency such as the FBI, or the Surete, or



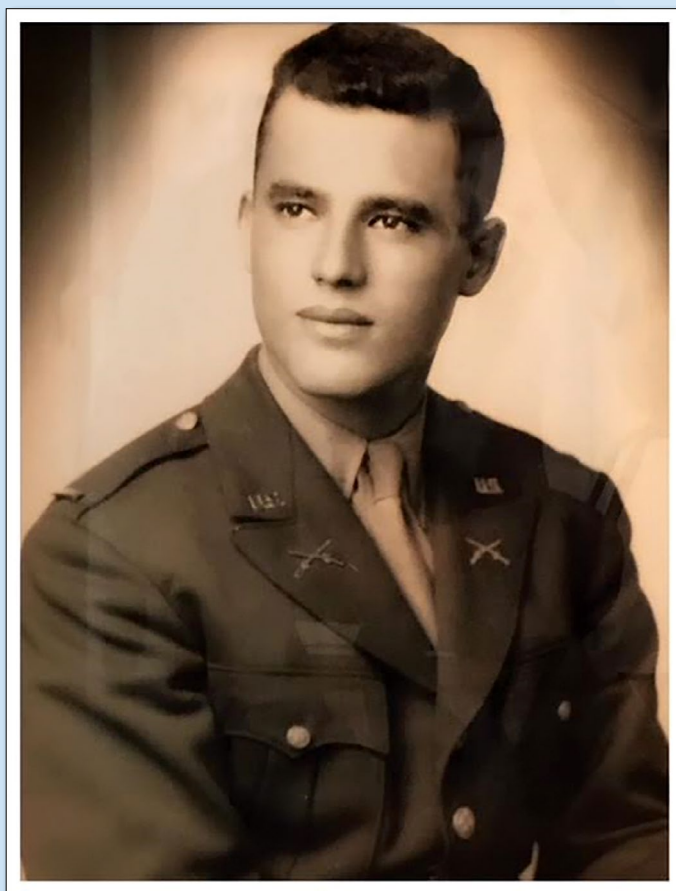
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Scotland Yard. Distress at being labeled a “coward” is further enhanced in those potential perpetrators who believe in a hereafter. The possibility of being considered a coward in eternity dampens any images of a lifetime of bliss. Of course, being labeled a coward is not a panacea and cannot be expected to inhibit the behavior of all potential mass murderers.

If the murders were a political act, supporters of the perpetrator may maintain that he or she is a hero in that they risked their lives for a political goal. But political, religious, or other justifications for a murderous action that entails the killing of noncombatants are irrelevant. The deliberate murder of an innocent, unsuspecting individual remains an act of cowardice.

The inhibitory function of the label of coward can only be effective if the community at large believes that individuals who murder the defenseless are cowards. I know that I do. ■

**Seymour Feshbach, PhD,  
Professor Emeritus of  
Psychology, UCLA**



(Photo courtesy of Feshbach)

2nd Lt. Seymour Feshbach, 1943

Seymour Feshbach enlisted in the U.S. Army in June 1943. After basic training, he entered the Officer Candidate School program at Fort Benning, Georgia, where he earned a commission in the Infantry. He initially served at several stateside posts until being assigned to a task force that was earmarked for participation in the invasion of the Japanese mainland. However, while he was in the Pacific staging for the invasion, the U.S. nuclear attack on Japan resulted in an abrupt end to the war. He was subsequently reassigned to Korea, where he completed his World War II military service. Following World War II, he finished his undergraduate studies at the City College of New York (CCNY) and entered the graduate program at Yale University where he pursued a doctorate in psychology. During this time, he also met and married a fellow scholar with whom he would later have three children.

Upon graduation, and before initiating his academic career, he was recalled to active duty for the Korean War and selected for assignment to the Pentagon, where he served for the duration of the war. Subsequent to the Korean armistice, he began his career in psychology at the University of Pennsylvania during which his major area of concentration was research into the dynamics of aggressive behavior, particularly in the reduction of aggression. He later moved to the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where he spent the balance of his career. In his later research, the focus of his research shifted from the study of aggression to other areas, particularly analysis of patriotism and nationalism. At UCLA, he served as chair of the Psychology Department and head of the University's Academic Senate. He also served as president of the International Society for Research on Aggression, and president of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues. His work has been widely recognized through various awards, including UCLA's Karpf Peace Prize, as well as invitations to accept prestigious positions of responsibility.

# Response to Retired Lt. Col. Tim Thomas's "The Evolving Nature of Russia's Way of War"

(*Military Review*, July–August 2017)

I've had the privilege of being able to talk to the author of "The Evolving Nature of Russia's Way of War" on multiple occasions. What I've learned from Mr. Thomas about Russian strategy interests me as a Latin American researcher for a variety of reasons, including Russian influence on Cubans, and by extension, Venezuelans (whom together we can refer to as Bolivarians). Russians have influenced Bolivarian strategic culture directly through training and education, but the shared Marxist legacy might be of most interest to us. For instance, as the "Evolving Nature" article reminded me, the Bolivarians pursue what they call the "combination of all forms of struggle." Beyond the article, however, one of Thomas's books, *Recasting the Red Star*, touches on the influence of Marxist thinking on strategy-making, and discusses the centrality of deception. It all makes one want to ask, "What is the Russian deception to-day, and where are they unfolding it?" Might it not be, if the Russian global strategic goal is to gain increasing



Staff conversations, which included General Staff Chief Valery Gerasimov (second from left) and then General-Lieutenant Andrey Valerovich Kartapov (second from right) were held 15 July 2015 at the Russian Ministry of Defense in Moscow with representatives of the Republic of Korea. The writings and published speeches by both men are widely regarded as reflecting dominant strategic concepts guiding development of the Russian military. (Photo courtesy of the Russian Ministry of Defense)

## The Evolving Nature of Russia's Way of War

Lt. Col. Timothy Thomas, U.S. Army, Retired

This article discusses the three Russian military articles about which most Western military analysts specializing in Russia have focused their attention over the past four years. Unlike other analyses of those articles, this one offers a different perspective in that it compares them side by side, examining the text

of the original versions and not merely the press reports about them. New graphs and tables included in the original versions are named, and a few are discussed further, and one is included here. This article is intended to do four things in particular. First, it demonstrates that five elements of Russian military thought continue to dominate

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strategic advantage through control over hydrocarbon energy markets, that the geographical locus of the deception is eastern Europe? Might it not be—as Latin Americanists would dream—that the geography of the main Russian strategic effort is globally disperse with centers like Nigeria, Iran, Indonesia, and, of course, the country with the largest proven hydrocarbon energy reserves in the world. A Ukraine ploy would make for a perfect deception according to the notion of reflexive control. Playing to our predispositions, the Russians can gather almost every bit of American military attention away from South America and the Caribbean. What presence and influence does the United States currently have over the political parties, industries, and military units of Cuba and Venezuela? About as close to none as can be. Meanwhile, Russians are all over it. Sad. ■

**Geoff Demarest**