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The MAHB: Mission Impossible?

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The MAHB is launching an initiative to accomplish something that so far has eluded humanity: revitalizing the environmental movement to solve the “perfect storm” of environmental and social problems the world now faces. Members of the MAHB believe that the human predicament can only be solved by adopting a new theory of change: that success will only be made possible by embracing, not ignoring, the complex inter-relationships among all those problems. That enormous efforts by individuals, NGOs, and governments, and many billions of dollars have been spent trying to deal with the problems in isolation with no substantial results demonstrates that the human predicament cannot be solved piecemeal. The MAHB accepts that failure to recognize the interconnections has been a major stumbling block.

Sometimes historical situations can give clues to the sort of effort required to totally redirect cultural evolution and dramatically change an obsolete and dangerous culture. One from World War II is illustrative. Air Chief Marshall Hugh Dowding commanded the RAF’s Fighter Command from 1936 to 1940 and changed the course of the war by winning the Battle of Britain. British Fighter Command defeated Hitler’s attempt to destroy British air defenses so that Germany could control the sky over the English Channel and invade England. The systematic launching of modern fighters at the incoming German bombers was the main barrier to German success. The Luftwaffe could protect invasion barges from attack by the Royal Navy, and Britain’s small professional army had been decimated in France and was bereft of heavy weapons despite the “miracle” of Dunkirk.

From the start, Dowding had to fight conservative military men who held an erroneous view of the threat from the skies. They failed to understand that their entire view of air warfare was outdated and that their belief that “bombers will always get through,” and that only a powerful bomber force could deter attack, was totally false. What was required if England was to survive was a total revision of RAF command culture to focus on the multidimensional interconnections of air defense.

Dowding’s foresight intelligence allowed the creation of an unprecedented military-civilian complex to deal with England’s sudden perfect storm of problems. Germany unexpectedly had airbases close to England after the defeat of Holland, France, and Belgium. Thanks to Dowding, besides new kinds of fighter aircraft and the facilities to maintain them, Britain’s defensive complex included a radar network, “hardened” communications lines (ones buried and covered with concrete) and hardened coordination centers (“filter rooms”) to sort and collate incoming radar information, a women’s auxiliary air force to do much of that critical coordination, anti-aircraft artillery and search lights, barrage balloons, and civilian defense volunteers, including observers who supplied information on the altitudes of attacking Luftwaffe formations then not available via radar.

Dowding also had opposed Winston Churchill’s political wishes to send more precious British Hawker Hurricane fighters to France, since Dowding knew the number that would be required for his novel, multidimensional scheme to defend England to work. As he predicted, those sent were wasted because of France’s lack of the sort of effort Dowding later managed to mount in Britain. Dowding was, in fact, an exemplar of foresight intelligence – looking into the future and relentlessly promoting action on the basis of what he saw. The MAHB hopes to foster his kind of leadership; it will be absolutely necessary if a collapse of civilization is to be avoided.

MAHB-UTS Blogs are a joint venture between the University of Technology Sydney and the Millennium Alliance for Humanity and the Biosphere. Questions should be directed to joan@mahbonline.org

MAHB Blog: <http://mahb.stanford.edu/blog/the-mahb-mission-impossible/>