

# Resilience: A 21st Century Rediscovery

By General James L. Jones, U.S. Marine Corps (Retired); Founder and Chairman, Jones Group International

**EDITORS' NOTE** As President of Jones Group International (JGI) and one of America's leading authorities on foreign policy, energy security, and national security, General James Jones provides JGI clients with strategies for navigating the complex nexus of business, international affairs, and public policy. General Jones was appointed by President Barack Obama as National Security Advisor to the President on January 20, 2009. During his tenure in the White House, General Jones served



General James L. Jones

as a trusted Presidential advisor, represented the President as an envoy to American allies and partners, provided steady leadership during times of conflict, and oversaw an expansion of responsibilities of the National Security Council to include cyber security, homeland security, and strategic foresight. General Jones came to the White House from the private sector, where he served as the President and CEO of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Institute for 21st Century Energy. At the Chamber, General Jones worked to unite energy consumers and producers in pursuit of common goals – to increase U.S. energy supply and improve infrastructure, to advance international cooperation on energy issues, to protect national energy security, and to promote a better understanding of changes to the global climate and its effects on the environment. While leading the Chamber's energy work, General Jones also served in the George W. Bush administration as the State Department's Special Envoy for Middle East Regional Security. In this capacity, he worked with Israeli and Palestinian officials in furthering the Peace Process, focused on strengthening security for both parties to the conflict. General Jones retired from the U.S. Marine Corps in February 2007 after a distinguished forty-year career. From July 1999 to January 2003, General Jones served as the 32nd Commandant of the United States Marine Corps, the most senior position in the Corps. In 2003, General Jones was nominated to serve as Commander, United States European Command and Supreme Allied Commander Europe. As Commander of U.S. European Command, General Jones' area of responsibility included 92 countries from Europe, Eurasia, and Africa. In his capacity as Commander of all NATO forces, General Jones led the

Alliance into overall command of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, the largest combat mission in NATO's history. General Jones also oversaw the military integration of the Alliance as it expanded from 19 to 26 members, and he advocated that NATO take on energy security and defense of critical infrastructure as a core mission. General Jones spent the formative years of his youth living in France, where he became fluent in French and developed a global perspective.

General Jones graduated from the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Marine Corps in January 1967. He served as a rifle platoon and Company Commander in Vietnam, where he earned a Silver Star. On returning to the U.S., he attended the Amphibious Warfare School in 1973 and the National War College in 1985 and served as Marine Corps Liaison Officer to the U.S. Senate. In addition, he served as Commanding Officer of the 24th

Marine Expeditionary Unit in Northern Iraq and Turkey on Operation Provide Comfort; Chief of Staff, Joint Task Force Provide Promise, for operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia; and Commanding General, 2nd Marine Division, Marine Forces Atlantic. He also served as Military Assistant to the Secretary of Defense from 1997-99. Upon leaving the White House in 2010, General Jones founded Jones Group International. General Jones and the JGI team leverage their unmatched expertise, access, and credibility to assist clients in matters of energy security, national and international security, market access and trade promotion, and strategic leadership.

**FIRM BRIEF** Jones Group International ([jonesgroupinternational.com](http://jonesgroupinternational.com)) provides global strategic advisory services to help its sovereign partners in creating and fulfilling a transformative vision for their national defense, security and prosperity. With preeminent expertise and the best-in-class support available, the firm helps partners achieve tangible results to their most complex defense and security challenges.



Then Lt. Colonel James Jones participating in Operation Provide Comfort in Northern Iraq in 1991 with U.S. Senator Pat Leahy and General Anthony Zinni





*General James Jones speaking with then Secretary of the Navy James Webb, and Marine Corps Commandant Al Gray for whom General Jones was senior aide at the time*

Tom Brokaw coined a title for Americans born in the first quarter of the 20th century that immediately resonated with the country. He called them “The Greatest Generation” – an enduring moniker for Americans who lived their adult lives during an exceptionally perilous and future-defining period of our national history. Living through the Depression and coming of age during World War II, the members of this generation defeated the evils of fascism - saving the world. In its aftermath, they guided our nation through the long twilight struggle of the Cold War, with all its tumult and difficulties – the Korean and Vietnam Wars, the Cuban missile crisis, and the assassination of President Kennedy.

Despite these enormous challenges, they led the nation in an era of unprecedented economic growth, innovation, progress, and achievement, including putting a man on the moon. These accomplishments, and the timeless values and principles ennobling them, established our country as the model of democracy and capitalism for all freedom aspiring people.

The Americans of this exceptional generation have been described in many ways by their defining virtues – courageous, patriotic, innovative, dedicated, brave, selfless, and heroic, among others. But a virtue seldom used in describing the Greatest Generation is the word “resilient.” Yet it was supreme resilience that enabled them to overcome so much to achieve so greatly. Their resilience was defined by more than sheer bravery and toughness, though brave and tough they were. It was fired and forged by principle and conviction, and an unflagging sense of duty to posterity.

In this still young century, “resilience” has become a by-word for what it takes to succeed, whether for an individual, an organization, or as

a nation - properly so in today’s ever-changing operating environment in which threats, challenges, and setbacks surface with accelerating speed and complexity.

In a recent media interview in Kyiv, Ukraine a young woman was asked why the

people of Ukraine are so dedicated to defending their country and why they are so committed to defeating the Russian invaders. She responded that Ukrainians are, among other things, “resilient.” I was struck by her use of that word to so aptly describe the essential quality of her countrymen. Resilience is truly what enables them to endure despite being outnumbered and outgunned militarily, operating under the direst circumstances on the front lines of the new defense of Europe. To me it seemed exactly the right word for exactly the right time.

In the 21st century, however, the unanswered question, both at home and abroad, is whether the current generation of Americans possesses the quality of resilience required to maintain the global leadership and influence that has defined our nation for over a century. Today, we are confronted by monumental challenges on which the country’s future, indeed the future of freedom, democracy, and the human condition, depend. Now, as in the past, resilience is the indispensable quality for overcoming them, and in so doing maintaining America’s privileged and hard-earned position as the most influential nation on earth.

Of course, resilience is no less imperative in overcoming the obstacles we face in our personal lives, communities, and organizations. It’s the feature of who we are, not what we are, that is ever prepared for when inevitable difficulties arise to carry on – and with unwavering faith, conviction, and determination – to prevail.

My life began in 1943 and I’m now in my 80th year. I have been very fortunate to have been able to live my life as an American



*Newly selected Marine Corps Brigadier Generals meeting with Marine Corps Commandant*

with global experiences. My parents and their siblings were charter members of the Greatest Generation. My father and his younger brother were Marine officers in World War II. Both volunteered for duty in the Pacific, and both were highly decorated for heroism on multiple occasions. Incredibly, both survived that wartime experience.

My father left active duty in 1945 and accepted employment in 1946 with an American company in Paris, France, but remained in the Marine Corps Reserves and eventually retired as a Colonel. My uncle remained on active duty in the Marines until 1973 when he retired at the rank of Lieutenant General. He fought in our nation's wars in Korea and Vietnam and was regarded as one of our nation's great combat leaders. Both men and my mother and aunt, by their lives and example, taught me more about resilience than I could have ever learned in a classroom. I learned that resilience is not something that can be borrowed. It's not a quality that can be summoned and magically appears when challenges are great. True resilience is part of our character, and imbedded in our composition and culture as individuals, families, communities, and as a nation.

My youth in France was characterized by learning about the United States from Europe. In my mind, I imagined the "Iron Curtain" as a real barrier behind which lurked communist forces bent on destroying the liberty and human rights we hold sacred. I learned about the Korean War, the fall of Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam, the Algerian insurrection, and the Russian launching of Sputnik which many Europeans predicted marked the beginning of the decline of America in favor of communism. But through that I learned about America's greatness and its resilience in the face of incredible adversity. I greatly admired the American forces deployed in post war Europe, the rise of NATO (then in France), and my family's struggle to adapt to a new culture and in learning a new language.

Returning to the United States in 1961, I attended Georgetown University's great Foreign Service School in Washington, DC, thinking that my future would lie in the Foreign Service, but only after a three-year tour in the Marine Corps. In 1966, I married my wife, Diane, whom I had met in 1964. I was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in January 1967, and was an infantry Platoon Commander in Vietnam by November of that year. From my early days as a Marine Officer, I knew that I had found my calling, though it took me a while to commit to it being my career.

I learned about the essentialities of leadership and resilience in tandem. One was hard to conceive of without the other. From those senior to me I learned that selflessness, humility, and deflecting praise to others were traits essential to success in building personal and organizational resilience. In combat, I learned that trusting one's subordinates and delegating authority were key enablers, especially during times when resilience was necessary to survive to fight another day. In the combat I experienced, there were no racial, religious, or ethnic issues that could

define or divide us; we were one team in one fight and we trusted each other. Not everyone made it home, unfortunately, but the resilience of the Marines I served with is something I still think about almost daily. The Marines had many ways of expressing their ethos. One of the most popular sayings of the day was "to err is human, to forgive divine, neither of which is Marine Corps policy." It truly wasn't! But I came to recognize the importance of valued tradition, common purpose, discipline, commitment to excellence, and esprit de corps and preparedness to forging organizational resilience.

Resilience, of course, is not an essential

---

**“Americans have always  
shown resilience in  
the face of adversity  
and in support of its  
convictions. That  
quality comes  
from each of us as  
individuals, finding its  
place in every element  
of our society to  
define us as a nation.”**

---

character of the military alone. My witness and experience of it is broader and deeper. In my family, we have met with challenges on many occasions requiring resilience at its strongest. In dealing with separations for a year at a time, military spouses must cope with the absence of their partner and the children left behind must cope with the challenges of everyday life without two parents.

My wife and I have raised four children. Our second child, Jennifer, was born in 1971 with serious mental disabilities and life-threatening health conditions that created enormous strains on our family. Yet, over the years, Jennifer has been one of the greatest gifts we could have ever received. She has had such a positive impact on our lives. Even though she cannot speak, she

communicates feelings and love that touch us all every day. Jennifer's three brothers learned compassion from Jennifer at a very young age and that quality has defined them as the kind men they are in their adult lives.

My wife, Diane, is the unquestioned real hero of our family. She battled breast cancer in 1983, more recently she had to undergo two hip and two shoulder replacements. She wears a pacemaker and now battles bone marrow cancer coupled with heart difficulties that cause breathing problems impeding her mobility. Through it all she has maintained an irrepressible will and a love for life and others. Her individual resiliency and courage through great adversity over the years is a prime example of what having a resilient spirit can do to overcome challenges that come our way in life's journey.

And, of course, resilience is an essential feature of our communities and our business and civic organizations, continuously confronted by hardship. To overcome it and succeed, those entrusted with leadership responsibilities must create a culture of resilience. It begins with putting people first, including the welfare of employees and helping those most vulnerable on the path to success. When individuals within the company experience personal problems, it is important that leadership demonstrate its genuine concern and quickly offer help. This is the ethos that helps build strong and sturdy organizations.

A great example of a leader who has demonstrated resilience, personal and professional, in the face of enormous obstacles and challenges is Thomas J. Donohue, the former President and CEO of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. As a young man he took on the job of finding work for wounded World War II veterans and later for physically disabled people in general. He rose to run the United States' premier business organization. From one of his early mentors, who had been born with no legs and went on to found the organization Abilities Inc., he learned the conviction, "It doesn't matter if people think you can't do it; if you want to do it and it's honorable and reasonable, you can usually get it done." Tom personifies the traits of the Greatest Generation and the conviction he learned from personal experience and examples around him gets to the essence of what it means to be resilient – achieving a worthy object no matter what the impediments or what others may think.

Americans have always shown resilience in the face of adversity and in support of its convictions. That quality comes from each of us as individuals, finding its place in every element of our society to define us as a nation. Today, as America confronts challenges both within our borders and overseas, our global leadership is being tested in many ways. Overcoming these challenges will require the same type of resiliency that the Greatest Generation demonstrated. If that is to happen, the spirit of resilience must reside in the hearts, minds, and convictions of those we will be counting on to carry on the cause of liberty and our way of life in the years and decades ahead – what must be the new Greatest Generation of Americans. ●