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Fighting Terrorism: Are We Programmed for Defeat? Part One

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With the bombings in London on July 7th, 2005, the airwaves were once again filled with discussions about terrorism. As usual, terrorist acts become fodder for debates between those who support proactive and aggressive response and those who do not. Opponents fall in two predominant camps: pacifists who support negotiation and appeasement and those who are politically motivated.

For example, after the London bombings, New York City Mayor Bloomberg employed a policy to randomly search the bags and knapsacks of transit passengers. Supporters found this policy reasonable and received very little press. Opponents believed it is too intrusive and were supported by the liberal media, which aired interviews with ACLU members. Calling themselves “civil liberty activists”, they declared the searches were illegal and violated the U.S. Constitution, which was misleading, as it was an opinion and not fact.

This example represents common themes among liberals, civil liberty activist or however they choose to identify themselves. They do not recognize the enemy and ignore the threat. They oppose reasonable security tactics that can decrease the odds of a terrorist attack and offer no realistic strategy to combat the enemy. Opponents of reasonable tactics to protect our way of life have no concept of history.

A historical review illustrates terrorism is as old as recorded history. Even though Maximillian Robespierre created the word “terror” during the French Reign of Terror in the late 1700’s, terrorist activities precede the term. Dr. Melissa Luke touched on this subject in the July 2005 newsletter when she chronicled some terrorist activities that occurred in the U.S. Though incomplete, it effectively illustrates the historical context of terrorism. In a study on terrorism, Jedediah Purdy (2003) suggested piracy in the eighteenth century fit the definition of terrorism.

The definition of terrorism varies. Purdy defined terrorism simply as politically motivated attacks on civilians by non-state actors. Ariel Cohen (2004) defined terrorism as violence or threats of violence against civilians to achieve religious, political, or military goals. The Center For Fawkesian Pursuits (2005) noted several definitions, including Walter Laqueur’s definition that terrorism is the premeditated, deliberate, systematic murder, mayhem, and threatening of the innocent to create fear and intimidation in order to gain a political or tactical advantage, usually to influence an audience. Another was the FBI definition that terrorism is the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives. According to these definitions the historical acts of terrorism is expanded to include a multitude of atrocities. The killing of non-combatant settlers on the American frontier by Indian war parties would fit this definition, as well as the murders and riots that occurred in New York City during the civil war. In retrospect, the list of events that could be defined as terrorism is endless. The point is this; opponents of reasonable tactics to protect our nation and way of life have no concept of history. They seem to live in an Alice-in-Wonderland world. It is as if they wake each morning with the belief the world begins anew. As if life’s tribulations are resolved quickly and without sacrifice like in a 60-minute TV episode and their opinions are supported by thirty-second sound bites heard on TV.

These phenomena illustrate that politics, language and the media can have a major impact in combating terrorism. For example, after 9/11 the primary term identifying the enemy was “terrorist”. After liberal politicians’ and the media’s continuous reference to terrorist fighting in Iraq as insurgents, terrorist were redefined. Terrorists are not rebelling against a lawful Iraqi government. They are fighting a religious jihad against Western Civilization and Iraq is just one battlefield. To refer to them as insurgents legitimizes the enemy. A domestic example is the PATRIOT Act controversy. The media’s repeated stories about the threat the PATRIOT Act imposes on civil liberties lack the support of empirical evidence. In fact, the police have conducted activities authorized by the PATRIOT Act for decades. The PATRIOT Act expands the targets of investigations and changes some procedures. For those with no concept of history, compare the RICO Act.

Opponents of aggressive tactics to combat terrorism fail to recognize that Islamic terrorist are intent on destroying our way of life. They are not conventional warriors or uniformed military conducting conventional battle with our military. They are religious fanatics without a state that carry the battle to the innocent to break the will to fight. In contrast, our enemies understand the historical context of a Viet Nam or Mogadishu, endure, kill a few Americans and rely on the liberal media and politicians to promote defeat by keeping a body count, reporting negative news and misinforming. Americans will tire of the fight and surrender.

Supporters of the War on Terror understand the opponent's approach will lead to defeat and effective strategies must be employed to combat the enemy. It is true that not any single tactic will guarantee security or prevent a terrorist act that will kill thousands, but a defeatist attitude must be overcome. Tactics like profiling as a means of identification, intelligence gathering and reasonable searches that are not unduly intrusive, should not be arbitrarily excluded; they should be one of many tools available to law enforcement.