



Tactics of Terror



By John Loofbouruow, MD

THERE HAVE BEEN MANY well-written, informative pieces on terrorism in the medical and public press. Yet few offer any historical or modern perspective. While I am no authority on such things, I do claim to be a multigenerational student of humankind, and I write from that perspective.

The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon revealed the tactics of modern international terrorism. They suggest continuing violence directed at civilians, centers of world trade, and the underbelly of military and political power. The terrorists' hope is to create chaos that uncovers a critical weakness, causing an arrogant, technology-dependent, over-developed world to collapse to rubble, like the Twin Towers themselves.

Compared to most of humankind, we in the USA have lived for more than half a century in a dream world. Gone is the pioneer life where the average longevity was less than 50 years, where death and hardship were every day realities. Somewhere else hundreds of millions still die from malaria yearly, from genocide, religious war or famine. Not here.

Is it possible that we could over-react to terror, so future terrorist exposures cause a kind of societal destructive auto-immune response? Haven't we been phobic and irrational over trace amounts of chemicals like alar? Didn't many people believe the Brokovitch chromium saga was based on fact rather than greed and extortion? Weren't we stampeded to senseless and harmful action by fear of irradiated food, and by two cyanide grapes? Might not a poorly informed and intellectually lazy public drive poll-fearing politicians to act irrationally?

Belief defines a nation's strength or weakness. Along with our basic faith in liberty, equality and representative government, we tend to believe in our own historic and social destiny. Though many are uncertain of heaven, most are sure of universal God-given rights.

Yet, we seem to believe in a degenerate form of fairness and our own power to right life's wrongs. Therefore, when bad things happen, small or great, it's someone's fault; someone's duty to reverse. When we can't find that someone, get everyone else: the state, or anyone with deep pockets. If we were just a quiet rich nation, this might be considered a cute though indecent idealism. But we are active earth-shakers, powerful, resented, and not very world wise.

Self-serving mythic belief can make people vulnerable to the cruelty and uncertainty of terrorist warfare. I suspect a modern ruthless terrorism could be as effective here today as it was in the hands of the Goths at the gates of Rome, or the Spanish on the plains of Cajamarca and causeways of Tenochtitlan.

To avoid vulnerability to terror, we will, I hope, adapt. It is encouraging that initial public and governmental reactions in September and October last year were quite appropriate, measured and often heroic. However, we now seem to be reacting as terrorists might wish: hysterically screaming at one another to determine who is really at fault, as if the

terrorists had no part in events. Pumping out money irrationally, as if we learned nothing about its limits from our recent failed wars: The War on Poverty, the War on Drugs and the War to save Vietnam. There is continuing rhetoric about "working" people; but how many of these wars can working folk support before they are disillusioned and our economy fails?

I suggest that we put terrorism and its effects in perspective. Each year we tolerate several hundreds of thousands of deaths from automobile accidents, fires, preventable disease, suicide and injuries. Yet we accept those risks, and our inability to avoid them. Terrorist warfare is another risk of living, one we cannot totally avoid. As with other risks, we must reconfirm each day that we are alive, check our loved ones and, with luck, go on with our lives. Yes, it would be terrible to lose 40,000 or 100,000 Americans to terrorism.

But if that ever happens, or if worse occurs, we will respond by placing those deaths in the perspective of life on earth, and go forward; not without concern or without taking steps to stop the carnage, but with resolve and a rediscovered humility knowing that one day we will overcome, as those before us have done, saying, in effect, "Nya, Nya! Here I am, Baby! You missed, sucker, so Rest In Peace, Sweetie."

That, and that alone can strike terror in the heart of a terrorist.

lufboro@jps.net

Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society
5380 Elvas Avenue #100 • Sacramento, CA 95819
916.452.2671 PH • 916.452.2690 FX • Email: info@ssvms.org

Copyright © 2000-2008 Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society - All Right's Reserved