

My Soap Box

Fighting the unwinnable war

By Ann Knudson

We are now at war against terrorism. It is an unwinnable war.

We can conquer a country, such as Iraq. However, we can't conquer an attitude. As long as people are willing to die and to murder civilians for their cause, there will be terrorism. There will be people that strap bombs to their bellies and set them off on crowded buses, or drive planes into skyscrapers, or drive trucks full of explosive into their targets.

Terrorism is not going to stop. The history of the world is a history of war. People who can't win by outright standup battle fight by other means. The British in the Revolutionary War considered that us rebels fought unfairly because we sniped from behind trees instead of marching out in ranks on an open battlefield, where we would have lost. Now we are the "British". The terrorists are hiding behind the mosques and the civilian population instead of the trees, but it's the same idea.

We can't guard everything. If we succeed in guarding planes, terrorists will target trains. Or buses. Or stadiums. Or kindergartens, or old age homes, or state capitols. Or dams, or factories, or something.

What, then, can we do?

We can guard our highest-value targets, like our President and our power plants. We're doing that.

We can keep a lookout. Not everybody in the world loves us, some with cause, and "you're not paranoid if somebody IS out to get you." I'm told the flying schools where the 9/11 terrorists trained to fly noticed they weren't paying attention to how to land, and tried to tell the FBI about it, but got brushed off. I hope they would be listened to now.

We can observe the Geneva Convention and other rules of war, even if the other side doesn't. Torture of prisoners must not be allowed. Keeping 9/11 suspects incarcerated without trial and without access to lawyers must not be allowed. It's bad enough to be hated because of lying propaganda. It's much worse if we deserve it.

We can fight for our civil liberties by repealing or modifying things like the Patriot Act. If we give up our freedoms in order to fight terrorism, we'll never get them back, because terrorism will never end. We beat Iraq. We caught Saddam. Is terrorism over? No. How many generations have the Israelis and the Palestinians been at it? Terrorism is not a temporary emergency. It's a way of life.

We can fight for the right to trial of those thrown in jail after 9/11. If the government can throw 9/11 suspects into jail for years without access to lawyers or to their families, how long before they do it to you and me?

We can tell our side of the story. We could put satellites into orbit over the Gulf that spout our version of the news on radio and TV in Arabic and English. We could listen to what local media are saying and answer them. Heck, we could put satellites up to cover the world!

We can teach ethics to our children. We can try to bring them up to be people who would not kill civilians or torture prisoners. Or, at least, people who would know it was wrong and would be ashamed of doing it, instead of mugging for the camera.