

Detroit and A Lesson in the War on Terror

Michael Sean Winters | Dec. 28, 2009 NCR Today

One of the signal differences between the current administration and its predecessor is the manner in which it handles events like the attempt by Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab to detonate a bomb on his plane as it landed in Detroit. The appropriate administration officials have spoken about how something like this can happen despite the many precautions undertaken at airports worldwide. Security at the airports is increased in case this one incident is not one incident but the first in a series. The President did not rush into a press briefing in the middle of his vacation.

During the Bush years, any whiff of terrorism was cause for all manner of hysteria. And more than hysteria. I understand that the sense of responsibility that fell on President Bush's shoulders on September 11, 2001 must have been enormous. But, it is a President's job to make sure the pressure is not crushing, and Bush allowed the fear of terror to crush many things from Habeas Corpus to our commitment to treaties prohibiting torture. Additionally, Bush and his political genius used the fear of terrorism to fight domestic political struggles. We all remember the disgusting ad that attacked the patriotism of Sen. Max Cleland who unlike President Bush and Vice-President Richard Cheney did not dodge the Vietnam War but lost both legs and an arm there. We all recall the "wolves" ad just before the 2004 election. And, of course, Mr. Cheney has made it his task to pronounce judgment on the changes in policy the Obama administration has made, always suggesting that the President has a cavalier disregard for the safety of the nation, a suggestion that is as evil as it is preposterous.

Of course, our intelligence services must be vigilant. No one should take the prospect of someone like Mr. Abdulmutallab succeeding in his evil aims lightly. But, it always bears repeating that for all the talk of a war on terror we have endured the past few years, the struggle with Al-Qaeda and other terrorists is not like other wars to which we have been a part. Al-Qaeda is not Germany or the Soviet Union. They cannot defeat us by conquering our territory. They can only win by causing us to abandon the standards of civilization we have attained. They can only win if we let ourselves being scared into abandoning our commitment to Habeas Corpus. They can only win when we turn a blind eye to torture or define it down so that acts like water boarding don't count as torture. Mr. Obama is to be commended for not giving Al-Qaeda the satisfaction of thinking they can so easily distance the West from our own best standards of civilized behavior and culture.

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