

The Fearsome—and Hopeful— Facts of Life

A Blog Entry in GordonTalk and Comments From Left Field

July 7, 2005

Who cannot imagine themselves as having been one of those aboard that quaint, quintessential symbol of old Londontown, the double-decker bus—the one so hideously blown apart in the street like some enormous red fish lying gutted on the beach.

Who cannot imagine themselves as having been one of those trapped within The Tube, as the subway commute turned from mundane to murderous, smoke and screams and death and dismemberment filling the all-too-enclosed space between you and escape.

But who can imagine themselves as one of the inhuman beings who carefully planned these atrocities for years, stealthily avoiding the armies of counter-terrorism agents ever-vigilant for just such threats. And who can imagine themselves actually executing the wicked plot, this precisely synchronized slaughter of innocents?

As security expert after security expert on the morning news drones on and on about how there is no way to ever move so many people so quickly through our mass transit systems without the constant threat of attacks like this (or worse), it becomes depressingly apparent

that terrorism will not end by increasing security, as vital as that obviously is.

And just as obviously, the "war on terror" cannot be "won" by the invasion of nations that have actually sponsored Al Qaeda, such as Afghanistan under the Taliban—as absolutely vital as that was (as is the continuing hunt for Bin Laden et al.)—let alone by the invasion of nations that had nothing to do with 9/11 and Al Qaeda, such as Iraq—large segments of which are now in fact much more of a threat to us (particularly, although not exclusively, to our troops).

Radical Islamic terrorism is a cancer upon the civilized world—including the Muslim world, whose faith is perverted to such unholy effects—but it is less a tumor that can be surgically removed than a malignancy that has metastasized throughout the international community.

The uneasy question then, in the back of many of our minds, is, are we truly faced with a terminal condition? Will the reactionaries in one culture inflame those in another, and those inflame yet others in another, until the entire world is

consumed by hatred and violence, both stateless and well-regimented?

The uneasy answer is, of course, no one knows for sure.

However, I can see the light of hope through the smoke of fear.

In those very streets of London shaken by explosions today, for years there were bloody bombings committed by extremists from Northern Ireland.

During the darkest days, it must have looked like the carnage would never stop. But it did stop. How did it stop? And how, in God's name (Allah or otherwise), might we stop this current madness?

The bombings and violence in Northern Ireland and England—inflamed in no small measure by religious passions as vehement as those fueling today's worldwide war of terror—came to an end only after sufficient numbers of everyday people on both sides of the dispute became so sickened and enraged that they demanded an end to the insanity, particularly for the sake of the children, and withdrew their support from the most radical and intransigent factions within their numbers.

And of course, the brilliant and compassionate diplomacy of widely respected former Senator George Mitchell, dispatched by then-President Clinton, played a key role in making the peace between the mortal enemies (By the way, if John Kerry had become President, Senator Mitchell's

name would undoubtedly be on the short list of nominees to replace retiring Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor; that is the high standard against which I will judge the eventual nominee from the current President).

History, thus, does strongly suggest that although intelligence, security, and—in the proper place—military force do have vital roles in "combating terrorism," the only way to actually put an end to the otherwise endless cycle of violence and reprisals is reaching out, sincerely and tenaciously, to the more moderate elements in those societies harboring and producing the radicals promoting, planning, and perpetrating the violence.

We must, of course, do everything in our power to defend ourselves, with force if necessary (although that does not excuse those who use real threats as excuses to pursue false threats, to settle old scores or pursue other ends, idealistic or decidedly less so).

However, the only way to win the war on terror is to undercut its support overseas; we cannot "hermetically seal" our "homeland" from every conceivable threat sent our way.

Ultimately—as the personal Savior of some of the most warlike as well as some of the most peaceful among us once preached—the only thing that can conquer hate is love.