



Free Press Viewpoint

Terror war, too, will eventually pass

It's far from clear who's winning the War on Terrorism, though the U.S. has not suffered greatly in the last few years, and the terrorists have taken a beating.

Around the world, leaders of al Qaida and its related groups have been killed by bombs and missiles, hunted down and arrested and run into hiding. While the Taliban has become aggressive in Afghanistan, it's nowhere near a victory.

Americans, however, and our news media in particular, tend to blow out of proportion every little skirmish in this war. Overall, we are not only winning the general fight, but our losses have been negligible.

Take the incident where a terrorist double agent who gained the trust of Jordanian and American intelligence officers detonated a bomb in a briefing room, killing eight CIA officers. The loss of eight officers is tragic, but in war, there are casualties.

While not insignificant to the individuals involved or their families, this incident, in history, will be little remarked. It represents a series of mistakes in an individual operation, but not a failure of intelligence or a major defeat in the war.

Yet, news reports trumpet the bombing as if it was a major issue for the U.S. You almost get the idea that some people want us to lose, or at least to play up our every setback.

In the same vein, the "underwear bomber" does not represent a massive failure of air transport security, though it points out weaknesses. If security had not been so good, one expert noted, the bomber might have carried a real bomb — one that worked. Instead he was captured, alive but horribly wounded.

It's easy to say that the security apparatus should have spotted the bomber, who had been turned in to our embassy in Nigeria as a possible terrorist by his father, but in truth, the system is not that good. It may not even be possible or desirable for the system to be that good.

The fact is, it works. Millions of people fly every day, and not one has been killed by a terrorist act in years. It could happen again, to be sure, but it seems less likely as time goes by. The terrorists are not winning and have mustered only feeble efforts against the U.S. since 2001.

In the meantime, they've been run out of their sanctuaries around the world and forced to exist in caves and inhospitable mountains. They are no longer the threat they once were.

That is not to say we've won this struggle, but it may never be won. Terrorists can claim victory from a single act, but the civilized world needs to be safe all the time. Eternal vigilance may be the price of 21st century civilization.

Yes, we should be prepared for further indignities at the airport checking line, though gate screening isn't terribly effective. Lots of contraband gets through, many fly who shouldn't.

The greatest obstacle to a victory by the forces of reason may be our will to continue. The more we hear about bombings, the less we want to face the threat. Americans, in particular, do not relish long-term conflict, but this one will not go away soon.

Go away it will. All threats fade, all movements run their course. Even the dreaded communist monolith went away, leaving only a hollow shell to scare us in the end.

For now, though, we need to gain perspective on what's happening, step back and realize that our side has not fared badly, though the battle is far from over.

And think about the consequences of ignoring this problem and letting the terrorist movement grow and fester.

— Steve Haynes



Closet finally sees the light of day

I'm a little young to remember the radio show "Fibber McGee and Molly," but my parents told me about it and I did watch many episodes of the short-lived television version.

I don't remember much about the show except that the couple's hall closet was a noted disaster. Every time someone would open it, all sorts of stuff would fall out.

That was sort of the feeling I got when Steve and Lacy went to clean our son's closet over Christmas. Things just sort of fell out all over the place.

Lacy graduated in 1999 and left for college and, except for occasional short visits home, he hasn't lived in "his" room or used "his" closet for more than 10 years.

It had become the repository of anything that was taking up space on the table when company was coming or papers that were too good to toss but not worth filing.

It was a mess, and the mess was starting to creep out from under the door and slide along the bedroom floor. We either had to clean it up or name it and get a pet tag from the city.

So when son came home for Christmas, he and his father went to work.

The first layer was stuff Steve and I have brought home from a dozen conventions. You



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

know the kind of stuff I'm talking about: It's interesting, and you just know that when you have a few minutes, you'll study it and it will be of use. But you never have the time and it just piles up and up and up.

The next layer was things I had brought home when mother cleaned out her home before she sold it. This included a box of broken wind chimes, some Swedish weaving I had done and my Classics Illustrated comic books, each neatly packaged in plastic. The wind chimes went in the trash, but I put the weaving and comics aside, thinking that they might be worth something, sometime to someone.

This explains why the closet will never really get cleaned out.

The last layer was son's, and it was probably the most interesting.

I didn't even know that he had ever owned

a bowling ball. And what do you do with a couple of old skate boards that look like a puppy has used for teething? There was a ball. It wasn't a basketball or a volleyball or even a soccer ball. None of us could figure out what it had been used to play but it was deflated and definitely out of there.

Next were school papers and camp stuff, photos and the old Nikon he used in high school. He was about to toss his old football tights when I snagged them. They wouldn't fit him anymore, but they sure have come in handy for me this past week when the temperatures bottomed out in the minus 0 range.

The boys gave up when they came to the earthenware jars my Daddy used to make wine in. Son is a professional bartender, but he's not quite ready to start making his own product.

That's just as well. I doubt if his landlord in Lawrence would approve and, despite the cleaning, there still isn't room in the closet for more stuff.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

'Opting out' undermines curriculum

What can schools require of students? President Obama's speech to school children in September brought this question into the spotlight. Some parents kept their children at home. And a few spineless school administrators made broad sweeping statements that students could be exempted from anything to which parents objected.

The controversy has "blown over." But the "right" to opt-out is limited to religion and sex education. And any administrator who lets parents pull students from any lesson for any other reason undermines teachers and the future of Kansas.

Consider little Calvin, working away on a math problem similar to 2+2. This problem is too hard, decides Calvin in an old Calvin and Hobbes cartoon. So Calvin decides to write that he can't answer the test problem because it is against his religion. It makes for a funny cartoon line. But it sets up the serious question: what can we actually require of students in the public school classroom?

In Kansas, there is one and only one exemption that applies across grades and disciplines. Kansas Statute 1111e states that: "No child attending a public school in this state shall be required to participate in any activity which is contrary to the religious teachings of the child if a written statement signed by one of the parents or a person acting as parent of the child is filed with the proper authorities of the school attended requesting that the child not be required to participate in such activities and stating the reason for the request." In practical operation, simply stating that the request is based upon religious principles satisfies the "reason."

So, can Calvin opt-out of the math lesson based on his own unique personal "belief" about difficult math problems. No. Such a belief, even if genuine, is a "theosophy" and is not a legitimate basis for opt-out.

Calvin can be compelled to do the homework or test or get an "F." Courts have been



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

wise in not micromanaging the interpersonal interactions of classrooms. They know that allowing such a loophole would snowball into many students asking for exemptions across many lessons. Teaching would become unmanageable.

What about the sex education opt-out? Kansas was second in the nation to adopt an AIDS/sexuality education requirement, effective in September 1988. Part of getting it accepted was a provision requiring parent notification and allowing parental opt-out. Across the state, school boards formed policies to comply. But with the adoption of new high school graduation requirements in 2005, effective for seniors graduating this year, the state "sex ed" mandate and opt-out were dropped from Quality Performance Accreditation regulations.

New health education standards allow the school to use either opt-in or opt out for sex education, but technically, there is no state opt-out required any more for biology reproduction lessons. School districts and administrators in most cases are unaware of this and continue with opt-out policies in place before the 2005 change.

Aside from the general religious opt-out and the specific sex-ed option, all other coursework in Kansas can be required. Certainly, an any veteran teacher knows how to gauge a student's sincerity when the student does not want to pursue certain study, but there is no automatic exemption.

If we taught only those ideas that met with no objections, we'd have very little to teach. For instance, we teach about communism so

students will understand it. We do not compel students to adopt particular ideas or to express that they believe in them when they answer tests.

Over 20 years ago, Arizona Governor Evan Mecham appointed Jim Cooper as state education advisor. During confirmation hearings, Cooper stated that if a student "... wants to say the world is flat, the teacher doesn't have the right to try to prove otherwise. The schools don't have any business telling people what to believe." Little Calvin could have found refuge in Arizona — until Mecham was impeached.

But neither Arizona nor Kansas can afford to have a population that believes the world is flat — or avoids learning math. With the exceptions of religion and the limited sexuality opt-out/opt-in, Kansas teachers can and should require students to do coursework — and give them an "F" if they do not.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

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