

COMMENTARY

Editor in Chief:
 Michael J. Kleckner
 Managing Editor:
 Jessica Richelderfer
 Editorial Page Assistant:
 Salena De La Cruz

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Editorial

America needs to learn that killing won't end terrorism

Terrorist bombings last week in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and in Casablanca, Morocco, have left many Americans concerned about safety and asking questions about the "war on terror." It's smart to ask questions, especially as U.S. efforts to make Americans safer — primarily by attacking and killing people, but also by supposedly improving homeland security — are plagued by problems and may be making the world less safe.

Two items, in particular, stand out as noteworthy examples of how silly it is to believe America can just stamp out terrorism with a strong boot. The first regards the Transportation Security Administration and the second has to do with 75th Exploitation Task Force.

As reported by The Washington Post on Friday, the TSA hired new screeners for the nation's airports so quickly that 40 percent of the country's 55,600 security screeners haven't undergone in-depth background checks. Dozens of screeners, the Post reported, at Los Angeles International Airport and John F. Kennedy International Airport were discovered to have criminal records, including convictions of assault with a deadly weapon and felony gun possession.

The TSA needs to fix this situation and be sure its screeners are not themselves potential threats. But the beleaguered agency's woes don't stop there. As The Wall Street Journal reported in April, the TSA's "No-Fly" list, a list of names airlines are required to cross-reference with their passenger lists in an effort to screen out potential threats, is riddled with problems. Airline technology, the paper reported, is old and results in many false positives. Innocent people get repeatedly detained, in other words, taking up valuable time that could be spent identifying terrorists.

Then there's the TSA's CAPPS II program, a computer-assisted screening system that searches more than 100 computer database sources for personal information about passengers in the hopes of identifying them as terrorists. Yeah, because when terrorists are filling out forms, they usually put "suicide bomber" in the "Occupation" field. Right.

CAPPS II has caused Delta Airlines plenty of negative publicity, as many Americans are rightfully worried about the potential invasion of privacy issues that the system brings up. A Web site detailing efforts to fight CAPPS II offers news about Delta's involvement; check it out at www.boycottdelta.com.

The second item of concern is more straightforward. The 75th Exploitation Task Force, the only publicly disclosed U.S. attempt to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, is leaving at the end of this month with nothing to show for its efforts. The Washington Post reported last week that Task Force members themselves no longer believe there are any WMDs. Most of the top-priority sites have been searched, and nothing has been revealed. Game over.

Both of these examples show that if America is to be successful in reducing terrorism — because eliminating attacks is clearly not possible — it needs to carefully and thoughtfully address the reasons behind terrorism. It needs to carefully plan homeland defense, rather than have knee-jerk responses borne of fear. It needs to reassure Americans that the world hasn't really changed; only our understanding of it has.

And as shown by Israel's long history and the past week's bombings, Americans need to realize that killing and killing and killing won't eliminate the problem. It will only make it worse.

Editorial policy

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to letters@dailyemerald.com.



Presidential similitude

Presidents Richard Nixon and George W. Bush couldn't be more different personally. Nixon grew up poor, while Bush enjoyed all the benefits due a congressman's son. Nixon's working-class upbringing made him deeply suspicious of privileged Ivy Leaguers; Bush is a privileged Ivy Leaguer.

Yet despite their different backgrounds, the two presidents couldn't agree more on domestic spying, presidential secrecy and rewarding big contributors with posh ambassador posts.

Perhaps the most dangerous of Richard Nixon's many frightening compulsions was his long and fierce campaign to spy on American citizens.

Nixon's insatiable appetite for domestic surveillance resulted in the CIA accumulating files on more than 7,200 Americans, many of whom had done nothing more than criticize the president. The CIA under Nixon read private mail, installed wiretaps and conducted break-ins against U.S. citizens.

Nixon and the CIA knew that many of their methods were illegal. Yet despite the CIA's record in such matters, President Bush is now trying to greatly expand the CIA's domestic spying capabilities.

According to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, the Bush administration quietly slipped provisions into an omnibus

intelligence bill to authorize the CIA and the military to issue what are known as "national security letters." These fuzzy-sounding issues aren't Christmas cards from servicemen, but rather subpoenas that would require private institutions to release records of Americans' phone calls, bank transactions and e-mail communications.

Currently, only the FBI has the authority to issue such subpoenas. Why? Well, the FBI has an inherent safeguard that the CIA and military lack: It has to make sure that the information it gathers can be used in court.

If the FBI were to abuse its power to issue national security letters, courts could throw out any illegally gathered evidence. The CIA and military have no such safeguards. They could potentially use national security letters to monitor American citizens without repercussions.

Thankfully, Senate Democrats forced the removal of Bush's power grab from the intelligence bill. But don't expect the Bush administration to give up on seeking unprecedented domestic spying powers.

Both Nixon and Bush see the presidency as above public disclosure. Nixon kept records of nearly everything and refused to release any of it until ordered to do so by a court. Even then, Nixon's records were marked by erasures and omissions.

Men like Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, both former Nixon officials, saw how Congress snatched up Nixon's documents. They have vowed, as former Nixon counsel John Dean has said, to prevent the same thing from happening to Bush.

Another disturbing parallel between Nixon and Bush is both men's practice of rewarding loyal contributors with ambassador posts to great vacation spots. Bush rewarded a contributor named Mercer Reynolds, a Cincinnati oilman who helped raise \$605,082 for Bush, with the ambassadorship to Switzerland, according to the Associated Press.

Bush's second-ranking fundraiser, Ronald Weiser, got the ambassadorship to the Slovak Republic. His number three fundraiser, Howard Leach, is now the ambassador to France.

People close to the Nixon administration went to jail for stuff like this. Herbert Kalmbach, an attorney and friend to Nixon, got six months behind bars for promising a wealthy contributor a European ambassadorship in exchange for \$100,000.

While, unlike in Nixon's case, no hard evidence has yet come to light of a direct quid pro quo relationship between the ambassadors' contributions to Bush and their foreign appointments, the coincidence is far too striking to dismiss.

Two years into Nixon's first term, no one could have imagined that he would be forced to resign his office in disgrace. Bush, as far as we know, has thus far managed to stay within the letter of the law. Time will tell if he can continue to do so and end his administration on his own terms.

Contact the columnist at chuckslothower@dailyemerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.



Chuck Slothower
 Clocktower hush

Your opinions can't be wrong this time!

On the Commentary page, I tell you what I think regularly. And much of the time, you respond with opinions on topics from abortion to public displays of homosexual affection to international politics.

Now, I want to know what you think of the Emerald. We're currently conducting a readership survey to determine who reads the paper, what parts they read, what they like and don't like, and what their spending habits are.

Why are we doing this? First and fore-

most, we want input on improving the paper from those who mean the most to us — our readers, our clients and members of the community. We also want to know where our readers shop and what types of items they buy, so that we can provide the best advertising possible.

We've put together an online survey that will provide crucial information about our strengths and weaknesses so we can continue to offer a high-quality community newspaper. Please be candid — we can't improve without honest feedback.

We have hired Pulse Research, Inc., a nationally respected, independent newspaper research firm in Portland, to tabulate the results and provide us with data analysis. And everyone — the news, classified advertising, display ad-

vertising, production and circulation departments — will use this information to do their jobs better.

To show our gratitude for completing the survey, we are offering a \$100 cash prize, a \$50 cash prize and a \$25 Campus Cash prize. Winners will be selected from everyone who completes the survey.

So what are you waiting for? Go to the nearest computer, point the browser at www.pulseresearch.com/dailyemerald and take the survey! It's secure, private and takes about 10 to 15 minutes.

And in this case, no matter what opinion you express, no one is going to say you're wrong. That's a rare opportunity; take advantage of it.

Contact the editor in chief at editor@dailyemerald.com.



Michael J. Kleckner
 The editor's office