

On My Mind
10/12/01

Teno has been telling people that the CNMI is a safe place to visit. Is he correct? Should people in the CNMI worry about terrorist attacks? Realistically speaking, I don't think so. Terrorists usually aim at one of three targets: high-profile strategic sites, like embassies, communication centers, transportation hubs, or military strongholds; at high-density sites, like barracks, subways or high-rise buildings; or else at smaller, random sites, like a street corner, a bus stop, or a car.

So what is there in the CNMI that offers a probable target? The CNMI has no military base, houses no central bank or commercial hub of any kind, does not even have a reservoir.... It has no big buildings, big arenas, big harbors. In fact, the CNMI is so small and so remote that 98% of the terrorists probably never even heard of it - much less know where it is. (Remember, there are lots of U.S. Congressmen and government officials who have never heard of the CNMI either, or know where it is.)

Moreover, high profile attacks and attacks at high density sites require a lot of preparation and ground work, at least a handful of people to gather all the information, do the planning, make the arrangements, carry out the attack. It would be difficult to hide such activity in the CNMI. The CNMI isn't in much danger of random smaller acts of terrorism either, since even random attacks need some coordination with others to obtain the weapons used, to provide for shelter for the attackers - assuming the attacker survive. And the possibility of terrorists living here undetected, able to plan and carry out either high profile or isolated personal attacks is, to all intents and purposes, non-existent. Of course, one could argue that the thefts, robberies, rapes and personal assaults the people of the CNMI are subject to are acts of terrorism, but there is a difference. That is violence on an individual basis, not as part of some fanatic sect's mission.

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On the other hand, what could make the CNMI of interest to terrorists is its accessibility, and therefore, its potential as a conduit between terrorist countries and the U.S. mainland, or, for that matter, other Asian countries. With immigration, as well as control of air and sea ports in the hands of the CNMI, rather than federal agencies, there is a vulnerability that might not otherwise exist, that might tempt terrorists to try find their way through our ports themselves, and/or to ship through their weapons.

Thus, heightened, more stringent security measures at the ports deserve all the focus and attention the CNMI government can afford. But aerial attacks, or street bombs, or biological or chemical attacks? They just don't seem very realistic threats in the CNMI.

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Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for Guam, with its several military bases which, from all reports, are being strengthened and upgraded. Guam could be said to have strategic importance not merely because it houses military installations, but also because those installations are so close, relatively speaking, to the middle east.

This, however, gives the CNMI a significant edge when it comes to competing for tourists. Though sounding perhaps both self-serving and cold-hearted, the fact remains that the CNMI is a whole lot safer from terrorist activity than its neighbor. To a tourist market that, we are constantly told, places a high premium on safety, the "irrelevance," if you will, of the CNMI to the goals and objectives of the terrorists can and should be used as a major selling point.

MVB - are you listening?

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It is deeply distressing to me that the United States - touted as the richest, most powerful country in the world - is still so backwards in its thinking that it feels compelled to resort to war's weapons of destruction to counter the terrorist attacks of September 11. Not yet has there been any indication that anyone in power in the U.S. stopped to ask why those attacks took place, stopped to analyze what goals were being sought, stopped to seek for and weigh the alternatives for response. It's embarrassing to me that the U.S. would be so reactionary.

The U.S. has attempted to broker peace in Ireland. It has attempted to broker peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. It condemns the war in Macedonia. It supports the peace-keeping efforts of the U.N. Yet after advocating one truce, peace accord, cease-fire after another, the U.S. has now deliberately chosen to ignore every one of the strategies it has tried to foist off on other warring nations, and has itself invoked the same level of barbaric behavior it condemned in them.

Doesn't the U.S., with all the brain power, all the money, all the resources at its disposal understand that this is not a "normal" war for power, or for more territory? That this is an ideological war - between people of conflicting beliefs, holding radically different perspectives? That the forces of "normal" war - bombs, missiles, hand-to-hand fighting, food drops - or even the capture and/or death of bin Laden - will not and cannot resolve those ideological differences?

Mankind (humans, in the words of the politically correct) has been at war, it seems, since time began. Is man destined to be at war for all eternity? Doesn't man have the ability, the will, the intelligence, to find other ways of dealing with differences? Doesn't anyone believe that there are other ways of dealing with each other - either as individuals or as nations?

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Well, if volume is any criterion, the Covenant party would seem an easy victor. Of three political rallies held in my neighborhood recently, the Covenant party's was by far the loudest,

reverberating and echoing over, around, and between homes, trees, stores, drowning out any other sounds, keeping everyone within earshot restlessly tossing and turning until it was finally over.

It also seems to have the highest volume of road-side “waves” - those dangerous incursions onto the road forcing traffic, particularly at the Beach Road-Pale Arnold intersection, to crawl along in a single line of cars. It may even have the highest volume of participants in those road-waves, and the rallies (I’ve not seen them all.)

But volume isn’t everything, and it’s hard to imagine that the shouting and the slogan repetitions persuade many voters to change their position. Not understanding the words, after a while all the speeches sound the same. There’s an identical rhythm, a pattern, a style to the rhetoric and the delivery at the rallies - as though everyone has taken classes in political oratory at the same school. They almost sound like the prompters and front men at tv-shows, who “warm up” an audience for the appearance of a “star.”

It would be interesting to find out where and why the practice of delivering campaign speeches at the top of one’s voice began. Or why it persists. How can intelligent dialogue take place at such volume? With such short phrases? Such catch-all verbiage?

High (audio) volume in such circumstance is a sign of disrespect, an invasion of privacy, an attempt to dominate by force. But an omen of victory it is not. Is he correct? Should people in the CNMI worry about terrorist attacks? Realistically speaking, I don’t think so. Terrorists usually aim at one of three targets: high-profile strategic sites, like embassies, communication centers, transportation hubs, or military strongholds; at high-density sites, like barracks, subways or high-rise buildings; or else at smaller, random sites, like a street corner, a bus stop, or a car.

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