

On My Mind
10/29/04

(Due to network difficulties, I was not able to upload this column over the week-end. My apologies for the inconvenience.)

The authorized version of the 9/11 Commission Report, now available at the local Bestseller outlet in Susupe, is an intimidating 1¾" thick. Another version, with *NY Times* commentary - but without the original's copious notes - is somewhat smaller, and is also available at Bookseller. But it is not an intimidating read - in the sense that the writing is dense, or the language dry and stuffy, or full of jargon, or otherwise difficult to comprehend. On the contrary, it is very well written, and easy to follow. In fact, the report has been nominated as a finalist for a National Book Award - surely an unusual honor for a government committee-generated report.

But it is intimidating, in the sense that it is disconcerting, if not downright frightening, to learn how easily those participating in the 9/11 attack traveled to and from the United States, were free to travel within the United States, managed to study American customs, attend various flight schools, and plan their schedules of attack.

It is even more dismaying to read of the countless committees, offices, divisions and sections within the various U.S. government agencies and departments responsible for terrorism and counter-terrorism, intelligence and counter-intelligence, and of the barriers - political, jurisdictional, legal, personal - that kept them from communicating with each other. Most of the information to stop the 9/11 attack was available - it simply wasn't shared across the barriers.

The Report is full of details - sometimes overwhelmingly so. In other sections, the language is stark and clear, as in the table showing the specific times from take-off to crash of the four flights, or the narration of the events from crash to collapse of the twin towers in New York.

In assessing what could, or should, have been done to prevent the attacks, the Commission notes, "Looking back, we are struck with the narrow and unimaginative menu of options for action offered to both President Clinton and President Bush."

Pointing out that today's threats aren't defined by national borders, the Commission explains, "An organization like Al Qaeda, headquartered in a country on the other side of the earth, in a region so poor that electricity or telephones were scarce, could nonetheless scheme to wield weapons of unprecedented destructive power in the largest cities of the United States."

"But," cautions the Commission, "the enemy is not just "terrorism," some generic evil....The catastrophic threat at this moment in history is more specific. It is the threat posed by *Islamic* terrorism - especially the al Qaeda network, its affiliates and its ideology."

The Commission states that there are actually two enemies, the stateless al Qaeda network and "a radical ideological movement in the Islamic world, inspired in part by al Qaeda, which has spawned terrorist groups and violence across the globe." The first, it believes, is weakening, but

“the second enemy is gathering and will menace American and American interests long after Usama Bin Ladin and his cohorts are killed or captured.”

In its chapter, “What to do? A global strategy,” the Commission states that efforts to combat terrorism should be directed at the individuals and organizations that use terrorism as a tactic to kill and destroy. “But long-term success demands the use of all elements of national power: diplomacy, intelligence, covert action, law enforcement, economic policy, foreign aid, public diplomacy, and homeland defense. If we favor one tool while neglecting others, we leave ourselves vulnerable and weaken our national effort.”

“Our effort,” the Commission continues, “should be accompanied by a preventive strategy that is as much, or more, political as it is military. The strategy must focus clearly on the Arab and Muslim world in all its variety.” And it should be done with Muslim nations as partners in development and implementation of that strategy, the Commission states.

The global strategy chapter lists 27 recommendations for action to be taken by the U.S. government. The recommendations cover a wide range of activity, from the need for the U.S. to define its message and what it stands for - “If the U.S. does not act aggressively to define itself in the Islamic world, the extremists will gladly to the job for us,” the Commission warns - to the recommendation that Homeland security assistance no longer be distributed on a per capita basis, but according to a strict assessment of risks and vulnerabilities.

The next chapter, “How to do it? A different way of organizing government,” lists five major recommendations, of which four begin with the word “unifying” - bearing out its criticism that the government sector which deals with terrorism-related concerns is not now well organized. The Commission states at one point, “Congressional oversight for intelligence - and counterterrorism - is now dysfunctional.” The chapter includes a suggested organization chart titled “Unity of Effort in Managing Intelligence,” that sets out in hierarchical order the many agencies involved in dealing with terrorism, counterterrorism, intelligence, etc., in national and international as well as military arenas.

Given that an awareness and understanding of the Commission’s criticisms and recommendations - and implementation of the latter - are critical to the survival of the United States, its Report, while long (some 567 pages including nearly 40 pages of notes and lists), deserves wide reading as well as strong support.

The Commission has since disbanded, but according to an article in an August issue of the *PDN*, Commission members will continue to lobby for enactment of their recommendations, using funds raised from private sources.

<center>***</center>

On a brighter note, the Red Sox actually won the World Series!!!! They’ve broken the jinx! Hooray! What a phenomenal achievement - winning the last four games of the league play-off,

and then the first four of the series - eight games straight in a row. Wow! I haven't lived in the greater Boston area in more years than I care to think about, but in combination with my tendency to support the underdog, I couldn't resist cheering for the whole team.

<center>***</center>

Short takes:

Though not an underdog in the same sense, I would support CUC's decision to raise power rates to cover its ever-increasing fuel costs. We allow the gas stations to increase their rates because of the ever-increasing fuel costs - and they've done it frequently and significantly. CUC faces the same problem: higher fuel costs. Should we not allow it the same solution for meeting those costs: raising its rates?

CUC has other problems, of course, but in this instance, I think it is not only reasonable, but only fair, to grant it the rate increase.

<center>*</center>

I'd also like to express my support for Representative Claudio Norita's proposal that the legislature become part-time. All too often, its members appear to be in their own "ivory tower" of sorts, totally unaware of the real situation "on the streets." Perhaps if they participated more directly in the private sector, rather than isolating themselves in governmental surroundings, they'd become more practical, and be more willing to prioritize their time and activities.

It will require approval by $\frac{3}{4}$ of the members of both houses for the such an initiative to be put on the ballot for voting by the general electorate.

<center>*</center>

Despite the Paseo Marianas, Garapan's tourist district is a mess: torn up streets, gravel instead of sidewalks, and puddles everywhere - right on Hotel Street, and on streets almost everywhere else.

Can't be very pleasing or inviting to the tourists - of whom, is it said, there are again an increasing number - to try navigate, across, around and through the mess, especially tourists with strollers, or toddlers, or the elderly.

Public Works, or the contractors, or MVA owe it to the tourists - and to the future of tourism - to acknowledge the mess, and to apologize to the tourists. There is no reason there could not be numerous signs along the streets and sidewalks, as one finds in airports undergoing remodelling, for example, that say "sorry for the inconvenience," or "thank-you for your patience," and explain that the work is being done to better serve their needs. At least that will give the tourists a sense that the CNMI is aware of the inconvenience, and cares about them - which the present situation does not do. Just imagine the impression those tourists are carrying back with them!

<center>*</center>

Another place where signage is needed is at the top of Capitol Hill, at the post-office crossroad. With so many government offices up there among all the cul-de-sacs, it sure would be helpful if there were a sign to at least indicate which office is on which side of the road.

<center>*</center>

The election outcome? I hope I'm wrong, but it looks like a bonanza for attorneys, and a waiting game for the rest of us.