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Is Cal Thomas Right or Wrong?

by **Charles L. Hooper**

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Although I don't often read Cal Thomas's syndicated column, I got a fair number of insights from [his 11 September 2007 column](#) ("The only hope in the Iraq war is to win it"). After reading this article, I thought: if Thomas's assessment of the situation is correct, I, too, should be a big fan of the Iraq War. In a nutshell, here is what Thomas is saying.

There is a big pool of Islamic terrorists. These terrorists hate us and are just waiting to kill Americans and level America. The only thing preventing the total destruction of everything we love is the U.S. military's presence in Iraq. In Thomas's words, a pullout would be "...followed by a huge terrorist base that would surely spawn new and more devastating attacks on the United States."

This got me thinking. If you believe Thomas's assessment of the situation, you would be insane to oppose the Iraq War. You would also be more critical of "civil libertarians" such as those in the ACLU who throw barriers in the way of the government as it tries to spy on its citizens, some of whom could be murderous religious fanatics.

Let's consider Thomas's assessment. If we believe his assessment, we should support the war and be less critical of the government's other actions. If we don't believe it, we should withdraw our support for the war and government spying.

Lets take as a given that Thomas is right about the big pool of Islamic terrorists wanting to kill us. How is it possible that the war in Iraq is stopping them? Do they need to drive through the war zone and are just waiting for the fighting to pass? "I don't want to scratch the paint on my car, Mohammed. Let's wait for this thing to settle down." Have the American soldiers blocked all the exits from the country? Are the American soldiers too much fun to shoot at? Are the terrorists lost because all the street signs leading out of Iraq are filled with bullet holes? Or can the terrorists leave at any time, but they can't seem to pull themselves away, as if they are sitting in a comfortable chair watching TV after work? "Yeah,

yeah, honey, I'll go over to America and detonate some bombs as soon as this war ends." None of this seems plausible to me. I fail to find any reasonable way to explain how the Iraq War is keeping these terrorists away from my neighborhood.

Oh wait. Thomas says that the terrorists are *already* in this country. "[T]hey are even now building a religious and educational infrastructure inside the United States from which terrorist attacks could be carried out." This makes the argument for the war even more interesting. If the enemy is already here, why should our soldiers still be over there?

Perhaps, just perhaps, Thomas isn't correct about the big pool of terrorists waiting to kill us. I flew to the East Coast for a business trip just a day after the post-9/11 air travel restrictions were lifted in 2001. Everyone was on edge and security was tight. Only poor shmucks like me who really had to fly were in the airport. The flight attendant was close to tears. As I took my seat in the rear of the airplane, I looked around at my fellow passengers, wondering if any were hijackers. Sitting in my seat I thought that while the passengers couldn't bring any weapons on board, I'd bet that there were makeshift weapons already on the plane. Right then I heard a chipping sound coming from the galley behind me. A single female flight attendant was using an ice pick to break apart ice cubes. There's the weapon! A hijacker would need only to wrestle that ice pick from the attendant – something many young strong men could easily do.

Or consider another example. On 29 April 2007, a gasoline tanker truck was driving on a freeway overpass in Oakland, California. The driver crashed the truck and it caught fire. While the driver escaped the inferno, the fire was so hot that it melted the whole overpass and caused massive traffic problems.

What am I getting at? Terrorist acts are pretty easy to perpetrate, especially if you don't care about getting caught or even losing your life. And especially if you *want* to lose your life as a supposed "martyr." A terrorist could have gotten that ice pick and hijacked my plane. A terrorist could drive a gasoline truck into a target much more valuable than an overpass. I bet that I could come up with a list of hundreds of good terrorist schemes. So could you. Forest fires? Dams? Bridges? Electrical systems? Military systems? Airplanes? Downtown buildings? Key people? Oh my, we live in a target-rich environment.

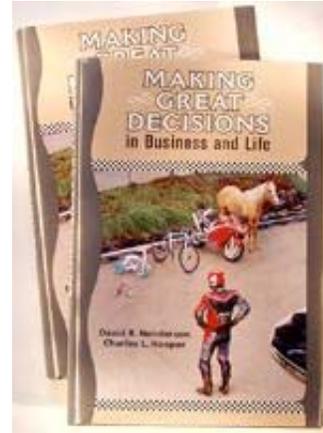
And if I chose to follow through, I could perpetrate these awful acts without nuclear weapons or a base in the Middle East. And I'm not even a professional.

No, I'm not a terrorist. And neither are you. And neither is almost everyone else in the world. If terrorist acts are so easy and yet so rare, the only conclusion we can draw is that very few people are motivated enough to

follow through on such bloodshed and destruction. That's a good thing.

You don't need to worry about me killing people; I'm morally and intellectually opposed to such acts and I've got too much to live for. And so do my neighbors. And so do you and your neighbors.

Which leads to the conclusion that Thomas is wrong. The Iraq War is not the only thing stopping terrorists because it isn't stopping them at all. In fact, it may be the primary trigger for their warped immoral religious delusions.



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Charles L. Hooper [[send him mail](#)*] is a visiting fellow with the Hoover Institution. He and David R. Henderson coauthored* [Making Great Decisions in Business and Life](#) *(Chicago Park Press, 2006).*

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