

The Great Divide

Although he'd never admit it, President Bush is not a "uniter." In fact, I don't think any human being could unite America right now. Three primary issues form the wedge: Fighting terrorism, redistributing income, and accepting controversial behavior.

Progressive Americans want the government to impose high taxes on affluent Americans and spend the money on entitlements like medical treatment for those less well off. Conservative Americans believe this kind of tax imposition goes against the capitalistic system and would greatly damage the economy.

Many progressives also want to change societal norms; they want gay marriage, drug legalization and a general tone of acceptance for actions traditionally deemed unacceptable in America. Traditionalists are appalled at that possibility.

But, by far, the most divisive issue in America today is how to confront worldwide terrorism. According to a new Pew Research Center poll, just 17% of Americans who voted for John Kerry believe using military force is the best way to defeat terrorists. By contrast, 66% of those voting for President Bush think military action is the most effective anti-terror tactic.

That divide is disturbing. If you look at the history of terrorism over the past 22 years, you find again and again that the USA has done little to confront foreign terror killers. In April of 1983, terrorists bombed the U.S. Embassy in Beirut. Ten years later, the first World Trade Center bombing resulted in the deaths of six Americans; more than a thousand others were wounded.

The Khobar Towers bombing in 1996 killed 19 more Americans in Saudi Arabia. The bombings of two U.S. Embassies in Africa left 12 Americans dead in 1998. Two years later, the terrorist

attack on the USS Cole resulted in 17 American sailors being buried.

In each of those cases, the core group involved (Hezbollah in Lebanon, Al Qaeda in the others) was not confronted militarily in any serious way. In fact, in the two decades before the 9/11 attack, the government of the United States allowed Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups to grow in strength and ferocity, preferring to talk about the situation rather than confront it.

Senator Edward Kennedy and his supporters want still more conversation. If you go to Kennedy's website, the only terror solution he offers is to enlist the help of our allies in Iraq, and continue to talk to the U.N. about Al Qaeda. I'm sorry, but this is dangerous. The attack on 9/11 happened because we did not attack Al Qaeda soon enough.

America needs a tough, smart military strategy designed to kill as many terrorists as possible. It also needs a consistent, persuasive diplomatic corps to try to enlist reluctant nations to actively fight the terrorists. We should try to make diplomatic deals for the help we need. But if those deals are not forthcoming, we must not back away from hunting the terrorists down, wherever they may be.

The war in Iraq has not gone well, and that is blurring the vision of millions of Americans who somehow believe we can reason our way out of this conflict against the Islamofascists. Go the root causes of terrorism, they wail. If we become a more generous, kinder nation, they will stop trying to kill us.

Sure. And I'm George McGovern. American blood and treasure has freed millions all over the world. We were the good guys then, we are the good guys now. But the bad guys want to kill the good guys, and the words of Ted Kennedy and others will not change that. United we can defeat worldwide terror, divided we

cannot. And right now, we're divided.