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## **The real threat is terror itself**

By Charles C. Krulak and Joseph P. Hoar

We've faced many tough enemies on the battlefield, but a new threat is stalking the homeland: Fear itself.

The Fort Hood shooting and the foiled Christmas airliner bombing have Americans worried that our government hasn't protected us from suicide killers inspired by al-Qaeda's hateful message.

The attackers' radical Yemeni connections are disturbing. So are the intelligence failures that allowed the plot to go forward. President Obama has called the security lapses that allowed the Nigerian suspect to board the airplane in Amsterdam "intolerable." They are, and they must be remedied swiftly.

Equally disturbing, however, are the prophets of fear who have taken to the airwaves to tell us that the rule of law is a luxury we can no longer afford. That's a formula for destroying America to save it.

The struggle against terrorism will take years. We need to set aside partisan scare tactics and think strategically about weakening the terrorists without weakening ourselves by resorting to lawlessness, cruelty, and revenge - which have short-term political appeal but are ultimately self-defeating.

Particularly self-defeating is the assertion that the U.S. justice system isn't up to handling terrorists, and that ad hoc military commissions in Guantanamo Bay are better for the job. In fact, the reverse is true.

A lone Nigerian caught with a bomb in his underwear is no match for FBI interrogators and skilled federal prosecutors - without resorting to torture, which violates our laws and subverts our values. Some assert that once suspects like Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab get "lawyered up," it will be impossible to get information from them about plots in progress. But FBI interrogators routinely crack tough suspects, even those with high-priced lawyers.

The assertion that suspects with lawyers never talk is simply wrong. Lawyers routinely encourage their clients to cooperate, especially in cases where suspects have been caught red-handed. And terrorists have proven eager to brag about their grand plans and al-Qaeda connections. Questioning in such cases has led to vital intelligence in the past - about sleeper cells in the United States, training camps in Afghanistan, and high-level terrorism suspects such as Khalid Sheikh Mohammed.

Moreover, the civilian courts have an excellent record of nailing terrorists. Since 9/11, the military commissions at Guantanamo have successfully convicted only three prisoners. In that same period, federal prosecutors have convicted 195 people on terrorism charges.

U.S. prisons are holding about 355 convicted terrorists. They include the notorious jihadist Omar Abdel-Rahman (the "blind sheikh") and Ramzi Yousef, who were convicted in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, as well as "shoe bomber" Richard Reid. None of them has ever escaped.

Terrorist bomb-makers on the loose in Yemen or Afghanistan may have the potential to harm U.S. citizens. Terrorists in federal custody do not.

Another argument of the "fight fire with fire" camp is that suspects like Abdulmutallab don't "deserve" the protection of U.S. law. But the question is why he deserves to be treated differently from any other would-be mass murderer.

To dignify Abdulmutallab with the designation "enemy combatant" would only accord him status as a jihadist warrior. We need to send him and other would-be suicide bombers the opposite message: There is no nobility in, or ideological justification for, murdering innocent civilians.

Finally, those who oppose closing Guantanamo have seized on the deteriorating situation in Yemen as proof that the detainees, particularly the Yemenis, are too dangerous to try, imprison in the United States, or send home. But the Christmas plot shows that holding suspects for years in Guantanamo has done nothing to make us safer. Attempted attacks will continue as long as there is an expanding pool of fresh recruits willing to be suicide bombers.

Guantanamo gives our enemies a potent recruiting tool. We must deny them this powerful weapon, or the struggle against terrorism could be truly unending. And that prospect really ought to worry Americans.

Former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld once wondered whether the United States was creating more terrorists than it was killing. As we learn more about how Abdulmutallab was radicalized in Nigeria, London, and Yemen, it becomes clear that we must focus on undercutting al-Qaeda's ideological appeal.

Fidelity to our values is vital. Especially now, in this time of conflict and insecurity, they point the way forward. We must not allow ourselves to be terrorized into vandalizing our own institutions of justice, our own values, or our own honor. If we do, the terrorists win.

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*Charles C. Krulak was commandant of the Marine Corps from 1995 to 1999. Joseph P. Hoar was commander in chief of U.S. Central Command from 1991 to 1994.*