

SEEING IS BELIEVING!

For many years I had been convinced that there were no terror attacks in the U.S. because of the immense popularity of American action movies and TV in the rest of the world. In all of them the hero is backed up by an all-knowing and all-powerful computerized security establishment - a push of a button reveals the exact location of anyone, anywhere in full color; the address and photograph of whoever the agent is looking for; a 3-D representation of the subjects movement in real time; and if needed a film of what the suspect ate for breakfast and an analysis of his scrambled eggs. In addition, some of the human heroes are almost superhuman: in my favorite, "24", that is supposedly taking place within an actual 24 hour period, the hero, Jack Bauer, never sleeps, never goes to the bathroom or drinks a coke or eats anything, but still manages to eliminate the bad guys.

I am certain that the vast majority of millions of Moslem young men who watch these films become convinced that their chances of success in penetrating the almighty U.S. security apparatus to blow up an American hotel or supermarket are minuscule as opposed to blowing up hotels in, say, Indonesia or Egypt, or trains and buses in London or Madrid.

The success of 9/11 did nothing to change this belief. Polls have shown that the overwhelming majority of Moslems – and many Europeans – are convinced that 9/11 was a plot by the CIA and the Israelis to create a pretext for attacking Iraq – and Islam in general - as part of a secret diabolic plan for a worldwide American-Israeli empire.

There hasn't been a single successful terror attack within the United States in the almost 5 years since the tragedy of 9/11. There have been numerous attempts that have been prevented. During all that time, as terror attacks continued around the globe, I became more and more convinced that my thesis of invulnerable America, as promoted by Hollywood, was a major reason for the calm we enjoyed.

The truth, that the performance and ability of our security agencies was nowhere near the perfection and efficiency attributed to them by Hollywood wishful thinkers, was not exposed. I didn't write about this for fear of revealing the emperor's nudity and thus jeopardizing America. Others may have had the same motivation or may have simply not thought of the possible connection between our imagined omnipotent Big Brother image and the image's impact on the ignorant, semi-literate and impressionable young Muslims.

What motivates me to write this column is the ongoing campaign by well-meaning idealists to reduce our effectiveness to fight terror. Fortunately, the average young Middle Eastern male is not an avid reader of the front pages and Op-Ed pages of our newspapers and magazines. If he were, he'd be aware that our media have been up in arms for months over the so-called wiretapping of private U.S. phones and the horrible impact this transgression and invasion of privacy would surely have on the life and liberty of us all.

This uproar is continuing in spite of the latest news from London where an independent commission concluded that the 7/11/05 terror attack which murdered 39 and injured almost 700 might have been prevented by more wire tapping of telephones and more intensive surveillance of the perpetrators and instigators of these terror attacks.

It also appears that the discovery and arrests of the terror cell in Canada was also the result of wire tapping the phones and cell phones of the Canadian citizens who planned to blow up the Canadian parliament and murder the Prime Minister.

Judging from the articles, columns and cartoons one might think that our government is engaged in listening to and recording the billions of phone calls made by ordinary Americans every day, a la Hollywood action film scenarios. Nothing, however, is farther from the truth. The fact is that the NSA program that has created all this outrage only collects the names and numbers of those who make numerous calls to individuals or organizations abroad who have been determined to be somehow connected with terrorism.

I find nothing wrong with this – if I were to make a couple dozen phone calls a week to a relative of Bin Laden or Zarqawi somewhere in the Moslem world, I think that it would be perfectly appropriate for the government to look into it, even if it turned out that I was an importer of alabaster camel figurines produced by the individual I was calling.

The media are intent on undoing even this feeble effort at stopping terrorism. I hope they do not succeed and that the potential terrorist recruits will go on believing what they see on the screen rather than what they might gather from the media.

I hope that seeing will continue to generate belief in America's omnipotence.