

Actions Often Make Far More Sense Than Words

By Thomas Sowell

May 14, 2009

One of the many signs of the degeneration of our times is how many serious, even life-and-death, issues are approached as talking points in a game of verbal fencing. Nothing illustrates this more than the fatuous, and even childish, controversy about "torturing" captured terrorists.

People's actions often make far more sense than their words. Most of the people who are talking lofty talk about how we mustn't descend to the level of our enemies would themselves behave very differently if presented with a comparable situation, instead of being presented with an opportunity to be morally one up with rhetoric.

What if it was your mother or your child who was tied up somewhere beside a ticking time bomb and you had captured a terrorist who knew where that was?

You wouldn't care what the New York Times would say or what "world opinion" in the U.N. would say. You would save your loved one's life and tell those other people what they could do. But if the United States behaves that way it is called "arrogance" -- even by American citizens. Indeed, even by the American president.

It is scary when the president of the United States is not being serious about matters of life and death, saying that there are "other ways" of getting information from terrorists.

Maybe this is a step up from the previous talking point that "torture" had not gotten any important information out of terrorists. Only after this had been shown to be a flat-out lie did Barack Obama shift his rhetoric to the lame assertion that "other ways" could have been used.

For a man whose whole life has been based on style rather than substance, on rhetoric rather than reality, perhaps nothing better could have been expected. But that the media and the public would have become so mesmerized by the Obama cult that they could not see through this to think of their own survival, or that of this nation, is truly a chilling thought.

When we look back at history, it is amazing what foolish and even childish things people said and did on the eve of a catastrophe about to consume them. In 1938, with Hitler preparing to unleash a war in which tens of millions of men, women and children would be slaughtered, the play that was the biggest hit on the Paris stage was a play about French and German reconciliation, and a French pacifist that year dedicated his book to Adolf Hitler.

When historians of the future look back on our era, what will they think of our time? Our media too squeamish to call murderous and sadistic terrorists anything worse than "militants" or "insurgents"? Our president going abroad to denigrate the country that elected him, pandering to feckless allies and outright enemies and literally bowing to a foreign tyrant ruling a country from which most of the 9/11 terrorists came?

It is easy to make talking points about how Churchill did not torture German prisoners, even while London was being bombed. There was a very good reason for that: They were ordinary

prisoners of war who were covered by the Geneva Convention and who didn't know anything that would keep London from being bombed.

Whatever the verbal fencing over the meaning of the word "torture," there is a fundamental difference between simply inflicting pain on innocent people for the sheer pleasure of it -- which is what our terrorist enemies do -- and getting life-saving information out of the terrorists by whatever means are necessary. The left has long confused physical parallels with moral parallels. If we have reached the point where we cannot be bothered to think beyond rhetoric or to make moral distinctions, then we have reached the point where our own survival in this dangerous world can no longer be taken for granted.