

Shades of gray

Thomas A. Treadon's position ("Terrorism trumps liberties," Voice of the People, Jan. 20) was characteristic of some conservatives who write in, and unfortunately, it obstructs solutions to the problems we face in the war on terror. Those who rant about "whiny liberals" see the problem only in black-and-white terms: Either we do everything the president wants, or the terrorists will destroy us.

Well, no. In the real world, there are all kinds of shades of gray, and there are all kinds of steps that can be taken in between what the president has done and doing nothing. No one says we should do nothing; no one wants the terrorists to win. It is a phony argument that these conservatives serve up.

I wonder whether Treadon sees the contradiction in his position that the only way to prevent the terrorists from taking away our liberties is to give them up ourselves.

Those of us concerned about National Security Agency wiretapping, warrantless searches and indefinite imprisonment of American citizens don't want the president to stop pursuing terrorists; we just want him to follow the law and respect the Constitution.

He can conduct wiretaps by getting a FISA warrant, which is quick and even can be obtained after the fact. He can conduct secret searches of our homes by showing a court "reasonable cause" (an even easier standard than probable cause). He can hold American citizens who are suspected terrorists by at least informing them of the reason they are suspected and giving them a chance to respond.

And, if he doesn't think he can meet any of those tests, he controls both houses of Congress, so he can get them to change the law. One wonders why the president doesn't think he could be successful at this.

Treadon doesn't want to confront any of these demanding issues about how to protect the liberties that have defined us as a great nation, so instead he just attributes disagreement with him to a "blind, visceral hatred of President Bush." That's an easy way out, but it is false. People have genuine concerns, and the president could address these and still fight an effective war on terror. I share Treadon's concerns about terrorists, I wish he shared mine about protecting the Constitution.

Perhaps if the conservatives turned off Fox News for a few hours, they could get a better grip on the reality that we can be both safe and free, and that one can disagree with the president and still be a patriot.

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