

the groupthink tanks.

Consider the way the Boston Democrats have embraced the quick-fix of our intelligence weaknesses with an intelligence czar (or, not to be sexist, czarina). Perhaps misadvised by the inadverter whose nickname is now the same as the Clinton White House cat, John Kerry proposed this easy palliative months ago.

With great fanfare, the 9/11 commission amplified that call for a super-spymaster. This rush to "reform" is stampeding otherwise sensible senators into writing a czarist bill to combine the spying techniques of secret surveillance with the law-enforcement power of the F.B.I., invading the unsuspected citizen's privacy under the rubric of fighting terrorism.

With this fear-driven new groupthink spurred, booted and in the saddle, nobody at this convention stops to ask: Would John Kerry, if elected, be well served by a fixed-term, "cabinet level official" who does not serve, as other members of the cabinet do, "at the pleasure of the president"? What if, in some crisis about pre-emption, they disagreed - would the unelected official prevail? Who would really be in charge?

And suppose one person had budget authority over intelligence-gathering and evaluation as well as F.B.I. investigations - what would become of the rules of evidence that protect the innocent accused? What the czar wants, the czar gets - and one day he could just as easily be a John Ashcroft as a Lee Hamilton.

One looks in vain for a Democrat here in the Boston lovefest to break out of the groupthink enough to say: "Hold on. In the spirit of the 9/11 bestseller, let's use our imagination to discern hidden dangers in unrestrained dot-connecting." Won't happen; in a time of fear, civil liberty butters no political parsnips.

With dissent suppressed, we can expect a well-behaved convention. With "values" rhetorically devalued, no speech will be permitted without the words "strong" and "respect." You can tune in with your children; there will be no breast-baring or breast-beating or frenzied Bush-bashing. Why? Because the angry Outs have been seized by In-ism.