

Home security: Inconvenienced for the war

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [February 8, 2005](#) issue

Speak of nightmares! I dreamed that on a below-zero day my garage-door opener failed. Bundling myself in down until I looked like a Green Bay Packer fan, I braved the wind and went in through a side door. I had to remember how to pull the rope for manual lifting, all the while practicing new imprecations for the garage-door makers.

One could hear grunts by rope-pulling neighbors mixed with curses from commuters who knew they would be late for work. Calls to garage-door repairers elicited the message: “Mr. Door cannot come today. He’s had hundreds of calls.”

Some made it to Grumpy’s coffee shop near the train station, where they grumped about the decline in services. Some abandoned autos, walked past “Support our troops” signs in the parking lot, and, as they walked, listened to the radio talk shows that called critics of the war in Iraq traitors.

Then I woke. . . . No, I didn’t. Through it all I’d been wide-awake, reading the morning papers. In the *Chicago Sun-Times* I read Howard Wolinsky’s “Opening the Door to Chaos,” about a real-life possibility: “The U.S. Navy may be sinking your garage-door opener.” It seems that, “as part of homeland security efforts, the Navy is planning to install a new public-safety radio system that could jam and render useless garage-door openers as far as 50 miles from the Great Lakes Naval Base near Waukegan.”

The warning came from a garage-door-opener industry group—some capitalists who must not know about homeland security needs, or how to “Support our troops.” Unbelievable? Unlikely? Garage-door openers near military bases in Florida and Pennsylvania are already being jammed, since the program depends on two-way radio systems like those now used for cell phones. So we experience shock and awe. Let a homeland security/military base operation stifle cell phones: 90 percent of the “Support our troops” ribbons will be stripped off cars, and 80 percent of citizens will call for immediate troop withdrawal.

Wolinsky says that those victimized by the jamming have a few options. They can learn how to live with it. They can park in their driveways. Or learn that openers sometimes work if drivers pull up right next to the door. Or “retrofit the wireless openers to broadcast on a different frequency” at a cost of \$60 to \$160. A spokeswoman said, “We weren’t expecting to have an interference option. She should get a job in the Defense Department, where they also “weren’t expecting to have an interference option” in Iraq after “Mission Accomplished.” The opener manufacturers said, “The worst part of it was the military did not give consumers or manufacturers any warning.” Perhaps the military could shift to another frequency? “Dream on,” said that spokesman.

The Pentagon’s point man said the military is “very empathetic with those individuals who have experienced some interruption of use.” What if the problem spreads and we have to add garage-door-opening problems to the other inconvenience civilians are experiencing because of the war: airport security checking? The only people now paying for the war—some of them dearly, ultimately—are among the military and their families.

In 2004 the Martys tried to discern whether anyone other than our grandchildren, who will pay off the debt, are being inconvenienced by that distant war. Yes, “Support our troops” is an understandable, necessary, even urgent call. It will become more meaningful in 2005, however, if we at home have to make sacrifices bigger than stuck garage-door openers and security checks.