

The New York Times
nytimes.com



December 1, 2008

OP-ED COLUMNIST

Jihad's True Face

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Much of the reporting from Mumbai the last few days has been informative, gripping and often moving. Some of the commentary, on the other hand, has been not just uninformative but counterinformative — if that's a term, and if it's not, I say it should be.

Consider first an op-ed article in Sunday's Los Angeles Times by Martha Nussbaum, a well-known professor of law and ethics at the University of Chicago. The article was headlined "Terrorism in India has many faces." But one face that Nussbaum fails to mention specifically is that of Lashkar-e-Taiba, the Islamic terror group originating in Pakistan that seems to have been centrally involved in the attack on Mumbai.

This is because Nussbaum's main concern is not explaining or curbing Islamic terror. Rather, she writes that "if, as now seems likely, last week's terrible events in Mumbai were the work of Islamic terrorists, that's more bad news for India's minority Muslim population." She deplores past acts of Hindu terror against India's Muslims. She worries about Muslim youths being rounded up on suspicion of terrorism with little or no evidence. And she notes that this is "an analogue to the current ugly phenomenon of racial profiling in the United States."

So jihadists kill innocents in Mumbai — and Nussbaum ends up decrying racial profiling here. Is it just that liberal academics are required to include some alleged ugly American phenomenon in everything they write?

Jim Leach is also a professor, at Princeton, but he's better known as a former moderate Republican congressman from Iowa who supported Barack Obama this year. His contribution over the weekend was to point out on Politico.com that "the Mumbai catastrophe underscores the importance of vocabulary." This wouldn't have been my first thought. But Leach believes it's very important that we consider the Mumbai attack not as an act of "war" but as an act of "barbarism."

Why? "The former implies a cause: a national or tribal or ethnic rationale that infuses a sacrificial action with some group's view of heroism; the latter is an assault on civilized values, everyone's. ... To the degree barbarism is a part of the human condition, Mumbai must be understood not just as an act related to a particular group but as an outbreak of pent-up irrationality that can occur anywhere, anytime. ... It may be true that the perpetrators viewed themselves as somehow justified in attacking Indians and visiting foreigners, particularly perhaps Americans, British and Israeli nationals. But a response that is the least nationalistic is likely to be the most effective."

If, as Leach says, "it may be true" the perpetrators viewed themselves as justified in their attacks, doesn't this mean that they did in fact have a "rationale" that "infused" their action?

But Leach doesn't want to discuss that rationale — even though it's not hard to find. Ten minutes of Googling will bring you to a fine article, "The Ideologies of South Asian Jihadi Groups," from the April 2005 issue of Current Trends in Islamist Ideology. It's by the respected journalist and diplomat Husain Haqqani, who, as it happens, is now Pakistan's ambassador to the United States.

Lashkar-e-Taiba, Haqqani explains, is a jihadi group of Wahhabi persuasion, "backed by Saudi money and protected by Pakistani intelligence services." He notes that "Lashkar-e-Taiba has adopted a maximalist agenda for global jihad." Indeed, the political arm of the group has conveniently published a pamphlet, "Why Are We Waging Jihad?," that lays out all kinds of reasons why the United States, Israel and India are "existential enemies of Islam."

So much for Leach's notion that the Mumbai terrorists had no "cause" or "rationale." But Leach's refusal to see this is in the service of persuading India not to respond in a "nationalistic" way — and of persuading the United States not to see itself primarily as standing with India against our common enemies.

But if terror groups are to be defeated, it is national governments that will have to do so. In nations like India (and the United States), governments will have to call on the patriotism of citizens to fight the terrorists. In a nation like Pakistan, the government will have to be persuaded to deal with those in their midst who are complicit. This can happen if those nations' citizens decide they don't want their own country to be dishonored by allegiances with terror groups. Otherwise, other nations may have to act.

Patriotism is an indispensable weapon in the defense of civilization against barbarism. That was brought home over the weekend in an article in *The Times of India* on Sandeep Unnikrishnan, a major in India's National Security Guards who died fighting the terrorists at the Taj hotel. The reporter spoke with the young man's parents as they mourned their son: "His father, dignified in the face of such a personal tragedy, was stoic, saying he was proud of his son who sacrificed his life for the country: 'He died for the nation.' "

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