

Boston and the Infantilism of Jihad Denial

Posted By [Bruce Bawer](#) On April 26, 2013 @ 12:47 am In [Daily Mailer,FrontPage](#) | [61 Comments](#)

First of all, I don't care about the psychology of the Boston jihadists – whether the older one put pressure on the younger one, etc. All we need to know is that they were jihadists, and therefore our enemy. Period.

What I do find myself preoccupied by is the psychology of those Americans who, even before the perpetrators were identified, [hoped against hope](#) that they weren't Muslims – and who, after the perpetrators were identified, were quick to assure us that Islam had nothing to do with it. Or who argued that, even if the brothers *were* motivated by Islam, that little detail doesn't matter, and we shouldn't focus on it.

I'm fascinated by the mindset of those who sought to obscure the vital moral distinctions in this case by waxing philosophical about such matters as the complexity of human character and the power of history. For example, David Remnick, in the *New Yorker*, [described](#) the Tsarnaev family as "battered by history...by empire and the strife of displacement, by exile and emigration." Many commentators strove mightily to make the case that, in the final analysis, we're all equally guilty and all equally victims.

Then there's the repulsive U.N. hack Richard Falk, for whom the [lesson](#) of the Boston bombings is that "self-scrutiny and mid-course reflections on America's global role is long overdue." There's been a lot of that going around. And what about those who have preferred to see the brothers not as jihadists but as Chechen separatists, who were driven by an understandable, even noble, antagonism to Russian tyranny (and who had, apparently, somehow mistaken Boston for Moscow)?

And let's not forget Salon's Andrew O'Hehir, who [insisted](#) on Saturday, the day after the younger Tsarnaev was taken into custody, that "we still have no idea what role their religion and national background may or may not have played in motivating the crime." These sentences from O'Hehir deserve to be quoted in full:

...it's not entirely fair to suggest that Americans think one kid killed by a bomb in Boston is worth more than 12 kids killed in Afghanistan. It's more that we live in a profoundly asymmetrical world, and the dead child in Boston is surprising in a way any number of dead children in Afghanistan, horrifyingly enough, are not. He lived in a protected zone, after all, a place that was supposed to be sealed off from history, isolated from the blood and turmoil of the world. But of course that was a lie.

What, exactly, is O'Hehir doing, or trying to do, here? He's trying to shift our attention away from the jihadist murder of eight-year-old Martin Richard to children killed in Afghanistan – not the innumerable children killed by jihadists, of course, but those who die as the result of the actions of American soldiers at war. In short, O'Hehir wants to draw our attention away from a jihadist act on U.S. soil to American military actions abroad, the implied idea being that they are more or less comparable – although America's crimes are, presumably, more extensive and thus more deplorable and more deserving of our attention than those committed by the Tsarnaevs.

O'Hehir doesn't dare to suggest explicitly that the American military strike was twelve times morally worse than the jihadist act – but he doesn't have to. The implication is there. Also present is the implication that the act of jihad was perhaps not in fact an act of jihad at all, but rather a (legitimate?) reaction to American acts abroad.

The subject of this passage from O'Hehir isn't the malice of the jihadists – it's the mendacity of American officialdom, lying to American citizens about their security. Lost is the fact that until 9/11 America *was*, in a very real sense, a "protected zone," sealed off from the bloody, turmoil-filled history of the Old World. And that was a good thing: it was the reason why generations of immigrants left behind their own cultures and languages and centuries of family history in order to make a new start in the New World – to learn English, work hard, and contribute to America, all the while enjoying American freedom and security and an unprecedented opportunity to prosper. That was the American compact. And it's this compact that these two jihadist immigrants betrayed. But instead of faulting them for this, O'Hehir condemns the compact itself as a damnable lie.

If I'm curious about the psychology of O'Hehir and his ilk, it's because their brand of twisted thinking isn't marginal. In a large and, I think, ever-growing segment of American society, it's reflexive. It's mainstream. Among urban types who view themselves as liberal-minded and sophisticated, it's considered *de rigueur* to think this way about things like this. Certainly you're obliged to think this way if you want to count on getting published in major establishment newspapers and at websites like Salon.

It's necessary to fight jihad. But it's equally necessary to fight this weed that has grown up among us – this decadent, despicable readiness to deny the reality of jihad, to relativize it, to make excuses for it, to blame it on us, on America.

These decadent characters take these positions, of course, because they've been marinated in multiculturalism and, in particular, have absorbed the all-important lesson that the great danger of our time is not Islam but the criticism thereof. Yet what made multiculturalism attractive to these people in the first place is that it's tailor-made for spoiled, narcissistic grown children who don't want to have adult enemies – that is, the kind of enemies who represent a real danger to them or that they might ever really have to fight. It's tailor-made for people who cherish the notion of themselves as sensitive and understanding toward "The Other," and whose enemies of choice are, basically, parental substitutes – people who draw clear moral distinctions, who talk about the need for security, and who make unequivocal assertions about the superiority of American freedom to Islamic tyranny.

Fighting the mental affliction – the terminal puerility – of the O'Hehirs may be even harder than fighting jihad itself. How do you repair a culture in which mature moral judgment and adult civic responsibility have systematically been replaced by childish, self-aggrandizing displays of "sensitivity"? How do you install a moral compass in a fully grown adult?

For that's the problem, in essence: these people are missing certain working parts that are essential components of the civilized adult. First of all, they lack the imaginative capacity, and the sense of identification with their own country, to understand that the bombing in Boston wasn't just an attack on the three people who died and the dozens others who were wounded, but was, in fact, an attack on *them* – and on their families and friends, their very lives, their children's future. For all their mockery of America's idea of itself as a "protected zone," their supposed empathy for the jihadists is a luxury in which they're able to indulge precisely *because* they think of themselves, consciously or not, as living in a "protected zone." Like any baby in a crib, they feel safe, cocooned, impregnable – yet they don't realize that the reason for this feeling of safety is that they've spent their lives in a country where the cops and the military have protected them from, well, people like the Tsarnaev brothers.

Like any child, they accept this protection as their due, their right. They take it for granted. But they don't think of themselves as having any responsibility that accompanies this right – for example, a responsibility as citizens to the safety and well-being of the American people as a whole. No, as far as they can see, their only responsibility is to themselves. Indeed, if they can't wrap their minds around the reality of the murderers' dedication to the idea of jihad, and thus (in many cases) reject the possibility that it was indeed jihad that drove the Tsarnaevs to commit their heinous acts, it's because they themselves don't know what it means to be dedicated to anything outside of themselves – and to the preservation of their own self-image as sensitive, caring people who are too evolved to hate.

Yes, evolved. Yet of course, in reality, they're the ones who are unevolved. Their relationship to adult moral responsibility is, again, that of small children. The case is hardly ambiguous: two "refugees" from horror and havoc were welcomed into a free country and given splendid educations and opportunities – and showed their gratitude by murdering and maiming innocents, including children, in service to a movement that seeks to crush freedom. In such a situation, any adult citizen of that free country should see very clearly where his obligations lie. To instead take this assault on one's country as an opportunity to engage in self-indulgent moral preening and to defend and even glorify that freedom-crushing movement is, quite simply, the act of a moral infant.

There's no question – as Robert Spencer, among others, has [pointed out](#) – that many of those who have so eager to exculpate the Tsarnaevs would have reacted very differently if they'd been, say, Christian extremists. Also worth noting is that, careful as they are to avoid saying anything potentially hurtful about the brothers or their religion, these purportedly sensitive souls haven't hesitated to lash out viciously at those among us who insist on recognizing jihad as jihad. How to characterize this behavior, except as that of pampered, cosseted children who are terrified of the new bully at school but know they can backtalk their parents with impunity?

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