

The Washington Post

You Can't Fight Terrorism With Racism

By Colbert I. King
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During my day job I work under the title of deputy editorial page editor. That entails paying more than passing attention to articles that appear on the op-ed page. Opinion writers, in my view, should have a wide range in which to roam, especially when it comes to edgy, thought-provoking pieces. Still, I wasn't quite ready for what appeared on the op-ed pages of Thursday's New York Times or Friday's Post.



A New York Times op-ed piece by Paul Sperry, a Hoover Institution media fellow ["It's the Age of Terror: What Would You Do?"], and a Post column by Charles Krauthammer ["Give Grandma a Pass; Politically Correct Screening Won't Catch Jihadists"] endorsed the practice of using ethnicity, national origin and religion as primary factors in deciding whom police should regard as possible terrorists -- in other words, racial profiling. A second Times column, on Thursday, by Haim Watzman ["When You Have to Shoot First"] argued that the London police officer who chased down and put seven bullets into the head of a Brazilian electrician without asking him any questions or giving him any warning "did the right thing."

The three articles blessed behavior that makes a mockery of the rights to which people in this country are entitled.

Krauthammer blasted the random-bag-checks program adopted in the New York subway in response to the London bombings, calling it absurd and a waste of effort and resources. His answer: Security officials should concentrate on "young Muslim men of North African, Middle Eastern and South Asian origin." Krauthammer doesn't say how authorities should go about identifying "Muslim men" or how to distinguish non-Muslim men from Muslim men entering a subway station. Probably just a small detail easily overlooked.

All you need to know is that the culprit who is going to blow you to bits, Krauthammer wrote, "traces his origins to the Islamic belt stretching from Mauritania to Indonesia." For the geographically challenged, Krauthammer's birthplace of the suicide bomber starts with countries in black Africa and stops somewhere in the Pacific Ocean. By his reckoning, the rights and freedoms enjoyed by all should be limited to a select group. Krauthammer argued that authorities should work backward and "eliminate classes of people who are obviously not suspects." In the category of the innocent, Krauthammer would place children younger than 13, people older than 60 and "whole ethnic populations" starting with "Hispanics, Scandinavians and East Asians . . . and women," except "perhaps the most fidgety, sweaty, suspicious-looking, overcoat-wearing, knapsack-bearing young women."

Of course, by eliminating Scandinavians from his list of obvious terror suspects, Krauthammer would have authorities give a pass to all white people, since subway cops don't check passengers' passports for country of origin. As for sweaty, fidgety, knapsack-bearing, overcoat-wearing young women who happen

to be black, brown or yellow? Tough nuggies, in Krauthammer's book. The age-60 cutoff is meaningless, too, since subway cops aren't especially noted for accuracy in pinning down stages of life. In Krauthammer's worldview, it's all quite simple: Ignore him and his son; suspect me and mine.

Sperry also has his own proxy for suspicious characters. He warned security and subway commuters to be on the lookout for "young men praying to Allah and smelling of flower water." Keep your eyes open, he said, for "a shaved head or short haircut" or a recently shaved beard or moustache. Men who look like that, in his book, are "the most suspicious train passengers."

It appears to matter not to Sperry that his description also includes huge numbers of men of color, including my younger son, a brown-skinned occasional New York subway rider who shaves his head and moustache. He also happens to be a former federal prosecutor and until a few years ago was a homeland security official in Washington. Sperry's profile also ensnares my older brown-skinned son, who wears a very short haircut, may wear cologne at times, and has the complexion of many men I have seen in Africa and the Middle East. He happens to be a television executive. But what the hell, according to Sperry, "young Muslim men of Arab or South Asian origin" fit the terrorist profile. How, just by looking, can security personnel identify a Muslim male of Arab or South Asian origin goes unexplained.

Reportedly, after Sept. 11, 2001, some good citizens of California took out after members of the Sikh community, mistaking them for Arabs. Oh, well, what's a little political incorrectness in the name of national security. Bang, bang -- oops, he was Brazilian. Two young black guys were London bombers: one Jamaican, the other Somalian. Muslim, too. Ergo: Watch your back when around black men -- they could be, ta-dum, Muslims.

So while advocates of racial profiling would have authorities subject men and women of black and brown hues to close scrutiny for criminal suspicion, they would look right past:

- White male Oklahoma bomber Timothy McVeigh, who killed 168 people, including 19 children, and damaged 220 buildings.
- White male Eric Rudolph, whose remote-controlled bomb killed a woman and an off-duty police officer at a clinic, whose Olympic Park pipe bomb killed a woman and injured more than 100, and whose bombs hit a gay club and woman's clinic.
- White male Dennis Rader, the "bind, torture, kill" (BTK) serial killer who terrorized Wichita for 31 years.
- D.C.-born and Silver Spring-raised white male John Walker Lindh, who converted to Islam and was captured in Afghanistan fighting for the Taliban.
- The IRA bombers who killed and wounded hundreds; the neo-fascist bombers who killed 80 people and injured nearly 300 in Bologna, Italy; and the truck bombings in Colombia by Pedro Escobar's gang.

But let's get really current. What about those non-Arab, non-South Asians without black or brown skins who are bombing apartment buildings, train stations and theaters in Russia. They've taken down passenger jets, hijacked schools and used female suicide bombers to a fare-thee-well, killing hundreds and wounding thousands. They are Muslims from Chechnya, and would pass the Krauthammer/Sperry eyeball test for terrorists with ease. After all, these folks hail from the Caucasus; you can't get any more Caucasian than that.

What the racial profilers are proposing is insulting, offensive and -- by thought, word and deed, whether intentional or not -- racist. You want estrangement? Start down that road of using ethnicity, national



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