

Outrage

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Like most of you, I was outraged at the Boston Marathon bombing and the murder and mayhem that followed. Four people are dead, including an 8-year-old child killed because one of the bombers chose to place the bomb right next to him, and scores are maimed. Hundreds of lives will never be the same. And for what — to satisfy the blood-lust of two evil young men? Why were these terrorists full of hatred for a country that never did anything to them except take them in and give them a home, and even grant one of them citizenship? How does anyone become so morally stunted that they think any cause can justify the deliberate murder of civilians? What kind of man puts a bomb next to a child and then walks away with a sense of satisfaction? A soldier does everything he can to minimize or avoid civilian casualties in the course of accomplishing his mission. For a terrorist, civilian casualties are the mission. That's the difference between the two. One is a warrior who seeks to do as little harm as possible in the course of war, the other a criminal who wants to do as much harm as possible whether in or out of war. I will never understand the mind that finds joy in suffering, death, and destruction — or in the intentional murder of a child.

Neither do I understand the fundamentalist mind. A mind that not only accepts some particular book or text as the literal and inerrant word of God, no matter what the evidence against the literal truth of that text, but that harbors no doubt whatsoever. No matter how strongly we believe something, no matter how convinced we are, in most of us — in some dark little corner of our minds — lurks the thought, "But I could be wrong." That tiny, buried doubt is what keeps us from killing or committing some other outrage in the name of our beliefs. Doubt is good. Doubt is protective. Doubt leads to tolerance. Doubt is a form of humility. To be utterly without doubt is a malignant type of hubris. It leads to bloodshed, and can even threaten civilization itself. Absolute certainty paves the road to savagery, death, and darkness.

As I write this, less than two weeks after the bombing, no motivation for this terrorist act has been made public other than the religion of the bombers. Yet these two young men did not seem to be living the life of Muslim fundamentalists — or Islamists or Jihadists — whatever label you prefer. They seemed to be well integrated into American society.

Obviously many questions remain to be answered. Not just questions about the terrorists, but questions about our security. More than a decade after 9/11, are our ports and borders truly secure, and if not, why not? Is that even possible? Should visitors and immigrants be subject to more thorough background checks and stricter entry criteria? On what basis did our security agencies decide the elder terrorist was not a threat, after being warned about him by both the Russians and Saudis? If both the elder terrorist and even his mother were on a CIA Jihadist watch-list, why wasn't he expelled from the country or at least under

surveillance? The most important question in the long run: how should we react to yet another terrorist attack?

I know what we shouldn't do. We shouldn't sacrifice more of our civil liberties in the hopeless quest for absolute security. If Western civilization is at war with a violent, dictatorial strain of Islamic fundamentalism, we must recognize that we are going to suffer casualties in the course of battle. In my opinion, we have already given up far too much freedom in the name of safety. For many years now, even before terrorism was a problem, we have allowed our government to seize the private property of an American suspected of selling drugs, even if that citizen is never charged with a crime — much less convicted. Now the government can examine our financial records and read our emails without a warrant. To top it off, for a while it looked like our president was going to claim the authority to order the execution of an American citizen, on American soil, without the full due process of law. I wonder what our founding patriots would think of that — and of the the law called the Patriot Act? Actually, I don't wonder at all.

The creativity and innovation that blossom with freedom, and the prosperity that comes with a free market, guarantee that we will win this war unless we destroy ourselves. The only way for us to lose is to throw away our own liberty — personal, economic, or both. Even wiping out an entire city won't destroy this nation. American resilience was evident immediately following the explosions in Boston, as bystanders aided the wounded, paramedics rushed them to hospitals, and police responded to the horrific crime. Our security apparatus may have failed to prevent the attack, but Boston's public safety system performed brilliantly afterward — including its emergency departments and trauma services. Boston Medical Center, Mass General, Brigham and Women's, Beth Israel-Deaconess, and Tufts shared the burden of mass casualty care. Many of the walking wounded went by private vehicle to other area hospitals. These hospitals and their EDs have done us proud. Several continued to function despite their own internal bomb scares. Tufts had to evacuate its ED for 45 minutes. Mass General even dealt with the possibility of poisoned food. AAEM's Dr. Leana Wen, immediate past-president of RSA, was on duty at Mass General during the bombing.

Finally, I am in awe of the police work that followed the bombing. Local, state, and federal law enforcement agents did an incredible job in identifying the perpetrators, locating them, and then killing one and capturing the other. Taking one alive says a lot about the professionalism and character of those involved in the manhunt, just as keeping him alive speaks highly of those who rendered medical care after his capture. Hopefully, we will eventually have the answers to many of our questions. In the meantime, remember the words of Ben Franklin: "Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety." ■