

“Racial, ethnic and religious profiling makes the world more secure.”

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We live in a strange and dangerous world; that seems most evident. I have been hearing my parents discussing the seemingly endless debate on how to protect ourselves, as Americans, from terrorist attacks since September 11, 2001. “Is this normal? Did everything seem so dire when you were a kid?” I asked. My mother responded, “I feel like I lived in a protected bubble when I was little, compared to what you kids are exposed to.” Not very comforting words from the person I look to for protection, I must admit. The acknowledgement that our safe and cushioned world is only a hair’s breadth away from being wiped out is somewhat dire, but it does force one to consider what can and should be done to protect ourselves from an enemy that seems bent on destroying our way of life.

As a Jew, I am particularly sensitive to the hostile rhetoric being directed at my people from a hostile segment of the Islamic world. I cannot help but feel that simple answers would best suit the safety and well-being of those that might be harmed by the terrorist mentality. To just say, “Lock ‘them’ up, and throw away the key” sounds most comforting, but in reality, to whom am I referring to when I say ‘them?’ Assuming that one can lock up and protect oneself from billions of people that don’t share my belief system is ridiculous, even to a somewhat naïve teenager. The issue of racial profiling when dealing with racial, ethnic and religious individuals becomes a truly debatable point when looking for ways to be safer in our country.

Ever since Islamic extremists attacked the London underground system this past summer, the inclination to add racial profiling to the U.S methods of counterterrorism security has become prevalent. Proponents of racial profiling make fun of the New York Police Department's decision to conduct random bag searches in the subway as a politically correct waste of time, because Girl Scouts and old ladies get subjected to searches while "everyone knows" that the terrorists who are trying to kill us are Muslim men.¹ It is suggested that pointing to Muslim men for closer examination would be a more productive use of our counterterrorism resources.

As I searched online for population statistics, my initial research showed that racial profiling would most likely be just as unproductive as random searches. The tragic shooting of a Brazilian tradesman who was mistaken for an Arab terrorist by British undercover policemen shows the difficulty of identifying race by merely looking at someone. But even if police here in the United States could be trained to properly identify Arab Americans on sight, only a slight minority would actually turn out to be Muslim. The vast majority -- 63 percent, according to a 2002 Zogby poll, are Christian. It would prove nearly impossible to differentiate by sight alone.

If police and the FBI wished to stop Muslims here in America it would be more productive to target South Asians (such as Pakistanis, Indians, Bangladeshi and Afghans), who make up the largest percentage (33 percent) of the American Muslim population, according to statistics compiled by the U.S. Department of State. Southeast Asians make up an additional 1.3 percent. Charles Krauthammer, a syndicated columnist, wrote that at

¹“Racial Profiling No Tool in Thwarting Terrorism,” Mike German, San Francisco

this time, we can exempt all East Asians from suspicion, but it seems that most police officers would have as much trouble telling East Asians apart from South Asians as they can with telling Arabs from Brazilians.

Police would have to search African Americans at a higher rate as well. Blacks make up a percentage of the Muslim-American community and Africans who come from Islamic ruled countries make up a slight percentage as well, according to the State Department. If Arabs make up only 25 percent of Muslims, then they are a smaller minority than the combined numbers of Black Americans of Muslim descent. If we decide to use racial profiling, the police will need to focus on Asians, blacks, Arabs, along with any other minority who happens to look like an Arab. There are also white Muslims as well; for example Adam Gadahn, who is being sought by the FBI for connections to terrorist threats against the United States. They'd also miss terrorists from the far right and far left, as well as animal-rights extremists and eco-terrorists, who are overwhelmingly white. It just doesn't seem to end the numbers of individuals who would come under suspicion under the guise of racial profiling.

And what kind of damage to the American psyche might occur when we started judging every one of these minorities based on the heinous crimes of just a sprinkling. Any person wearing a turban, whether Arab or not, would be viewed with suspicion by the general populace. In fact, anyone who chose to wear a mode of dress not consistent with American fashion would be looked at as either a perpetrator or an instigator of crime against humanity. In France, the Nationalist party doesn't just look to oust all Muslims from their country, but they look to exile all Jews as well. There isn't a Jew in France

who has perpetrated a terrorist crime, yet anyone who isn't a "true Frenchman" is looked upon by the Nationalists with suspicion, disdain and hatred.

In my readings I learned that there are somewhere between 2 million (State Department) and 7 million Muslims (the Islam Project) living in the United States. If only 10 percent of Muslim Americans were sympathetic to Islamic extremism, we would be looking at a level of terrorist activity in the United States on a par with what is occurring in Iraq.² I believe that if the Muslims were to constitute a force that large in the United States, we would be experiencing a level of terrorism much greater and much more insidious than what has, or hasn't occurred, since September 11. It doesn't, because the number of Islamic extremists is actually only a tiny percentage of the Muslim-American population.

Even so, I still can understand the thinking that racially profiling all Asian, black and Arab Americans who might be Muslim in the hope of catching the very tiny percentage of Muslim extremists that are responsible for the terrible acts of murdering innocents. I don't ascribe to the blatant criticism that racial profiling is tantamount to racism, I just don't believe it is the answer to making our lives safer. Further gathering of intelligence to hone in on the groups who have already proven to be enemies of Western civilization is the only hope for stopping the bloodshed. Targeting our citizens who happen to appear a few shades darker in skin tone is not the answer at all.

While we are indeed facing terrible times, it is only through trust in our stated goals of liberty that the United States was founded upon can we look to the future where we can all be safe and happy in our beds.



² Welch, Ronald H., and Angulo, Carlos T., Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, Justice on Trial: Racial Disparities in the American Criminal Justice System, p. 7.

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