

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

Peter Schwartzman

Look at the big picture

Based on available information, Christmas Day 2009, a young male passenger from Nigeria attempted to blow up a plane on route to Detroit from The Netherlands. President Obama has stated that there is evidence linking this man to radical Islamic groups based in Yemen, a country of around twenty-three million people located on the Southern part of the Arabian Peninsula. In response to this event, airports worldwide are raising the bar on security inspections and many are planning to move to full body scans rapidly. U.S. politicians are contemplating military action in Yemen. This story dominated our news over the holidays. Is it worth so much attention? Are we asking the right questions? Are we responding appropriately?

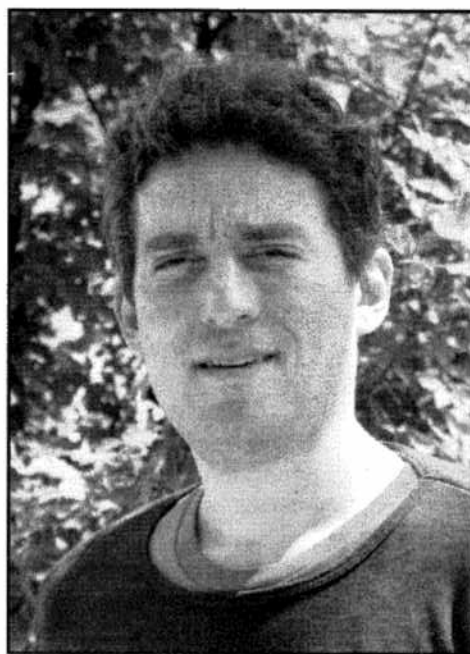
The fact that someone would board a plane with the intention of killing everyone on it is definitely something we should know about, whatever the person's motivations. If some group is behind this attempt of great violence, they should be brought to justice. These two things are indisputable. However, we cannot continue to understand these situations in isolation or as part of some master plan by "insane evil" people who just want to destroy our way of life. We have to begin looking at the full picture, something that is hidden largely from us by the mainstream media, the two dominant political parties, and others who have lots to gain from increased militarization and the absolute control of fossil fuel resources.

When one begins to see what has happened since 9/11/2001, a clear picture emerges. The U.S. has reasserted its military might in two key regions of the world—Afghanistan and Iraq (the capitals of which are ~1420 miles apart). The governing principle has been, "Get them before they get us." As a result, we have sent hundreds of thousands of our troops and citizens (working under government contracts as

mercenaries and developers) to West and Central Asia in an attempt to "kill those that are preparing to kill us." While this seems to make perfect sense to a certain percentage of our population (and why shouldn't it given that the press makes it seem so cut and dry), when one looks at the bigger picture, one can't help to recognize the major failings in this type of response.

To draw the "big picture" on modern terrorism here would take this entire paper. So much has happened in the world over the past 100 years that is relevant to the conversation. But to give a glimpse of the big picture, consider what else happened in only the past few weeks. A bomb went off at an outdoor volleyball tournament Northern Pakistan killing over one hundred people. This appears to be work of the Taliban in Pakistan. A federal U.S. judge threw out "all charges against the five Blackwater operatives involved in the 2007 Nisoor Square massacre that killed seventeen Iraqi civilians" (Democracy Now, 1/04/10). Hundreds of Afghani students protested the killing of tens of civilians throughout the country who have been killed by raids of villages including at least eight children. Elsewhere in Afghanistan, seven CIA agents were killed by a suicide bomber who appears to be a double agent from Jordan, a country just northwest of Saudi Arabia, and, as reported in the *Times*, a major British newspaper, "US-led troops dragged innocent children from their beds and shot them during a night raid on December 27" (Democracy Now, 1/04/10). Meanwhile, hundreds of "Gaza Freedom" marchers were denied access to the Gaza by the Egyptian government.

These six events are also major news stories but none got nearly the attention that the airplane terrorist received. I contend that this is because each of these is much more complex, and, thus, requires connecting



dots and bringing in historical information that our public is largely unaware of and unwilling to grapple with. Many want things simple, where there is a clear "good" and "evil" (with us on the "good" side, of course). Thus, it is easier to focus on the young man, the "terrorist." The above events are all interconnected, and they probably have a lot to do with why a young man was compelled to sacrifice his life aboard a plane. To a person from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Peru, or most nations of the world, these news stories represent horrors perpetuated by global warfare and militarization. And, when they look at the situation objectively, they notice that the U.S.'s military is #1 in the world—largest budgets (now 48% of global expenditures), most nuclear weapons, most military bases in foreign countries (in 130 nations according to Chalmers Johnson), etc. Add to this, the extreme poverty and unemployment found all around the world (while we comparatively thrive) and it becomes clear why people elsewhere

would feel animosity and distrust towards our government and an extreme few would contemplate a violent crime. People with anti-U.S. sentiment appears to be growing and how can it not when so many innocent people end up getting killed as a result (or in association with) of our presence in Iraq and elsewhere? In 2003, a *Time Magazine* (Europe) poll showed that 87% of voters thought that the U.S. posed "the greatest danger to peace" while North Korea and Iraq received only 13% of the votes. What does this tell us? It tells me that we have to begin to think more holistically about our military prowess and its effectiveness in preventing and resolving conflicts.

During our involvement in the Middle East over the past 6+ years, the opium trade appears to have flourished. Additionally, the heavy violence and willingness of people to commit suicide missions has spread to from Iraq (where it was once rare) to India, Pakistan and beyond. Will it end with more drone missiles fired into neighborhoods? Will it end with increased battalions of troops? Will it end with full body screenings at all our airports (not to mention trains, boats, and buses)? I don't think so.

I don't condone the acts of terrorism. Violence (preemptive or retaliatory) is not the answer. It must stop somewhere before it will stop everywhere. When you are perceived as the biggest bully on the world scene, you have to use your might very carefully. The "big picture" makes us aware that we are less than 5% of the world's population and we cannot control all others by force. The world is too big, our growing number of enemies too many (how many enemies do we make when one child is killed and brushed off as "collateral damage"?), and our historical record too blemished. We must lead the world in peace not war. Then, and only then, will our planes (and streets) will be safe.

THE OLD SCOUT

Garrison Keillor

Floating village provides the good life

The cruise ships sail from Tampa and Fort Lauderdale and Miami, great ocean-going pueblos, 10 decks high, passengers lounging on their verandas, gazing at the sea, workhorse Americans trying to get out of cell-phone range for a week and sweeten up to their families. It is a beautiful thing to behold.

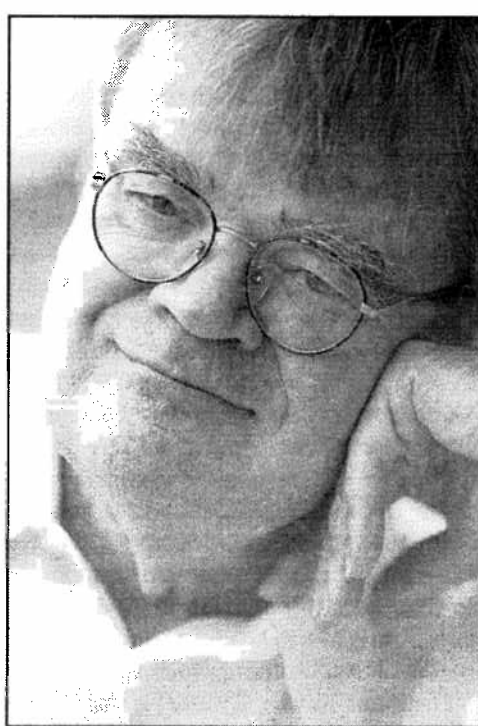
You walk around the ship as Florida slips past in the gloaming and smell hamburgers frying and hear the rhythm of mojitos being shaken and the clik-clok of the ping-pong tables and pick out the accents of New Jersey, Canada, Atlanta, Little Havana, Iowa, people who have left their lives behind and formed a village of 1,200 souls joined by a solemn compact to try to have fun.

Vacation cruises are advertised as luxurious journeys to exotic places, but a chief pleasure is the reading of books and another is making small talk with strangers. On steamer chairs topside or poolside, in the lounges, everywhere you see men and women with their noses in books, devouring them for hours. The Book: Man's Chief Weapon Against Tedium. Woman's, too. I read a book of stories by a young Pakistani writer, Daniyal Mueenuddin, and found it riveting, the most wonderful thing I'd read in a long, long time, thanks to the freedom of being at sea, away from CNN and NPR and Google, out in a vast silence in which the details of Pakistani village life loom

large, as if one were actually there, sipping sweet tea with Saleema and Husad and Mr. K.K. Harouni.

It's the village aspect of ships that we love. The food is OK, the entertainment is third-rate Las Vegas. The ship docks in Mexico and you take a bus to look at Mayan ruins for 45 minutes and return to the SS Gringo. Fine. It's the village life that's wonderful, the pleasure of people-watching and eavesdropping, which the automobile has cheated us of, the camaraderie of card games. Remember that? Back in my leisurely twenties, I sat around for hours with my Republican in-laws and played gin rummy and Five and then I fell in among earnest Democrats who preferred to sit and argue. Cards belonged to the Elks lodge and the Ladies Circle and my generation didn't go in for that. Decades passed and nobody shuffled. And suddenly, walking into a salon full of card players, I remember how much fun it was, the gentle teasing and the small talk. "Go ahead, amaze me," an old lady says to her grandson as she slaps down trump. He folds his hand. Everyone laughs.

The ship sails south across the Gulf of Mexico and you lie on deck, the Aztec sun beating down on your northern Protestant skin, and you're moved by the bravery of the semi-naked folks around you, beefy people with pork butts and shoulders, piano legs, unashamedly browning themselves. There



are few perfect specimens past the age of 20. For women over 30, the bikini is not a friend. Most American men should not remove their shirts in public. There are old ladies who serve as living examples of the danger of solar radiation. But who cares? In this village, we are who we are, mortal beings, why pretend otherwise?

The ancient Mayans did not take vacations on ships. They were busy growing maize

and hauling rocks to make their temples higher and you just have to wonder if a little down time wouldn't have been a good thing for them. An intelligent people, whizzes at math, who developed a calendar more accurate than the Gregorian, but they did monumentally stupid things like cutting holes in their teeth to insert chunks of jade — good God, the pain! — and they bound babies' heads to make them pointy and then there was the practice of human sacrifice. They did it to win the favor of the gods and as an express ticket to heaven, but who did they sacrifice? Not the enemy. No. Their own warriors, children, virgin women — the very people a society needs for its survival. Duh.

I read about Pakistan and watch my daughter in the pool. Little boys tear around and hurl themselves into the water, but little girls congregate, bobbing, ducking, holding hands, chatting, reassuring each other by small gestures that You Are Not Weird, You Belong Here With Us. Boys cannonball a few feet away and the girls are unfazed. And that's what I did on my winter vacation. Back to basics. Let's all try to get along.

(Garrison Keillor is the author of "77 Love Sonnets," published by Common Good Books.)

©2010 by Garrison Keillor. All rights reserved. Distributed by Tribune Media Services, INC.