

In the first debate among Democratic presidential candidates, each candidate was asked how they would respond if two U.S. cities were leveled by nuclear devices planted by al Qaeda. Moderator Brian Williams, trying so hard to bring gravity to his position, didn't mention North Korea or Iran, or anybody else. Then, during the Republican debate, Rudy Giuliani lambasted the Democratic candidates for not using the phrase 'Islamic fundamentalist terrorism' during their debate.

So, it's official, al Qaeda has been installed as the new and improved, bigger and better bogeyman. The latest metaphor for All Things To Be Feared.

Forty and fifty years ago, the same question felt even more chilling, but then, of course, the evildoer posited at the other end was the Soviet Union.

Twenty years earlier, before Hiroshima and Nagasaki gave worldwide fears a new scale, it was in the form of German submarines launching commando raids—in Narragansett Bay, among other places.

Oh, and we mustn't forget that little Orson Wells episode.

Now, we imagine horrible things about roaming Arabs contemplating heavenly virgins.

When the Prime Minister of Australia made remarks to the effect that an event such as the Virginia Tech shootings was unlikely to occur in his country because Australian attitudes toward and laws around guns are so different from ours, one talk-show listener phoned in to scream that when al Qaeda takes over down under we all know it will be the good ole US of A who comes to their rescue.

Apparently, our caller forgot that the Aussies have troops in Iraq. Momentary lapse, I'm sure.

All roads now lead to al Qaeda.

Of course al Qaeda is dangerous. So is driving over to visit your grandmother. And missing your annual physical.

What we focus on matters. And if we only focus on one thing all



Musings

By Robert Morton-Ranney

the time, we miss everything else.

Focusing too much on al Qaeda can make one forget that Sunnis and Shiites have been at odds for longer than there have been Protestants and Catholics. It can lead one to forget that the gap between have-somes and the have-a-lots in the U.S. and around the world keeps getting bigger. It can make you feel like rising temperatures don't matter.

Say, there's a new career for an up-and-coming social commentator. Find a way to blame al Qaeda for global warming.

This new enemy is more delicious than we've had in a while, isn't it. After all, those godless communists didn't even believe in God. Now Americans, arguably the most religious Christian nation in the world, have an enemy that, if anything, is even more religious than we are.

To be more specific, they are looking for ways to become martyrs with an enthusiasm Christianity hasn't seen in 1700 years.

It's fascinating to note the view of one scholar that Islam as a whole, younger than the Jesus movement by some seven centuries, may be going through a messy process of overall institutionalization not unlike what Christianity experienced in earlier times. The idea is that no broad consensus has yet emerged as to what matters most at the heart of their expressions of their faith and, until it does, the world will have to endure further convulsions of one sort or another.

But, hey, who cares what's really going on? Nuance is for non-deciders. The important thing is that there's an enemy out there who, in the eyes of many Americans, believes in God the wrong way. And nothing gets their juices flowing

more easily. It makes Protestant vs. Catholic look like kid stuff.

For those who don't get quite as excited about the religious angle, there's the fact that they don't dress like us. Visual distinctions are a big help in maintaining the notion that someone is an enemy. This was a problem with the Soviets, and so the economics button had to be pushed hard and often.

On the other hand, the Russian language was very different, and even had its own alphabet, which made it easier to distrust, and, therefore, fear them. Arabic fills the same slot.

The biggest thing, of course, is that they live somewhere else. And it's never too difficult to look askance at people who live far away.

Al Qaeda claimed responsibility for the worst terrorist attack on US soil. Why wouldn't a great many people hate them for that?

But we wanted so much to respond to our newfound enemy that apparently we didn't pause to ask enough questions before setting out to make the world in our own image, one more time.

Al Qaeda. The perfect label for the latest image of an all-season, general-purpose, multi-functional enemy. Many people want us to believe they will take away life as we know it any moment.

There is no question that figuring out how to live in a world with people who do things differently, some of whom can be very dangerous, is a tricky business.

At the same time, the most important freedom we have is to decide for ourselves what actually needs our attention.

Does it matter who the next President is going to be? Yes, but so does eating vegetables.

Should we plan for possibilities around enemy-induced disasters? Yes, but not all of us. Some of us should concentrate on remembering to buy a Mother's Day card. Most of us, in fact. And putting out the blue and green bins and saving up for those funny new light bulbs. And thanking friends for hanging in.

FDR was right. But, perhaps, the one thing we do have to fear more than fear itself, is the possibility that someone has a vested interest in keeping us afraid.



Good citizen awarded

James E. Walker, left, president of the Jamestown Rotary Club, presented Maurice Browning, manager of McQuade's Marketplace, with a service award for his at-cost pricing for supplies for the annual May Breakfast and Thanksgiving turkey baskets over the past three years.

'Anne' takes two at Motif magazine awards event

The Hi Hat Restaurant and Club in downtown Providence was the venue Monday evening for Motif Magazine's annual Theatre and Music Awards. Jamestown Community Theatre was well-represented by JCT actors, board members and supporters.

JCT was nominated for three awards based upon their most recent production, "Yours, Anne." Hannah Cordes was nominated for Best Child Actor—Professional and Semi-Professional Theatre, Mary Wright for Community Theatre—Best Director and "Yours, Anne," for Community Theatre—Best Production.

Awards were presented to Mary Wright for Community Theatre Best Director and the "Yours, Anne" cast and crew for Community Theatre Best Production. The awards are in recognition of excel-

lence in the 2007 Motif Theatre Awards readers poll.

Stunned at her win, Wright said, "We were so thrilled just to be nominated—we had no expectations! We came to the ceremony deeply honored and to have a nice time together!" Accepting the Best Production award on behalf of JCT, Matt Bolles, who played Otto Frank, said he was "especially gratified to accept this award for 'Yours, Anne' as it had been Mary Wright's dream to direct this play almost since she founded Jamestown Community Theatre 17 years ago." Asked if she was disappointed to not win her category, 14-year-old Hannah Cordes said, "No! I was just so happy to be nominated. And it was fun to see so many other kids who were nominated for their roles in some really great plays."

Motif Magazine is a free, bi-weekly arts and entertainment publication focusing on local arts. It publishes an extensive calendar of live music, theater, art exhibits, Indie films, etc. They are strong supporters of local arts organizations and artists.

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