

Today, we are all Norwegians

Written by Roger J. R. Kendrick and Daryl Morini

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ROGER J. R. KENDRICK AND DARYL MORINI, JUL 25 2011

The murderous carnage allegedly unleashed by a lone gunman in Norway this weekend is almost beyond comprehension. The numbers speak for themselves: 92 killed, 97 wounded, and a nation traumatised. By a single, hateful, deranged psychopath at that. The urge to demonise the killer is overbearing, almost natural to shocked domestic and international audiences. But doing so would overlook the most frightful part of this entire story, namely that Anders Behring Breivik – supposing he acted alone in this premeditated campaign of anti-government mass murder – could pose such a disproportionate security threat to a capital city, its leaders, and their children.

The Norway massacre echoes the challenges that directly faced the American government in 2001, the Spanish government in 2005 and the British government in 2007. The question is, how would you respond as a political leader? How would you keep your people safe?

Foreign policy analysts are debating whether this is Norway's equivalent of 9/11 or Oklahoma City. This misses the point somewhat. Firstly, it glosses over the important differences – namely the potential precedent of “home grown” European violent extremism targeting governments accommodating of multiculturalism and ethnic diversity. Breivik's self-styled act of “pan-European patriotic resistance” against perceived “cultural Marxists/multiculturalist traitors” may not set about a new European civil war by 2083 – that's what 1914-1945 was all about – but it may encourage copycats. Juxtapose this trigger event against the latent conflict and social hatred of a rising tide of Islamophobia, both in Europe and worldwide, and the Norwegian massacre has the potential to be a game-changer in European security.

Secondly, all analogies are imperfect, but the events of 22/07 may be more akin to the 2008 Mumbai attacks than 9/11. This is not a conspiracy theory regarding alleged foreign intelligence intrigues in the Norwegian case. Instead, the basic reason that Mumbai was a “game changer” for counter-terrorist officials, both in India and the U.S., was due to the painful lesson that a relatively low-cost terrorist operation – enabled by Google Maps and other commercially-available technology, backpacks full of weapons and explosives, and external state-backed assistance – could paralyse an entire city of over 20 million people.[1] The particularities of the India-Pakistan rivalry, the Afpak war theatre and Indian demographics aside, the present tragedy in Norway was arguably Europe's Mumbai. Late last year, U.S. and European intelligence officials warned of potential future Mumbai-style attacks by the usual jihadist suspects.[2] It has now occurred, just not as was originally conceived.

Finally, this sad story raises more questions than we can answer alone: Should the Norwegian authorities – and perhaps the European Union – develop new powers for the police to profile, monitor and track right-wing Christian groups? Should they employ such anti-terrorist measures as advertising campaigns to raise public awareness of suspicious behaviour? Or utilise more invasive strategies such as the increased use of CCTV, similar to what exists in Britain? How far should governmental intrusion into citizens' lives go? Should Interpol seriously suspect all eccentric or socially-awkward teenagers using the free Wi-Fi at McDonald's? How would you, as a leader of a terror-hit country, tackle social fears over immigration and the reactionary nationalism that could be emerging in response thereto? Where do you stand in the old dilemma over how much freedom should be sacrificed to protect citizens of a democracy in the quest for security? How far can we push the Afpak/Europe analogy? Can we speak of the Afghanistanisation of European societies, or the Talibanisation of right-wing extremist groups in Europe? Is this a temporary aberration – an historical footnote – or a precursor of worse things to come?

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We don't have the answers, but we're hoping you'll contribute some. In any case, the phrase may be overused, it may be a cliché, and it may ultimately not be of any practical use beyond a symbolic show of empathy, but as Norway mourns, we can only intone: Today, we are all Norwegians.

Please, share your thoughts using the comment facility.

[1] See Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 47.

[2] See Nic Robertson and Paul Cruickshank, 'Sources: Al Qaeda eyes more Mumbai-style attacks', 10 November 2010, *CNN*, available at:
<http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/europe/11/09/europe.plot/index.html>