

Boston Terrorist Chase: Manhunt for the “Bad Guys”

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Our nation of sleuths—a watershed scaled in our hunt for bad guys.

I think it was the cheering on that Friday night which most disturbed me.

With thousands of police spreading through tranquil neighborhoods, FBI massive search engines working overtime, an army of tactic-gearred men swarming through the city, military helicopters churning the night sky, SWAT teams moving from house to house, it would not be long before the wounded 19 year-old suspect was seized. So his eventual capture was, I felt, hardly anything to cheer about. I became disturbed by the feeling that that chorus of shouts was a self-congratulatory outburst.

Because that terrorist chase had become a nation-wide effort. Indeed, an obsession. The US public was brought into the manhunt on a scale never seen before. Executed as a singular mission, it unfolded with shared excitement and purpose. For millions of onlookers this hunt became a personal pursuit.

Whether we approve or not, we have to give US authorities credit for their superbly orchestrated outreach to the nation.

Their strategy seemed totally transparent. Homeland Security and the people merged into a single-minded patriotic force. Not only Bostonians were recruited.

With national media mobilized into the chase with their on-the-spot reportage and dynamic sketches, their seemingly spontaneous interviews with anyone remotely connected to the suspects, every onlooker was made to feel they had a stake in the event. Each detail seemed available for sharing—suspicions, personal testimonies, boxing matches, anything with the remotest association with the culprits. While talk is now focused on the brothers’ family history, Chechnya, Miranda rights, self-radicalization and immigration policy, we need to realize that this case plugged into social networking on a new level and thereby transformed surveillance into a public duty.

What a coup for our police and intelligence forces! During the past two decades, well before 911, US citizens were encouraged to inform authorities about Muslim suspects.

Many of the anti-Muslim sting operations executed by US law enforcement agents build their cases on such tips. Our mosques have become no-pray zones for many simple Muslim adherents because FBI operatives are rumored to frequent Islamic centers trolling for suspected radicals or informants.

US students retreated from their Muslim Student Association gatherings after learning they too had been infiltrated. If that was the status quo before the Boston bombings, imagine where our newly endowed population of citizen sleuths might lead us. There are plenty of anti-Arab racists and islamophobes out there to take this challenge really seriously. Moreover if the exalted occupant of the US-vice presidency can call Muslim perpetrators “knock-off jihadists”, doesn’t this give license to others?

My fellow Muslims—we are in for another rough ride.

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