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## Bill O'Reilly's Absurd and Dangerous Historical Comparison

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The other night, Fox News host Bill O'Reilly again insisted that ISIS poses a dire threat to the United States. On this occasion, though, O'Reilly surpassed the shrill warnings of his ideological colleagues, insisting that the situation was the same as the nation faced in 1938 with the rise of Nazi Germany and its fascist allies.

It is a preposterous comparison. In 1938, three of the top seven world powers were governed by fascist regimes and were linked together in the Tripartite Alliance. Those three countries, Germany, Italy and Japan, were all modern, powerful nation states, with large, productive economies.

They also were able to field several million ground troops backed by extremely capable air and naval forces. Together, those countries posed a credible threat not only to American security but to the entire global balance of power.

The resources ISIS can draw upon are puny by comparison. The movement controls a very limited territory, the shaky "caliphate" in western Iraq and eastern Syria, and that redoubt is nearly surrounded by hostile regional forces—Iran and its Shiite allies in Iraq, the Kurds and the Alawite-led government in Syria. The correlation of forces was not favorable to ISIS even before Russia added its considerable military weight to the anti-ISIS coalition.

The closest historical model to the ISIS threat is not the menace that the fascist powers posed in the late 1930s but the far more limited one that radical anarchists mounted in the last half of the 19th century. Akil N. Awan, Associate Professor in Modern History, Political Violence and Terrorism at the University of London, ably shows the similarities in a recent article [in National Interest Online](#).

Awan points out that anarchists were responsible for an alarming series of mass shootings, bombings and high-profile assassinations. An 1893 attack on the opera house in Barcelona, Spain, which killed 22 people and wounded another 35, was eerily similar to the recent incident in Paris.

In a period of less than five decades, anarchists assassinated two U.S. presidents, a Russian czar, an Austria-Hungarian empress, an Italian president, a French president, an Italian king and two Spanish prime ministers. And as in our own era, there was a growing atmosphere of panic, with calls for drastic measures that would do lasting damage to fundamental civil liberties.

We should keep that historical precedent firmly in mind when we see similar efforts to hype the ISIS threat and use it as a justification for draconian security measures.

The recent ISIS attacks are scary (indeed, that is the whole point of terrorist tactics), but my colleague Mike Tanner correctly placed the risk in context in an article on [National Review Online](#). Mike notes that the risk for Americans dying in a terrorist assault is still an infinitesimal one in 20 million.

Indeed, the chance of dying in an automobile accident is nearly 200 times greater. It is far more rational to worry about an incompetent, distracted or drunk driver barreling down the road at you the next time you get into your automobile than it is to fret about being the victim of a terrorist attack.

ISIS is the 21st century equivalent of the 19th century anarchists—a movement of violent malcontents with very limited power. It is a wild exaggeration to compare the threat they pose to the fascist powers of the 1930s (or the Soviet Union during the Cold War). Invoking such a false historical analogy to panic the American people does a profound disservice both to historical truth and fabric of liberty.

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