

What can we do to cause Boston terrorist the most pain?

Editorial April 17, 2013.

As of this writing, we don't know the "who" or the "why" or even some part of the "how," regarding the Boston Marathon Bombing.

We do have a pretty good idea of about the damage – at least 3 dead, including an 8-year-old boy, and more than 100 injured. Of the injured, there are at least a dozen amputations.

What happened is incredibly serious. It is traumatic to watch. It causes our emotions to surge. It is something we never want to see happen again.

And, from a public policy standpoint, we should do absolutely NOTHING about it.

Nothing.

We shouldn't change public security measures. We shouldn't spend more money. We shouldn't enact new laws.

Nothing.

We are inspired to write these provocative words after reading a Washington Post interview with Bruce Schneier, a security expert and cryptographer.

Schneier makes arguments that spring from one of our favorite philosophies — "rational risk assessment," which essentially is the process of taking a detached view of any situation to determine the ACTUAL risk of some sort of event occurring.

Often rational risk assessment is paired with the “law of unintended consequences” to illustrate the inanity of certain public policies. One that comes to mind is the “safety” policy of requiring infants to have their own seat and child restraint in airplanes. Despite a low “risk” of injury, the law was passed. The “intended consequence” was that more parents, who couldn’t afford to buy a separate plane ticket, DROVE to their destination, which (you guessed it) caused more children to die since auto travel is much more dangerous.

A rational risk assessment of terrorism in the United States reveals it is still incredibly rare. A Cato Institute study in 2005 revealed that: “Even with the September 11 attacks included in the count, the number of Americans killed by international terrorism since the late 1960s (when the State Department began counting) is about the same as the number of Americans killed over the same period by lightning, accident-causing deer or severe allergic reactions to peanuts.”

Yet, so far as we know, very little money has been spent on keep deer out of roadways, etc. Unfortunately, untold billions have been spent on fighting terrorism. Schneier: “Almost everything we’ve done post-9/11 is mere security theater. The stuff that did work was interdicting terrorist funding and rolling up terrorist networks.”

Which brings us back to Boston. Mr. Schneier, who said, when asked why terrorism “hits the fear button” more than other threats said: “It’s rare and spectacular. It’s random ... It’s immediate. It’s graphic.”

He went on to talk about what people SHOULD be afraid of: “Car crashes ... What people should worry about are the things so common that they’re not longer news. That’s what kills people. Terrorism is so rare, it’s hardly a risk worth spending a lot of time worrying about.”

But, of course, the aim of terrorism is the exact opposite of what Schneier is talking about. Terrorists want “irrational” risk assessment.

They want public policy driven by fear, not logic.

Schneier goes on: “The damage from terrorism is primarily emotional ... We must refuse to be terrorized. If you are scared, they win. If you refuse to be scared, they lose ...”

About 40,000 people die in car crashes each year in the United States. That's more than 100 per day. And who knows how many are injured.

But since those 40,000 deaths are spread out across the nation and aren't national news as individual events, we are anesthetized to the impacts. Few of us head off to work each day gripped by fear that a fatal car crash could happen any minute. In fact, that's probably a fear many of us haven't experienced while driving in quite some time.

Yet, rational risk assessment tells us that the thousands of folks who drive to next year's Boston Marathon will be far more likely to be injured or killed while in their vehicles as opposed to while on the marathon course.

So, our view is this: Mourn the dead and injured. Pray for them.

Let the intelligence experts work on finding terrorists.

But don't let the horrific images and absolutely real horror the victims endured cause you to advocate wide-ranging policy changes that will almost certainly be overreaching and ineffective.

We can recognize this as the senseless cowardly act that it is without giving its perpetrators even more power and glory by succumbing to fear in this tragedy's aftermath and demanding our political leaders "do something" in the vain attempt at preventing it from happening again.

Instead, let's do the one thing that will cause terrorists the most angst: Nothing.