

## *Tucson Sentinel*

# 'Bad things happen someplace, Muslims involved'



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I know there are more important problems in the world than Jennifer Rubin's blog on *The Washington Post* like the debt ceiling crisis, the Republican [assault on the welfare state](#)—that “if enacted, it could well produce the [greatest increase in poverty and hardship](#) produced by any law in modern U.S. history”—the [criminality of the Murdoch empire](#), [unchecked global warming](#), the [banking industry's assault on the new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau](#), and so on.\* But bear with me.

I've written about Rubin a few times in this space and elsewhere, but to be perfectly honest, I don't even read her myself. Her blog, however, shows up on my various radar screens on occasion and almost always instructively. This week, it's because Rubin, relying on arguments drawn from *The Weekly Standard* and the American Enterprise Institute, rushed into “print” last Friday afternoon with a column insisting that the horrific massacre in Oslo had “a specific jihadist connection” in the attack and employed this insight to argue for a bigger budget for the Pentagon.

I swear I am not making this up. She wrote: “This is a sobering [sic] reminder for those who think it's too expensive to wage a war against jihadists.” The column also insisted, no less crazily as it happens, that “Obama would have us believe that al-Qaeda is almost caput and that we can wrap up things in Afghanistan.” She was so proud of her column that she followed it with a tweet that read “Norway bombing and why we shouldn't slash defense- IT IS A DANGEROUS WORLD.”

Had this brilliant analyst waited for, say, her own newspaper to report on the incident, she would have learned that a "Norwegian man taken into custody, whom Norwegian media identified as Anders Behring Breivik, has admitted to firing the weapons, police chief Sveinung Sponheim told reporters Saturday. Police officials have described the man as a right-wing Christian fundamentalist, a member of a small, largely Internet-based community that has been quiet in recent years."

The murderer was also, inconveniently for Ms. Rubin, a strong "Israel right-or-wrong" variety of Zionist. He was also a [big fan](#) of an anti-Islam documentary featuring neoconservative rabble-rousers like Daniel Pipes and Steven Emerson. Mr. Emerson, we cannot help but note, was the guy who, Rubin-like, [tried to pin](#) the Oklahoma City bombing on Muslims before anyone knew the truth of that tragedy.

In a [follow-up column](#)—and I swear I am not making this up, either—Rubin argued that this just proved her original point. "That the suspect here is a blond Norwegian does not support the proposition that we can rest easy with regard to the panoply of threats we face or that homeland security, intelligence and traditional military can be pruned back. To the contrary, the world remains very dangerous because very bad people will do horrendous things. There are many more jihadists than blond Norwegians out to kill Americans, and we should keep our eye on the systemic and far more potent threats that stem from an ideological war with the West."

Naturally, Rubin [was not alone](#) in her boneheaded, belligerent speculation. People on MSNBC, Fox (including Laura Ingraham), *The Weekly Standard*, and the editors of Rupert Murdoch's *Wall Street Journal* among others did so as well, with the latter noting, "Al Qaeda's Ayman al-Zawahir has repeatedly singled out Norway..." Too lazy to do his own lying, Rush Limbaugh tweeted Rubin's musings with approval.

All were seeking, in the words of Stephen Colbert, to "scoop reality," or as he also put it, "[pulling a news report completely out of \[their\] ass\[es\].](#)"

Those places, together Rubin's home base—and *Commentary* magazine, where editor John "Normanson" Podhoretz [worried](#) that America might respond to the killing in an overly "intellectual" manner—are exactly where one would expect to find this poisonous potion of fear, ignorance, and racism masquerading as news and comment. But *The Washington Post*?

Well, yes. And while *The Post* has proven [particularly craven](#) in its coverage of and by conservatives under former *Wall Street Journal* editor/buy-out king Marcus Brauchli, it remains representative of the need of mainstream institutions to coddle conservatives by abandoning all previously known journalistic standards if they are to remain in their good graces.

It's no secret that *The Post* only hired Rubin because Brauchli and company felt they needed a right-wing blogger to offset the liberal [Ezra Klein](#). In their first attempt to hire one, they picked out wet-behind-the-ears nonjournalist Ben Domenech, who turned out to

have a greater talent for [plagiarism than journalism](#), though he later went on to greater heights of character assassination and purposeful lying after being fired. In their second effort, they picked Dave Weigel, failing to realize that it was possible to cover the right smartly and fairly—and this is not my opinion but that of Brauchli himself, who called Weigel’s work “excellent”—without being a conservative oneself. And so they [got rid of him, too](#). Finally came Rubin, who has achieved little (if any distinction) as a blogger except among those obsessed with attacking any and every criticism of Israel. But she was conservative and available.

To compare the knowledge, sophistication, research, and fairness of her posts to those of Mr. Klein is as instructive as it is cruel. Klein does real reporting, does justice to the views of those with whom he disagrees, and provides evidence for his views, which are rather more moderate than my own on most issues but always well supported. This statement will strike most readers of both writers as self-evident, but if you doubt it, do the research yourself. I’ll even get you started [here](#) and [here](#). I dare any conservative to take the Ezra/Jennifer test. (What is perhaps funniest about Rubin’s misguided hysteria was the fact that her column made no sense even on its own terms. Yes it’s a “DANGEROUS WORLD,” but what exactly is the nature of that danger? In this case, let’s say the Oslo killer had been a member of a radical Islamic sect. How would increasing the Pentagon budget have prevented the murders? By invading Norway? The big-ticket items in the Pentagon budget, are, sadly, more useful for fighting a land war against the Soviet Union than defending against homemade bombs and the like.)

The fact that each of these writers represents the “left” and “right” on *The Post* points to two salient facts about today’s political discourse. First off, the left supports and believes in actual journalism. Its complaint with the media is that journalists allow other factors—laziness, sensationalism, silliness, and the right’s “working of the refs”—to interfere with the process of informing news consumers. But on the right, the actual news is a problem, and so journalists are attacked when they report it overly zealously, regardless of whether it is true.

Look [here](#) and you will find a *Commentary* blogger complaining that the media pays too much attention to Israel. Scroll down and you will see a bunch of other *Commentary* articles complaining of the same thing. Note that *Commentary*, since the late 1960s, has existed almost exclusively to defend Israel (and attack affirmative action) and yet they complain of the fact of anyone else paying too much attention, regardless of the quality of information.

Why? I don’t profess to know, but I offer two hypotheses. First, conservatives know that they cannot support their arguments in light of inconvenient truths (“The facts have a liberal bias”) and so they seek to kill the messenger. Second, those institutions who are genuinely committed to balancing alleged liberalism with alleged conservatism are going to have a hell of a hard time finding right-wingers able and willing to live up to their standards.

In a conservative complaint about the alleged unfriendly environment for conservatives in the nation's universities, *New York Times* right-winger John Tierney [finds](#) that those who have studied the paucity of such people on campus discovered it is not due to any identifiable discrimination (“It is unlikely that discrimination is a major causal factor accounting for professorial liberalism”), a view that is endorsed by almost all Republican professors as well.

Interestingly, however, Tierney goes on to observe that “These respondents weren’t your typical Republicans. Nearly two-thirds of them favored stricter environmental regulations—hardly a right-wing agenda.” He is right, of course, but he fails to see how damning this is to “real” right-wingers. To be a conservative today means to deny reality.

All 20 of 20 Republican Senate candidates in 2010 rejected the scientific consensus on man-made global warming—one that [every significant scientific panel has reinforced](#). So too did all 31 members of the House who [declined to vote](#), on Tuesday, in favor of allowing the Environmental Protection Agency to regulate greenhouse gasses.

So yes, great universities are unfriendly to people who prefer to embrace know-nothing propaganda put forth by people like the Koch-funded Cato Institute, or to the kind of colleges [that make Dinesh D’Souza their president](#). They prefer people whose research and writing relies on actual evidence that can be tested and reproduced in the sciences or footnoted to scholarly sources in the humanities.

“Left” and “right” are not equivalents in this country any more. One is genuinely concerned with facing reality and addressing it, however imperfectly and often, mistakenly. The other couldn’t care less. It’s time those in the media seeking “balance” understood this. Their failure to do so is likely to do a great deal more damage to this country than all of the crazed Muslims that exist in Jennifer Rubin’s imagination. You might even call it a [“cult.”](#)