

## A byline for Hamas?

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It's unconscionable that The Times has given editorial credibility to terrorists.

Marvin Hier and Abraham Cooper

Memo to Al Qaeda's Ayman Zawahiri: Forget the mule pack; give your video cam a rest. Our nation's leading media outlets are making an offer you can't refuse: If you can keep it to 1,250 words, the next time you want to communicate directly to the American people, the Los Angeles Times, Washington Post and New York Times want your byline.

Inconceivable? Consider Hamas' summer hot streak. Not only has it driven Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas out of Gaza, threatened Israeli civilians and bombarded fellow Palestinians, but it has scored the ultimate media trifecta. First, the New York Times and the Washington Post simultaneously ran Op-Ed articles by Ahmed Yousef, a senior leader of Hamas who defended his group's bloody putsch in Gaza. Now, the Los Angeles Times has opened its Op-Ed page to Hamas political bureau deputy Mousa Abu Marzook for his insidious take on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"Why should any Palestinian 'recognize' the monstrous crime carried out by Israel's founders and continued by its deformed modern apartheid state, while he or she lives 10 to a room in a cinder-block, tin-roof United Nations hut?" Marzook asked in his article in The Times earlier this month.

Of course, he knows very well why Palestinians are in the position they're in. It's because of the refusal of the Arabs to accept the 1947 U.N. resolution for a two-state solution in the Holy Land. The architects who laid the foundation for the U.N. refugee huts are the Arabs themselves. And why is that misery still continuing in the Palestinian territories today? Because of the delusional aspirations of their Islamic fundamentalist leaders who will not accept the rights of the Jewish people to any homeland in the Middle East. Had the Arab states then, or Hamas today, chosen peace, no Palestinian would be living in refugee camps and there would be no suicide belts.

In reaction to a firestorm of protest, the New York Times' public editor defended his newspaper's publication of Yousef's piece by stating that "the point of the Op-Ed page is advocacy" and that "if you get only one side, that's not debate," a view we're sure some editors at the Los Angeles Times share.

But how to explain the radical makeover from terrorist pariah to sought-after guest commentators in our national newspapers of record? Perhaps the editors at The Times and their colleagues back East think they are performing a service by accepting Op-Ed articles that allow people like Abu Marzook to speak

unencumbered to the American people. What better way to prove to these radicals that the pen is mightier than the sword?

But this is a dangerously flawed and naive approach. Hamas, an offshoot and affiliate of the Muslim Brotherhood, is as committed to its vision of an Islamic state governed by Sharia law as Hitler was to his "1,000-year Reich." And the editors turn a blind eye to Hamas' founding charter, which invokes the infamous forgery "The Protocols of the Elders Of Zion." Also ignored is the reality that Israel is in a struggle with a group of religious fanatics who embrace a culture of death, preferring the next world to this one; whose ideology abhors compromise; and who surely view their newfound status in the U.S. media as a complete capitulation by a crucial segment of America's elite.

This is the issue before us -- should the nation's Op-Ed pages be thrown open to everyone? Are there no constraints or red lines? Whatever happened to the basic standards that civilized people are expected to live by? Like a belief in the reverence and sanctity of all human life; an abhorrence of violence toward others, especially innocents; the desire and ability to be reasonable and avoid extremes. Has Hamas suddenly embraced any of these values? Of course not. So why is The Times conferring a journalistic honoris causa degree on terrorists whose modus operandi is to deliberately target innocent civilians of all faiths on buses, in theaters and in shopping malls?

So what will the editors' answer be? That simply because Abu Marzook can turn a good phrase, mass murderers will from now on be entitled to their point of view?

Let's be clear: This issue is not about giving ink to Hamas' views. Their statements and actions deserve real-time coverage, just the way the statements and actions of Hitler and Stalin received coverage by the most prestigious newspapers in the world's most important democracy. But such people do not deserve the status of a sagely byline, because that destroys the distinction between honorable men and women bound by basic principles of humanity and the despots and terrorists eager to destroy those values.

If the criteria is simply because "it is an important story," then would the editors have welcomed articles by Auschwitz's Dr. Josef Mengele justifying his gruesome medical experiments, or by the Virginia Tech killer explaining why he committed mass murder? Of course, newspapers have the right and responsibility to inform their readers about dictators and purveyors of terror. But they don't have the right to bestow editorial credibility on those bent on genocide.

It is true that, just like Hitler, Hamas was democratically elected. But it is equally true that once it took power, like Hitler, it made it brutally clear that its god is the bullet, not the ballot.

So if terrorism doesn't do it for the editors, when will their moral outrage kick in?

When the KKK or Nazi party submit their rants for consideration? On Sept. 12, 2001, it would have been an inconceivable question to ask, but not today. When will Osama bin Laden's guest column appear? What price "relevance"?

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