

EAST OREGONIAN

Founded October 16, 1875

KATHRYN B. BROWN
Publisher

DANIEL WATTENBURGER
Managing Editor

JENNINE PERKINSON
Advertising Director

TIM TRAINOR
Opinion Page Editor

OUR VIEW

Another tragedy to overcome

It was late March when we wrote an editorial titled “Response to tragedy,” about the terrible shooting in Brussels. We began the piece like this: “Tragedies are coming at us too fast to keep track: Brussels. Paris. Ankara, twice. San Bernardino. Umpqua Community College. Newtown. Downtown Manhattan.”

Those events feel so long ago, don’t they? Humanity’s ability to overcome senseless tragedy and traumatic scenes of violence and death is admirable and necessary.

But our ability to forget them comes with a price: we can lose our focus and our drive to make things better. We can fall into inaction until the next tragedy, when the pain and fear returns again with a temporary fury.

We will get past this one, too. Human nature is like that. But perhaps we should not do it so quickly again. This tragedy, one of the most deadly shootings in modern American history, is more vicious and hateful and bloody than even those other terrible attacks.

While facts are still being uncovered, it is clear that homophobia and Islamic radicalism are driving forces behind the killer, Omar Mateen.

Mateen was a regular at the gay club that he later terrorized and for years used gay hookup apps, but he was twice married and his family has spouted anti-gay views to the press.

His co-workers remembered him as bigoted, racist, angry and volatile. He physically abused his first wife. He pledged support to ISIS and other terrorist organizations, even those in combat with one another.

He was clearly an awful person, terribly confused and held in the grips of a radical, hateful ideology. On top of that, he had an arsenal of weapons and was well-trained in the gun that allowed him to kill 49 innocent people.

Before we try to stuff this terrible event into the dark hole of memory, we should take one simple fact to heart, which will make millions of people safer.

Muslims must make room, as many Christians have, for a healthy respect of gay rights. Perverted and hateful religious views — no matter the religion — cannot be used as reason to kill, threaten and intimidate anyone. The Pulse nightclub was targeted because of the people who congregated there, and those people are targeted daily in many Muslim countries throughout the world. They are imprisoned, beaten and killed.

Mateen was a radicalized person, there is no doubt about that. And his act was undoubtedly terrorism — violence with a political purpose. But it looks at this point like a hate crime leveled against a protected class of people that Mateen could not square with his radical views.

Our ability to forget traumatic events comes with a price.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

OTHER VIEWS

Holding police accountable

The Oregonian/OregonLive

Back in October 2014, Portland city commissioners professed their commitment to hold Portland Police accountable for their actions. The commissioners at the time were discussing police reforms mandated by a settlement with the federal justice department over excessive force allegations. But the message they sent was not limited to the parameters of the settlement.

Portlanders, Commissioner Amanda Fritz noted, should look to the council as a whole, not just Mayor Charlie Hales, to ensure the police bureau acted in conformance with the values of the community. “For the first time,” she said, “the entire council is responsible for police accountability.”

It’s telling, then, how dead silent she and the other commissioners have been for the last two weeks as the story of Portland Police Chief Larry O’Dea’s accidental shooting of a friend during a hunting trip — and Hales’ failure to disclose it — has unfolded. Being “responsible” for police accountability, it seems, means waiting for someone else to say or do something, no matter the cost to the public’s trust.

The need for someone in leadership to rally the public’s confidence has been obvious from the moment reporters revealed that O’Dea was under investigation for a shooting. There’s the strange details of the shooting itself: O’Dea, camping in Harney County with six others, was drinking alcohol and firing at ground squirrels when he accidentally shot his friend on April 21, *The Oregonian/OregonLive* reported. The injury was not life-threatening.

But things got stranger after investigators arrived on the scene. O’Dea misled the deputy, suggesting that the victim had somehow shot himself, Harney County Sheriff Dave Ward told Bernstein. O’Dea never corrected that account, Ward said, even though O’Dea admitted to Hales four days later that he had shot his friend. And the chief never identified himself as a law enforcement officer, a standard practice in off-duty situations where police respond.

Then there’s Hales’ handling of the case. Hales chose to keep quiet about the shooting for nearly a month. Not only did he fail to alert the public to the fact that the police chief was under criminal investigation, but he also failed to refer the matter to the Independent Police Review, which conducts personnel investigations for high-level officers.

He also didn’t place the chief on administrative leave until after Ward’s comments about O’Dea’s misleading account. Even then, Hales downplayed the move as a way to help clear some of the “turmoil and confusion” at the police bureau. Certainly, a criminal investigation of a sitting police chief can cause that.

Hales’ statements show that he does not recognize how such special treatment for the police chief harms the integrity of the police bureau as a whole. Putting the chief on leave is the bare minimum of what we should expect from a leader, at least one who understands his loyalty should be to the public, not his cronies. Hales, unfortunately, is not that leader.

So far, the other city commissioners fall into that category as well. None has openly questioned Hales’ decision to keep the matter quiet or publicly urged Hales to place O’Dea on administrative leave. None has come out to say that the allegations of O’Dea’s misleading statements or that his assistant chiefs also knew of the shooting without alerting investigators are troubling. By staying silent, no one is championing the public or acknowledging its justified anger of yet another breach of trust by the police and the leaders who oversee them.

Commissioner Nick Fish told *The Oregonian/OregonLive* editorial board that he shares the public’s concerns about the failure to notify the Independent Police Review, which started its own investigation after reading about the shooting in news reports. He said, however, that he is waiting for the results of the investigation before commenting.

Commissioner Amanda Fritz’s chief of staff, Tim Crail, said the commissioner does not publicly comment on personnel issues. Commissioner Dan Saltzman has similarly not come out on the case.

City commissioners don’t need to wait for the results of an investigation to assure the community that they will hold the police chief accountable if he engaged in misconduct. They aren’t violating anyone’s privacy by criticizing Hales’ bad decision to keep such a matter of public importance secret. They can and should offer their support for the Independent Police Review division and emphasize the need for all officials to promptly report cases.

Fritz was right when she said in October 2014 that the community should be able to expect the city council to hold the police bureau accountable. Unfortunately, she and her fellow commissioners have too easily ducked an opportunity to do so.

OTHER VIEWS



Paper Trail

Orlando and Trump’s America

Omar Mateen, the Florida shooter who had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, just ushered Donald Trump to the White House, Britain out of the European Union, Marine Le Pen to the French presidency, and the world into a downward spiral of escalating violence.

Aged 29, Mateen is the Gavrilo Princip of the early 21st century, a young man who ripped up an old, decaying political order. Like the 19-year-old Bosnian Serb nationalist whose bullets ignited World War I, Mateen has set a spark to a time of inflammable anger.

Of course, these somber imaginings may prove to be no more than that. Mateen has not yet changed the world; he may never.

But there is no question that the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history comes at a time of particular unease. In both the United States and Europe, political and economic frustrations have produced a groundswell against the status quo and an apparent readiness to make a leap in the dark. Washington and Brussels have become bywords for paralysis.

Trump and “Brexit” represent action — any action — to shake things up. They are, to their supporters, the comeuppance smug elites deserve.

On top of this, and feeding this, Islam is in epochal crisis. Its Sunni and Shiite branches are mired in violent confrontation. Its adjustment to the modern world has proved faltering and agonized enough to produce a metastasizing strain of violent anti-Western jihadi beliefs to which Mateen — like the San Bernardino shooters — was apparently susceptible.

That he shot revelers in a gay club suggests once again that Islam and sexuality constitute a particularly combustible realm. Liberal Western sexual mores are the most troubling affront to a certain strain of Islam. The resultant confrontation incubates explosive violence.

It is 12 years since Theo van Gogh was murdered in Amsterdam by a Dutch-Moroccan Muslim jihadi for making a movie about the treatment of women in Islam; and now homosexuals at the Pulse club in Orlando, Florida, are targeted by a U.S. citizen of Afghan descent who, it seems, had also found in Islamic extremism the ideological answer to his troubles.

It is poisonous to blame all the world’s 1.6 billion Muslims for this crisis of their religion. Trump’s self-congratulatory reiteration of his call for a temporary ban on non-American Muslims entering the United States exemplifies his violence-tinged politics of division. Michael Oren, the former Israeli ambassador to the United States, was quoted on Twitter hours after the massacre as saying: “If I were Trump, I’d emphasize the Muslim



ROGER COHEN
Comment

name, Omar Saddiqui Mateen. This changes race.” Later, he said Trump would do this, not that he had recommended it.

It is, however, also dangerous to ignore or belittle the potency of ISIS ideology, the core role it has played in recent violence from Paris to California, and the link between that ideology and the broader crisis of Islam. The favored phrase of the Obama administration in addressing this scourge — “violent extremism” — is vague to the point of evasive meaninglessness. Yes, jihadi terrorists are “violent extremists” but calling them that is like calling Nazism a reaction to German humiliation in World War I: true but wholly inadequate.

America is the perfect setting for “lone wolf” ISIS followers because they have access to the weapons they need to do their worst.

Mateen demonstrated again just how potent the mix of ISIS and National Rifle Association ideology is. America is the perfect setting for “lone wolf” ISIS followers because they have access to the weapons they need to do their worst.

Despite having been investigated twice in recent years by the FBI for possible ties to terrorism, Mateen was able to walk into a Florida gun dealership recently, and acquire a “long gun” and a pistol. This, by any reasonable standard, is madness.

The AR-15 assault weapon used by Mateen was also the weapon used by the San Bernardino shooters. The former NRA president, David Keene, once described it as the “gun liberals love to hate.” It is in fact the rifle that illustrates why lax U.S. gun laws make American lives cheap. The laws are an aberration.

President Barack Obama described the shooting as “an act of terror and an act of hate.” He made clear his disapproval of the existing gun laws. He called for solidarity. He said nothing about ISIS, or the way the Islamic State’s hold on territory in Syria and Iraq reinforces the charismatic potency of its ideological appeal, disseminated from that base through the internet.

He also said this: “To actively do nothing is a decision as well.”

Yes, to have actively done nothing in Syria over more than five years of war — so allowing part of the country to become an Islamic State stronghold, contributing to a massive refugee crisis in Europe, acquiescing to slaughter and displacement on a devastating scale, undermining America’s word in the world, and granting open season for President Vladimir Putin of Russia to strut his stuff — amounts to the greatest foreign policy failure of the Obama administration.

It has made the world far more dangerous. I hope for the best but fear the victory of the politics of anger in America and Europe.

Roger Cohen joined *The New York Times* in 1990.

YOUR VIEWS

Playgrounds should be higher priority than apartments

If I were a resident of Pendleton I would be terribly upset with the city’s plan to subsidize developer Saj Jinvanjanee thousands of dollars to help him build in the Tutuilla Creek area when the city of Pendleton is closing three playgrounds because of lack of funds.

Where are the priorities? The housing on Tutuilla is not filled and is advertising places for rent. There really is no housing shortage in Pendleton. Read the newspaper advertising.

Aside from this, I am strongly opposed to the building of apartments, as are my neighbors, as we have stated earlier.

Dorys C. Grover
Pendleton

LETTERS POLICY

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published. Send letters to Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.

Be heard!

Comment online at eastoregonian.com