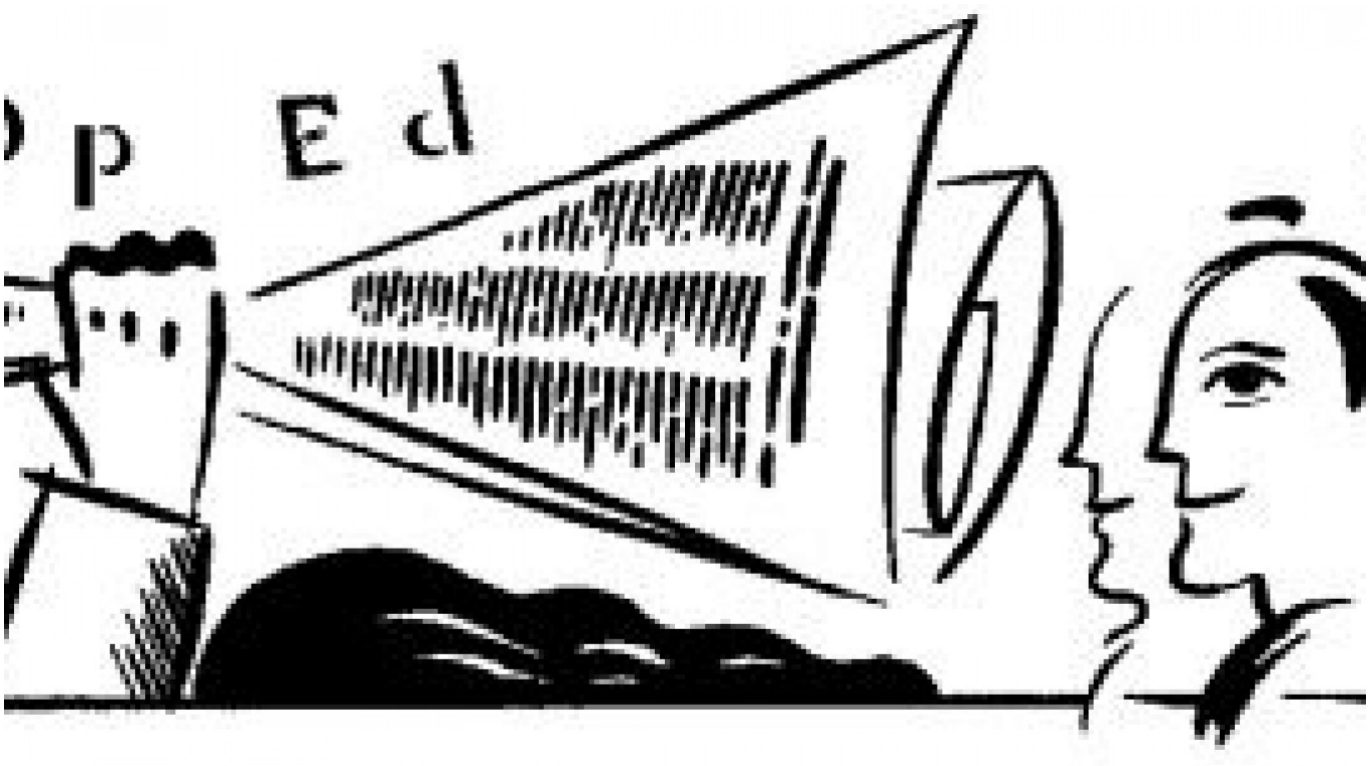
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After the Boston Tragedy, Americans Are Wiser

By Naomi Wolf

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When America absorbed the bombings at the Boston Marathon, what was striking was what did not happen. Twelve years after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the country was saddened, but it was also better informed.

After the Boston attack, there was little of the rampant jingoism, get-them-at-all-costs bloodlust, constant speechifying and flag-waving that followed the 2001 attacks. Perhaps most remarkable was the absence of reflexive Islamophobia and of the willingness to fight any war — even the wrong war in the wrong country for the wrong reasons — against the supposedly culpable "other."

Instead, this time, Americans' sadness was mingled with cynicism and suspicion. The country is warier of being manipulated. While Americans certainly mourn the dead and support the city of Boston, there has been a kind of penetration into the national consciousness that, after the 2001 attacks, U.S. leaders used the bogeyman of terrorism to encroach on individual rights, fund almost every conceivable domestic-security boondoggle and advance the self-

interested agendas of the defense and surveillance industries.

Even conservative, Fox News-watching Americans have become aware that the U.S. has created its own "blowback," which wasn't the case in the aftermath of the 2001 attacks, The spin that worked so well back then — that the attacks occurred because "they hate our freedoms" — does not ring true anymore.

Americans know that a million refugees have fled Iraq; the Oscar-nominated documentary "Five Broken Cameras" and other media have shown how the U.S. contributes to the brutalization of Palestinians — a major driver of "jihad," or what the U.S. State Department calls "extremism"; U.S. soldiers have repeatedly been implicated in war crimes; and Jeremy Scahill's book "Dirty Wars," which details targeted assassinations by the U.S. around the world, has hit bookstores and the Internet.

In short, while no one condones violence against innocents like that suffered by the victims at the Boston Marathon, Americans are far more aware than they were 12 years ago of their own slaughter of innocents around the world. Their self-image is no longer that of the "good guys," against whom an act of violence is mad and inexplicable.

Americans also are more aware of how such attacks are used to justify abuses of their own rights. Immediately, the bombings began to be cited by some leaders as a call to limit constitutional rights. Republican Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham called for the surviving suspect, Dzokhar Tsarnaev, to be labeled an "enemy combatant" and shipped to Guantanamo Bay, an idea that many Americans find chilling.

Other responses appall many in the U.S. as well. The fact that Tsarnaev, despite his many requests, was not initially informed of his right to remain silent and be represented by an attorney — normally a required part of any U.S. arrest — caused considerable anxiety. The panicky public response that permitted the establishment of Guantanamo is no more. Americans recognize that a violation of anyone's rights threatens the rights of all.

Notable, too, are the conspiracy theories this time around. Most Americans probably do not actually believe that the bombing was a "false flag" event, perpetrated by others than the Tsarnaev brothers. Rather, the conspiracy theories seem to show how jaded Americans have become about their government's approach to "terror."

After all, U.S. leaders lied about so much in the aftermath of the 2001 attacks. They lied about former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction; lied about why Iraq had to be attacked, and then about the course of the war there; and the head of the federal Environmental Protection Agency at the time, Christie Whitman, even lied about the air quality in lower Manhattan after the attack, leading thousands of children in Manhattan and surrounding areas to suffer from severe respiratory problems.

Of course, reliance on fear and misdirection may still be part of official strategy. With Dzokhar Tsarnaev in custody and his older brother killed by police in a shootout, the next round of stories reported on alleged "sleeper cells" and planned attacks that had been thwarted by vigilant U.S. security services.

The Boston Globe, for example, ran an article about the man, identified only by his first name

Danny, whom the brothers carjacked three days after the attack. Danny claimed that the only word of the brothers' conversation that he understood was "Manhattan," and that the terrorists had asked him if his car could leave the state. The Boston Globe's one-source report proved nothing and was unverifiable by other reporters or citizens. But it suggested much, leading to a spate of equally unverifiable reports that New York had been targeted.

Other recent "terror"-related reporting has been as flimsy. In Charles Savage's recent account of the Guantanamo "uprising," The New York Times credulously reproduced the "arsenal" that Guantanamo officials showed reporters in a video still. The "weapons" were allegedly made from mop handles and nail files — objects that, as I know from having reported from Guantanamo, are literally impossible for any detainee to obtain. The prisoners are housed far from anything like mops or other cleaning articles, they are given no chores to perform, and they receive no mail.

In swallowing the official account without skepticism — Savage did not ask where any of these items may have come from — The New York Times has apparently learned nothing from its badly flawed reporting on Saddam's supposed weapons of mass destruction.

Fortunately, most Americans have learned from the past, and this was reflected in the public response this time around — sadness, yes, but also some wisdom. Perhaps Americans have moved closer to understanding that they can and must fight terrorism in a civilized way — as free and thoughtful people.

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