

THE MEDIA'S PAVLOVIAN REFLEX by Si Frumkin

Do lab rats or circus monkeys realize that they had been trained?

Animal - and human - training depends on making the subject react in response to a stimulus, in other words, to accept that actions have consequences. This is called Pavlovian conditioning after a classic experiment in which professor Ivan Pavlov trained a dog to salivate when a bell was rung. Training can involve negative or positive reinforcement, with either unpleasant or pleasant consequences. The subject becomes conditioned/ trained to perform whatever the experimenter wants without necessarily understanding its meaning or purpose.

Human beings have the ability to reason, to project and imagine future events. This how we have been – without being aware of it - successfully trained during the last two or three decades. We are now conditioned to act in ways that are contrary to the ideals and values we espouse. We are conditioned by a most effective negative reinforcement: fear of terror and its consequences.

What terrifies us is something new in human history. In the past, terror was used by oppressive regimes to stay in power – the majority of the population was too terrified to speak out. The terror in totalitarian societies rooted out opponents and severely punished even mild criticism – like jokes and cartoons. There were no appeals. Remorse and recantation were rarely forgiven. The totalitarian society used intimidation, terror, and self-destructive and meaningless mass murder to silence potential opposition.

But almost without exception, in the past, the totalitarians did not attempt to extend their retribution for criticism, satire or hostile humor beyond their borders. Even during the coldest days of Cold War, American and European news media and book publishers were not threatened for opposing communism. Nazi violence abroad restricted itself to infrequent brawls with socialists or Jews. American politicians did not need protection from communist or nazi assassins and American presidents rode in open limousines.

Terror is now a household word. Casual murder and maiming of innocents is worldwide. But one aspect of contemporary terror is seldom acknowledged even

though it is more successful than the terror of suicide bombers. This is terror that doesn't terrorize – it conditions by terrifying and wins by intimidating and silencing those whom we would expect to be in the forefront of our defense.

Our media have been targeted for reeducation and conditioning and as a result they are by now overwhelmingly united in avoiding criticism of Islam. They almost unanimously oppose profiling to identify potential murderers. They keep repeating the mantra that the overwhelming majority of Muslims is peaceful and abhors violence but they don't explain the puzzling lack of mass protests by this alleged majority when crimes are committed in Allah's name with Muslims randomly murdering not only unbelieving Christians and Jews but fellow Muslims as well.

The reaction by most U.S. and European media to the riots, church burnings and dozens of lynchings by Muslims after the publication of the quite innocuous Danish cartoons is typical: most papers refrained from reprinting them, others abjectly apologized for having done so. They were – and still are – intimidated and terrified.

When the Pope quoted a criticism of Islam by a 14th century Byzantine emperor, riots broke out. Innocents died, churches burned but our media criticized the Pope while groveling and asking for forgiveness and understanding of our enemies. They reacted exactly like the trainers expected them to.

Sometimes there is no need for actual occurrences to create negative reinforcement. The bogus accusation of a Koran being flushed down a Guantanamo toilet resulted in worldwide mob violence that was not explained and condemned as yet another typical example of Islamic violence. A sympathetic article in a Nigerian newspaper that praised the contestants in the Miss World competition as being beautiful enough to be selected as wives for Prophet Muhammad also resulted in church burnings, lynchings and mob violence. The lesson is that nothing must ever be said or written that could be even remotely seen as insulting to Islam and Muslims!

Our media reported the opposition to Gay Pride Parade in Jerusalem by Christians and Jews, but there hasn't been a word about the oppression of gays in Moslem countries where the punishment for homosexuality is death. The proud and courageous American gays and their impassionate sympathizers in the media have been conditioned to avoid criticism of Islamic behavior.

Even in Australia there is silence on criticism of Islam or Muslims. “Scholastic Australia”, a publisher of children books has rejected a book because its villain is a fictional Muslim terrorist who is stopped by teenagers from blowing up a nuclear power plant. The reason? It contained material inappropriate for children. Really? The author, an award winning author of thrillers, said that there was no sex, no cursing, no firing of guns or graphic brutality in it, so maybe, just maybe the editors were just doing what they had been trained to do?

Is there another explanation for this peculiar and counterproductive behavior by those who are supposed to be the purveyors of truth and defenders of our liberties? Is it simply cowardice by those who otherwise so courageously defend their – and our – rights (*Just kidding!*) when faced by our benign legal system? Is it mass hypnosis? Mass insanity? Could be.

And just maybe, those who control our media have been trained/conditioned, like Pavlov’s dogs, to avoid criticizing Islam in a reflexive, automatic, knee-jerk reaction.