



The discussion brought up in the *RJ: Standpoint of the Week* newsletter on the fears of the new decade has become immediate once again due to the recent terrorist attack at the Domodedovo airport in Moscow. RJ returns to this particular topic and gives the floor to *David Altheide*, an American sociologist, who is a renowned media and social relations expert. The author believes that we must not give way to fear.

## MARKET OF FEAR

David Altheide

A fearful society is a dangerous society. Fear changes a democratic state by expanding the limits on law and social control. The mass media in the U.S.A. promote reports about fear and threats because these are entertaining and tend to attract audiences. This repetition produces the discourse of fear, which may be defined as the pervasive communication, symbolic awareness, and expectation that danger and risk are central features of our everyday life. This makes us more vulnerable to the 'next' source of fear or report thereof.

Democratic states are based on protections or guarantees about certain freedoms that cannot be restricted. However, these protections tend to be eroded to protect us from targets of fear, such as criminals or terrorists or immigrants. We give the police more authority to search people, to conduct surveillance, and wiretap telephones and other communications. **We also talk more about security and protection, even to the extent of giving up certain rights in order to be safe.** Thus, fear can move a democracy closer to totalitarianism.

Media logic has transformed the 'market place of ideas' into the 'market place of fear' because fear takes little time to sell. We need to keep in mind that there are many industries and businesses that benefit from fear, including arms manufacturers, many security and surveillance organisations and, of course, police agencies. We must teach 'media literacy' so that audiences can recognise propaganda,



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just as we teach children to wash their hands in order to protect themselves from disease.

There are fears that unite (as, for instance, a foreign invasion). The current fears do not, however, belong to that category. They tear apart or explode country-wide solidarity, they essentially position regions, enterprises, interest groups

and individuals in the state of fierce and uncompromising rivalry. They devalue the idea of joining forces and marching step in step, while tempting to pursue a strategy of 'every one for himself and the devil takes the hindmost'.

There appears to be nothing to be gained from sticking together, and everything to be gained from defeating and ruining the competition... Or so, at least, this seems to be the truth. But let me note that, rather than actually being the truth, this is indeed a Gordian knot or a vicious circle. More yet to the point, this is a self-confirming view and self-intensifying tendency: the more widely and uncompromisingly that such a strategy is preferred (in deeds, if not in words), the more its alternatives grow thin, and the more difficult it becomes to escape its pressures and free oneself from its grip.

**Most fears divide people because they focus on a target or source of fear, an outsider, or the 'other'.** Focusing on an external enemy can unite a country, but it happens to divide the world. Humanity has some potential common sources of fear that could unite them, such as the issues of environmental destruction, natural disasters, world hunger, and disease. Even the fear of nuclear weapons could serve to unite the world.

I am hopeful that more education, research, and the creative use of our wonderful information technologies and good advice to policy makers will promote global integration rather than fearful divisiveness. No Fear! ■

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