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OPINION

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America's Other Most Wanted

An animal rights extremist makes the FBI list.

By P. MICHAEL CONN AND JAMES PARKER

Now that Osama bin Laden is dead, the FBI's "Ten Most Wanted Terrorists" list is down to nine. Eight are wanted for aiding al Qaeda, attacking federal facilities, bombing the USS Cole, or committing air piracy—clearly public enemies, all. But the last one on the list is different.

He is Daniel Andreas San Diego, a U.S. citizen who has been indicted for helping bomb two corporations: Chiron, a pharmaceutical company that makes vaccines, and Shaklee, which makes vitamins and shampoo. So is Mr. San Diego a public enemy? Maybe not, if we are to believe recent public opinion polls.

The story is this: The FBI says Mr. San Diego targeted these companies for their ties to a British-based research firm, Huntingdon Life Sciences, that performs laboratory testing on animals. According to police, he also set a second bomb timed to kill or injure police and firefighters arriving on the scene.

Mr. San Diego, you see, is an animal rights activist who objects to animal testing and to basic medical research with animals. He is the first animal rights or environmental extremist to make the FBI list. In his view, the so-called rights of animals are more important than the health and well-being of humans.

Like al Qaeda, such extremism is committed to changing public policy by violence and terror. University researchers in California have had their children followed, their cars fire-bombed and their homes vandalized. Researchers in Oregon have had their cars and homes

damaged and their families harassed by bullhorn-wielding extremists. And graduate students nationwide were recently threatened by several extremist groups who promised to "target" their attacks at the next generation of scientists.

Unlike al Qaeda, however, animal rights extremists enjoy worrisome public support for their cause. Polls by the Foundation for Biomedical Research show that only about half of Americans support the use of animals in health-related research, down from near-universal support 40 years ago. This decrease has followed massive campaigns by organizations such as PETA and the Humane Society of the United States (which spends only a tiny fraction of its huge budget on animal shelters, with most going to "educational endeavors," according to IRS forms reviewed by the watchdog group HumaneWatch). These campaigns claim that animal research is without value, cruel and unregulated.

Opponents of animal research distribute images that are altered or outdated, even 50 years old in some cases. And they never mention that animal research is regulated and inspected by the federal government. Anyone who hasn't visited a research laboratory is left to assume the worst.

We researchers are a soft target for misinformation because we don't speak well to the public, prefer to work in our laboratories, and tend to assume, incorrectly, that the truth will win out.

As a community, we've failed to explain that the federal government requires animal testing before drugs can be given to humans. Nor have we explained that biomedical research, even more than drug safety and efficacy testing, remains dependent on the use of animals for advances in our health and well-being. We haven't succeeded in getting the public to think about why there are now 12 million cancer survivors in the U.S., or why we live longer than our grandparents.

If it is to flourish, research needs public understanding and support. As the famous researcher and heart surgeon Michael DeBakey put it in 2006, "It is the American public who will decide whether we must tell hundreds of thousands of victims of heart attacks, cancer, AIDS and other dread diseases that the rights of animals supersede a patient's right to relief from suffering and premature death."

In short, someone who would halt medical advances through bombings certainly belongs on our list of public enemies.

Mr. Conn, a senior scientist at the Oregon Health and Science University's Oregon National Primate Center and a professor in the university's School of Medicine, and Mr. Parker, an ethicist, are co-authors of "The Animal Research War" (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

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