

THE BROWNISH PINK GHETTO ON TERRORISM PROTECTIONS

As DDay formulated it, when someone set off a bomb at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Grand Chute, WI yesterday, it turned the political war on women into an actual war on women.

Within short order after the attack, DOJ's Civil Rights Division announced that it had joined the local FBI in investigating the attack. Civil Rights' involvement is routine in matters of possible violations of the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances act. At one level, I'm happy anytime the Assistant Attorney General Thomas Perez' division gets involved in a crime I'm worried about; Civil Rights has been, alone among Obama's DOJ, unreservedly great. And, as NPR reported last year, Perez' department has pursued FACE violations where Bush's DOJ virtually ignored them.

The Obama Justice Department has been taking a more aggressive approach against people who block access to abortion clinics, using a 1994 law to bring cases in greater numbers than its predecessor.

The numbers are most stark when it comes to civil lawsuits, which seek to create buffer zones around clinic entrances for people who have blocked access in the past. Under the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, or FACE Act, the Justice Department's civil rights division has filed eight civil cases since the start of the Obama administration. That's a big increase over the George W. Bush years, when one case was filed in eight years.

"There's been a substantial difference between this administration and the one immediately prior," says Ellen Gertzog,

director of security for Planned Parenthood. "From where we sit, there's currently much greater willingness to carefully assess incidents when they occur and to proceed with legal action when appropriate."

But I have the same concern I had with the treatment of mosque attacks as a hate crime rather than a terrorist attack.

If attacks on unpopular people like Muslims and women's health providers are treated differently from other terrorist attacks, it has a slew of implications on policing. Such attacks won't count as the worst kind of black mark on law enforcement records: a terrorist attack they missed. That means law enforcement won't prioritize investigating groups that foster such violence. And, of course, it means the penalties for attacking these unpopular people will be less than if the attacker were Muslim.

Now perhaps this will ultimately be investigated as a terrorist attack. But until such time as women's health providers and Muslims are treated as targets of terrorism, not just civil rights violations, such attacks will be treated as somehow less aberrant than "real" terrorism.

Which means such attacks will continue to happen.