

The New York Times229 WEST 43RD STREET
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10036BILL KELLER
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

July 8, 2005

Dear Mr. O'Reilly,

As a rule, I assume that those of your viewers who read The New York Times understand that often your remarks about the paper bear little relation to what we actually print.

But I can't overlook the insinuation on your show Thursday, that The New York Times has somehow soft-pedaled the atrocities of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the Jordanian terrorist who has masterminded some of the worst crimes of the Iraqi insurgency.

No reader of The Times can possibly believe that we have portrayed Zarqawi as anything but a terrorist and, literally, a cutthroat. We have described his beheadings and mass killings of civilians. We have quoted his blood-curdling rhetoric. We have traced his links to Osama bin Laden, and reported on his efforts to rally support from like-minded terrorists abroad.

You have focused your fury on a single phrase in a single article. The article reported that Zarqawi had claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of a senior Egyptian diplomat in Baghdad — the same diplomat who, as we reported on the front page this morning, was subsequently murdered. I am confident that many people who read that article were infuriated — at Zarqawi, for his latest crime. You somehow managed to be infuriated, instead, at The Times, because at one point the reporter used the shorthand "Jordanian fighter" to identify Zarqawi. You didn't explain why this phrase caused you to fly into a rage, but the implied accusation was that by neglecting to use a more emotionally charged term on this occasion we have somehow erased Zarqawi's infamy and elevated him to heroic status. Good grief.

In the dozens of articles we have printed about Zarqawi in just the past few months, we have referred to him variously as "Iraq's most-wanted terrorist," "the most-wanted terrorist in Iraq," "al Qaeda's chief representative here," "the Al Qaeda leader in Iraq," "the Jordanian militant and operative of Al Qaeda," "the mastermind of many of the most violent attacks against allied forces," "the most ruthless insurgent leader," "the Jordanian terrorist," "Jordanian militant," "Islamic militant," and so on, and so on. In those articles, whether the descriptive phrase included the word "terrorist" or not, we have portrayed his monstrosity in all its dimensions — not merely by pinning labels on him, but by reporting on his behavior.

Perhaps you would prefer that every time we mention a terrorist we be required to use the word "terrorist," lest our readers mistake him for a member of the Rotary Club. We do call him a terrorist, but our well-informed readership does not need to be reminded in every single reference that a man who kidnaps and kills for the purpose of terrorizing a populace is a terrorist.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill Keller". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style. The first name "Bill" is written with a large, looping 'B' and a small 'i'. The last name "Keller" is written with a large 'K' and a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.