

# EDITORIAL OPINION

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## Domestic violence is a killer, so don't be silent



LINDA OBERHAUS

On Jan. 7, Omaid Garcia was shot to death by her boyfriend in the bedroom closet of her North Naples townhouse.

Four months later, Barbara Bitterman's husband shot her in the face in the bedroom of their upscale home in a North Naples gated community.

They were two very different women from very different walks of life, who died as if holding each other's hand.

We will never know the terrifying last moments of these women's lives because their killers committed the ultimate act of power and control by turning their guns on themselves following their horrific crimes.

While their deaths made a few local headlines, their stories fell second to news of delayed water hookups to a local Publix and the Collier School Board's approval of new textbooks.

If a gunman had shot a stranger in downtown Naples, we would have read about it for days, but when he kills a wife or girlfriend in their home, it becomes little more than a sad fact of life.

The Bitterman murder-suicide originally garnered more media attention. Reports of two people found shot in the face in a secured home in an affluent gated community initially raised shock and awe. After it was revealed that the deaths were not suspicious, there was no follow-up headline on the real story: A woman's life was brutally taken by the very person to whom she once entrusted it and in the very place she should have been the safest — her home.

For those who could read between the lines, the news accounts raised valuable awareness that domestic violence does not discriminate. It crosses all ethnic, economic and geographic boundaries. Victims and abusers live next door, play bridge at your club, work out at your gym and share your pew in church. Omaid and Barbara were your neighbors.

Domestic violence homicide is on the rise in Collier County. According to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, there were two homicides in 2015, neither associated with domestic violence. That number jumped to 10 homicides in 2016, and of those five were the result of domestic violence.

In addition to these, there were 22

forcible rapes and 217 aggravated assaults associated with domestic violence. Hundreds more went unreported.

While Collier's statistics may be lower than those of neighboring counties, any act of violence committed within the walls of our homes is one too many. As Americans, we live in an era of heightened security. We are urged to be vigilant and report anything suspicious.

Domestic violence is domestic terrorism. It is imperative that we stand as a community to oppose it. By not speaking out, we condone it.

No matter how well their abusers tried to conceal their violence on their victims, there were signs that Omaid and Barbara were being abused and there were opportunities to intervene. These signs either went unnoticed, were ignored or waived off as "it's not my business," "I could be wrong" or "it can't be too bad if she is staying with him."

Failure to recognize and report domestic violence puts the entire community at risk because violence at home does not stop at the front door. Many mass murderers had a history of domestic violence prior to committing

their violent public attacks.

Today, somewhere in the United States, Omaid and Barbara will be joined in death by three more women. Outside of their families and immediate communities, few will hear anything about them being killed.

And when we do learn of it, the news value will somehow be minimized by the fact that the killer was a spouse and not a random stranger. The truth is, no one is safe from domestic violence. It is a crime against all of us, for if we cannot end violence in our homes, we will never end violence in our community.

» If you know someone affected by domestic violence, call The Shelter for Abused Women & Children's 24-hour crisis hotline at 239-775-1101.

» For more information on how to recognize and act on the signs of domestic violence, go online to [naplesshelter.org/help](http://naplesshelter.org/help).

*Oberhaus is executive director of The Shelter for Abused Women & Children in Collier County.*

**Editor's note:** A Collier County sheriff's spokeswoman confirmed that detectives determined Omaid Garcia was shot by her boyfriend and Barbara Bitterman was shot by her husband.

### Today in history

Today is Sunday, June 25, the 176th day of 2017. There are 189 days left in the year.

On this date in:

**1788:** Virginia ratified the U.S. Constitution.

**1876:** Lt. Col. Colonel George A. Custer and his 7th Cavalry were wiped out by Sioux and Cheyenne Indians in the Battle of the Little Bighorn in Montana.

**1938:** The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 was enacted.

**1947:** "The Diary of a Young Girl," the journal of Anne Frank, a German-born Jewish girl hiding with her family from the Nazis in Amsterdam, was published.

**1950:** War broke out in Korea as forces from the communist North invaded the South.

### Today's birthdays

Actress **June Lockhart** is 92. Singer **Eddie Floyd** is 80. Actress **Barbara Montgomery** is 78. Actress **Mary Beth Peil** is 77. Singer **Carly Simon** is 72. Keyboardist-saxophonist **Ian McDonald** is 71. Actor-comedian **Jimmie Walker** is 70. TV personality **Phyllis George** is 68. Supreme Court Justice **Sonia Sotomayor** is 63. Keyboardist **David Paich** is 63. Actor **Michael Sabatino** is 62. TV chef **Anthony Bourdain** is 61. Actor **Ricky Gervais** is 56. Actress **Erica Gimpel** is 53. Actress **Angela Kinsey** is 46. Actress **Linda Cardellini** is 42.

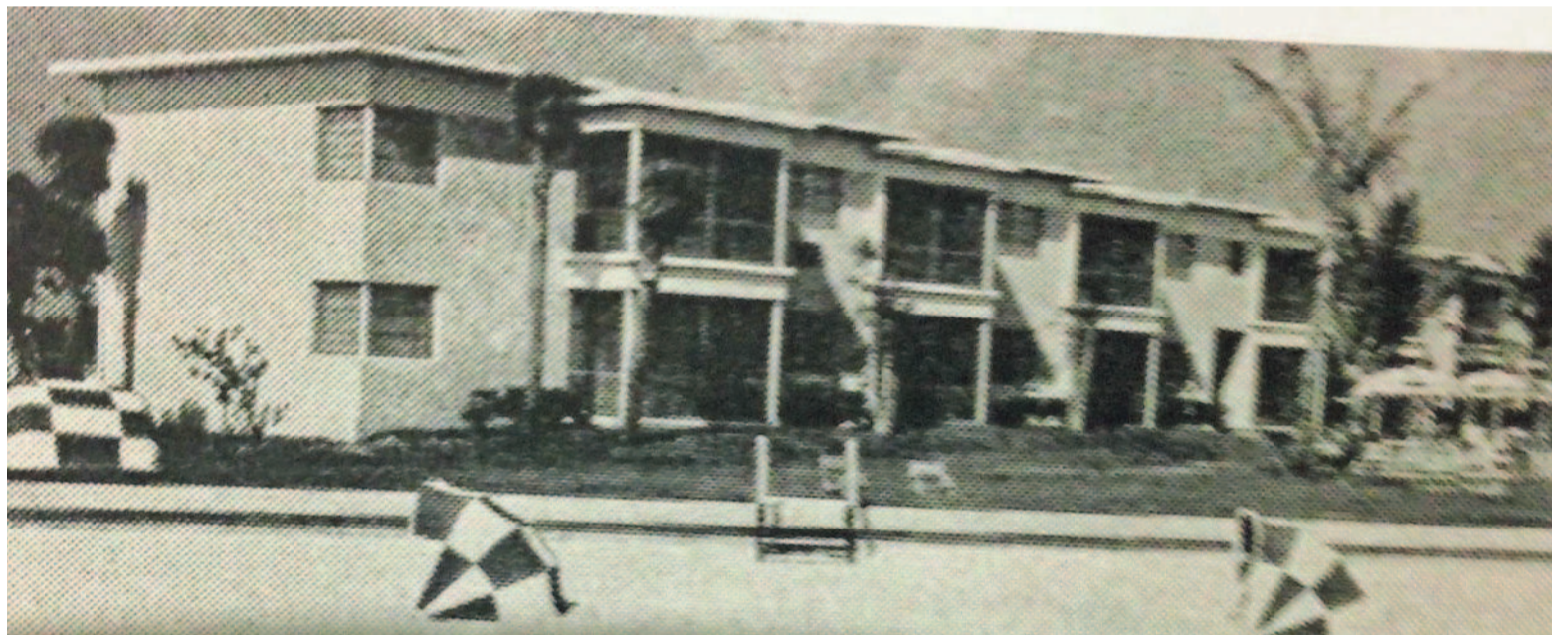
### Today's quote

"Perhaps a man really dies when his brain stops, when he loses the power to take in a new idea."  
— George Orwell,  
"Coming Up for Air"

### Bible quote

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.  
— Hebrews 12:2

## THEN & NOW



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**Last week's answer:** Moraya Bay Beach Tower, 11125 Gulfshore Drive.

**Last week's winner:** Brad Erck

## Planning for aftermath of Muslim civil war



CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER

WASHINGTON — The U.S. shoots down a Syrian fighter-bomber. Iran launches missiles into eastern Syria. Russia threatens to attack coalition aircraft west of the Euphrates.

What is going on?

It might appear a mindless mess, but the outlines are clear. The great Muslim civil war, centered in Syria, is approaching its post-Islamic State phase. It's the end of the beginning. The parties are maneuvering to shape what comes next.

It's Europe, 1945, when the war was still raging against Nazi Germany, but everyone already knew the outcome. The maneuvering was largely between the approaching victors — the Soviet Union and the Western democracies — to determine postwar boundaries and spheres of influence.

So it is today in Syria. Everyone knows that the Islamic State is finished. Not that it will disappear as an ideology, insurgency and source of continuing terrorism both in the region and the West. But it will disappear as an independent, organized, territorial entity in the heart of the Middle East.

It is being squeezed out of existence. Its hold on Mosul, its last major redoubt in Iraq, is nearly gone. Raqqa, its stronghold in Syria and de facto capital, is next. When it falls — it is already surrounded on three sides — the caliphate dies.

Much of the fighting today is about who inherits. Take the Syrian jet the U.S. shot down. It had been attacking a pro-Western Kurdish and Arab force (the Syrian Democratic Forces) not far from Islamic State

territory.

Why? Because the Bashar Assad regime, backed by Iran, Hezbollah and Russia, having gained the upper hand on the non-jihadist rebels in the Syrian heartland (most notably in Aleppo), feels secure enough to set its sights on eastern Syria. It hopes to restore its authority over the whole country, it will need to control Raqqa and surrounding Islamic State areas. But the forces near Raqqa are pro-Western and anti-regime. Hence the Syrian fighter-bomber attack.

Hence the U.S. shoot-down. We are protecting our friends. Hence the Russian threats to now target U.S. planes. The Russians are protecting their friends.

On the same day as the shoot-down, Iran launched six surface-to-surface missiles into Syrian territory controlled by the Islamic State. Why? Ostensibly to punish the jihadists for terrorist attacks two weeks ago inside Iran.

Perhaps. But one obvious objective was to demonstrate to Saudi Arabia and the other Sunni Arabs the considerable reach of both Iran's arms and territorial ambitions.

For Iran, Syria is the key, the central theater of a Shiite-Sunni war for regional hegemony. Iran (which is non-Arab) leads the Shiite side, attended by its Arab auxiliaries — Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Shiite militias in Iraq and the highly penetrated government of Iraq, and Assad's Alawite regime. (Alawites being a non-Sunni sect, often associated with Shiism.)

Taken together, they comprise a vast arc — the Shiite Crescent — stretching from Iran through Iraq, Syria and Lebanon to the Mediterranean. If consolidated, it gives the Persians a Mediterranean reach they have not had in 2,300 years.

This alliance operates under the patronage and protection of Russia, which supplies the Iranian-allied side with cash, weapons and, since 2015, air cover from its new bases in Syria.

Arrayed on the other side of the great Muslim civil war are the Sunnis, moderate and Western-allied, led by Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Egypt and Jordan — with their Great Power patron, the United States, now (post-Obama) back in action.

At stake is consolidation of the Shiite Crescent. It's already underway. As the Islamic State is driven out of Mosul, Iranian-controlled militias are taking over crucial roads and other strategic assets in western Iraq. Next target: eastern Syria (Raqqa and environs).

Imagine the scenario: a unified Syria under Assad, the ever more pliant client of Iran and Russia; Hezbollah, tip of the Iranian spear, dominant in Lebanon; Iran, the regional arbiter; and Russia, with its Syrian bases, the outside hegemon.

Our preferred outcome is radically different: a loosely federated Syria, partitioned and cantonized, in which Assad might be left in charge of an Alawite rump.

The Iranian-Russian strategy is a nightmare for the entire Sunni Middle East. And for us too. The Pentagon seems bent on preventing it. Hence the Tomahawk attack for crossing the chemical red line. Hence the recent fighter-bomber shoot-down.

A reasonable U.S. strategy, given the alternatives. But not without risk. Which is why we need a national debate before we commit too deeply. Perhaps we might squeeze one in amid the national obsession with every James Comey memo-to-self? — *Washington Post Writers Group*