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Fissures among the International Left on radical Islam - On the tendency of the Western left to focus only on state violence

Sunday 22 May 2016, by [HEINTZ Andy](#) (Date first published: 17 May 2016).

While researching and interviewing people for a book I'm writing about international progressive politics, I've observed with sadness the deep fissures within the progressive movement about how U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East should be framed and understood.

One of the biggest complaints that progressives from (or originating from) Middle Eastern countries have about many Western progressives is that their view is of U.S. foreign policy in that region is too one dimensional. They charge fierce critics of U.S. foreign policy like Noam Chomsky (Glenn Greenwald has faced similar charges) as mistakenly viewing Islamists as anti-imperialist. Being someone who has read and profited from Greenwald and Chomsky's work (though not agreeing with them on every single issue); I pored over their articles looking for any sympathy or apologetics for violent jihadists.

My research rendered little evidence to validate this claim and much evidence to the opposite. For example, Chomsky wrote in an article for *New Political Science* entitled "Wars of Terror" that "scholarship is unanimous in taking the terrorists at their word, which matches their deeds for the past 20 years: their goal, in their terms, is to drive the infidels from Muslim lands, to overthrow the corrupt governments they impose and sustain, and to institute an extremist version of Islam.

"More significant at least for those who hope to reduce the likelihood of further crimes of a similar nature, are the background conditions from which the terrorists organizations arose and that provide a reservoir of sympathy for a least parts of their message, even among those who despise and fear them. In George Bush's plaintive phrase, 'Why do they hate us?'"

In Greenwald's case, while he has featured quotes from jihadists explaining their reasons for launching attacks on innocent Americans was based on U.S. foreign policy to serve as a counterbalance to the self-deluding and self-flattering idea that they are attacking us because they hate our freedoms (while they do hate democracy, gender equality, gay rights and secularism this has nothing to do why violent extremists are targeting innocent Americans instead of say innocent Swedes, Chileans, Bolivians, Costa Ricans or South Africans.) However, Greenwald also repeatedly points out that causation doesn't imply justification.

"It is inherently unjustifiable to target innocent civilians with violence no matter what the cause," he wrote in an article for the *Guardian* titled "The same motive for anti-U.S. 'terrorism' is cited over and over."

However, as brilliant feminists like Marieme Helie-Lucas, Karima Bennoune, Maryam Namazie and

others have pointed out — yet many progressives fail to grasp — many Islamists inside the West and in Muslim-majority countries are from the middle and upper classes (some of them attending elite universities within the United States). These violent extremists have shown little concern with neoliberalism or neocolonialism, focusing instead on creating mini-Talibans in their respective countries (as Chomsky correctly stated). These same feminists, and hundreds more like them who are risking their lives on a daily basis to fight Islamic fundamentalism and promote free speech, secularism, gender equality and universal rights in their respective countries, unintentionally have their own struggles erased when the only form of resistance to U.S. hegemony is portrayed as violent extremism.

This not only omits Muslims and non-believers from a Muslim heritage (not all people from Muslim backgrounds are believers any more than all people from Christian backgrounds are Christian) courageous efforts; It also ignores the fact that Islamism is itself an imperial project that seeks to control violent and non-violent extremists (so-called moderate Muslims) respective countries through intimidation, harassment and horrific violence.

Bennoune and Lucas both bore tragic witness to the maddening tendency of the Western left to focus on state violence instead of the violence of non-state actors when progressives along with otherwise admirable human rights organizations like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International focused almost exclusively on state-sponsored violence in their native Algeria while ignoring the hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians (there was never a proper inventory done of the crimes) killed by the Islamic Armed Actors in that country during its brutal civil war in the 1990s.

Greenwald and Chomsky (the latter of whom has shown solidarity with the dissidents in the countries of America's official enemies like Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, the now defunct Soviet Union and Iran) shouldn't be considered Islamic apologists for concentrating most of their time and energy on U.S. crimes any more than a Russian, Cuban or Iranian intellectual should be criticized for not focusing enough energy on denouncing U.S. crimes, but Chomsky and Greenwald should both read the works of Helie-Lucas — an atheist who makes Bill Maher and Sam Harris look amateurish when it comes to analyzing Islamism — who has a prescient definition of Islamic fundamentalism: A group that uses its amateurish and self-interested interpretation of Islam to promote a far-right fascist political agenda.

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P.S.

* The Ottawa Herald. May 17, 2016:

http://www.ottawaherald.com/opinion/columns/fissures-among-the-international-left-on-radical-islam/article_3f37efd9-6618-5b44-aefa-7627ad26b781.html

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