

The Left and Extreme Islam - “Western foreign policy and Islamic terrorism are sometimes, but not always intertwined”

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While I read conservative literature, I’m a creature of the left and I tend to believe that, if nudged in the right direction, enough of the American left can come together to unify the country around a cohesive strategy to weaken Islamic extremism. But there is much work to be done.

After last month’s repugnant terrorist attack in Manchester killed 22 innocent civilians after a concert mostly attended by young girls and their parents, the subsequent articles by some prominent figures on the American left me with a feeling of deep discomfort. A star-studded benefit concert for the victims reportedly raised more than \$12 million this weekend.

Amy Goodman, co-host of Democracy Now, and Denis Moynihan co-wrote a story, “Let the media coverage of Manchester victims be a model for all young victims of war.” The title itself is problematic. The terrorist attack at an Ariane Grande concert was not an act of war; it was an act of terror by an angry young man using an incoherent far-right political project to justify his actions.

Whatever one thinks of drone strikes or U.S. bombing raids in Iraq and Syria, these are done with political purposes in mind — weakening ISIS and ensuring U.S. hegemony in the Middle East (something I oppose) — it’s harder to discern any purpose behind exploding a bomb at a concert attended by mostly young girls and their parents.

In an op-ed for the *New York Times* Kenan Malik writes: “Terrorist groups in the past, such as the Irish Republican Army, which bombed Manchester’s main shopping center in 1996, used terror as a means to a political end. Not so with today’s jihadists. For them, terror is an end in itself, whose sole aim is to inflict pain and instill fear.”

What else was the Manchester attack?

Goodman and Moynihan go on to write that “The media should use their coverage of the victims of the Manchester bombing, with its poignant biographies and life stories of each of the young lives lost, for the coverage of the deaths in Yemen, in Syria, in Iraq, in Afghanistan. We need to know the names, we need to hear the stories, of those lost lives as well.”

Moynihan and Goodman are half-right and half-wrong. The U.S. media does humanize the people killed by terrorist attacks in the Western world, while often simply listing the results of U.S. casualties in the war on terror as mere numbers. The public rarely hears intimate stories of their lives, loves and aspirations. If they were to hear these stories, one would hope they would develop a sense of empathy with these people in faraway lands that made them question the wisdom of U.S. invasions, bombings or support of brutal dictators in the Middle East and elsewhere.

But should a suicide attack by a young man of Libyan descent at an event attended mostly by young girls be given the same sort of coverage as, say, a U.S. raid in Yemen that kills a number of civilians,

or a drone strike in Pakistan that kills both members of Al Qaeda and innocent civilians? I don't think so.

While some, Glenn Greenwald in particular, have made the case that there is often a casual link between Islamic terrorism in the West and the foreign policy of the United States and Western allies, is this always the case? And if so, is targeting civilians that have no control over foreign policy decisions really a rational response? The answers are no and no.

Even if the perpetrator of a terrorist attacks cites some dubious aspects of U.S. foreign policy as the reason for his terrorism against innocent civilians, should we take this person at face value?

Wouldn't the more rational reaction be to join a progressive group in the Middle East or, if this person does believe that violence should be met with violence, why wouldn't he or she target a weapons manufacturer or a military base. Perhaps the answer is that U.S. and Western foreign policy and Islamic terrorism are sometimes, but not always intertwined.

Malik writes: "I have written before about the increasingly blurred lines between ideological violence and sociopathic rage. There is now what we might call a 'jihadi state of mind,' in which some mixture of social disengagement, moral dissolution, unleavened misanthropy and inchoate rage drives some to see the most abhorrent expressions of violence as a kind of revolt."

While some angry individuals have used Islamic extremism as a way to justify their sociopathic rage, others have found homes in white nationalist groups. That people cannot find more healthy outlets for their anger is a troubling problem for Western society in general and can only be fixed by rebuilding civic institutions in a way that promotes solidarity and public debate over polarization and apathy.

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P.S.

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