

Mainstream media's good intentions only pave the road to hell

by Lev Tsitrin



After listening to an excellent talk on terrorism by a former Pentagon official whom I will not name here, I found his e-mail address and asked his opinion of my recent article on the West's failure to confront and counter Islamist ideology. His reply was extensive and substantive. "In military academies, they teach the so-called DIME model, that is that every strategy has a diplomatic, informational, military, and economic component. Countering ideology is 'informational,' and yet it is the one component at which the United States is worse at," he observed. When I pushed further, he gave this assessment of the Western press: "Today, we have Islamists, anti-Islamists, and I would argue that the press are largely anti-anti-Islamists in their motivations on the subject."

This makes a lot of sense. The high-brow snobs that occupy offices at *The New York Times* and suchlike see Islamists as fanatics, and anti-Islamists as bigots, each being equally disgusting. Hence, the so-called "elites" that inhabit the mainstream media don't want their publications to serve as a platform for either. They would rather stay above the ideological fray in aloof high-mindedness. That they do not "offend" anyone in staying silent, is an added bonus.

Except that this is sticking one's head in the sand, rather than being high-minded. Islamist terrorism is a symptom of a mental disease that is Islamism, and the refusal to examine what goes on in an Islamist's mind and explain its errors, is an abandonment of any possibility of ending that kind of

terrorism for good. Contrary to the high-brow view, anti-Islamists may be motivated not by the blind hate of Islam, but by something else: by understanding that Islamists process Islam wrongly – they treat it as the truth, rather than as a mere cultural tradition, the truth value of which is not only unknown, but is unknowable.

Being a disgusted “anti-anti-Islamist” is, therefore, not a sound position to take. Only the clear-eyed critical analysis of Islamist thinking – or of whatever mental processes that, to an Islamist, pass for “thinking”, and the public discussion of the fallacies of Islamist reasoning and logic can cure the world from the curse of Islamist terrorism. Academia and the press should be two key participants in that effort, yet they don’t want to get involved.

For all their pretensions to being knights in shining armor, eager to shine disinfecting light of public scrutiny on the hidden malfeasance and in defense of the truth, journalists and academics in the so-called “social sciences” are anything but. Newspapers are but a commercial product. As to “social scientists”, their published works are, more often than not, just a fulfillment of the need to maintain academic visibility and obtain tenure. Caught between the terrible professional demand to “publish or perish,” they publish – but what they publish, often adds only to their pocketbook rather than to our sum of knowledge.

In writing about his fellow-scientist Max Plank who founded quantum physics, Einstein compared physics to a tall cathedral, and described three kinds of scientists who built it: those who see science as a challenge to their ego and a way to show off the power of their minds, those who are in it for the money, and those driven by an essentially religious passion to understand the universe. Though the greater part of the cathedral of physics had been built by the first two categories of scientists, it is not they who made it magnificent and tall, according to Einstein. As he put it,

just as the crawling plants alone cannot grow into the tall forest, the opportunists alone cannot build up science. Those who built the science high are the scientists of the latter category – those who are in it for the thing itself.

It is the same outside of physics, too. The mere tenure-hunters won't produce ground-breaking research; nor will the journalists who are in it just for the salary explain the logical flaws of Islamism to us, and to the Islamists themselves. This is the task for people with genuine interest, people outside of the mainstream media and academia, people who have been voiceless before the advent of the internet, and whose voices only now start having the chance of being heard.

The academics and journalists want to keep the middle ground and not offend, so as not to lose the subscribers and academic grants. In their cautious timidity, they cannot produce fruitful thought. Their desire to not offend and the resulting "anti-anti-Islamism" are the proverbial good intentions that pave the road to the hell of further terrorism.

What is needed is dispassionate, honest examination of the Islamist mind, and the open critique of the logical errors that infect it. For that task, mainstream press and academia are of no use. The only people fit for this task are those who are willing to think, rather than cautiously weigh the political benefit of thinking. Nothing shows how useless our legacy media is, as its fear of being anything but "anti-anti-Islamist."

Lev Tsitrin is the author of