

The Objective Standard

Reason, Egoism, and Capitalism

Libertarians: “Terrorism Poses No Existential Threat to America”

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In an [article](#) posted on the website of the Cato Institute, John Mueller (a senior fellow at Cato) and Mark G. Stewart (a professor at the University of Newcastle) claim that “terrorism poses no existential threat to America” and that “we must stop pretending otherwise.” Their article begins: “One of the most unchallenged, zany assertions during the war on terror has been that terrorists present an existential threat to the United States, the modern state and civilization itself.”

In reading their piece, one is immediately struck by the fact that Mueller and Stewart are not concerned with the objective unit of moral and political concern: the individual. If they were concerned with individuals, they could not conceivably say or imply that Islamic terrorism poses no existential threat to America and the civilized world. Islamic terrorists, after all, murdered (i.e., put out of existence) nearly 3,000 American individuals on 9/11 and have murdered many thousands more individuals in America and other parts of the semi-civilized world since then.

In their Cato piece, Mueller and Stewart ignore all such murders. They also ignore the existential threat posed by jihadists to Americans who have not already been murdered for “Allah.” The authors instead focus on whether Islamic terrorism—which they irresponsibly refer to as “terrorism,” with no mention of the motive behind it—will put America out of existence, and they assure us that it will not.

Well, if the standard for determining whether a foreign aggressor poses an actionable threat to America is whether the aggressor will put the nation of America out of existence, then we can all sit back and relax; there is no such threat to speak of. If, however, the standard is whether the aggressor credibly aims to kill or otherwise violate the rights of *individual* Americans, then Islamic terrorism, the jihadists who engage in it, and the regimes that sponsor it pose a clear and serious threat to Americans—and thus to America.

It is true that Islamic terrorists won’t eliminate America (at least not anytime soon). But to imply that they pose no threat to America because they won’t eliminate America is absurd. A threat to the lives and rights of Americans is a threat to the very values that America exists to protect. The phrase “threat to America” *means* “threat to Americans.” It has no other relevant meaning.

Why do purportedly pro-liberty intellectuals writing for a think tank as well funded and renowned as the Cato Institute fail to acknowledge this vital and relatively obvious fact? That’s a subject for a separate post.