

- The Daily Caller - <http://dailycaller.com> -

Marie Harf's Nuanced Nonsense On Terrorism

Posted By [Jamie Weinstein](#) On 10:43 PM 02/17/2015 In | [No Comments](#)

-
- [Tweet](#)
-



Some myths never die.

Such is the case with the idea that poverty causes terrorism.

"[W]e cannot win this war by killing them," State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf [said on MSNBC's "Hardball" Monday night](#), when asked about America's strategy to defeat ISIS. "We cannot kill our way out of this war. We need in the medium and longer term to go after the root causes that leads people to join these groups, whether it's a lack of opportunity for jobs."

After her statement caused a bit of a ruckus, Harf [went on CNN Tuesday](#) to defend her remarks, saying that her point was just too "nuanced" for some people to understand.

"I'm not the first person to say something like this," she said. "Military commanders that we've had throughout many years here fighting this war on terrorism have said the exact same thing."

"We cannot kill every terrorist around the world, nor should we try," Harf continued. "How do you get at the root causes of this? It might be too nuanced an argument for some, like I've seen over the last 24 hours some of the commentary out there, but it's really the smart way that Democrats, Republicans, our partners in the Arab world think we need to combat it."

Harf is right on one point: she is not the first to make this point. Sadly, lots of very prominent people have. But it is only a nuanced point if you define "nuanced" to mean "total nonsense."

We know the idea that poverty creates terrorism is total nonsense because there have been many studies on the subject and all have found the contention to be entirely without merit. In 2010, [I highlighted some of the studies in the Washington Examiner](#):

In a study of Palestinian Islamist terror organizations from 1987 to 2002, Princeton economist Claude Berrebi discovered that members of these organizations were frequently better educated and better off economically than the Palestinian Arab population as a whole.

"If there is a link between income level, education, and participation in terrorist activities," Berrebi concluded, "it is either very weak or in the opposite direction of what one intuitively might have expected."

In his book Understanding Terror Networks, terrorism analyst Marc Sageman documented 102 Islamist radicals involved in global jihad. Roughly three quarters of these men could be classified as "upper class" or "middle class." From the information he was able to glean, Sageman concluded that "members of the global Salafi jihad were generally middle-class, educated young men from caring and religious families, who grew up with strong positive values of religion, spirituality, and concern for their communities."

Desperately poor individuals they were not. And other studies have come to similar conclusions.

In 2005, for instance, Reuven Paz examined the biographies of 154 Arab jihadists who died in Iraq. From his study, Paz was able to determine that many of the jihadists "came from wealthy or middle class families."

Back in the late 1970s, Saad Eddin Ibrahim came to a similar conclusion after interviewing radical Islamists in Egyptian jails. From his interviews, Ibrahim concluded that if the Islamist radicals he interviewed were out of the ordinary in any way, it was "because they were significantly above the average of their generation" in education, financial background, and motivation.

Most people don't need to read the academic literature to know the contention that poverty causes terrorism is false. They just need to read the newspaper. Anecdotes abound. Osama bin Laden, for instance, didn't get into the Islamist terror game because he was a pauper. The attempted underwear bomber, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, [came from](#) a wealthy and prominent Nigerian family. One of the 2005 London bombers, Shehzad Tanweer, [had over \\$150,000](#) in his bank account on the day he blew himself and others up on a bus. [One could go on and on and on.](#)

If poverty created terrorists, the term "Papua New Guinean suicide bomber" would produce millions of results on Google instead of zero. What's truly scary, though, is not that a State Department spokeswoman believes this rubbish, but that she is just echoing the worldview of President Obama and his top lieutenants in the White House. Talk about a national security jayvee team.

[Follow Jamie on Twitter](#)

Article printed from The Daily Caller: <http://dailycaller.com>

URL to article: <http://dailycaller.com/2015/02/17/marie-harfs-nuanced-nonsense-on-terrorism/>