

Contextualizing the Threat of Radical Islam

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Note: This article begins a series by Richard Greeman. Longtime socialist and international activist Richard Greeman is best known for his studies and translations of Victor Serge, the Franco-Russian novelist and revolutionary. His recent book *Beware of Vegetarian Sharks: Radical Rants and Internationalists Essays (Illustrated)* is available online at Amazon.com and may be downloaded for free at www.lulu.com/923573. I have done my non-specialist's best to make comprehensive sense of a complex 'hot-button' issue, taking care to give empirical evidence and historical examples based on a variety of accessible sources. My goal is to situate the dangerous escalation of the conflict between Western democratic imperialism and radical Islam – the so-called War on Terror – in the various contexts of ideology, history, geo-politics and popular struggles for democracy in the Moslem world. Reviewing *Surrender : Appeasing Islam, Sacrificing Freedom* by Bruce Bower, (NY Times Book Review, Sunday July 26, 2009, p. 12.) The Times' critic Stephen Pollard, began breathlessly: 'There is no more important issue facing the West than Islamism, Islamofascism or – to use another label – radical Islam. And there is no more necessary precondition to countering that threat than understanding it, where it springs from, how it is expressed, and the ways in which it is spreading. But before we do any of that, we have to agree that the threat exists.' But does 'the threat' indeed exist? And is it really 'more important' than catastrophic climate change, proliferating WMD's, or the world economic crisis? If we sincerely wish to analyze the social forces which express themselves under the various banners of what Westerners have lumped together under the heading of 'Radical Islamism,' perhaps we should begin by deconstructing the concept and to situating it in the context of the Orientalist ideology of Western colonialism/imperialism. And what better place to begin our study than America's moderate, middlebrow Sunday Times Book Review, a generally a good barometer of middle-of-the-road opinion in the U.S. and a publication which has reviewed one or more of the proliferating new books on the Islamic threat almost every week over the past decade? Returning to the Times' 'Appeasers' piece, the 'insidious problem' for Pollard is that 'many liberals and others on the European left are making common cause with radical Islam and then brazenly and bizarrely denying both the existence of that alliance and in fact the existence of any Islamic threat whatsoever.' Bower's book *Surrender : Appeasing Islam, Sacrificing Freedom* supports Pollard's thesis by rounding up the usual suspects : the insidiously charming Islamic theologian Tariq Ramadan, the left-wing former Mayor of London Ken Livingstone, and the unnamed 'Western leaders' who allegedly failed to defend the publisher of the anti-Moslem Danish cartoons. The Times' Pollard concludes somewhat hysterically: 'Bower is unquestionably correct, and that fact is quite simply terrifying.' Terrifying? To be sure the silver-tongued scholar Ramadan, does send different messages to the Faithful and to the kaffirs (Arabic for 'goyim') ; and Livingstone was an unprincipled, opportunistic Left politician looking for votes among England's fast-growing Moslem population (along with the British Socialist Workers' Party and its erstwhile ally Respect). But this is old news. Neither has much influence any more, and although 'insidious' they were hardly 'terrifying.' On the other hand, equating Western leaders' alleged 'appeasement' of political Islam with the appeasement of Hitler in the 1930's is sheer hysterical (and historical) lunacy, as those of us who actually live in Europe can testify. * In any case, writers representing the 'Appeasers' school of anti-Islamism (not to mention the Times' fact-checkers) can hardly be unaware that for at least a decade the U.S. and Britain (not to mention Israel) have been systematically boycotting, bombing, invading Islamic countries and assassinating Islamic leaders. They call that 'Appeasement?' The ongoing wars against Afghanistan and Iraq have already lasted much longer than WWII, with concomitant waste of lives and treasure and no end in sight. Can Messrs. Pollard, Bower and the Book Review editors who commissioned, headlined and ran this hysterical propaganda piece really believe that the feeble, phoney left-liberal voices of Ramadan, Livingstone and the like threaten to

prevail over negative stereotypes with which CNN, Fox News, the N.Y. Times and Western leaders have been bombarding us for years as justification for hugely expensive oil-wars in the Middle-East ? What we read in their texts is not empirical argument but ideology which, like religion itself, is supremely indifferent to fact and logic. It is easy for us Westerners to laugh at the Ayatollahs' depiction of dear old Uncle Sam as the 'Great Satan,' but harder to see the ideological demonization of Moslems and Arabs in our own 'liberal' media. * Far from 'appeasing' Islam, the Swiss, after a virulently anti-Moslem right-wing campaign, have just voted by referendum to ban the construction of minarets. Meanwhile, at this writing the right-wing Sarkozy government is orchestrating a summit-level discussion of 'French national identity' while simultaneously demonizing and expelling non-white immigrants including long-time residents and human rights activists. Nor is there a dearth of French anti-Moslem books denouncing the 'appeasement' of Islamicism with titles like *Conquering the West: the Secret Project of the Islamists* and *France Infected with Islamism: Terrorist Threats within the Hexagon*. Sylvain Besson, *La Conquête de l'occident: Le projet secret des islamistes* (Paris, 2005), cited in Patrick Haenni and Samar Amghar, "Un spectre hante l'Europe: Le mythe renaissant de l'islam conquérant," ("A specter is haunting Europe: the rebirth of the Myth of Islam the Conquerer") *Monde diplomatique*, Jan. 2010. See also Mohamed Sifaoui, *La France malade de l'islamisme : Menaces terroristes sur l'Hexagone* (Paris, 2002). Next article in series: 'Urgent Threats' of Yesteryear