

## Tucker Carlson Apologizes to Muslims

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**Glenn Greenwald (GG):** Next question is from Zale Axelrod who asked this, quote: "Less of a question, more of an observation on Tucker Carlson... After 9/11, I despised how Christopher Hitchens tried to pretend as if his complete 180 on political views such as war was somehow just a linear philosophical position he always held and everyone around him had changed". Yeah, just for those of you who don't know, Christopher Hitchens was always a leftist, a man of the left, and yet he became an ardent supporter of the Iraq War, an ardent supporter of the broader War on Terror, aligned himself with George Bush and Dick Cheney. I don't want to simplify or be too reductive about it because Christopher Hitchens had a kind of nuanced view, but on those issues that the left had cared about most, which are these wars and the War on Terror and how to understand Islam, Christopher Hitchens was aligned against them. And his argument was not, oh, I changed, his argument was, no, I'm the same leftist I always was, but a leftist should want Saddam Hussein to be gone because Saddam Hussain is so repressive to his people, Islam is an anti-leftist ideology, they don't assign any value or rights to women, they throw gay people off roofs, et cetera, et cetera et cetera. And somehow his leftism became a vehicle for supporting endless militarism and war and bombing and erosion of civil liberties in the name of the War on Terror. And so that's that reference. Just because Christopher Hitchens appeared to change, he certainly found himself aligned with people he had once opposed, but his view was, his argument was, "no, I don't have anything to apologize for because I haven't changed my views on anything. I'm just following the logical extension of my ideology and these other people aren't".

And then the question goes on: "Tucker Carlson, on the other hand, whether one agrees with the entirety of his views, has openly admitted that he was wrong in the past. Present-day politicians seem to think admitting past errors somehow invalidates any future views and discredits them with the public. I think part of Carlson's appeal is that he can genuinely admit he's been wrong as everyone surely has at one time. Do you think this is part of his appeal?" I absolutely think this is part of his appeal. And I want to say there's a difference between a cursory admission of error – like, wow, I got that wrong, and then just moving on – and a genuine attempt to publicly grapple with the public errors that you committed. And this with Tucker has been going on for a long time and I've seen it, I've gotten to be a close friend of Tucker. I started going on his show in 2016 and largely what we had in common then was our

strong skepticism, in fact, contempt for the whole Russiagate narrative, which I do think has been strongly vindicated. But I saw what happened there, which is what led him to then start questioning the role of the CIA and the role of the security state. And then once you do that, you start questioning its dogma and you start questioning the Neocon-Never-Trumpers who were behind Russiagate and were its most aggressive promoters, and you start questioning their doctors as well. And that led him, I think, to understand that he had become, for a long time, for the prior 15 years of his adult work, an arm of an ideology that he came to believe was not just deceitful, but destructive. He was on air defending Israel, defending neoconservatism, defending the Bush administration, defending the invasion of Iraq and all those other wars which he had come to believe were not just errors, but moral atrocities and geostrategic disasters.

And there were people who supported the war in Iraq who ended up pretending to have a kind of mea culpa, but it was a very limited admission of error. It was more, "oh, I was wrong because I thought the war was going to be quick and easy", or "I was because I trusted President Bush and Dick Cheney on how they were going to prosecute it, and they prosecuted it all wrong". Or "I was wrong because they overestimated the strength of the opposition", or whatever. Those kinds of very technical, limited, analytical, or geopolitical errors, but there were no moral confessions or fundamental acknowledgments that one had gone off on a very wrong path. And it does take a lot of courage and a lot of integrity to do that because if you look at how American media functions, there's actually huge numbers of people who got all these issues wrong – the Iraq war, the War on Terror, the broader idea of militarism. They haven't paid any price. You don't have to admit you're wrong. You can just keep going. And looking out on Fox News and right wing media, but also like in standard corporate media attached to the Democratic Party, these people don't have any career incentive or self-interest to acknowledge they're wrong – let alone to do so in the way that Tucker has in this ongoing enduring continuous way. You really only do that if you're sincere about it.

And in fact, even if you are sincere about it and you make people see that you're sincere, there's no guarantee that your career won't be destroyed by that admission of error. Like I said, if you get things wrong, if you lie, as long as you're doing it for the right cause, the people who believe in that cause will instantly forgive you. They won't care at all. You know how many times Rachel Maddow went on air and spouted complete and utter bullshit that ended up being totally debunked and discredited and disproven? But nobody ever cared because she never apologized and everyone understood she was doing it to harm and weaken Trump, so people who hate Trump aren't the slightest bit upset with Rachel Maddow. No one cares if she delivers an apology. Same thing with people who supported the Iraq war. As long as you're lying or getting things wrong or spouting propaganda for the right cause, your career won't be in any way impeded, even if you don't apologize or if you just apologize slightly.

But if you really spend a good amount of time saying, "all these things that you heard me saying over the years, I realize now I was totally wrong about them and I'm embarrassed about it and I feel ashamed of it and I want to devote myself to rectifying it" – the reason

that's so risky is because you will end up alienating the people who were on board with you who haven't come to that same conclusion that they were wrong. So all those warmongers and all those conservatives and all those national security state people who once recognized a common ally in Tucker now see him repudiating their core worldview and so they're going to hate him. But there's no guarantee that the people who were on the other side the whole time, the ones who are against these wars, there's not guarantee that by apologizing you're going to then attract them because the nature of our politics is very much that if you say something that people think is wrong, they'll hate you for it. But then if you admit that what you said was wrong, it's not like they're going to welcome you with open arms. They're going to say, oh, well, you should never be listened to again, look at how wrong you've got everything. Especially when you're moving from a more right-wing position to a more anti-war position. I think the American right is much better at welcoming people who they used to find themselves with no agreement with, but who now have come to see things more in their way – they're like, oh, welcome, we want to expand our faction, we want to have additions to our political faction. The left is much more – or not even the left, but American liberals more broadly – like, no, we don't want you, you've been the enemy, we don't care if you come to seed things in a different way. So I think what Tucker did was actually quite risky. And that's why I say, I think It takes a lot of courage and integrity. But what strikes me about Tucker is, and honestly what I admire about Tucker, is that he has not just admitted wrongdoing or apologized in some quick way in passing, just to check the list and say he's done it. He's really tried to come to terms with why he got things so wrong as he sees them, has zero problem over and over publicly discussing how wrong he got things, and has really reconstructed his worldview once he realized that so many of the foundations on which his worldview had been based are rotted.

And I just want to show you a clip – and I'm only showing this clip, not because it's unusual, but because he does it constantly. In fact, this clip is from today. I saw this today. And it's about an issue that he says he was wrong on that to this very day continues to be foundational to huge parts of right-wing politics in the American conservative movement on which his career has long depended and to some extent still does. And yet he's willing to stand up and say, not in the Iraq war, which is a little bit easier because 25 years ago, lots of people now think that was wrong, Donald Trump said that was wrong – listen to what he said. And again, I'm not only showing it to you just because it happens to be today, it happens all the time. Let's listen to this.

**Tucker Carlson:** ...Are delusional for a bunch of different reasons. I don't think that's an Israeli-specific phenomenon. We felt a little bit of that after 9/11, when people bought the many lies about 9/11. But the net result was to convince Americans that they were under siege from global Islam, that there were a billion people trying to kill them. I felt this way myself. Many times I said on television, the problem is Islam, the problem is Muslims. They all want to kill us. They're all crazy. They're all in this lunatic suicide cult created by Mohammed in the 7th century. And I believed that. I was hysterical. I believed that. Now, that's not true. Nothing about that is true. But I believed it. So it's a little harder for me to judge Israelis when they're like "every Arab, Christian or Muslim, it doesn't matter, Arabs

are, by definition, committed to the extermination of Jews. And we must kill them before they kill us". They believe that.

**GG:** There's a couple of important points there. One of the things, again, that makes that so notable, and I think what makes Tucker very rare in our political discourse, is that he's talking in a very genuine and sincere way about what he got wrong and not pulling any punches about it, not blaming other people, not excusing it. And it's not an ancillary issue. It's on an issue that has been fundamental to conservative politics for the last 25 years, which is the idea that Islam and Muslims are a unique threat – and not just a threat in terms of like 9/11 kind of attacks, but are a unique threat in terms of immigration to Western societies because Islam and Muslims inherently or overwhelmingly are more violent or more primitive. And he's saying, these are things he genuinely believed. And I believe that Tucker genuinely believed them. And he has now come to see that they're not true. And he is willing to say it, no matter who it alienates, including probably large parts of his audience.

But he's also saying something there that I think is important. And this is something I try really hard to do. And I don't think any of us succeed perfectly with this, because it's extremely difficult. Maybe this is something that you kind of start seeing a little bit better as you get a little older, as you kind of have passed through so many different phases of life and seen so many types of thinking and people change and evolve, is despite how critical Tucker is of Israel and Israeli society, and he is extremely critical of it in ways that I am as well and that I think are entirely valid, you notice there that what he's saying is: it's very hard for me, Tucker Carlson, to judge Israelis when it comes to their belief that all Arabs and Muslims pose a grave threat to them because I, Tucker Carlsson, once thought that as well. So how can I sit there and look at Israelis and say, oh, these people are insane or they're completely hateful or they are crazy for believing something that I myself spent many years of my own life believing?

It doesn't justify what the Israelis think, it doesn't excuse it. I guess what it is is a kind of empathy for people who you actually think are not just wrong, but almost sociopathic. And I think this is such an important skill and ability to try and develop, as difficult as it is. On the issues where I feel most strongly, like the things that I'm most convicted about, most passionate about, if somebody has a completely different view, and I really feel like it's a moral imperative or compelling ethical question, I think my tendency is similar to what a lot of people's tendencies are, which is to say: I don't have any empathy at all for what those people think. What they think is evil, what they think is wrong. And I do sometimes struggle to understand how people have certain views that I find so transparently misguided or hateful or distorted.

But the reality is, that so much of who we are is based on these arbitrary factors of where we were born, the kind of culture or community into which we were born, that raised us, what kind of ideas we were indoctrinated with. Obviously, nationality plays a big role, religion plays a big role, ethnicity plays a big role, class plays a big role, where you are regionally in the world plays a big role. And I think anyone who doesn't realize that a lot of things they

think they think simply due to the accidents of the subjective almost accidental features of your life, rather than because you are this extremely well reasoned moral person who reached them and therefore, anyone else who thinks differently must not be. That's really delusional. But I think there's an important balance between being able to say, I understand why that person thinks this, I understand it, it's not completely alien to me, it's not completely foreign to me, but I nonetheless find it reprehensible.

Anyway, when I first heard that clip from Tucker, I didn't notice that part, that he was kind of connecting his own errors to how Israelis think, and I think that empathy is important, but I think the bigger issue is what Tucker is doing. And it's such an important example, because he is succeeding – and this is what the question really was – not to spite his willingness to admit error in such a raw, candid, fundamental, enduring, repetitive way, and to grapple with those errors, and to try and figure out where he went wrong so he can avoid repeating those same mistakes in the future. It's not just that. It's that he has reconstructed a worldview that he is able to defend because he has dismantled the one that he previously had.

And I've certainly done that in some instances in my life. And those are, to me, among the most gratifying things you can do: when you have ideas that you're not even sure why you have them, just kind of embraced them at some point, not a lot of independent or critical thought went into it. I mean, there's so many – our brains are almost necessarily designed to do that. We're political animals. We are connected to society. We absorb things externally and start believing them almost subconsciously. Not because we ever sat down and said, let me read 30 books and sit in contemplation and then decide what my view on this issue is. We kind of just absorb them by osmosis. And the process of then going and uprooting them and saying, is this really something that I believe or is this something that has just kind of been implanted in me through this process, I think is one of the most important and gratifying. Because it's the only way that you can actually ensure that the things you think and believe are things that you think you'd believe because you've arrived at through your own agency and critical thought. And I think Tucker is doing that as well as and as honestly as and as constructively as anyone. And in doing so, I think there are a lot of people who are willing to give him a lot of their time who otherwise might not because even as much as they may have hated him previously, or even as much as they may just like what he has to say now, I think that is the hallmark of a person struggling as best they can to understand the world and to describe it as truthfully as they see it. And that more than anything is what builds trust. None of us are the monopolists of truth. And we're all going to make errors. We're all going to say things that are not just wrong, but thoughtlessly wrong.

And the more you have prominent people who are willing to kind of go through that process in public, I think the more normalized it becomes, the less shameful it seems. There's still kind of a stigma to saying, hey, I went on television every day for 10 years and I insisted this was true and I realized that was all bullshit. Like, you're afraid that people are going to think: well, if you went on TV for 10 and said stuff that was bullshit, were totally wrong, every day you went on and said these Muslims are all coming to get us, there's a 7th century violent ideology that is a threat to us because of what Mohammad said in the 7th century, and you

realized that was all wrong – why should I ever listen to you again? You were so wrong about everything. And that is the reaction of some people. But the reality is we're all wrong about things in our lives. And I've come to trust people much more who are willing to admit what Tucker's admitting than people who just pretend that they've always seen the truth from the very beginning and have nothing to apologize for or to admit error about or to rethink their way. So I do think that that is an important contribution he's making.

**END**

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