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Book Reviews

Arun Kundnani (2014) *The Muslims are Coming! Islamophobia, Extremism and the Domestic War on Terror*. London and New York: Verso.

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Martin Luther King Jr understood the link between individual violence at home and state violence abroad. In part of his message that is often downplayed, he told an audience at Riverside Church, New York in 1967 that the promotion of nonviolent direct action (or the prevention of violent extremism) among young Americans depended on opposing the violence of US foreign policy in places like Vietnam. Arun Kundnani ends his book arguing this point remains as valid today in the global war on terror. Indeed, in many ways, the material presented in the book paints a depressingly familiar picture of state secrecy and surveillance, the normalisation of preventative measures in the post-9/11 era, governments instilling fear and anxiety across populations, and the criminalisation of formerly lawful activities. It is now beyond dispute that these developments have eroded human rights and civil liberties in Western societies. But they have also impinged, more broadly, upon social relations and political processes. Not surprisingly, this has impacted Muslim communities the most because relations of trust have been eroded in the domestic war on terror.

Kundnani tells how police operations in both the UK and US have infiltrated Muslim communities, and they have done so by enlisting the assistance of non-policing local services, such as by recruiting schoolteachers and youth workers as intelligence sources. Partnerships built between police forces and community organisations constitute 'soft interventions' that have become increasingly integral to counterterrorism strategies since 9/11. Although soft power has also been accompanied by the exercise of hard power (for example, in the enactment of new terrorism-related offences), that hasn't stopped the state from getting involved in questionable tactics reminiscent of police states in the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War.

Kundnani shows how law enforcement agencies have integrated intelligence gathering as part of a 'provocation strategy', which has included the use of *agents provocateurs* who manipulate circumstances to push individuals into criminal activity, so they can be arrested and prosecuted. Yet, he says, '[i]n every case where defendants have attempted an entrapment defence in post-9/11 terrorist trials, it has been unsuccessful' (p. 193). Other forms of inducement to becoming an informant include: the promise of financial reward; a special route to permanent residence (the 'snitch' green card); removal from the no-fly list, which bars people from flying from the US; and threats of criminal prosecution or the release of embarrassing personal information.

In the post-9/11 atmosphere of fear and mistrust, mosque leaders have been reluctant to engage with young people expressing radical views, such as those who might voice anger at US foreign policy in the Middle East. On the one hand, this potentially has the effect of further alienating disaffected young Muslims. And, to Kundnani, that is more likely to foster terrorism. On the other hand: 'A strong, active, and confident Muslim community enjoying its civil rights to the full and able to engage with young people on issues they feel strongly about is the best way of preventing violence' (p. 199). Notwithstanding that, the US and UK governments have pursued a counterterrorism approach that, Kundnani argues, is premised on flawed radicalisation models, which regard extremism as synonymous with radical opposition and assume, therefore, that 'the best way to stop terrorist violence is to prevent radical ideas from circulating' (p. 288). Consequently, '[p]olitical and cultural disaffection is then misread as terrorist radicalization' (p. 279), which is one reason many Muslims are fearful of participating in traditional modes of political activism, such as street protests.

In the war on terror, the default position is that 'the term "terrorist" is reserved for acts of political violence carried out by Muslims' (p. 23). However, as Kundnani points out, violence committed by far Right groups in Europe between 1990 and 2012 was of a similar magnitude to that of jihadist violence. Further, in the US from 1990-2010, there were 145 acts of political violence carried out by the far Right resulting in 348 deaths, compared to 20 people killed over the same period from acts of political violence committed by Muslims-American citizens or long-term US residents. Moreover, in the UK, 'despite the focus on al-Qaeda, the number of deaths caused by sectarianism in Northern Ireland over the last decade is similar to the number of lives lost in jihadist attacks' (p. 24).

The threat of jihadist terrorism, then, is largely imagined. Hence, in the US, the government is, to a large extent, 'fantasizing into existence the very threat of domestic jihadism it claims to be fighting' (p. 24). The FBI has been complicit in this by busily manufacturing terrorist plots with *agents provocateurs*, which gives 'the appearance of an efficient counterterrorism program' (p. 196). Ironically, however, the gathering of vast quantities of information has meant law enforcement and intelligence agencies are less efficient at connecting material to specific criminal acts, which, in turn, means they are less effective at detecting actual terrorist plots, information about which 'was somewhere in the government's systems, but its significance was lost amid a morass of useless data' (p. 284).

A key argument of Kundnani's book is that, to understand what lies behind so-called jihadist terrorism, as much attention needs to be given to Western state violence and the identity politics sustaining it, as to Islamic ideology. A depoliticised model of extremism should be rejected since political context is essential to the analysis. In simple terms, Kundnani argues we have to consider that, '[w]hat governments call extremism is to a large degree a product of their own wars' (p. 15). By contrast, government counterterrorism strategy and media reporting about extreme acts of political violence are 'restricted to the official narrative of radicalization by dangerous ideology' (p. 19). Such views are premised on Islamophobia, which is not restricted to extremists on the far Right of politics, but also chimes with the war on terror's official discourse. As Anders Behring Breivik noted in the first week of his trial, his view that multiculturalism has weakened national identity across Europe and facilitated Islamic extremism (the 'Eurabia' thesis) was also a view held by three of the most powerful politicians in Europe: Nicolas Sarkozy, Angela Merkel and David Cameron.

To Kundnani, there is a 'race principle' at work here 'that enables the separation of Muslims from the usual liberal norms of rights and citizenship' (p. 284). Although developments since 9/11 have trampled generally on rights and freedoms in liberal democracies in a way similar to that which occurs in totalitarian regimes, the experience of the war on terror tells us that 'if the same tools of totalitarian rule are applied only to racialized groups rather than the population as a whole, the trappings of democracy can be maintained for the majority' (p. 283). Moreover, if

this 'racialized totalitarianism' starts to overreach and step on the freedoms of others (for example, through overbearing screening at airports; the introduction of identity cards), 'such excesses can be quickly corrected while preserving the essential structure of the system' (p. 284).

In this context, argues Kundnani, radicalisation is the solution, not the problem. What is needed is radicalisation 'in the true political sense of the word' (p. 289). Terrorism thrives where politics have been brutally suppressed; it is 'not the product of radical politics but a symptom of political impotence' (p. 289). Arguably, then, the most productive approach to reducing so-called jihadist terrorism, is '[o]pening up genuinely radical political alternatives and reviving the political freedoms that have been lost in recent years' (p. 15). Presently, however, a kind of 'democratic totalitarianism' provides 'a racialized discourse of fear that constructs Muslims as a cultural threat to the liberal order' (p. 284). What results is a hollowed out version of democracy, with 'an empty, technocratic consensus in which real politics is disavowed' (p. 285). And, when radical political contestation is suffocated like this, the processes by which societies reinvent themselves and resolve social tensions are neutered. In such circumstances, where there is an absence of genuine emancipatory movements, Kundnani concludes: 'the only possible outlet for the impulses generated by social and economic marginalization is the fake radicalism of armoured identity politics, conspiracy theories, and apocalyptic fantasies' (p. 285).

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