

## **Book Reviews**

**Arun Kundnani: The Muslims are coming!  
Islamophobia, extremism, and the  
domestic war on terror, Verso: London,  
New York, 2014, 327 p.**

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In several Western European countries the debate about Islam and that of Muslim migrants and minorities in society is very much politicized and polarized. To some extent, this can be explained by the attacks on the United States on 9/11, the London Bombings on 7/7 and other attacks in the name of Islam. Also the subsequent 'Global War on Terror' and national counterterrorism policies that predominantly focus on Islamic groups have played a role in the creation of fear, tensions and the idea of Muslims as the enemy of the West. The ultimate expression of this type of politicization and polarization are antiimmigration and anti-Muslim political parties – such as the Party for Freedom of Geert Wilders in the Netherlands – or political movements – such as the English Defence League (EDL) in the United Kingdom and such 'leagues' elsewhere. Their anti-Muslim agenda is often based on fear and stereotypes and expressed in the notion of an ongoing struggle or clash of civilizations between Christianity and Islam. Even worse, there are groups and individuals who have used violence to stop what they believe is an ongoing war or an invasion of Europe. They believe that there are both external enemies (for instance Saudi Arabia and its political-religious agenda) and internal enemies (national politicians or groups that are in favour of a multi-cultural society) that have to be fought against and have indeed targeted these groups. Extreme examples include beatings and killings of immigrants and Muslims by neo-Nazis, as well as the very lethal and tragic case of Anders Breivik who decided to turn his frustration about immigration and Islam to those he believed to be responsible for selling out Europe and Norway to the Muslims – the government and a group of social democrats gathering on the island of Utoya.

Whereas most of the political parties, movements and some of the most brutal killings are well known to the general public, much less known are the many and sometimes day to day intimidations of Muslims in Western countries and acts of violence against these often vulnerable groups. Some of these acts of violence and intimidation are conducted by state actors. The latter is one of the issues put forward by Arun Kundnani in his book "The Muslims are coming! Islamophobia, extremism, and the domestic war on terror".

With this book, Kundnani aims to show how the domestic aspect of the struggle against terrorism is based on Islamophobia and how and why this can be regarded as a form of structural racism directed against Muslims, with all its negative consequences. The study focuses on the domestic fronts of the war on terror in the United States and the United Kingdom. In these two countries, dealing with radicalization – or what is regarded as radical behaviour – has been made a central notion for policy making. In the eyes of Kundnani, this has widened the perceived threat of terrorism to all those having an Islamic ideology and has resulted in a situation in which any Muslim who challenges the existing order or political practice has become a potential object of observation by the authorities. Moreover, it precluded any wider discussion on the foreign front of the war on terror, in particular with regard to what is happening in the Islamic world. With his book, the author aims to find answers to the questions 1) what reasons there are for thinking Islamic ideology is the root cause of terrorism, and 2) why the acceptance of Muslims as fellow citizens should be conditioned on their distancing themselves from any particular set of ideological beliefs.

Unfortunately, the author hardly answers these important 'what' and 'why' questions. Instead he focuses on the many, and sometimes shameful examples of policy failures, misuse of power, (authorized) intimidations, and human rights abuses that occurred in the United States and the United Kingdom after 9/11 and 7/7. Showing the dark side of the domestic part of the war on terror and exposing official treacheries and authorised illegal practices – including the use of agent provocateurs and extra-judicial killings – is an important exercise on its own. And Kundnani makes a strong argument for more attention to Western state violence and the politics that sustains it. In addition to that, he shows that what governments call extremism is to a large degree a product of their own wars and foreign policy. However, he fails to properly explain his

two main questions, partly because he does not attempt to understand why the authorities and a large part of the general public perceive Islamic ideology in the way that they do. Fear for and suspicion of Islam can be explained, even if one wants to stick the label Islamophobia on it. In general people are more easily worried about that which they do not know, what is foreign to them, what they do not understand or cannot make a good risk assessment of. The enormous impact of 9/11 in the United States on the psyche of both the Bush administration (and to some extent also the current generation of politicians), the executive branches and the general public is partly missed in Kundnani's book. The same holds true for the genuine worries and fears among many British (and European) citizens after Madrid, 7/7, Bali, and other major terrorist attacks conducted by perpetrators who claimed to do so in the name of Islam. Hence, the attempt to find an answer to the question of what reasons there are for thinking that Islamic ideology is the root cause of terrorism is not very balanced. Kundnani too firmly holds on to the notion of racism which is very broadly defined and not very helpful in explaining the real and unfortunate overreactions, fixations, misinterpretations, the use of double standards, downright failures and blunders, and sometimes clearly malicious anti-Muslim policies and practices. Kundnani gives many examples of the above, but does not explain why this happens. As a consequence he also finds it difficult to explain why there has been relatively little criticism among liberals against the domestic side of counterterrorism and its predominant attention to Islamic radicalization. This is why the book is less of an analysis of Islamophobia and the domestic war on terror, but rather a well-documented and elaborate account of the consequences of counterterrorism. The book provides a good oversight of the consequences of this policy for the communities that have been regarded as suspect populations based on Islamophobia and leading to even more Islamophobia and the earlier mentioned politicized and polarized debate on Islam and Muslim migrants and minorities. One conclusion that can be drawn after reading "The Muslims are Coming" is that the cause and the effect of Islamophobia needs further studying and that there are many reasons why we should be much more critical of the war on terror in general, including what is happening on the domestic front.



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