

The Muslims are coming! Islamophobia, extremism, and the domestic war on terror. By Arun Kundnani. London & New York: Verso, 2014, pp. 336, ISBN: 978-1-78168159-6

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After the horrific events of 9/11, academics in America and Britain searched for the cause leading young men and women to engage in terrorist action. The mainstream view, among the academics, is that terrorist action is due to a person holding a radical ideology. Arun Kundnani, in his admirable book *The Muslims Are Coming* (2014), gives a counterpoint to this view.

In the mainstream view, there are two conceptions of radicalisation. There is the culturalist conception, and there is the reformist conception (p. 55-6). The culturalist conception views radicalism as an inherent trait of Muslim culture. This trait is not formed by external factors, whether they be social, political, or economical. It is seen as being part of the essence of Islam and of Muslim identity. The reformist conception views radicalism as not being an inherent trait of Muslim culture, rather, Muslim culture is inherently peaceful and it is only a radical Muslim fringe that causes radicalism.

Kundnani traces the origins of culturalism to Bernard Lewis's 1990 article "The Roots of Muslim Rage" (p. 56). Culturalism became the framework on which Bush's War on Terror strategy was based (p. 60). Kundnani points to the fact that culturalism has affinities to, and could be derived from, "popular forms of racism" (p. 61). He gives the example of David Yerushalmi, who has a group called the Society of Americans for National Existence. Yerushalmi campaigns to highlight the danger America is in from a soon-to-come *Sharī'ah* takeover. He also wrote that some races, due to their genes, are better suited to live in civilization, while other races, due to their genes, are better suited to live in tribes (p. 63). Culturalism supports the narrative that there is a war between Islam and the West, and that this war is due to Islam's inherent tendency towards violence. It is no surprise then that Lieutenant Colonel

Matthew A. Dooley said that Mecca and Medina should be nuclear bombed (p. 185).

Kundnani shows that reformism was inspired by, and has roots in, the Cold War strategy (p. 71). Reformism acknowledges that Islam is not monolithic. It does not lump all Muslims into the radical box, as culturalism does. Instead, it divides Muslims into those who follow “moderate Islam” and those who follow “radical Islam”. Reformists argue that radical Muslims must be alienated from the moderate majority (p. 67-8). This position, though more nuanced than culturalists, still contains major conceptual and practical problems. The reformists are searching for the “true voices of Islam,” but did not realise that, in Asma Jahangir’s words, Islam has “a diversity of voices” (p. 164). Reformists took their strategy from the counter-insurgency theory first used by the British in the Malayan Emergency of 1948-1960 (p. 71). This strategy meant using an application of both hard and soft powers (p. 75). An example of the application of this strategy can be seen in the figure of John Brennan, Obama’s advisor on counterterrorism. He gave a speech on how *Jihād* is an act of self-purification, while at the same time he helped the US Drone program in spreading Hell Fire Missiles (p. 85). Reformism, with its focus on what interpretation a Muslim holds, cannot explain why a Muslim decides to have a perverted interpretation of the Qur’ān.

Kundnani says that both culturalism and reformism have the same common flaw. They think that a radical ideology is enough to cause terrorism. They do not look at the role of social and political factors that affect terrorists (p. 56). Dzhokar Tsarnaev, while hiding from the police, wrote that “[t]he US government is killing our innocent civilians... Now I don’t like killing innocent people it is forbidden in Islam. . Stop killing our innocent people and we will stop” (p. 18). Michael Adebolajo, holding a bloodied knife, said, “The only reason we have killed this man today is because Muslims are dying daily by British soldiers... by the almighty Allah we will never stop fighting you until you leave us alone... So leave our lands and we can all live in peace” (p. 19-20). Anwar al-Awlaki, before he was assassinated, said, “we have just seen in Yemen the death of twenty-three children and seventeen women. We cannot stand idly in the face of such aggression, and we will fight back and incite others to do the same... with the American invasion of Iraq and the continued US aggression against Muslims... I eventually came

to the conclusion that jihad against America... is binding on every other able Muslim” (p. 147). Culturalists and reformists think that the above statements cannot help us understand why some Muslims choose to become terrorists.

The House Committee on Homeland Security chaired by Peter King, discussed why Somali Americans were joining Al-Shabaab. Experts spoke over two hours. Not once did they mention the 2006 US-backed Ethiopian invasion of Somalia (p. 222). The reason for the absence of any mention of Ethiopian invasion is due to the experts being under the influence of theories of radicalisation that stem from both culturalism and reformism. If the social and political context of Somali Americans were taken into consideration, the discussion of the House Committee of Homeland Security could have been more beneficial than it originally was.

In the fourth chapter of his book, Kundnani criticises various academic theories of radicalisation, including the theories devised by Walter Laqueur, Israel’s representative to the Congress for Cultural Freedom, and Marc Sageman, former CIA operations officer who worked with the Afghan Mujahedin. Kundnani discusses different perspectives on radicalisation, all of which are based on reformist assumptions. He deals with “Radicalization as a Theological Process”, “Radicalization as a Theological-Psychological Process”, and “Radicalization Models as Policing Tools.” Though his critiques are superbly done, Kundnani should have dealt with each radicalisation theory in greater depth. This would have made his argument more convincing, and help bolster his damning conclusion that, “the radicalization literature fails to offer a convincing demonstration of any causal relationship between theology and violence” (p. 140).

Theories of radicalisation logically lead to the mass surveillance of Muslims (p. 279). Kundnani shows, statistically, how the FBI is spying on Muslims more than the Stasi spied on East Germans (p. 282). The Establishment is, in Kundnani’s words, a “racialised totalitarianism” (p. 284). The theories assume that some Muslims have a latent tendency to become radicalised. The police have the problem of identifying which Muslims have this latent tendency. The FBI solution is to force Muslim suspects into doing acts of terrorism (p. 186). To see the FBI in action, take the example of James Cromitie. An FBI agent promised to give

Cromitie, who had just lost his job, \$250,000, a two-week holiday in Puerto Rico, a barbershop business, and a BMW, if he helped bomb two synagogues. Cromitie accepted the offer, then later rejected it. The agent threatened Cromitie with beheading if he rejected the offer (pp. 189-190). Cromitie relented. He took part in an FBI-staged attempted bombing of two synagogues; the FBI captured him. Judge Colleen MacMahon, who presided over Cromitie's trial, said:

Only the government could have made a terrorist out of Mr Cromitie, a man whose buffoonery is positively Shakespearean in its scope... I believe beyond a shadow of a doubt that there would have been no crime here except [that] the government instigated it, planned it, and brought it to fruition (p. 192).

The FBI, instead of stopping terrorist attacks, are manufacturing terrorist attacks, then swooping in at the last second to save the day.

British police, under the influence of theories of radicalisation, believe that four year old children can be radicalised (p. 178). The Chanel project tried to de-radicalise a nine year old child (p. 177). The personal data the project collects on potential radical Muslims can be stored till those Muslims are a hundred years old (p. 180). This means, theoretically at least, that if the Chanel project identified a four year old Muslim as a potential radical, then for the next ninety six years, that Muslim would be seen as a potential radical. The Muslims labelled as potentially radical are "not identified on the basis of criminal suspicion" (p. 180-1). Kundnani says that theories of radicalisation and their implementation will lead to the hollowing out of democracy (p. 285).

Kundnani's book has some leaky joints. He says that he is looking at "Islamophobia as a form of structural racism," then later spends time discussing street hooligans and crazed xenophobes (p. 233-242). He conducted 160 interviews, but he reports only a handful of them (p. 25). The book has no bibliography. Overall, the book provides a worthwhile contribution to the ongoing debate in academia about the nature and source of radicalisation.
