

Book Review

Cornelia Beyer (2010)

Counterterrorism and International Power Relations: The EU, ASEAN and Hegemonic Global Governance

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Cultural identity and confusion have become to a great extent a leitmotif for the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Identity politics and the concept of cultural incompatibility have become increasingly fashionable as a means to explain global insecurity and opposition to Western democracy and the globalisation process. A debate on the hitherto inconceivable notion of the failure of multiculturalism is opening and there is a growing awareness amongst academics and practitioners alike of the need for a fresh and innovative approach to this question of cultural accommodation in contemporary society and its accompanying spectre of the rise in global terrorism. Anna Cornelia Beyer has already explored the margins of this debate in her *Violent Globalisms: Conflict in Response to Empire* (2007), Aldershot, Ashgate. In her new *Counterterrorism and International Power Relations*, the subject of this review, she immerses herself fully in this complex, but fundamentally important issue offering a fresh and original approach with awkward and challenging questions being posed for a global community that has all too often staked all its chips on traditional unilateralist approaches to terrorist threats.

The tragic events of September 11th, 2001 with the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York by *Al-Qaeda* catapulted terrorism once again onto television screens and the front pages of newspapers worldwide. The events of that momentous day have left an indelible imprint on the mindset of contemporary society; subsequent military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq coupled with terrorist attacks in mainland Europe and Asia have maintained terrorism at the forefront of global attention. However, this concern with the growth of terrorism as a political tool is not new and over the last forty years, the rise of terrorism or more correctly, the terrorist movement, is a phenomenon which has been increasingly greeted with fear and trepidation by both governments and academics throughout the Western world as it is seen to threaten the values, mores and indeed, the sheer existence of Western civilisation.

Therefore, Anna Cornelia Beyer's impressive *Counterterrorism and International Power Relations* tackles this issue in an erudite yet innovative manner and unlike much of the current literature, it offers workable and meaningful, if sometimes aspirational, solutions to what is one of the, if not 'the', major threat affecting global stability in the twenty-first century. Moreover, this volume manages like its aforementioned predecessor *Violent Globalisms: Conflict in Response to Empire* (2007), to tackle a very emotive and inflammatory area in a balanced and objective manner and while never condoning

terrorism or by extension, counter-terrorist operations, she seeks to comprehend, rather than taking the easy path of condemnation. While consecutive state governments have worked to develop policies and mutual understandings, which, supporters claim, will improve their collective ability to protect themselves from terrorism, Beyer demonstrates that their efforts conform to a framework of organisation and power relations that she describes as hegemonic governance. Beyer argues for this form of governance as a natural progression from traditional unilateralist approaches. Case studies of the ASEAN and the European Union support her theories and throughout the volume, Beyer's arguments are enhanced by recourse to interviews with practitioners in the field. Above all, Beyer argues for the omnipotence and omnipresence of power relations in any discussion regarding the present or future of global counter-terrorism operations; extensive interviews and primary research on her behalf present compelling arguments for the latter.

A serious deficiency in many contemporary studies on terrorism and counter-terrorism is the tendency to generalise and use an overly simplified approach in the definitions applied both to terrorists and counter-terrorist strategies and Beyer admirably avoids this. The reality is that the world of terrorism and counter-terrorism is a deeply fragmented and heterogeneous one, which contains a kaleidoscopic myriad of diverse and often conflicting groups, trends and currents of thought which differ not only from country to country across the globe, but indeed within individual countries themselves. Beyer captures this plurality and diversity is stressed rather than played down. This leads at times to a blurring and almost confusion of aims within the book. However, on the whole, it is a much better road than the over-simplified, all-explanatory approach which has been adapted by many academics working in the field of terrorism studies, particularly when their work is associated with or linked to a government strategy or organisation.

The questions of identity and cultural inclusion are fundamental issues, which the global community needs to address. The under-estimation of their potential impact is a perilously dangerous exercise that Beyer at all times recognises. The refusal to recognise these symptoms of a spreading societal cancer has already led to the growth of the contemporary Islamist movement and its consequent radicalisation across the Muslim world. It would not be foolish to suggest that a continued polarisation of respective positions could lead to a similar scenario in Western Europe and the strength of the fragile European societal fabric should not be over-estimated. However, in the immediate future, Beyer does argue that it is unlikely that terrorism in Western Europe will provide a catalyst for societal disintegration, although it is time for both sides to engage in a meaningful dialogue and recognise the importance of the issue. Whether such a dialogue will be initiated in the context of shifting power relations between interested parties and if it will succeed along the terms indicated by Beyer are questions which still remain unanswered. Nevertheless, the challenge and opportunity of dialogue are currently there for all parties and it may well be pertinent to address this before the whole question of dialogue with escalating polarisation becomes classified in terms of a problem.