

ASYMMETRIC ALARM, VIRTUAL CONVERGENCE

The Enemy of My Enemy

The Alarming Convergence of Militant Islam and the Extreme Right

George Michael

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Reviewed by Brent Nelson

The subtitle, if not the title alone, of George Michael's book suggests that it is a journalistic compilation of newspaper accounts, regarding militant Muslims, interwoven with snippets from various publications of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, warning against the "extreme right." Michael, however, has produced something much better than that: a thoroughly researched work that approaches, as much as possible, that ideal of *wertfrei* inquiry which should be the objective of any work in the social sciences. His method of examining his subject must be respected as well as his critical assessment of how much alarm there should be about any convergence between the two principals of his subtitle.

At the beginning of "How the Extreme Right Views the Current Crisis," chapter 8, Michael explains why his method of approaching that topic involves publishing extensive excerpts from interviews with representatives of the extreme right such as William L. Pierce, Jared Taylor, David Duke, Nick Griffin, David Myatt, Tom Metzger, Jürgen Graf, and others. To "clarify the ideologies that animate it [the extreme right] . . . requires the reader to develop a phenomenological understanding (i.e., get into the minds of the subjects being studied) of the worldviews of this movement. I seek clarity and comprehension, not endorsement or excusal. Greater attendance to grievance interpretation enables us to better understand the minds of the subjects we study" (p. 220).

This is the method employed by Betty Dobratz and Stephanie Shanks-Meile in their *White Power, White Pride!*,¹ one of the few other

¹ Betty Dobratz and Stephanie Shanks-Meile, *White Power, White Pride! The White*

studies of the extreme right which takes an empirical approach to the subject. Dobratz and Shanks-Meile, perhaps unfortunately, do subject the data which they collected to a type of reductionist-Marxian explanation, the hardly novel assertion that expressions of “white separatism” are manifestations of a false consciousness arising from economic insecurities, both psychological and material. Michael does not seem to bring any such theoretical apparatus to his work, or at least has kept it carefully hidden. Indeed, he does not seem eager to promote any particular thesis, save for that which is implicit in the subtitle, being content to allow a thorough examination of the evidence to lead to his conclusions.

For obvious reasons, Michael is much more dependent on secondary sources in his examination of militant Islam. His two Islamic interviewees, David Myatt and Ahmed Huber, are extreme rightist Westerners who have converted to Islam. His “Selected Bibliography” is restricted to English-language titles (save for a novel in German by Josef Meighy). This is to be expected because the author is an American professor of political science and justice administration, not a specialist in Middle Eastern studies. He does quote extensively from the position papers of militant Islam, especially communiqués from Osama bin Laden.

That official alarm regarding terrorism has, at least in the past, been asymmetric is argued by Michael in the following excerpt from chapter 6, “The US Government’s Response to Political Extremism and Terrorism”:

For most of the 1990s, right-wing terrorists have preoccupied government counterterrorism analysts. Perhaps more focus ought to have been placed on the better organized, more disciplined, and highly financed radical Islamic terrorists that compose the al Qaeda network. Clearly, the first World Trade Center attack of 1993, the bombings of US targets in Saudi Arabia in the mid-1990s, the bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and the attack on the USS *Cole* should have demonstrated the formidable capabilities and intentions of this terrorist network. Despite these red flags, the FBI continued to focus the agency’s counterterrorism efforts on combating right-wing extremist groups. According to a retired FBI official, this pattern

held all the way up to September 11, 2001. (p. 192)

Following a survey of US government prosecutions of right-wing terrorists (pp. 173–92), Michael concludes that "Most of the arrests described in this chapter seem to suggest a high degree of political motivation on the part of the government" (p. 192). Similarly, official alarm was asymmetric when directed to probable terrorist events with the coming of the new millennium: "The FBI's much heralded report on possible Y2K terrorism, *Project Megiddo*, made no mention of Islamic terrorists. In fact, the only serious terrorist threat surrounding the landmark event involved an al Qaeda operative, Ahmed Ressay. Similarly, a Commerce Department official in charge of security went so far as to expurgate all references to Islamic terrorists in a Y2K report on potential terrorist threats" (pp. 192–93).

In his "Introduction," Michael presents the conflicting views of Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington regarding the prospects for future conflicts among civilizations, without endorsing either one. He notes that Benjamin Barber's work, with its focus on world conflict arising from resistance to globalization, may be a useful contribution to understanding what the extreme right and militant Islam have in common (p. 7).

"The Contemporary Extreme Right," chapter 2, finds the essence of right-wing extremism in "Particularism . . . Low regard for democracy . . . Antistatism . . . A conspiracy theory of history . . . [and] A racial or ethnic component . . ." (pp. 12–13). The "typology" of the extreme right in the United States which follows briefly characterizes particular organizations while grouping them into three categories: (1) the revolutionary racialist right, (2) the nonrevolutionary racialist right, and (3) historical revisionism (pp. 13–22). The chapter concludes with an analysis of the radicalization of the American extreme right in support of the thesis that "Since the 1980s, the extreme right has evolved from a movement characterized by ultrapatriotism to one increasingly characterized by nihilism. This change can be explained in large part by various social trends that have significantly changed the racial makeup of the United States" (p. 23). Regardless of the advance in extremism on the right, evidenced by such events as the activities of the Order in 1984 (pp. 27–28) and the bombing of the Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City in 1995 (p. 11), "right wing terrorism has not posed a serious domestic security threat" (p. 29). Michael concludes that "The principal reason for the extreme right's lack of success

is in large part—to use Mao Zedong’s metaphor—the absence of a sea in which to swim” (p. 29). Rather than a sea, there is, as Benjamin Netanyahu has noted, merely “a collection of puddles” (p. 29).

Chapter 3, the second most lengthy in the book, provides a needed survey of “The Development of Militant Islam and Arab Nationalism.” According to Daniel Pipes, Islamism is “essentially an effort to transform the religion of Islam into a contemporary political ideology. . . . Pipes used the following terms to characterize militant Islam: Radical utopian . . . Totalitarian . . . Antidemocratic . . . Antimoderate . . . Anti-Semitic . . . Anti-Western . . . Unwilling to coexist . . .” (pp. 33–34). Obviously, these converge in at least three areas with the previously detailed essence of the extreme right. The extreme right, however, is not anti-Western, has not developed the utopian element which is latent in demands for a white separatist state, and has been, thus far, only a weak echo of the fascist totalitarianism of various European states.

In the history of the Muslim Brotherhood which follows, probably the most interesting section is the account of how the Egyptian Sayid Qutb developed the political ideology of Islamism in the early twentieth century (pp. 37–44). The development of “Islamic anti-Semitism” (pp. 44–52) is central to the book’s theme because “there is considerable convergence in the anti-Semitic narratives of both militant Islam and the contemporary extreme right” (p. 52). The rest of the chapter (pp. 52–83) presents a detailed history of the resurgence of militant Islam as manifested in Khomeini’s Islamic revolution in Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, and al Qaeda.

Qutb might be best described as a radical traditionalist, though Michael does not use that term. He argued that, “Islam offered a way of life regulated by God’s laws and nature. All other types of government . . . communism, capitalism, democracy, nationalism—were human constructs and thus woefully inadequate” (p. 39). For Qutb, “the only place on earth that could genuinely be called *Dar-al-Islam* (the abode of Islam) was those countries and territories in which an Islamic state had been established, [and] sharia was recognized as the law . . .” (p. 40). Despite the seemingly extremist nature of Qutb’s philosophy, he was a universalist, opposed to racism and ethnocentrism (p. 40).

The rise of Khomeini also heralded a universalism, “a gradual decline in the potency of Arab nationalism” (p. 56). Similarly, Hezbollah considers “the national borders between Lebanon and Palestine to be artificial boundaries and an artifact of colonialism. The party rejects

the classification of Muslims into national, ethnic, and racial categories, as well as the notion of Arab supremacy in Islam" (p. 58). Although Osama bin Laden grew up as a Wahhabi, a sect which "has equated Islam with the Arab world," and which sought to emulate the generation of Muslims living during the life of the prophet Muhammad, bin Laden has also been influenced by universalism, enabling him "to reach out to Muslims in various parts of the world, regardless of their race, ethnicity, culture, or Islamic denomination" (p. 64). Al Qaeda's great innovation, its addition to Qutb's universalist ideology, has been that it "has institutionalized the operation of suicide attacks," "suicide terrorism," a tactic that has persisted "because it works" (p. 69).

"Militant Islam in the United States," chapter 4, presents evidence that Islamist groups have found the United States a productive source of funding and recruits. These "foreign extremists have been able to penetrate the United States under the radar screen of intelligence agencies because of its liberal immigration policies and porous borders. The attacks visited upon the United States on September 11, 2001, were a tragic illustration of both an intelligence failure and an immigration policy gone awry" (p. 84).

Until the attacks of September 11, 2001, US law enforcement officials showed "little concern for Islamist ideology" (p. 84). This was despite the significant terrorist event of February 26, 1993, in which six persons were killed and 1,042 wounded in an attack on the World Trade Center (p. 87). Before this event, both Hamas and Hezbollah had been successful in raising funds in the United States (pp. 91-92).

Approximately six million Muslims now live in the United States, most of them having entered as immigrants from more than sixty nations (p. 94). In addition to these, "it is estimated that up to one million Americans have converted to Islam. Of this million, the overwhelming majority are black. Whites number probably no more than 50,000" (p. 94). Michael examines the Nation of Islam at some length (pp. 94-100), concluding that its "impact on Islam in the United States cannot be overstated" (p. 98). Muammar Qaddafi, dictator of Libya, "has on numerous occasions urged blacks and Native Americans to create an independent and sovereign state inside the United States and has offered to arm and train them to accomplish this goal" (p. 99). Qaddafi successfully recruited members of the Chicago street gang known as El Rukns (p. 100). "Allegedly, sometime during the mid-1980s, the gang received \$2.5 million from Qaddafi to commit acts of

terrorism in the United States” (p. 101). Qaddafi also gave an interest-free loan of \$5 million to the Nation of Islam (p. 101).

Numerous Islamic “lone wolves” have received some attention for their acts of terrorism (pp. 101–107). Also, since 1995, “somewhere from 1,000 to 2,000 Americans have left the United States to join the ranks of mujahideen fighters overseas” (p. 101).

“Interaction between the Extreme Right and Islamic/Arab Extremists,” chapter 5, the most lengthy in the book, begins with a survey of cooperation between the Third Reich and Islam, with emphasis on the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, and considers how National Socialism served as a model for Arab nationalism after World War II (pp. 112–24). Brief attention is given to relations between Black September and some figures in the European extreme right (pp. 124–28) and the inspiration given to the Third Position movement by Muammar Qaddafi (pp. 128–30). Most readers will find of greatest interest Michael’s investigation of any known possibility of a connection between Islamists and the Oklahoma City bombing (pp. 131–36). Links between Saddam Hussein and Radio Islam and various European extreme rightists receive passing attention (pp. 136–40). The most useful portion of the chapter is the primary source material embodied in interviews with a variety of extreme rightists (pp. 142–72). It is this section which provides substantial evidence for determining what convergence may exist.

Possibly the two most interesting interviews in this book are those with David Myatt (pp. 142–48) and with Ahmed Huber (pp. 148–56). Both Myatt, a British subject, and Huber, a Swiss national, are converts to Islam who are also professed adherents to Hitler’s model of National Socialism. Since convergence would seem to be personified in these two individuals, the question immediately arises how they explain their synthesis of thought when one considers the contradictions between Michael’s criteria for the extreme right and Pipes’s criteria for Islamists. How do they reconcile the particularism, i.e., the racial-ethnic component, of the extreme right with the anti-Western stance of Islamists and the universalism of Islam itself?

Myatt admits to experiencing some initial difficulty in reconciling National Socialism and universalist Islam, but insists that the former has been “misunderstood” and really favors “independent homelands where the different races and cultures could live in freedom according to their own customs” (p. 144). He concludes that “in the end I had to accept that Islam and the way of Nature—the numinous way of folk

culture—were different ways of living" (p. 146). Ultimately, Myatt seizes on "tactical or strategic reasons" to ally with Muslims against "the New World Order" (p. 147).

Huber finds an affinity between Hitler and Islam in their common opposition to usury (p. 152). While Huber does not address the racial issue, he does have more experience in communicating with both young Muslims and "young right-wing Germans" and finds "common ground" between them in their opposition to the "so-called modernity of the modern world, which in many ways has gone far away from God. It is against creation, it is against nature . . ." (p. 153). Huber's synthesis of thought seems to have survived the test of practice because he was a major participant in the formation of the Islamist support group al-Taqwa (pp. 148–49, 155–56).

Limited cooperation appears to have yielded some short-term gains as evidenced by the common efforts of extreme rightists and Islamists in the area of historical revisionism (pp. 156–59). Despite his notoriety as a racist, David Duke, according to his account, experienced only positive reactions to his speaking tour in Bahrain and Qatar (pp. 161–64). The National Alliance's William L. Pierce, however, invited no such cooperative efforts, asserting that, "I have no sympathy for Islam or any other Semitic religion from the Middle East" (p. 166).

Michael concludes that there are two significant differences between far right terrorists and all other terrorists. The former "have had no significant state sponsors" (p. 168) and have shown none of the "propensity for martyrdom" of the Islamists (p. 169). Suicide terrorism among right-wing extremists, thus far, has been limited to the pages of William Pierce's novel *The Turner Diaries* (p. 169). The rightist interviewees all speak in terms of tactics, none of them, not even Myatt, evincing a sense of self-sacrifice on behalf of something transcendent.

"The Role of Nongovernmental Organizations in the Aftermath of 9/11," chapter 7, explores the activities of so-called "watchdog" organizations which investigate rightist and Islamic groups and frequently give the results of their inquiries to government agencies. It is Michael's belief that "private monitoring groups, such as the ADL and the Southern Poverty Law Center, have exerted considerable pressure on law enforcement agencies to take a strong position toward the extreme right" (p. 192). While the US government does not have the power to proscribe extremist ideology, "what is often ignored is that nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have inserted themselves

into this area of public policy and have done much to fill the void. They have persuaded the government to take a strong stand vis-à-vis the extreme right, and on numerous occasions they have augmented the government's efforts" (p. 207).

NGOs have perhaps been even more influential in shaping public interpretations of the attacks of September 11, 2001. "A major objective of the Jewish defense NGOs in the aftermath of 9/11 has been to convince the public that the terrorists targeted the United States not because of the country's policies but because of its values—democracy, freedom, secularism, and modernism" (p. 214).

"How the Extreme Right Views the Current Crisis," chapter 8, draws upon interviews and reveals the wide range of rightist reactions to the attacks of September 11, 2001 (p. 221). Rightists interviewed did, however, agree in their fear of government repression (pp. 222–24). They also were united in dissenting from the official view that the United States was attacked because of its "values" (pp. 224–28). Considerable attention is given to conspiracy theories among some of the extremists, such as Duke, Graf, and Huber (pp. 228–38). Even more attention is given to rightists' reaction against the US war on Iraq and their critique of neoconservatism (pp. 238–54). It is to Michael's credit that he reports this rightist analysis in some detail and does not leave the reader with the impression that rightists explain world events only in terms of conspiracies. Michael also notes that neoconservatives have promoted Eliot Cohen's concept of a "World War IV" (p. 247). He concludes that, "Despite the protestations of the ADL, there is strong evidence to support the notion that not only have Jewish organizations been in the forefront in advocating a war against Iraq, but also that they are very influential in this regard as well" (p. 252). Nevertheless, the situation is complex: while 62 percent of all Americans supported the Iraq war in March 2003, it was supported by 72 percent of "evangelical Christians" but only 52 percent of Jews (p. 253).

"How Militant Islam Views the Current Crisis," the rather brief chapter 9, is dependent upon secondary sources save for an interview with Ahmed Huber, who scarcely qualifies as a typical Islamist. Otherwise, the survey quotes extensively from the various communiqués of Osama bin Laden.

"Prospects for Cooperation between Militant Islam and the Extreme Right," chapter 10, is primarily a series of interviews with representatives of the extreme right. While David Duke and Ahmed

Huber see possibilities for cooperation in the production of propaganda, spokesmen for the right in Britain (John Tyndall, Nick Griffin) are in general sharply critical of Islam. Jared Taylor sees the chances for cooperation as "slim to none" (p. 278). Sam Francis was equally dismissive of any alliance with Muslims (p. 285). Steven Barry's analysis of the differences between the extreme right and the Islamists is most penetrating. Barry concludes that:

When we strip away the surface glitter of the matter, the only common ground between militant Islam and the 'extreme right'. . . is their common hatred of American-invented religious indifferentism . . . —for entirely different reasons. The former because they rightfully object to the United States smearing the face of Islam with our secularism; the latter because the official secularism of the United States refuses to deify their genes and raise their race to a state religion. There is no basis there for cooperation. (p. 280)

Michael concludes that "Currently it is still very speculative to predict how the strange relationship between militant Islam and the extreme right will unfold and develop" (p. 295).

"Conclusion," chapter 11, sustains this approach of measured judgment: ". . . several current trends have occasioned some strange alliances. Although it should not be overstated, there would appear to be some potential for cooperation between the extreme right and militant Islam in that they both share a strikingly similar critique on several issues" (pp. 305–306). Such potential could become especially troublesome because it could upend the US officials' reliance on (an unadmitted) ethnic profiling: "If well-funded Middle Eastern terrorists could enlist the support of terrorists with white, Anglo-Saxon ethnic features, it could present an intelligence nightmare to authorities" (p. 306). However, "One major obstacle to any kind of serious collaboration is the fact that in the United States, there is no real right-wing terrorist infrastructure to speak of: leaderless resistance—actually a sign of desperation—predominates" (p. 307). The "greatest potential for cooperation" is "in the area of propaganda" (p. 307). Michael closes with an example of "the cross-fertilization of rhetoric" between the extremes when, in December 2005, Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and David Duke agreed in dismissing the Holocaust as "a myth" (p. 309). This cooperation, however, is little more than

echoic, a convergence that arises only from a virtual focus.

One must wonder if the more baleful convergence is one which may be arising between radical African Americans and militant Islamists. The one million black Muslims in the United States might give terrorists, if not a sea in which to swim, at least a large lake, and one that grows ever larger. Moreover, alienation among blacks is probably at least as acute as that among the extreme rightists. According to a Gallup poll taken in April 2003, “78 percent of whites supported the war on Iraq, whereas only 29 percent of blacks did likewise” (p. 269). Who will dare to investigate this other area of potential convergence?

It would be unreasonable, however, to expect this book to be something quite other than what it is. What it is, moreover, is much to be preferred to anything else that has been written on this topic. George Michael deserves credit for his adherence to fact over theory and for the many interesting facts that he reveals along the way (e.g., the account, on p. 203, of Madeline Albright’s callous dismissal of the impact of economic sanctions on Iraq). His observation that the terrorist threat to the United States is directly related to the failure to control the nation’s borders (pp. 296–97) should be more widely disseminated. Students who are researching the extreme right and militant Islam need to encounter this book before they accept the publications of the ADL as the final word. *The Enemy of My Enemy* belongs in almost all academic libraries and in most public libraries.

Brent Nelson, Ph.D., is the author of America Balkanized (Monterey, Va.: AICF, 1994).