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Political Science

A Foreigner Carrying in the Crook of His Arm a Tiny Bomb
Amitava Kumar
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Nearly a decade after 9/11, that day's events continue to reverberate through American life. The Homeland Security Act bestowed unprecedented powers upon federal, state, and local governments in the name of fighting the war on terror. What many news media and, indeed, many American citizens seem to forget is that terrorism is not new to the US nor to other nations.

The war against terrorism, the extraordinary powers government gives itself to fight it, and the use of torture as an intelligence-gathering technique are the themes of Amitava Kumar's contemplation of the stories of two men who may have been scapegoats of the US government. His book also explores the roots of Abu Ghraib, the US response to 9/11, and the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Kumar has authored three other books and is a professor of English at Vassar College. Indian-born and a long-term US resident, Kumar is able to compare and comment on events in both countries. For example, he views 9/11 and the Mumbai attacks of 2008 as somewhat similar events. His comparison of the unsettling popularity of sting operations in US law enforcement and in Indian TV news reporting is startling and thought-provoking. The book's title is a slight paraphrase ("bomb" is substituted for "book") of a work by the late Cairo-born Edmond Jabès (1912-1991), one of France's most famous poets.

More than a piece of reportage, *A Foreigner Carrying in the Crook of His Arm a Tiny Bomb* illuminates the dangers to civil liberties from extraordinary governmental powers and torture's questionable effectiveness. Kumar questions all these things and more, including himself, in writing that is rich with facts and interlaced with personal opinion, but never strident. He easily engages the reader by moving beyond politics to consider the effects of political decisions on ordinary people, people caught up in the war on terror in both the US and India. His clarity of thought makes sense of the stories he tells.

Whatever one's views on 9/11 and its accompanying legal changes, the use of torture, or

the war on terror, *A Foreigner Carrying in the Crook of His Arm a Tiny Bomb* is a worthwhile read. Kumar's perspective is one not often seen in American writings on similar subjects. That alone would recommend the book; the high quality of the writing should secure its place on any library shelf.

J. G. Stinson