

***The Making of Pakistani Human Bombs. Khuram Iqbal,
London: Lexington Books, 2016, 212.***

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The book, *The Making of Pakistani Bombs*, written by Khuram Iqbal, offers a multi-level analysis of the factors influencing suicide terrorism in Pakistan. The book is divided into seven parts. The first part traces the history of suicide terrorism in Pakistan, followed by an introduction to research problems and methodology adopted by the author. The book further goes into an in-depth analysis of the factors influencing formation of human bombs taking into account three levels of study: environmental, organisational level and individual. The author has incorporated personal, demographic, economic and marital characteristics of the Pakistani human bombs. As the discussion unfolds, the author wraps up in the conclusion that Pakistan, like many other theatres, is another classic example endorsing multi-causal approaches.

Owing to different accounts, where suicide bombing took roots, the author has specified a single definition of suicide terrorism: “Suicide terrorism is a premeditated act of ideologically or religiously motivated violence, in which the success of the operation is contingent on self-inflicted death by the perpetrator(s) during the attack.”

Keeping the above definition in mind, the author has identified the birth of suicide bombing in Pakistan by linking it to al-Qaeda. Contrary to this explanation the author also provides us with another view point and that is the period of Indo-Pak war of 1965. According to the author, the threat landscape in Pakistan changed after 2007 i.e., after the military operation in Lal Masjid, which gave birth to a new generation of militants. The suicide attacks seemingly increased each year from 2005 till 2010 after which a decline was recorded in 2011-2012.

Due to insufficient material available on Pakistan, the factors discussed were extracted from the existing literature on the genesis of suicide

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terrorism in other conflict-ridden societies such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine. These five factors included: nationalism, Islamic fundamentalism, effectiveness of suicide bombings, relative or absolute deprivation and revenge. The book takes into account the common factors extracted from various theatres and applies it tactfully onto Pakistan.

The second chapter moves onto explaining the primary research questions and methodology of the study. The main question of the study is that “to what extent do the existing theories on suicide terrorism explain the emergence and evolution of the tactic in Pakistan?” This is further aided by secondary questions, which comprise of the issues related to the profiles of militant groups involved in suicide bombing, the reason for the dramatic increase in suicide bombings in Pakistan and probing the issue of, why the sectarian militant groups as well the Baloch nationalists did not resort to such means to acquire objectives. The issues mentioned were never discussed earlier in the context of Pakistan, thus, rendering them extremely unique and significant.

The five contributing factors of suicide terrorism mentioned earlier are tested as hypothesis to check their applicability in Pakistan’s context. The book tactfully unravels with explaining each context individually and categorically.

First is the environmental level. According to the author, it would be best understood by studying the history of jihad in Pakistan. Moving on to the driving forces of suicide terrorism at the organisational level, the author via various examples try to prove that organisational profiling is inadequate to the emergence of suicide bombing in Pakistan. Next level is the individual level which must be discussed to fill in a lot of gaps. The author has made use of 160 profiles of suicidal and non-suicidal militants originating from Pakistan to substantiate his argument.

The motivation behind the actions of the terrorists blowing themselves up is an extremely significant element to study and that is exactly what the book comprises of in the second last chapter. Due to very scarce research available on the Pakistani suicide bombers, the author provides a context-specific analysis of the description of demographic, economic, educational and marital traits. After going through the research, it is concluded that Pakistan has by far the youngest suicide bombers.

Furthermore, the general profile set by the author helps in establishing who the bombers are but it still does not adequately answer the “why?” For this, the author in the last chapter has placed the general profile into the organisational and environmental contexts systematically and has cross-examined this segment of the Pakistani society in light of the environment that nurtures them and the organisations that manipulate the vulnerabilities to achieve their goal.

Conclusively, the author brings the readers down to his point initially discussed that the existing theories on suicide terrorism have limited utility in explaining the emergence and evolution of suicide bombers in Pakistan. So, the term ‘multi-causality’ is used and applied in all three levels. Moreover, the book happens to be the first general profile of suicidal and non-suicidal militants in Pakistan. Despite the difficulties and limitations relating to the sensitivity of the issue, the efforts done by the author must be appraised. Finally, a contribution towards the policy side has been achieved by publishing this book. By identifying the contributing factors behind such a dire act, it may be easier for the government to deal with the issue more responsibly in the future. The author has proposed a recommendation to formulate policies that deal with casual factors at all the levels rather than fixating on a single one.

The book proves to be a coherent and well-organised account of the genesis of this entire phenomenon. The efforts made by the author in attempting to make use of both primary and secondary data despite the limitations faced pertaining to the sensitivity of the topic, is in fact commendable. However, there are certain elements that could be added to further enhance the quality of research. Keeping in mind the consequences Pakistan had to face, a book on such a topic should have given more pragmatic and issue-specific recommendations. Nevertheless, the book is an extraordinary attempt by the author into addressing this much needed issue through a context-specific and multi-causal approach. This will hopefully give impetus to raising this issue and carrying out more research on it.