

Book Review

Rohan Gunaratna and Khuram Iqbal, *Pakistan Terrorism Ground Zero*,
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For those who have ever wondered as to why Pakistan continues to dominate the media headlines in the recent years, the exact answers to the question are presented in this book. Although the country has demonstrated its efforts in the global war on terror, the threat emanating from Pakistan continues to impact both the regional and international security. Many fail to grasp the gravity and the complexity of the threat that emerges from within and simultaneously challenges the country. For this reason, contextualizing the militancy in Pakistan and its region at large becomes imperative not only to demystify common perceptions but also to plan a long-term strategy to counter the serious threat of terrorism. . Against this backdrop, “*Pakistan Terrorism Ground Zero*” by Rohan Gunaratna and Khuram Iqbal offer an interesting and compelling case as to how Pakistan became an epicenter of global terrorism over the years. Ultimately, this work demonstrates why grasping the complex nature of the threat is paramount in winning a crucial battle against the global war on terror.

The authors introduce the readers to the backdrop to the problem currently faced by the nation of Pakistan. The proxy war in Afghanistan fought between the superpowers produced generations of fighters from Pakistan and other nations to fight against the Soviet Union through years of indoctrination. The collapse of the Soviet Union marked an end of an era, leaving these warriors with arms and the will to fight, but without an enemy. Such environment became conducive to the country in becoming the most important sanctuary for both the local and foreign fighters to achieve the so-called incomplete mission of bringing down

the remaining super power in the world. The negligence of the international community in handling the aftermath of the Cold War, and the national policies promulgated by Islamabad vis-à-vis the insurgents proved to be a strategic blunder, which eventually proved fatal to Pakistan in the long run.

Starting with an explanation of tribal Pakistan as the epicenter of global terrorism, Gunaratna and Iqbal depict the manner in which the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) emerged as a new headquarter of Al Qaeda and the global jihad movement. They provide a concrete background to FATA and offer a systematic analysis on why the tribal areas serve to be the most important terrorist sanctuary in the country, which bears significance to both the regional and international security. The book subsequently shifts the focus on mapping out the myriad of insurgent groups that function under the umbrella of the Pakistani Taliban. The authors detail the generic profile of the sub-groups from its membership, leadership and organizational structure, methods of finance, operational capabilities, and links with other local and international groups. Ultimately, this section depicts the complexity of the Pakistani Taliban, which according to the authors is not a monolithic entity. Different factions are driven by different motivations and goal, and the authors argue that a comprehensive strategy needs to be promulgated in addressing the varied interests of the outfits.

The anomaly that devours the country takes in many forms- the most deadly being the stark rise in suicide attacks in the recent years. Although many scholars favor to present a single overarching theory in explicating the phenomenon, Gunaratna and Iqbal assert otherwise. The motivating forces behind suicide terrorism in Pakistan are an amalgamation of cultural, religious, social, political, and economic factors. A 'one-size-fits all' theory does not do any justice in truly grasping the suicide terrorist threat that pervades the entire nation, which also extends beyond its borders.

The writers also reveal the significance of Karachi as a hub of terrorism in Pakistan. They illustrate the intricate nature of terrorist

groups and criminal activities that live side by side with the sectarian and ethnic violence that are rampant in the financial centre of the country. This part of the book particularly illustrates the threat landscape of Pakistan from a distinct outlook. Not only is it crucial to understand the profile of the different terrorist outfits operating in the country outside of FATA, but the presentation of Karachi in this context adds a flavour in highlighting the intricate nature of threat that emanates from the country. As the threat from within inevitably spills over to its region, the authors urge for an awakening of the neighbouring countries to fight against respective domestic instabilities and encourage harmonious relations in preventing the proliferating menace in the region. This deadly anomaly is incurable by Pakistani efforts alone, but requires an unparalleled cooperation of the international community.

The authors give much credit to Pakistan's unprecedented effort in fighting the war on terrorism alongside with the US, in contrary to the numerous accusations made against the country as a perpetrator of militancy and terrorism in the region. As Islamabad became the frontline fighter and thus the frontline target of terrorist groups, the nation of Pakistan is now paying the price of countering this menace. The fundamental message behind all of this is that Pakistan is in fact the victim of terrorism. The writers exhort the readers to realize the severity and the complication of the anomaly that haunts the country, and calls for the need to strengthen international cooperation as a way forward in fighting this rigorous battle against Pakistan's most fatal cancer.

Gunaratna and Iqbal dissect the nature of the terrorist threat which emanates from Pakistan, and unfolds its intricacy in a succinct manner. They do not rely on abstract academic theories in explicating the anomaly. Instead, their arguments are informative and narrated in a logical sequence which is substantiated by anecdotal evidences. They excellently carry the readers through the threat landscape systematically, in an attempt to map out the status quo which is not easily digestible to many. Simultaneously, this work debunks the common misperceptions and clarifies the confusions that arise from grasping the current trends in Pakistan. This surely is a challenge in itself which has been achieved by