

## Book Review

Robert A. Pape and James K. Feldman. *Cutting the Fuse: The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism and How to Stop It*.

Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010. 349 pp.; price: US \$ 30.-; ISBN: 9-780226645605.

Reviewed by Irm Haleem

In their most recent book, *Cutting the Fuse: The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism and How to Stop It*, Robert Pape and James Feldman offer us their new analysis of the causes of suicide terrorism. To this end, the authors present detailed case studies on the causes of suicide terrorism in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Lebanon, Israel and Palestine, Chechnya, as well as those related to Al-Qaeda. In each of these specific case studies, the authors examine variables such as the nature and number of groups, their goals, the specific trajectory of suicide campaigns, their targets and weapons, local community support and the composition of recruitment. The book is structured around three hypotheses: (i) foreign military occupations are the major factor leading to suicide terrorism; (ii) foreign military occupations also account for transnational suicide terrorism; and (iii) suicide terrorism can only be effectively combated in the long-term through a strategic change in the military policies of the occupying state. Fundamentally, the arguments in this book can be understood in philosophical terms as violence being an existential rejection of oppression; oppression of host population being the inevitable consequence of the foreign occupation. This point is perhaps most directly put forth by Pape in his most recent article “It’s the Occupation, Stupid” (*Foreign Policy*, October 18, 2010) wherein Pape examines the negative consequences of the various cases of occupation.

In many ways, *Cutting the Fuse* can be seen as an extension of Pape’s earlier work entitled *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005). There are perhaps three critical differences. First, while *Dying to Win* is limited to pre-2005 data, *Cutting the Fuse* assembles data from around the world for the period 1980 to 2009. Second, while *Dying to Win* offered nationalism as the cause of suicide terrorism, thereby linking the rise of foreign occupations to the rise of suicide terrorism, it failed to shed light on the causes of *transnational* suicide terrorism. In other words, while nationalism can explain suicide terrorism in terms of a reaction to the foreign occupation of one’s country, what of the cases where individuals voluntarily take part in suicide missions in response to a foreign occupation of another country? An example of the latter would be the many non-Afghan ‘Taliban’ fighters currently fighting alongside the Taliban against the US-NATO contingencies in Afghanistan. *Cutting the Fuse* purports to address this gap in understanding. Pape and Feldman contend that they offer an explanation for transnational suicide terrorism in terms of what they refer to as “dueling loyalties”. The authors explain the notion of ‘dueling loyalties’ in the following manner: “a classic instance of individuals with multiple [ethnic] national loyalties to different stable communities of people associated with a territory, distinctive culture, and common language, one

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loyalty for their kindred community and another for their current country of residence, in which the loyalty of their kindred community wins out” (p.11). Third, *Cutting the Fuse* offers a far more assertive argument for a change in the United States military strategy of occupation (of Iraq and particularly of Afghanistan) and portrayed military aggression.

The merits of *Cutting the Fuse* far outweigh its weakness. As to merits: the book repeatedly points out that “the principle cause of suicide terrorism is resistance to foreign occupation, *not Islamic fundamentalism*” (p. 20 -emphasis added, IH).[1] Throughout the book, the authors point out that an overly aggressive foreign policy (such as one involving military occupations) engenders an equally aggressive rejection (such as suicide terrorism).

Another outstanding merit of this book is in its most detailed case studies. Rarely can one find in a volume such diverse and data-rich case studies.[2] For example, in explaining the almost non-existence of suicide terrorism within Pakistan in the period prior to 2001 but its steady rise since 2002, Pape and Feldman note that the post-2002 US-Pakistani alliance has been based on what they refer to as an “indirect occupation”: “...the indirectly occupied country (Pakistan) gives a higher-priority to the goals of the indirect occupier (the United States) than its national interests alone would warrant” (pp. 139-140). One may also understand the latter dynamic in terms of what I call a ‘dominant-subservient matrix’.[3] It is such subservience that Pape and Feldman argue has led to increased resentments within Pakistan, which has led to an increase in the anti-Pakistani government sentiments of the population, which has in turn benefited the recruitment efforts of Islamist extremist groups. The rise of suicide terrorism in this case, argue the authors, is thus linked directly to a quasi-occupation of the country. Finally, one other merit of the book deserves a mention. The concluding chapter of the book offers an excellent analysis of why the immediate post-2001 ‘us versus them’ narrative that had become popular in the United States not only demonized the Muslims at large—and unfairly so, as the authors argue—but led to ill-suited foreign policies, most notably the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. The authors conclude by noting that “over 95% of the suicide attacks are in response to foreign occupation” [329] and that therefore a change in the nature of U.S. foreign policy is imperative for the long term national security of the United States.

Despite its many merits, however, the book surprisingly suffers from three most critical omissions. First, the central thesis of the book, that suicide terrorism is a reaction to foreign occupations, does not address the issue of sectarian suicide terrorism. If foreign occupations explain suicide terrorism directed against the occupiers, what explains the suicide terrorism directed against the sectarian other (Shi’ia vs. Sunni) within the same country? Pakistan, for example, has historically suffered from bouts of sectarian violence and a number of cases of suicide terrorism within Pakistan today are of a sectarian nature (targeting the Shia or the Sunni ‘other’) and are not jihadi in nature (targeting a foreign entity). Second, Pape and Feldman’s assertion that suicide terrorism, in the majority of the cases, is not about Islamic fundamentalism does not explain why much of the discourse is *Islamic* in rhetoric. To be sure, Pape and Feldman do mention that the *Islamic* rhetoric of Islamist extremist groups “functions mainly as a recruiting tool in the context of national resistance” (p. 20). However, they fail to explain the

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critical link between the appearance of religious tenets in radical Islamist rhetoric and the motivations of individuals that voluntarily join Islamist extremist groups. Third—and this is perhaps the most surprising, if not disappointing, omission—Pape and Feldman’s explanation of the causes of transnational suicide terrorism as being a matter of complex nationalism featuring what they refer to as “dueling loyalties” (p. 11) completely omits any mention of the notion of the *ummah* – “a fundamental concept in Islam”, as noted by John Esposito.[4] The *ummah* refers to a belief in the “essential unity...of Muslims from diverse cultural and geographical settings.”[5] While Pape and Feldman’s reference to what they call ‘dueling loyalties’ as an explanation of the motivations for transnational terrorism sounds strikingly similar to the Islamic notion of the *ummah*, no actual reference is made to the notion of the *ummah* in either the text or the index of the book. Such a critical omission tarnishes the otherwise comprehensive nature of the analysis in this book.

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### Notes

[1]Although I have offered only one citation of this point, the authors repeat this point throughout the book.

[2]For those in academe, this makes for a most useful survey of varied cases that students can appreciate given its comparative analysis layout.

[3]I have coined the term ‘dominant-subservient matrix’ here in order to explain the point that I feel the authors are trying to put across. However, it should be noted that this is not a term used by the authors in the book.

[4]See John Esposito’s analysis of the critical and central notion of the *ummah* in Islamic thought in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 327.

[5]Ibid, p. 327.