

Jihadism in Pakistan

Antonio Giustozzi; Jihadism in Pakistan: Al-Qaeda, Islamic State and the local militants; London: I.B. Tauris; 2023; 256.

Eisha Tauqeer Kayan¹

Afghanistan, a barren land loaded with the invasions of foreign powers and their defeat, is rightfully known as the "graveyard of empires." Empire after empire, nation after nation has tried to conquer the land but miserably failed. One reason could be deemed that the people of the land were eager to fight the 'non-Muslim' enemies that stepped into their land. This narrative gave birth to the concept of jihad which means 'struggle' in Arabic. This term gained significance in the 1970s and 1980s when a group, namely Al Qaeda, promoted violence against such intruders and had consequential impacts across the borders.

Pakistan, a Muslim-majority country, was lured into this fight against the enemy and was made to send its Mujahideen for the Afghan wars. This may be referred to as a step towards Islamic revivalism but it was beyond that. It was a strategy used by the state government to protect the interests of the state against their eternal rival, India, by preparing generations of Islamic radicals to fight against the oppressor of Muslims within the state and around the world. This is exactly what the book "*Jihadism in Pakistan: Al Qaeda, Islamic State and The Local Militants*" by Antonio Giustozzi sheds light on.

The book offers insights about the relationship between various local jihadist groups in Pakistan, the global jihadist groups i.e. Al Qaeda

¹ Reviewer is a Research Intern at Islamabad Policy Research Institute, Pakistan.

Eisha Tauqeer Kayani

and Islamic State, and the relationship of these jihadist movements with the Pakistani state. It discusses the emergence and evolution of the local jihadist groups and their oscillating relationship with both the “deep state” and the global jihadists.

The author of the book, Antonio Giustozzi, has extensively worked on jihadist groups and insurgencies. This book heavily relies on primary sources in the form of interviews, meetings and questionnaires. He has written several other books and research papers covering areas of Pakistan, Afghanistan and terrorism, such as *War, Politics and Society in Afghanistan, 1978-1992*, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop: the Neo-Taliban Insurgency, 2002-7* etc. Giustozzi has conducted about 114 interviews and meetings with the members of the jihadist groups for this work. He carefully incorporated these interviews into his work to enhance the evidence and provide authentic accounts on this subject.

The author dives deep into comprehensive details of the local jihadist groups residing in Pakistan and traces their origins, splinters groups and their linkage with the jihadist groups. The book encompasses an extensive study of jihadism, dividing it into five chapters primarily discussing Pakistan's deep state relations with the global jihadists, strategies of global jihadists and explicit details about the TTP, Sunni supremacist groups and the jihadist groups active in Kashmir.

While reading the book, one may notice that the book often times relies on conjectures. For instance, the author alleges that the Pakistani local jihadist groups showcased global jihadist tendencies under the influence of Al Qaeda and some of them carried out attacks in the West. Nonetheless, later on, the author admits that there is no evidence of such attacks leading to the debate of whether these tendencies were authentic or opportunistic. This suggests that the book is prone to bias by the author. It is important to note that the statements and interviews carried out in order to support his work included members of Al Qaeda and local jihadist groups who showed

deep resentment against the Pakistani authorities which also reflects an anti-state narrative and only confirms the bias of the author.

The complex relationship between the Pakistani “deep state” and the jihadist groups paints a picture of contradictions between the Pakistani government and the “deep state” which has been referred to as a “double game” in the book. The book fails to acknowledge the dynamics of the domestic policies and historical contextualisation, which are equally significant in understanding certain events and policies. The muddling behaviour of the state government's crackdown on jihadist groups and simultaneously, the "deep state's" support for these groups may be referred to as "hypocrisy" from the vantage point of the West. It is just as important to understand it from the perspective of Pakistan; this 'double game' was a necessary tool of statecraft that possibly lacked strategic foresight.

This book counts greatly on the details of the role of men in the jihadist groups and completely overlooks the role and recruitment of women into these groups. There have been many instances where these jihadist groups attracted and forced women to carry out suicide bombings. There are equal to no accounts of the role of women in sharpening and broadening the lens of jihadism in Pakistan.

The author extensively explores the evolving landscape of the local jihadist groups in Pakistan that can be applicable in understanding the emerging violence of local jihadist groups primarily, the violence carried out by TTP, which poses grave threats and challenges for Pakistan. This book offers highly informative insights into the evolving dynamics of the jihadist groups, their strategies and the impact on the regional security of Pakistan.

The entire book encapsulates all the essential details about the jihadist movements, their motivations and inclinations towards global jihadist tendencies that may render important details to the people interested

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in the area of terrorism, insurgency, their causes and their impact on Pakistan. It is important to note here that this book may stand in good stead for a person having prior knowledge of the history and evolution of terrorism in the region, as this book lacks impartiality to some extent. This book, nonetheless, provides the most in-depth study of the jihadist groups in Pakistan. One may say that this book is enriched with details of jihadist groups, but falls victim to the crafted biases of the author.

Overall, the book contains exclusive details of the global jihadist groups, local jihadist groups, and their relationship with the Pakistani authorities, and the “deep state” backed by interviews and meetings with the relevant people and groups. This book proves to be helpful for people craving for in-depth study and dynamics of the local jihadist groups in Pakistan and their relationship with the global jihadist groups such as Al Qaeda and Islamic State.■