

# Review

## ***Cutting the Fuse: The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism and How to Stop It***

Robert A. Pape and James K. Feldman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010. 360 pp.

Sunil K. Sahu \*

Since 9/11 there has been a burgeoning literature on terrorism written by journalists, scholars, policy makers, diplomats, and military professionals. The last decade has also witnessed a dramatic increase in suicide terrorist attacks—violent attacks designed to kill others where the death of the attacker is a necessary part of the action—especially against American interests. There were twenty suicide terrorist attacks worldwide in 2000, one of which was anti-American inspired; the number of such attacks increased ten-fold by 2010, 90% of which were anti-American inspired. Although suicide bombing was used by imperial Japan at the end of World War II, the *kamikaze* tactics, they have not since been used by nation states. Instead, non-state actors such as Hezbollah, Tamil Tigers, Hamas and al-Qaeda have used suicide attacks since the early 1980s, especially in the last decade. The modern suicide terrorism is usually traced back to the Hezbollah attacks against Israeli military installations and American assets in Lebanon in 1982, and the phenomenon has been studied extensively in recent years. Scholars have offered

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\* **Sunil K. Sahu** is professor of political science and chair of the department of political science at DePauw University. He specializes in comparative politics, politics of developing nations (including China and India), and international politics/International political economy. He is the author of *Technology Transfer, Dependence and Self-Restraint Development in the Third World: The Machine-Tool and Pharmaceutical Industries in India* (Praeger, 1998).

explanations of the underpinning of such violent and hostile behaviors and suggested policy response to such threats.

*Cutting the Fuse: The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism and How to Stop It* by Robert Pape and James Feldman, published in 2010, received media attention that academic works usually do not get. A professor of political science at the University of Chicago and a leading authority on suicide terrorism, Pape is the founding Director of the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism (CPOST), which has collected the most extensive data on all suicide terrorism attacks worldwide from 1983 to 2009. He has been at the center of the scholarly and policy debate on suicide terrorism since the publication of his article “The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism” in the *American Political Science Review* (August 2003), considered by some to be the most influential article of the decade published in that journal; the article was later expanded and published in a book form entitled *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (Random House, 2005).

In *Dying to Win*, Pape argued that suicide terrorism is more effective than other kinds of terrorist attacks. Through an analysis of the data on 315 known suicide attacks committed worldwide between 1980 and 2003, he found that suicide attacks represented only 3% of all terrorist incidents, but were responsible for 48% of the casualties and therefore more effective. He further posits that terrorism is not a unique Islamic phenomenon; rather it is a rational response to occupation, a form of coercion by punishment. Contrary to the popular belief that suicide terrorism stems from economic alienation and/or Islamic fanaticism—after all, the overwhelming majority of suicide attacks in recent years have been carried out by Muslims!—Pape argues that suicide attacks are aimed at compelling “modern democracies to withdraw military forces from the territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland” (Pape 2005:4). The suicide terrorists, in his view, are rational political actors who wage a form of asymmetrical warfare, using terror to pursue “politics by other means” (to use the Clausewitz dictum).

The hypothesis that military occupation is the root cause of suicide terrorism was further refined and substantiated with more empirical data and scholarly rigor in *Cutting the Fuse*, which Pape co-authored with James Feldman, who taught at the Air Force Institute of Technology and the School of Advanced Airpower Studies. The argument presented in *Cutting the Fuse* is based on an analysis of the nearly exhaustive database of the incidence of suicide terrorism around the world, collected by a team of

researchers over six years at CPOST. The dataset consists of 2,200 suicide terrorist attacks, comprising over 10,000 records covering all suicide terrorism attacks from the first attack on the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon in 1983 to every known attack until 2009. The book is divided into two parts: the first, consisting of two chapters, provides an analytic overview, the second part going into well-researched case studies of large-scale suicide campaigns in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Lebanon, Israel and Palestine, Chechnya, and Sri Lanka, and there is a chapter devoted to transnational terrorism. The authors contend that since the United States military occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, total suicide attacks worldwide have risen dramatically—from about 300 from 1980 to 2003, to 1,800 from 2004 to 2009. They found that over 97% of all attacks in the last thirty years were in response to military occupation. For example, suicide attacks in Iraq, which had no record of such attacks prior to the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, increased significantly in the five years following the invasion, reaching the highest level (over 300 attacks) in 2007. Similarly, in Afghanistan, which had experienced one suicide attack two days prior to 9/11, there was a drastic increase in suicide attacks, which mirrored the increase in NATO troops in Afghanistan. There were fourteen suicide attacks in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2005, but the number of those attacks went up to 137 in 2007, which was, according to the authors, a direct response to the deployment of 11,000 additional U.S. troops in Helmand Province in Southern Afghanistan alongside the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) redeployment and to the use of increased airstrikes in 2006.

To prove the thesis that foreign occupation is the common thread tying suicide terrorism the world over, Pape and Feldman devote a chapter to Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) of Sri Lanka, a secular Marxist-Leninist-inspired terrorist group with an atheist leader, V. Prabhakaran, who pioneered the use of the suicide vest and made extensive use of female suicide bombers. LTTE waged four Eelam wars—1983–87, 1990–94, 1995–2001, and 2002–2005—in which it “used suicide terrorism as an integral part of its military and political strategy [for twenty-six years] to achieve a Tamil homeland” (316). The group engaged in more than 150 suicide attacks against the hard targets, as a substitute for military operations they could not compete with by conventional means, and in the assassination of Sinhala-Buddhist national and local politicians and policemen; it did not indiscriminately target civilians. The authors, however, fail to take into account a number of suicide missions that had nothing to do

with occupation but were aimed at the strategic objectives of LTTE—for example, the assassination of India's former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi (1991), the killing of the entire leadership of its rival Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) along with its 400 radical members (1986–87), the assassination of anti-LTTE Tamil leader Muthulingam Ganesh Kumar (1999) and of the moderate Tamil Liberation United Front M.P., Dr. Neelan Thiruchelvam (1999). These assassinations were carried out against fellow Tamil leaders, not Sinhala-Buddhist occupiers, for strategic reasons. The problem with Pape and Feldman's study is also with their definition of occupation, which is too broad. They conflate foreign occupation with domestic occupation, including the "threat of occupation," which is so hard to measure in the absence of cross-national public opinion survey data. Elsewhere in the book they consider Pakistan as "occupied," which defies commonsense, and the stationing of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia during and after the Gulf War leads them to classify Saudi Arabia among occupied countries.

The recent escalation of suicide attacks in Iraq, moreover, does not support the Pape-Feldman thesis that the end of foreign occupation will greatly reduce and eventually eliminate suicide terrorism. The number of suicide attacks in Iraq, which averaged between five and ten a month in 2011 and 2012, rose to thirty a month in the last few months. Most of the attackers, it is believed, belong to Jabhat al-Nusra (the "Victory Front"), a splinter organization of al-Qaeda in Iraq coming to Iraq from Syria. Since the number of Iraqis killed in terrorist bombings, including suicide attacks, reached its high level of 2008—in July 2013 alone more than 1,000 Iraqis were killed—the Iraqi government recently asked the U.S. for advisers, intelligence analyses and surveillance including drones to stop the conflict from further degenerating into a sectarian conflict leading perhaps to a civil war. Suicide bombing has now become a tool in sectarian violence in Iraq and elsewhere, which can't be explained by using the Pape-Feldman framework.

The evolving situation in Afghanistan may also disprove the Pape-Feldman thesis. The Taliban carried out 730 suicide attacks between 2001 and 2012, more than any other group in the world. In the last two years, they have killed more than 820 people and injured nearly 3,000 in suicide attacks (TOLONews, 5 July 2013). If there is no negotiated political settlement in Afghanistan that includes the Taliban before America withdraws, it is likely that the Taliban will continue and perhaps intensify suicide attacks. The end of occupation may not end suicide terrorism in Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, Pape and Feldman's argument that the U.S. must end its occupation of the Middle Eastern countries and return to the grand strategy of off-shore balancing to maintain its regional interests is the most viable policy option for the U.S. The strategy of off-shore balancing has been advanced by neo-realist thinkers such as Pape, John Mearsheimer, Christopher Lane, and Stephen Walt for over a decade. The neo-realists argue, contrary to the neoconservatives who dominated the foreign policy establishment under President George W. Bush and took a regional transformation approach in the Middle East through a regime change in Iraq, that a great power should rely on economic and non-invasive measures to prevent the rise of potential hostile powers or a regional hegemon. The Obama administration's Middle East policy, especially its decision to withdraw troops from Iraq and Afghanistan suggest an endorsement of the off-shore balancing strategy. (Pape was one of Obama's foreign policy advisers during his 2008 presidential campaign.)

The current crisis in Syria offers a test case for the neo-realist perspective on U.S. foreign policy. The conflict is now more than two-years-old and President Obama has been reluctant to get involved militarily. However, once it was established, in early September 2013, that the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad used chemical weapons against his own civilian population, President Obama decided to respond by a limited military strike. But he has also assured the nation and the world that there would be no American boots on the Syrian soil. Calling the United States "the anchor of global security" in a prime-time speech on the eve of the 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11 attacks, Obama offered moral, political and strategic arguments for being ready to launch limited military strikes while trying to negotiate a diplomatic solution to Syria's violation of a global ban on chemical weapons. Obama is still willing to give diplomacy a chance, and has asked the Congress to postpone a vote for now on authorizing military force against Syria.

Regardless of how the U.S. finally responds and how the Syrian crisis is resolved, it is unlikely that the U.S. will get involved in another war in the Middle East or elsewhere soon. While scholars continue to debate whether Pape-Feldman's definition of occupation is too broad, or whether their methodology is flawed, the informed citizens and general readers of this war-weary nation faced with fiscal constraints find the arguments of *Cutting the Fuse*, backed by rich data, to be persuasive and appealing.

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