



A Review of: "C. Christine Fair. *The Madrassah Challenge: Militancy and Religious Education in Pakistan.*"

Reviewed by Ryan Shaffer

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of the large amount of fissile material that was produced—roughly 600 metric tons of weapons-usable plutonium and HEU outside of nuclear weapons—which is enough for 20,000 nuclear warheads. As Joseph Cirincione of the Ploughshares Fund once opined, would-be nuclear terrorists are not unlike Willie Sutton, who once explained that he robbed banks because “that’s where the money is.” Caring less about a state’s geopolitical orientation, terrorists will go where the nuclear material is. During the early 1990s in Russia and some of the former Soviet republics, the security at numerous nuclear sites was often less than adequate. In fact, the Russian government was not even aware of the location and amount of much fissile material due to poor accounting practices. Despite these fears, there are no documented cases of nuclear weapons being stolen from Russian nuclear arsenals, though there have been confirmed cases of diversion and illicit trafficking of small amounts of nuclear-weapon materials. Pakistan also presents a danger. Though the supply of fissile material in Pakistan is relatively small—approximately one metric ton—chronic political instability casts a dark shadow over the country’s nuclear program. North Korea possesses a small arsenal, but the regime’s erratic behavior and previous sponsorship of terrorism raise fears as well.

In order to mitigate the threat of nuclear terrorism, the authors counsel that priority must be given to securing global supplies of HEU and plutonium. To that end, the U.S. government should work with the governments in Pakistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan where radical Islamist groups are active and pose a threat to the security of nuclear materials. Security should be upgraded at sites in Russia insofar as so much nuclear material resides there. Measures such as the Nunn-Lugar sponsored Cooperative Threat Reduction Program should be expanded to prevent fissile material from getting in the wrong hands. In order to minimize the effects of nuclear terrorism, the authors call for a program of consequence management to include training first responders, developing decontamination technologies, and post-attacks therapies. Finally, security at nuclear power and research facilities should be improved to prevent sabotage.

This is a well-informed study that carefully dissects the scenarios of nuclear terrorism along with an analysis of the technological and logistical hurdles necessary to carry out such an attack. As such, it will be of interest to specialists in the fields of terrorism and nuclear proliferation.

C. Christine Fair. *The Madrassah Challenge: Militancy and Religious Education in Pakistan*. Washington, DC: USIP Press, 2008. 180 pp., \$14.95 paper. ISBN: 978-1-6012-7028-3.

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Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the United States and the international community took interest not only in religious education in Afghanistan, but in Pakistan as well. Having established madaris (the plural of madrassah) in Afghanistan, the Pakistani government used those post-secondary full-time schools, devoted to Islam, to recruit people for the mujahideen to fight against the Soviet Union. After the 2001 terrorist attacks, the public and policymakers in the West

became interested in religious education, in particular, what role madaris played in cultivating terrorism and religious militancy. C. Christine Fair's book, *The Madrassah Challenge*, examines religious education in Pakistan and focuses on madaris, religious education, contemporary debates, and reforms. Fair, a political scientist with the Rand Corporation, offers a well-detailed empirical analysis of madaris from a variety of sources, including interviews with madrassah officials, teachers, students, and government administrators, as well as surveys, polls, and government data. She concludes that madrassah alumni were not "well represented in the ranks of the observed Islamist militant groups in Pakistan; nor are they prominent among international terrorist organizations" (p. 78). While madaris may contribute to militancy, including sectarian violence, "the Islamist militant groups in Pakistan need not take the madrassah student when evidence suggests they have better candidates at their disposal" (p. 79). Overall, Fair's research is a solid contribution to understanding militancy and religious education in Pakistan, and an insightful synthesis of secondary literature which challenges popular assumptions about madaris.

The book contains five chapters outlining her challenge to the popular assumption that madaris breed terrorists. The first chapter explores Pakistan's educational system, discussing the types of schools and required Islamic Studies courses in public schools. She explains that madrassah "enrollment is a rare phenomenon," encompassing less than 1% of Pakistan's full-time students, and often "when non-madrassah schools are not available, families are more likely to simply drop out of the education market than send their children to madaris" (pp. 33, 35). The second chapter discusses the sectarian distinctions in schools and the demographics of madaris' attendees. She notes estimates for religious schools in Pakistan range between 5,000 to 45,000, and government reports put the number of registered madaris at 6,741 in 2000.

The next chapter looks at militancy and terrorism, arguing "madaris are less relevant for recruiting militants for the Kashmir and Indian theaters, where better qualified recruits seem to be preferred" (p. 2). The chapter focuses on the findings of a study she commissioned "of families in Pakistan that had lost at least one son to militancy in Kashmir and Afghanistan in 2004," and examines Punjab and the North West Frontier Province (p. 68). The general results of the study demonstrate there is little evidence that madaris are an important part of broad militant activity. From the results of 141 mujahideen, "only nineteen were reportedly recruited at a madrassah—the same number recruited at a public school" (p. 68). Furthermore, 9 had no formal education and 82 of the 141 "were very well educated by Pakistani standards" (p. 69). Yet, she gives a caveat that "available evidence suggests that madaris are important sources of supply of suicide attackers (in Afghanistan and Pakistan)" (p. 70). An important footnote to the study was that the numbers do not add to 141 because "some militants were recruited at multiple venues and some respondents did not answer the question" (p. 68). So while Fair cautions that "one should not conclude, however, that madaris do not contribute to the militancy problem," the study found "madrassah products" were not well-represented in "observed Islamist militant groups in Pakistan" (p. 78). The reason, as Fair explains, is there are better applicants in other areas at the militant groups' disposal.

The fourth chapter investigates the attempted reforms of madaris by the Pakistani government, which were motivated by concerns regarding militant education. In particular, it explores debates between government officials and madaris' administrators. Even before pressure from the United States mounted, Pervez Musharraf tried to reform madaris, but even debates about registering madaris became an obstacle. By

2006, “although madaris [had] accepted in principle the idea of curriculum reform, they [did] not have the resources to implement it” (p. 86). Furthermore, “the education ministry has made funds available to madaris to hire teachers of the worldly curriculum and provide other resources for teaching worldly subjects” (p. 86). Yet, none of the madaris that are associated with the Ittehad-e-Tanzimat Madaris-e-Diniya, an umbrella organization for the five major organizations of madaris, accepted the money. Though the madaris administrators and government authorities disagree on much, many agree U.S. involvement in reform “has hurt more than it had helped” (p. 92). In the last chapter, Fair discusses her conclusions and the implications of the study by touching on recommendations for reform and the geographical differences that are an important part of understanding madaris. She writes that madaris are “low-number, high-risk” institutions and “merit continuous monitoring and evaluation” (p. 97). Islamabad’s and Washington’s hopes for secularization, she notes, are out of sync with many Pakistanis. Rather, the answer is “ensuring schools are available to families,” improving the quality of instruction, and providing “incentives” like stipends and food (p. 100).

Fair’s book sheds light on an often-discussed, but rarely empirically studied phenomenon. Her study tests particular assertions about madrassah students and challenges what the Western media and politicians believe they know. The students who enter a madrassah do so because their belief system already mirrors that of the school. Fair points out that there are other sources of indoctrination linked to militancy and the observed madrassah-militancy link is weak. The shortcoming of Fair’s work has to do with the narrowness of her study and the difficulty in obtaining information from areas like the Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan. Since Fair’s empirical study on the madrassah-militancy connection was based on one year, 2004, it leaves the reader wondering if the year was exceptional or not. If it was, how does the madrassah-militancy link change depending on the year and why? Also, would the study change depending on access to unreported attacks or unregistered madaris in areas with militant strongholds where it is difficult to obtain information? After all, spikes of violence in Afghanistan have occurred since 2004, with Pakistani militants and religious leaders taking the blame. These are important issues that, albeit, are difficult to answer, but are important in understanding the wider relevancy of madaris. Nonetheless, Fair’s book is highly recommended for scholars interested in militancy’s relationship to education and international policies on terrorism.

Yahya Michot. *Muslims Under Non-Muslim Rule: Ibn Taymiyya*. Oxford, UK: Interface Publications, 2006. 208 pp., £10.79 paper. ISBN: 978-0-9554545-6-1.

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There has been a lacuna in the terrorism and security studies field because most analysts lack the expertise and background to critically assess the citations of classical and medieval jurists used by jihadis to justify their cause. As a result, it is no wonder there has been much confusion over the controversial medieval jurist Taqi ad-Din Ibn Taymiyyah, whose work is purported to inspire the contemporary local and global jihadi movements. This problem is exacerbated because the filter through