

# The Academy of Political Science

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**Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom** by Mohammed M. Hafez. Washington DC, USIP Press, 2007. 240 pp. \$17.50.

Mohammed Hafez's new book, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom*, is a must-read for every American soldier or journalist on his or her way to Iraq. This book shows beyond a shadow of a doubt just how complex the situation is. Loaded with facts and figures, it will provide students of terrorism studies considerable data from which to conduct research and analysis for years to come. In addition, the book puts names to and gives details about the many un-named suicide bombers in Iraq and settles the debate of the past few years about their real identity and nationality. They are overwhelmingly foreigners (as Hafez and others have argued for years with a certain colleague from Chicago), overwhelmingly Saudis, Kuwaitis, Maghrebis, and Europeans of Moroccan descent; only a small percentage of suicide bombers in Iraq are actually Iraqis.

The chapters are rich in data, and Hafez provides an insider's understanding of the ideological underpinnings of Islamic martyrdom, tracing its origins to the times of the Prophet, linking it to Karbala with the death of the Prophet's grandson, Hussein, (in 680 AD), and explaining the ideological underpinnings of Salafism. Hafez provides a virtual primer to Wahabbi and Salafi ideology and traces how the opposition to innovation (*bida'a*) translates in the modern context of revolution and violent political mobilization. He makes a particularly insightful assessment that the use of suicide terrorism in Iraq is a Shia legacy that has been adopted by groups like al Qaeda in Iraq and is now being used against precisely the sources of this religious inspiration—the Shia.

The book however has a few shortcomings, which are worth highlighting. Mainly, the book does not know whether it is trying to be a data-driven factual account of what is going on in Iraq, or whether it wants to be a theoretical analysis applying concepts of social mobilization (based on the works of Sidney Tarrow, Doug McAdam, Charles Tilly, and others) to group mobilization among Sunnis. This may reflect an attempt to pitch the book widely to a too-large audience, giving everyone a little something of what they might want, but it actually weakens the coherence of the book and adds to a certain amount of confusion. Added to this confusion is the inherent contradiction in Hafez's main theses.

Hafez rightly points out how pragmatic many of the terrorist organizations are, how they will align with each other for status or mammon or to increase their bases of support. But he spends considerable time discussing the role of ideology and religion as a motivator. If the groups are, in fact, ruthlessly pragmatic in terms of strategic alliances, he should be critical of their ideological justifications. At times, Hafez takes at face value what the groups say in statements, pamphlets, and propaganda. Later, Hafez acknowledges that the ideologies are mere constructions to justify within an Islamic frame actions that had been decided upon previously. This is particularly true of his

depictions of the Islamic schools of *fiqh* associated with Salafism and of how Abu Musab al-Zarqawi came to join al Qaeda (changing the name of his previous group, Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, to al Qaeda in Iraq).

The book suffers from editing that is less than ideal in helping the narrative flow. At times, it is difficult to follow all the names, places, and acronyms. After years of expertise in this area, Hafez is clearly at ease with the alphabet soup of acronyms for the variety of groups in Iraq, but even an educated reader will get lost in the changing names, and groups that appear, disappear, join forces under a different name, and disappear again. Even the graphics demonstrating the linkages between the individual and the network hubs are presented in a small, monochromatic font on a one-dimensional axis. Following the network hubs and connections is challenging, especially when several of the individuals mentioned in the narrative do not appear in the actual graph (p. 197).

Although Hafez does a superb job of presenting copious data, he does not take a stand and say that these groups are using ideology fictively and that they are genuinely rent- and power-seeking. Hafez shies away from taking too strong a stance—against the war, against U.S. policies that support Israel, and against the use of rendition and torture. After a series of admitted generalizations and simplifications about why European Muslims join the global *jihad*, and detailed charts about their linkages, Hafez concludes: “Network ties are not sufficient to explain ... one can only speculate about what drove the young men and a young woman to volunteer there [in Iraq]” (p. 208).

These issues aside, my most pointed criticism is about how the author portrays my own work. Although he does acknowledge that “to her credit, Bloom recognizes a myriad of other factors that go into producing a campaign of suicide attacks” (p. 216), he reduces my argument to a mono-causal explanation about group competition and outbidding. In fairness, my book, *Dying to Kill*, argued that community acceptance or rejection of suicide terrorism as a tactic was a key variable in determining whether it would be used, spread, or fall by the wayside; that it would probably take place in a second iteration of conflict for a variety of reasons, including increasingly drastic counter-terrorism measures and coercion against the target population. This cycle of escalating violence would then impact whether the larger public accepted only military targets or civilian casualties. I argued further that under such circumstances, multiple groups using terrorist tactics would compete for “market share” and ramp up violence to capture extremist supporters. My work argued strenuously against any mono-causal explanation as being too simplistic and missing the nuances that connected the terrorist leadership, the larger public, and international public opinion to the growing phenomenon of suicide terrorism.

The International Crisis Group’s February 2006 report on Iraq, “In their Own Words,” echoed my hypothesis:

For Clarity, Crisis Group has distinguished 3 phases in the evolution of the insurgents’ discourse. In reality, rather than being clearly separate and sequential,

they are overlapping and intertwined: competition between groups for greater visibility generated increasingly bloody and controversial deeds (p. 6).

More recently, General David Petraeus stated that Iraq was an ethnic sectarian competition over power and resources but added a caveat: “If the population rejects Al Qaeda, then it is a different situation” (Jim Lehrer interview, 12 September 2007).

Setting aside these limitations, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq* is most definitely worth reading for anyone interested in understanding the Sunni insurgency in Iraq. The book fills in the gaps in our knowledge about the complexity of the situation and the challenges facing U.S. foreign policy in Iraq.

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**A Culture of Deference: Congress, the President, and the Course of the U.S.-Led Invasion and Occupation of Iraq** by F. Ugboaja Ohaegbulam. New York, Peter Lang, 2007. 309 pp. Cloth, \$79.95; paper, \$32.95.

The purpose of this book is to analyze the George W. Bush administration’s decision to go to war against Iraq in 2003 and to judge that action against a backdrop of governing constitutional principles. For the author, the Constitution vests in Congress the power to decide whether to take the country to war, but in passing the Iraq Resolution of October 2002, lawmakers abdicated their duties and left the key decision of initiating military operations to the President. Many Democrats who were possible candidates for president in 2004 (House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt, Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, and Senators John Kerry, John Edwards, and Joseph Lieberman) supported the legislation, perhaps because they “did not want to be seen as unpatriotic” or as weak leaders (p. 192).

Several top officials in the Bush administration pushed hard for war, including Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, and Douglas Feith, who created an Office of Special Plans in the Pentagon to make the case for war. Other officials might have insisted that the decision for military action be carefully scrutinized and thoroughly vetted by experts, but National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice functioned more like a “cheerleader” than a neutral analyst, CIA Director George Tenet refused “to speak truth to power,” and Secretary of State Colin Powell performed as a “loyal soldier” in giving an advocacy speech to the United Nations on 5 February 2003 that he later recognized, as the author says, would be a “lasting blot on his record” (pp. 148, 152, 155, 157).

Drawing from available newspaper accounts, journal articles, and books, F. Ugboaja Ohaegbulam tells a familiar story of an administration that failed to adequately calculate the risks of war and plan for its aftermath. The difficul-