



Guardians of God: Inside the Religious Mind of the Pakistani Taliban

Mona Kanwal Sheikh

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This book is an account of the emergence and key events related to the origin and expansion of Pakistani Taliban since 2001, with a focus on the role of religion in their actions, policies, and worldviews. The author brings to light rare insight into the ideological basis of Pakistani Taliban, drawing upon first-hand research comprising participant observation, interviews, content analysis of organizational literature, and Talibani communications, such as recruitment videos, recorded speeches, leaflets and pamphlets, jihadi anthems, and press releases to the local media. The book demonstrates how religion simultaneously appears as an object to be defended, as a threat, as the purpose of violence, as the source of rules and limitations on violent action, and as the source of motivational imagery and myths. Going into an analysis of just what role religion plays in violent activities of this group, and how does it do so, the author shows that Talibani narratives are both secular and religious at the same time, contradicting a clear-cut divide between religious and secular motivations for violence. The book advocates against extreme positions that accord religion either a primary or a negligent position in explaining the *raison d'être* of Pakistani Taliban. It makes a plea for more informed and empathetic approach instead of the purely militaristic stance towards extremism, which has only helped it grow in the past.

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