4-2012

Taliban Networks in Afghanistan

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CENTER ON IRREGULAR WARFARE AND ARMED GROUPS

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Message from the Editors

In 2008, the Naval War College established the Center on Irregular Warfare & Armed Groups (CIWAG). CIWAG's primary mission is twofold: first, to bring cutting-edge research on Irregular Warfare into the Joint Professional Military Educational (JPME) curricula; and second, to bring operators, practitioners, and scholars together to share their knowledge and experiences about a vast array of violent and non-violent irregular challenges. This case study is part of an ongoing effort at CIWAG that includes symposia, lectures by world-renowned academics, case studies, research papers, articles, and books.

Dr. Antonio Giustozzi is the author of this case study, which focuses on the Taliban. This case study was created to focus on two specific challenges that our experienced operators and practitioners face in Afghanistan: how to understand the actors and the complex irregular warfare environment; and how to manage interaction, adaptation, and reassessment in irregular warfare.

In this case study, Giustozzi relies on his extensive experience in Afghanistan as a researcher to create an insightful analysis of the Taliban. The author discusses a wide range of topics including assessments of the Taliban's strengths and weaknesses, their ability to reassess and adapt as well as their operational and strategic successes and failures. We believe he has presented a balanced treatment of the subject matter. Balance, however, does not mean that the case study will be uncontroversial. In fact, Giustozzi's analysis contains some rather blunt appraisals of many of the major actors in this conflict; including both ISAF and the Taliban.

This version of the case study was submitted in October 2011. We are at work on addendums that focus on individuals or specific factions within the Taliban network including the Haqqani network. The point is to make these case studies part of an evolving and adaptive curriculum that

fulfills the needs of students preparing to meet the challenges of the post 9/11 world.

Keep in mind that the questions and issues that this work raises go far beyond the Taliban and the borders of Afghanistan. By focusing on one type of armed group—the Taliban—and understanding its weaknesses and vulnerabilities, we are able to extrapolate what factors contribute to the success or failure of armed groups in general. We can examine the inter-relationship between the goals, strategies, and operational and tactical capabilities of other armed groups. For example, these groups can suffer from strategic overextension and they can reach past their culminating point of attack and even culminating point of victory. The question is, how do we recognize these opportunities and what can we do to take advantage of them?

It is also important to note three critical caveats to this case study. First, the opinions found in this case study are solely those of the author and do not represent the views of the Department of Defense, the Naval War College, or CIWAG. Second, while every effort has been made to correct any factual errors in this work, the author is ultimately responsible for the content of this case study. Third, the study questions presented in all CIWAG case studies are written to provoke discussion on a wide variety of topics including strategic, operational, and tactical matters as well as ethical and moral questions confronted by operators in the battlefield. The point is to make these case studies part of an evolving and adaptive curriculum that fulfills the needs of students preparing to meet the challenges of the post-9/11 world and to show them the dilemmas that real people faced in high-pressure situations.

Author Biography

Dr. Antonio Giustozzi is a Research Fellow at the Crisis States Research Centre at the London School of Economics. He works on the security dimention of failed states and states in a critical situation. He also researches the political aspects of insurgency and warlordism and states' response, as well as ethno-politics and the study of administration building in recovering states. In recent years, he has mainly been working in and on Afghanistan. Dr. Guistozzi is editor of *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field* (Columbia University Press, 2012); author of *Empires of Mud: Wars and Warlords of Afghanistan* (Columbia University Press, 2009) and *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The New-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan 2002-2007* (Columbia University Press, 2007); and co-author of *Negotiating with the Taliban: Toward a Solution for the Afghan Conflict* (Crisis States Research Centre working paper series 2, 2010).

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Acronyms and Terms

ANA – Afghan National Army
ANBP – Afghanistan New Beginning Program
ANCOP – Afghan National Civil Order Police
ANSO – Afghan NGO Security Office
COIN – Counter Insurgency
DIAG – Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups
FATA – Federally Administered Tribal Areas
IED – Improvised Explosive Device
ISAF – International Security Assistance Force
KGB – The Committee for State Security, the Soviet National Security Agency
from 1954-1991
KhAD – Afghan Intelligence Service
MoD – Ministry of Defense
NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NWFP – Northwest Frontier Province
OEF – Operation Enduring Freedom
SOF – Special Operations Forces
TTP – Tehrik-I-Taliban Pakistan, or Movement of the Pakistani Taliban
UHF – Ultra High Frequency

Figure 1: Topographical Map of Afghanistan

Figure 2: Political Map of Afghanistan (2008)

ETHNIC COMPOSITION

1:6 000 000

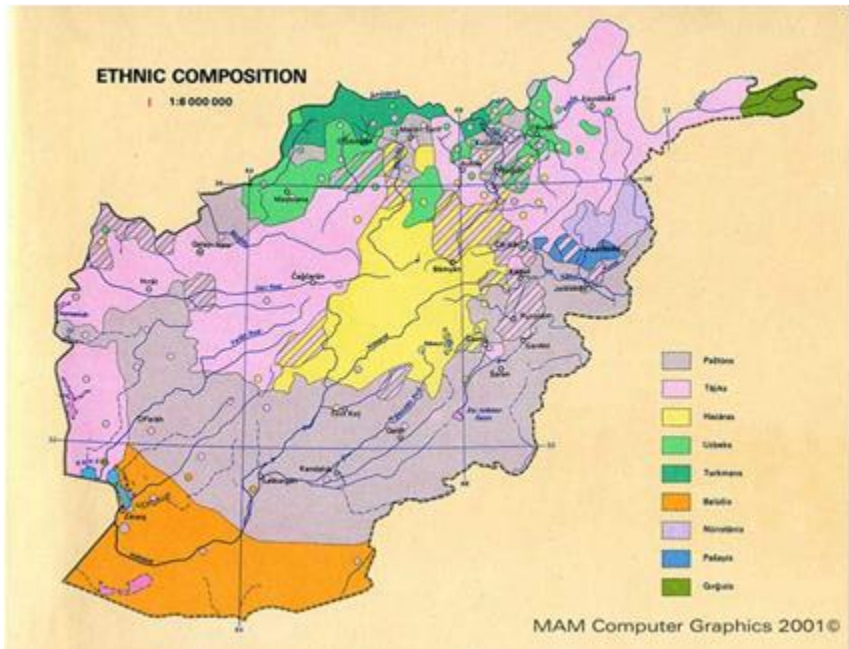|		
		Pathans
		Tajiks
		Hazaras
		Uzbeks
		Turkmens
		Baluchs
		Nuristanis
		Pashayis
		Gujars

MAM Computer Graphics 2001©

Figure 3: Ethnic Map of Afghanistan

Note: The religious division between Sunni and Shiite Muslims almost entirely coincides with that between the Hazara majority areas (Shiite) and the other ethnic groups.

I. Introduction

This case study analyses how the different sides in the conflict in Afghanistan—primarily the Taliban and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)—have developed their strategies over time. The emphasis is very much on the adaptation and counteradaptation process, in which opposing sides evaluate each other, study each other, take each other's blows, and react by shaping up, changing, adapting. The more flexible an adversary is, the more difficult to defeat; flexibility can make up for an inferiority in resources and numbers. The capacity to adapt is an indicator of flexibility, and that is why the case study will focus on this aspect.

Much adaptation for the challenges of war has taken place on both sides (less so within the Afghan armed forces). The insurgents have invested great efforts in developing, adapting, or redeveloping asymmetric tactics (IEDs, suicide attacks, targeted assassinations on a large scale, etc.), while ISAF and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) have greatly improved information gathering and their targeting of insurgent commanders and leaders. Both sides have been looking at ways to decentralize their fighting forces in order to operate more rapidly and safely. Adaptation, however, always has trade-offs. For instance, targeted assassination weakens the legitimacy of a fighting force, as does indiscriminate violence. Similarly, decentralization makes command and control more difficult.

Change and adaptation are not the same. Adaptation implies a degree of success, whereas change is neutral—it can be successful or unsuccessful. Even adaptation, however, is not necessarily enough if it does not occur in a coherent fashion. ISAF/OEF's counterinsurgency effort has been erratic and inconsistent, with frequent changes of focus:

some movement in one direction, then in the opposite, some adaptation of the military effort coupled with little or no changes in the political effort. Until 2010, the counterinsurgency effort had failed to contain the insurgency, let alone defeat it. Much of the change that occurred before 2010 was appropriate, hence qualifying as adaptation, but its erratic character prevented it from achieving the desired impact on the insurgency. Developments from 2010 onwards are more difficult to evaluate, but at least the ability to inflict damage on the insurgents improved significantly; the political dimension of counterinsurgency still appears to be very weak.

The key lessons from this analysis are as follows:

- By 2001, Afghanistan had a long history of virtually uninterrupted conflict, with a large number of people having experience of war as protagonists and accumulating the know-how of fighting an insurgency.

- However, insurgencies are dynamic processes of adaptation and counteradaptation. Insurgents, as much as counterinsurgents, have to keep learning and being flexible and adaptable.

- Although the Taliban took inspiration from the 1980s and 1990s, they had to innovate as the counterinsurgency pressure on them increased. The actual tactics employed in the post-2001 guerrilla war were in fact very different from those employed earlier, mainly because the adversary had changed and was technologically much more resourceful.

- No tactic or strategy is good or bad in itself; it just might or might not fit a particular environment. The Taliban are neither particularly efficient nor capable nor sophisticated as an insurgent movement, but they have been able to match their limited human resources in management and educational terms with appropriate strategy and tactics.

- The Taliban's modus operandi fits well with the fragmentation of Afghan society. Rather than trying to regiment their rank

and file according to rigid rules, they allow entrepreneurs of violence much space within a limited set of basic rules they have agreed to, and in fact rely on them for most tasks, including much of logistics.

- There is a trade-off between the Taliban's resilience and efficiency, particularly insofar as their resilience is obtained through decentralization.

II. The Taliban in Afghanistan: An Overview
A. Operation Omid

In 2009 to early 2010, the Taliban were at the apex of their power in Zhari, a primarily Pashtun district in Afghanistan's Kandahar province. They controlled almost all of the rural areas, rarely challenged by the government or the Canadian Forces. Taliban members openly roamed around, maintaining a few hundred full-time fighters and administering justice in several courts; their governor interacted with the population. They grew over-confident, exposing themselves, showing their judges' and administrators' faces and identities.

When ISAF and the Afghan security forces moved in in force in 2010's *Operation Omid*, Taliban losses were numerous, although they pulled back most of their full-time fighters rather than confront the advancing ISAF/Afghan forces. Elements hostile to the Taliban felt encouraged to emerge and show their support for the government, even forming a militia (Afghan Local Police) in a few villages. The Taliban were no longer able to maintain permanent bases in the district.

However, this was not the end of the Taliban in Zhari. They reorganized and adapted. As of July 2011, the number of full-time fighters had not returned to its previous high but had recovered from the low reached in *Operation Omid*'s aftermath. Re-infiltration occurred steadily after spring 2011, but the Taliban now operated more discreetly, relying on an underground structure in many villages, avoiding establishing permanent bases, and rotating their full-time staff in and out of the district more often than before. Their administrative and judicial structures were now mobile and often staffed by people from outside the district, which made it more difficult for the villagers to identify and relate to local governance structures.

The Taliban succeeded in improving their organization to the point where they could rotate military commanders between units, effectively

merging what might have been several separate insurgencies into one and strengthening command and control by the leadership. The Taliban's ability to use Zhari to infiltrate Kandahar might have been reduced, but at the same time, as in several other districts of Helmand and Kandahar, they were holding down a much larger ISAF and Afghan government force while still controlling most of the population and making gains elsewhere in the country. Perceptions count, and in the perception of the local population, the Taliban were as much in control in July 2011 as they had been before *Operation Omid*. Although it had been earlier assessed as a success, in the longer-term perspective, the operation might only have compelled the Taliban to evolve a few steps higher.

This vignette, one of a hundred such examples that could be drawn from the current conflict in Afghanistan, raises two important questions about the consequences of interaction and adaptation: What are the roots of the Taliban's way of warfare? How are they able to adapt and overcome the fog and friction of conflict? The answer to both of these questions lies in the history of conflict in Afghanistan and the social, economic, and military consequences of protracted warfare on Afghan society.

B. A Brief Background

The Afghan communist government came to power with a military coup in April 1978, prompting a jihad that continued in 1980 against the Soviet army. (See Appendix A: Historical Context.) Every military organization that has participated in the post-2001 conflict has its roots in this jihad. This explains why non-state armed groups in today's Afghanistan are all Islamist, fundamentalist, or at least Islamic conservative.[1] The consequences of this conflict and the Afghanistan civil

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[1] While initially there was some leftist, chiefly Maoist, and nationalist participation in the resistance movement, it waned because of the popular understanding of the conflict as a jihad, which by its nature favored Islamic groups. and because of external support from the United States, Pakistan, and Arab countries primarily focused on Islamists and

war in the 1990s include the creation of a professional military class with deep roots in society; the destabilization of social, political, and economic life; and the accumulation of tactical and operational military knowledge.

The Taliban existed during the 1980s in the form of Taliban guerrilla fronts, mostly associated with the clerical party of the mujahideen, Harakat-i Enqelab-i Islami (Movement of the Islamic Revolution). [2] The party as a whole demobilized in 1992 and barely took part in the civil war.[3] The Taliban emerged as an autonomous movement in 1994 but did not adopt guerrilla tactics. They fought instead as a semi-regular force, massing for conventional battles. Arguably, their military organization was more in line with the available resources (human and financial) than those of their rivals. Once they took Kabul in 1996, the Taliban developed something more like a standing army, with some artillery and armor and a small air force, and even incorporated some

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fundamentalist groups. See G. Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending* (London: Hurst, 2005); Lawrence Malkin, "Afghanistan," *World Policy Journal* 17, no.3 (2000); Geraint Hughes, "The Soviet-Afghan War 1979-1989: An Overview," *Defense Studies* Nov (2008): 326-50.

[2] Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending*; this author's personal interviews with former mujahideen commanders, 2007-9; Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, *The Enemies We Create* (London: Hurst, forthcoming 2011).

[3] For many readers, this overview of interaction and adaption in the period before current US involvement provides sufficient background to understand the current context. There is a detailed bibliography at the end of this case study on these issues, however, for those who are interested in further research, it is worth mentioning some of the academic resources on the topic. The best overall study of the period as far as political and social dynamics are concerned is Dorronsoro's *Revolution Unending*; in particular it features the only scholarly analysis of the Taliban regime, as well as of the Taliban in 1994-6. As an introduction to the world of Afghan militants, David Edwards' *Before Taliban* is excellent. Military tactics, organization and dynamics are discussed in Anthony Davis' chapter (Taliban), Giustozzi's *Empires of Mud* (the militias) and Olivier Roy's articles ('War as a Factor of Entry into Politics' and "Nature de la guerre en Afghanistan'). Giustozzi and Roy in particular discuss the social dynamics underpinning changes in military organization. Tactics in particular are discussed in Jalali/Grau, *The Other Side of the Mountain*.

officers of the former pro-Soviet army. The infantry, however, largely continued to use the same tactics as in 1994-95.[4]

The guerrilla phase of the jihad (1981-91) is of the greatest interest to us in order to understand post-2001 developments. Many of the tactics developed in the 1980s were used from 2002 onwards, as were some organizational techniques such as fighting on assigned fronts, a degree of centralized control, communications, and the development of a bureaucracy in Pakistan to oversee it all. Propaganda techniques and themes were also based on those of the 1980s. The way the insurgents of the 1970s and 1980s spread their influence presents some similarity with post-2001 Taliban techniques: political agents testing the ground; small teams moving in and securing the environment before more assets were moved in and local recruitment started in earnest.

Although much of the attention today, and this case study, is focused on the Taliban, in reality a variety of military-political actors have some degree of influence on the Afghan scene. (See Appendix D: Other Insurgent and Pro-Government Groups.) Pro-government non-state actors have a major impact in all regions, particularly in the north. Within the insurgency, smaller players like Hizb-i Islami play a significant role in some regions, chiefly the east. The interaction among these groups differs from region to region and is often complex, with alliances made and unmade.

This complex interrelationship among different actors in the insurgency characterizes the current conflict in Afghanistan and can be illustrated by looking at the province of Baghlan in 2010.[5] Both the Taliban and Hizb-i Islami were active here by early 2010, sharing control over Pashtun villages in the northern and northwestern parts of the

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[4] See Davis's chapter in David B. Edward, *Before Taliban: Genealogies of the Afghan jihad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

[5] See also the following documentary: *Dispatches: Afghanistan: Behind Enemy Lines* [Video]. (2010). Retrieved September 27, 2011, from, http://www.channel4.com/programmes/dispatches/4od#3111511.

province. The Taliban also had a presence among Tajiks, having co-opted some former commanders of Jamiat-i Islami, their ancient rivals. Hizb-i Islami and the Taliban even shared use of the Taliban's judiciary.[6]

However, tension existed between the two groups. The typical member of the Taliban was of humbler social origins than Hizb-i Islami's, and the two groups competed for resources, in particular the apportioning of tax collection. (See Appendix B: Afghanistan's Economic Environment.) The Taliban and Hizb-i Islami clashed repeatedly and violently over tax collection apportionment in 2010, and Hizb-i Islami was almost entirely eradicated as a result.

Tension also existed within the Taliban itself, between Pashtuns and Tajiks. The Tajik commanders had been the first to side with the Taliban in 2008 and received all the key positions at the provincial level, such as shadow governor and military commander. They also were in charge of the distribution of supplies and cash. During 2010, the Taliban succeeded in mobilizing many Pashtuns in the province, and leadership was transferred to a Pashtun governor and a Pashtun military commander. In comparison, only a few small groups of Taliban operated among Tajiks, mostly in remote areas. The Tajiks protested their lost influence by the spring of 2010, suspending military operations and asking either to be given a key position at the top or an entirely separate supply structure to manage themselves. A number of Tajik commanders reconciled with the Afghan government later that year.[7]

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[6] This is referred to in the video as the "judiciary of the Islamic Emirate.'

[7] A. Giustozzi and Christoph Reuter, *The Insurgents of the Afghan North* (Kabul/Berlin: Afghan
Analyst Network, 2011); A. Giustozzi and C. Reuter, *The Northern Front: the Afghan insurgency spreading beyond the Pashtuns* (Berlin: Afghanistan Analysts Network , 2010).

Discussion Questions

      1.   Could NATO forces have readapted and assessed their tactics to leverage the Taliban vs. Hizb-i Islami and Pashtun vs. Tajik infighting?

      2.   What are the opportunities and pitfalls in aligning with one tribe, clan, or political group over another? Is it a viable strategy for long-term success?

      3.   Is it realistic to engage a community without brokering with influential political, economic, and religious groups?

C. Structure and Organization

The Taliban is by far the largest opposition armed group in Afghanistan, accounting for more than 80 percent of the total number of insurgents. Their ideology can be described as Islamic fundamentalist, but there are variations within the movement, with its eastern Afghan wing (Peshawar *shura*) being more influenced by political Islamism. Although the leadership of Mullah Omar over the Taliban is largely undisputed, the extent to which the Taliban leadership is able to control its rank and file is a matter of debate. It relies on a mix of incentives, rewards, and direct orders to ensure a degree of compliance. Appointments to positions of leadership are decided at the local level by consensus through commissions appointed by the central leadership. Only when consensus cannot be reached does the central leadership step in to make a decision.[8]

The Taliban have always been a collection of small religious networks—a network of networks. The leadership has tried over the years to create an organized structure to overlay these networks, presumably to

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[8] Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop: The Rise of the Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); A. Giustozzi, *Negotiating with the Taliban: Issues and Prospects* (New York: The Century Foundation, June 2010).

reduce the impact of personal conflict among network leaders. In a sense, this could be described as an effort at institution building. Some success was achieved in this regard, but the Taliban essentially were still a network of networks in early 2011. The nature of these networks in the south is predominantly religious, and the typical commander is a mullah or a religious student (*talib*), although he might recruit on a tribal or sub-tribal basis. In the east (Peshawar *shura*), former mujahideen and other non-clerical elements have a larger presence, even in leadership positions, but the structure is still network oriented.[9]

The predominant or "mainstream Taliban" view is represented by the leadership's official position; at present, it argues for the expulsion of Westerners from Afghanistan and also insists that the fighters respect rules of engagement and of conduct determined by the leadership itself. Another viewpoint is more radical. It is hostile to leadership's effort to impose rules of engagement, more inclined to utilize indiscriminate terror tactics, and more inclined to cooperate with foreign jihadist elements. Once led by Mullah Dadullah, who was killed in 2007, it has been in disarray since his death but was considered to be in the ascendency in 2010-11, despite the absence of a clear leader. A third, small, faction displays pro-Iranian inclinations. There is also a more moderate tendency, not yet organized as a faction, favorable to negotiations, whose size is difficult to gauge but seems significant; some leaders at the national and local level allegedly belong to this tendency, including Mullah Baradar.[10]

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[9] Giustozzi, "Negotiating…"; T. Ruttig, *How Tribal Are the Taliban?* (Kabul/Berlin: Afghanistan Analysts Network , 2010).

[10] Personal communications with UN officials, 2010; Linschoten and Kuehn, *The Enemies We Create*; on Baradar see Carl Forsberg, *The Taliban's Campaign for Kandahar* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, 2009): 32.

Internal Coherence and Ability of Political Leadership to Exercise Control

The Taliban leadership has been steadily trying to increase the degree of control it exercises over its rank and file. Its control has always been stronger in the areas close to the Pakistani border, not least because of the use of a courier system as well as the practice of summoning commanders and local leaders to Pakistan for briefings. In areas where military pressure is greatest, the leadership's effort to exercise command and control has been disrupted and the Taliban have readapted using an almost completely decentralized system. In contrast, in areas where military pressure has not been as high, they have maintained a tighter control: examples are Zabul and Ghazni. Even in these areas, the senior leadership is not able to completely or immediately impose its views and has to rely on a degree of cooperation and sympathy from its local leaders.[11]

In areas away from the Pakistani border, such as the provinces on the Central Asian border, command and control from Pakistan is particularly difficult. When combined with intense military pressure, the local Taliban have often been thrown into disarray, as in Badghis in 2010 or Kunduz in 2010-11. The comparison between the southern and the northern borders highlights the role of the Taliban system of command and control in making the insurgency more resilient. The leadership intervenes to replace losses and solve disputes, enabling the combatants to focus on fighting; supplies and assistance can be made available, as well as punishment and reward. The Taliban are known to have sometimes punished and even executed their commanders for misconduct.[12]

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[11] Giustozzi, *Decoding the New Taliban*; interviews with Taliban members and sympathizers, Ghazni, 2010.
[12] A. Giustozzi and Christoph Reuter, *The Insurgents of the Afghan North*; Joshua Partlow, "U.S. strikes at the heart of Taliban leadership," *Washington Post*, October 24, 2010.

Recruitment

Taliban mobilization first focused on recalling members of the movement dispersed after defeat in late 2001. Their success in this regard was mixed, with only a relatively small minority of former members willing to get involved in a guerrilla war, with all the implications that this has in terms of lifestyle, risk, and personal sacrifices. Their strongest constituency after 2001 turned out to be the clergy, particularly the new generation of Pakistani-trained mullahs. The clergy was upset by its marginalization in post-2001 Afghanistan and by cultural changes that the mullahs found unacceptable.[13] The *madrasas* in Pakistan also provided a steady flow of young recruits.

Taliban recruitment has been growing steadily since 2002, and evidence suggests that recruitment was still going well in 2010, despite increased pressure and some territorial losses. The overall level of insurgent-initiated attacks increased by 54 percent in 2010, according to ISAF, and by 64 percent, according to ANSO. This would have been difficult to attain without some expansion of the ranks.[14] What drives this recruitment is a matter of debate. ISAF and the Afghan government tend to present economic interpretations, claiming that most Taliban recruits are motivated by the offer of payment by the organization. However, evidence suggests that the main drivers of Taliban recruitment are religious and ideological, at least as far as the full-time fighters and political cadres are concerned.

Grievances abound in Afghanistan because of the fragmented nature of society, which makes the distribution of aid, services and favors unequal; in segmented societies there is always a potential for conflict, and the Taliban have set out to exploit this.[15] (See Appendix C: Afghanistan— A Fragmented Society.) Their wider recruitment efforts were aimed at

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[13] Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop*; Giustozzi, *Decoding the New Taliban.*
[14] On ANSO, see www.afgnso.org.
[15] Giustozzi, *Afghanistan's 30 Years War*

enlisting the support of local communities, exploiting local conflicts and gaps in governance. Taliban political agents and preachers were dispatched around the country to assess the potential of different communities and exploit opportunities. Typically, communities subjected to discrimination by government officials or that felt short-changed in the post-2001 distribution of the spoils were most inclined to lend support to the Taliban. The elders leading many communities initially might have allowed the Taliban into their villages as a way to signal to the central government their displeasure, but frequently later lost control over their guests. [16]

The Taliban also targeted perceived "loose cannons" within both the rural and the urban populations for recruitment. In such cases, a complex propaganda effort was mounted, including a variety of press outlets and websites. Radio broadcasts have been more erratic because of the difficulty of broadcasting deep into Afghanistan. Taliban propaganda appears designed to exploit friction between the population and foreign forces, which inevitably occurs and which has been intensifying over time as the number of troops has increased. To at least some extent, the Taliban have succeeded in becoming a vehicle for the expression of grievance; since 2006, they have appeared as a serious opposition force with a strong chance of forcing at least a new political settlement, if not outright victory. Having reached this critical mass, even groups and individuals who do not appreciate the Taliban from a religious or ideological point of view started having relations with them.

Apart from their core fighters, probably numbering around 60,000 at the beginning of 2010 (roughly half being deployed in Afghanistan at any given time), the Taliban boasts hundreds of political cadres and tens of thousands of facilitators and supporters. The Taliban have also been mobilizing communities to fight alongside them, motivated by the desire

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[16] Ibid.

to defend the community against perceived external threats.[17] Community *lashkars* were mobilized in parts of Helmand, Kandahar, and Uruzgan, particularly from 2006 onwards. Community mobilization occurred in a few spots outside the south as well, but it has been rare—the best-known example is Koringal valley in Kunar. Such *lashkars* have been fighting on and off with the Taliban, but by 2010 they had mostly demobilized due to heavy casualties.

The casualty rate is high, with Taliban sources acknowledging 500 killed in 2010 in Helmand alone, which has driven opportunists and mercenaries away from the movement. Behavior in battle suggests a stern commitment to the fight. Few Taliban are captured on the battlefield; most prisoners are rounded up in their homes or seized in night raids. Finally, from what can be gathered from ISAF concerning prisoner interrogation, it is rare for Taliban members to claim to have been induced to fight by the offer of economic rewards. They usually claim to be loyal to the Taliban and seem to be closely identified with the movement. Certainly, recruits have various motivations for joining the Taliban, varying from revenge to indoctrination in *madrasas* to a lust for adventure, but it would seem that the Taliban are doing a fairly good job at socializing members into the movement.[18]

Ethnically, it is estimated that the Taliban is 93 percent Pashtun and the remaining 7 percent a mix of Uzbeks, Tajiks, Pashais, and others (see map for the ethnic breakdown of Afghanistan). Although modest, this percentage of non-Pashtuns (who account for about 50 percent of the total

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[17] Accounts of the fighting in Helmand seem to clearly indicate the presence of such community mobilization; the same can be said of Korengal. For the latter see Sebastian Junger, *War* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010).

[18] ANSO Quarterly Report 4 (2010), www.converge.org.nz/pma/nccdaf6.pdf; Gareth Porter, "Deferring to Petraeus: National Intelligence Estimate Failed to Register Taliban Growth," *CounterPunch*, February 14, 2011; Carlotta Gall, "Midlevel Taliban Admit to a Rift With Top Leaders," *The New York Times*, February 21, 2011; personal communication with ISAF officers, 2010.

population of Afghanistan) has been rising in recent years. Among new recruits, the percentage of non-Pashtuns has steadily risen at the expense of Pashtuns, even if in absolute numbers more and more Pashtun recruits have been forthcoming. Ethnic tensions within the Taliban have been reported—Tajik commanders often seem to be among the moderates (but not always), while Uzbeks tend to be among the radicals, for example[19]— but these ethnic divisions do not necessarily coincide with different political tendencies.

Discussion Questions

1.   Taliban recruitment increased from 2002–2010. What are the primary drivers for recruitment? How ha the Afghan central government and ISAF failed to reduce recruitment?

2.   Considering that the clergy play a fundamental role in mobilizing the insurgents, what strategy, if any, could be implemented to respond to that threat? What role does nostalgia play in the typical Afghan view of the Taliban or mujahedeen?

3.   What strategic gaps exist that allow the Taliban to continue exploiting foreign aid? Specifically, the implication that aid fuels conflict in unequal, segmented tribal enclaves throughout Afghanistan?

D. The Strategic Balance

The strategic balance has been constantly shifting since 2001. From a position of complete marginality in 2002, the insurgents managed to reach a strategic stalemate, if not a slight advantage, by 2009. The Afghan government in Kabul looked much more disunited than the

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[19] Giustozzi, *The Taliban Beyond the Pashtuns - The Afghanistan Papers No. 5* (Waterloo, Ontario: CIGI, 2010).

insurgents themselves as the insurgents continued to make territorial gains and expand their influence, including among ethnic minorities (i.e., non-Pashtuns). (See Appendix E: The Afghan Government.) The number of insurgents steadily grew. The reaction of the American government to a perceived risk of failure in Afghanistan brought the dispatch of more troops and the allocation of more resources to the Afghan theater. The result was the consolidation of the stalemate, but also the introduction of new elements of fluidity, which made predicting an outcome particularly difficult.

By early 2011, it became evident that the Taliban were losing ground for the first time in a number of areas, particularly Kunduz and some parts of Helmand and Kandahar. They were still gaining ground in other parts of the country, particularly in Nangarhar, and recovering strength in western Afghanistan, where they had suffered badly in 2009. The Taliban structure of command and control, which they had tried so hard to develop, was suffering as a result of the massive increase in Special Forces raids targeting commanders and leaders. At the same time, the legitimacy of the Afghan government did not seem to be increasing, nor was the popularity of foreign intervention.[20]

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[20] A. Giustozzi and Mohammad Ishaqzada, *Policing Afghanistan* (Hurst, forthcoming).

III. The Taliban: Strategy and Operations

Until recently, a majority of observers doubted that the Taliban had a strategy at all, arguing that they simply operated as a franchise of radical groups that were intent on creating as much disruption as possible. Over time, however, it has become increasingly clear that the Taliban does have a strategy. A strategy might even have been in place in the early phases of the insurgency (2002-05): the Pakistani Taliban were carrying out raids alongside the border, attracting the attention of Operation Enduring Freedom and drawing it away from the Taliban's slow in-depth infiltration of communities, leaving the inefficient and unpopular police as the only force to try to contain them. Other signs of an overall strategy emerged later, as the Taliban moved cadres from the provinces affected by the fighting and sent them to areas of fresh expansion to train and encourage inexperienced fighters. Geographic expansion has clearly been a priority for the Taliban and they have reaped benefits from their investments, bringing the conflict to new provinces every year.[21]

How the Taliban's strategy has been developed is not clear. It is known that debates have taken place within the leadership on specific issues, and we also know that the leadership is constantly assisted by Pakistani advisors, who very likely contribute to strategy development. The allocation of human and material resources is also debated by the leaders. For example, a debate occurred in 2007 concerning the opportunity to send cadres into Farah province to exploit extremely weak local governance and tribal connections between the Noorzais of Kandahar, recently recruited to the Taliban cause, and the Noorzais of Farah.[22] Some Taliban leaders, notably the Haqqanis, argued that Farah was not suitable to guerrilla war and that cadres there would be exposed.

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[21] Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop*; Gilles Dorronsoro, *The Taliban's Winning Strategy* (Washington: The Carnegie Endowment, 2009).
[22] On the Noorzai, see http://www.nps.edu/programs/ccs/kandahar.html

Those in favor of investing in Farah prevailed, however, and eastern and central Farah turned into a hotbed of Taliban activity in 2007-08. In 2009, an ISAF reaction led to the extermination of the local Taliban leadership and heavy losses of cadres, vindicating the Haqqanis' views. In general, issues are debated by the leaders, with input by advisers, which in some cases can be decisive if Pakistani interests are at stake. Decisions are taken by consensus, or by majority if consensus is not achievable.[23]

There are clear indications that the strategy of the Taliban evolves and adapts to the circumstances. The Taliban faced a backlash following their rapid expansion in 2006-07, for example, as many communities that they were entering strongly objected to their very conservative mores and to the enforcement of Mullah Omar's social edicts. These dated back to when the Taliban regime was in power in the 1990s and included a ban on music and on kite flying. After some discussion, Mullah Omar issued a decree authorizing the field commanders to not implement his social edicts, including the ban on music and orders to pray five times a day, if they judged that the environment was not conducive to them. This is a clear example of adaptation and strategic flexibility. In an apparent effort to limit civilian casualties, the leadership later gradually started tightening the rules on military engagement, another example of adaptation. This was probably in response to debates on civilian casualties, both in the West and in Afghanistan. Conversely, another example of Taliban strategic adaptation was the decision to appoint radical commanders to keep the level of violence high in 2010 in order to take advantage of ISAF's perceived lack of political will to remain in Afghanistan indefinitely.[24]

One of the most recent debates within the Taliban leadership concerns the issue of negotiations with the Afghan government. The debate appears to have been heated, with different positions confronting each other. A majority vote within the leadership, presumably in early

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[23] Waldman, *Sun in the Sky*; interviews with Taliban members and sympathizers, 2008-9.
[24] Interviews with Taliban members and sympathizers, 2008-10.

2010, saw the position sponsored by Mullah Omar prevail: negotiate only from a position of strength after having defeated ISAF's "surge." It is still unclear how the Taliban view negotiations—whether they are their ultimate goal or only a tactic to get foreign armies out of the country. There does seem to be genuine war-weariness building up within the Taliban's ranks among those commanders who have been on the scene for a while and have witnessed the heavy casualty rate and those who have developed personal issues with some of their colleagues. The problem appears to be that negotiating reconciliation implies risks, both from the Taliban who have assassination squads targeting the defectors as well as from government officials who might have personal rivalries with the reconciling Taliban.[25]

A. The Battle of Pashmul

The importance of operational planning in conflict is recorded in the ability of operations to achieve their strategic goals. This brief vignette focuses on this issue of interaction and operational cause and effect from the Taliban's perspective.

The Taliban reportedly conceived the Pashmul operation in 2005, when it became known to them that Canadian troops would take over responsibility for Kandahar province. Conceived by Mullah Dadullah, the plan was to use Pashmul as the springboard for stepping up Taliban operations in the province. It does not appear to have been in any sense a detailed operational plan. Its grand lines featured intensifying activity in order to inflict as many casualties as possible on the Canadians and then seizing control of a section of Kandahar city, including a symbolic building. The aim was to demoralize Canadian public opinion, cause panic among Canadian politicians, and force a Canadian withdrawal, with large-

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[25]Author's sources within the Pakistani military, 2010.

scale political repercussions. The Taliban's conviction that the Canadians could not take Pashmul derived from their belief that it was unconquerable and that even the Soviet army had not been able to take the area in the 1980s.[26]

    Although it appears that the plan faced opposition within the Taliban leadership, it was eventually approved and Dadullah was placed in charge. The location was chosen because of its vineyards and ditches, which offered cover to the Taliban. During the summer of 2006, an unprecedented build-up of Taliban presence in the area of Pashmul started taking place; bomb production workshops were established and fortifications were built. The plan may actually have involved luring or provoking the Canadians into attacking Pashmul, where terrain is more difficult than in the rest of Kandahar, thus getting them to fight on a ground of the Taliban's choosing. As the buildup grew to hundreds and perhaps over a thousand Taliban, attacks in and around Kandahar intensified.[27]

    The operation started rather successfully, with the Canadians meeting heavy resistance and five Canadian forces quickly killed in action. However, the belief that Pashmul's vegetation and ditches would provide cover from the air proved misplaced, as ISAF authorized unguided bombing over the area despite the risk of collateral damage to civilians. From that point onwards, the engagement was one-sided, with the Taliban unable to inflict significant casualties on ISAF forces. ISAF moved against Pashmul from Kandahar, and SOF intervened to cut off the withdrawal route; the Taliban could not hold the ground under heavy aerial bombardment and withdrew with heavy losses.

    Tactically, the engagement was a Taliban defeat. However, the very fact that the Taliban could engage ISAF in a conventional battle at

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[26] In reality, there is no indication that the Soviet army ever tried anything more then battalion-size probing operations there.

[27] See Chris Wattie, *Contact Charlie* (Toronto: Key Porter, 2008).

the outskirts of Kandahar had a major propaganda impact, demonstrating their emergence as a major military force. It is not clear whether Pashmul was actually meant to have a kind of "Tet offensive" impact or whether that was simply achieved by chance and the operation was decided on the basis of an unrealistic assessment of their own capabilities vis-à-vis the Canadian troops. In either case, the Taliban effectively exploited the situation and prioritized the return of their cadres in the area of Pashmul after their tactical defeat, symbolizing their resilience and challenging ISAF's statement of a crushing victory. After Pashmul, the Taliban's influence in Kandahar province started growing steadily.

From the Taliban perspective, the Pashmul engagement was part of a continuum of violence. Isolating it as a specific tactical event is therefore arbitrary. What turned the engagement into a strategic success for the Taliban was their willingness and ability to return to Pashmul within a few months of the battle, demonstrating that they had not been crushed.[28] However, the Taliban have not repeated operations like Pashmul after 2006, indicating that the cost in terms of casualties was assessed to be high and that alternative ways of achieving similar psychological victories were identified.

B. Operational Analysis

Few are the occasions when the Taliban tried to organize large-scale operations, and few are the instances in which they carefully planned small tactical operations (mostly in eastern Afghanistan). The battle of Pashmul was an exception to standard Taliban operations. Operational planning would normally take place within the scope of the team or front; the commanders would confer with each other on how to organize an attack or an ambush. Most fronts did not display much tactical sophistication, although some has been evident in the east and more

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[28] Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop*.

recently in parts of the south. Most ambushes and attacks therefore tended to rely on a limited number of templates. The use of IEDs, for example, is usually determined by the IED cell commander, who tells his men where and when to place them. The limited reliance on operational planning derives from the Taliban's decentralized system of command, which forces reliance on a limited number of basic templates that are easy to use even by marginally skilled commanders.[29]

The lack of tactical sophistication is coherent with the Taliban's general military strategy, which could be described as the "war of the flea."[30] The main tactical points are to convey an image of readiness to sacrifice and resilience to the enemy, which is perceived as weakly motivated (both ISAF/OEF and the Afghan security forces); the actual tactical outcome of single engagements is less important. It is likely that the Taliban developed their military strategy out of an assessment of their tactical capabilities vis-à-vis NATO's armies, rather than vice versa.

Another aspect of the Taliban's improvement between tactics and strategy has been their public relations campaign. It must be remembered that the Taliban started off their insurgency in 2002 as an utterly defeated and demoralized force. Their first priority was to challenge this image, and they received substantial support from the Pakistani Taliban in achieving this. Pashmul might be another example of an image-focused operation, although it is not clear whether it was planned as such from the beginning.

As pointed out above, the gradual tightening of the rules of engagement by the Taliban is very likely related to public relations concerns. The development of the Taliban's shadow governance system is probably also connected to similar concerns. Until 2006-07 there was little evidence that the Taliban were investing significant resources in it, but this

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[29] "Bigger, Badder IEDs…"; Jason Motlagh, "The Taliban's Changing, and Deadly, Tactics," *Time Magazine*, Jul. 01, 2010; Roy Gutman, "Afghanistan War: How Taliban Tactics Are Evolving," *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 15, 2010.
[30] Robert Taber, *War of the Flea:The Classic Study of Guerrilla Warfare* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2002).

changed as they acquired influence and control over more densely populated areas of the country. Whether or not the Taliban initially attributed much significance to their system of governors, clearly it was becoming a serious enterprise by 2008. In early 2010 the Taliban decided to appoint deputy governors at the district level, almost doubling the number of political cadres dedicated to shadow government tasks. Even the departments of education and health were reported to be active on the Taliban side in some areas. And in some regions the judiciary was staffed by real Taliban, as opposed to independent judges being sponsored by the Taliban, as elsewhere.[31]

Much of the Taliban propaganda effort was aimed abroad, either to the Afghan diaspora, which was wealthy enough to contribute to the cause, or to sympathizers elsewhere in the Muslim world, mostly the Arab Gulf countries. Inside Afghanistan, word of mouth and the activities of political cadres remain the main vehicle of political propaganda; the Taliban are also adept at exploiting the free market, with propaganda DVDs selling well in the bazaars of southern Afghanistan and in Pakistan.[32]

The Taliban seem, however, to have consistently opted for keeping the technological level of their military effort low. For example, despite the availability of Middle Eastern inputs that could have led to the adoption of more advanced technologies, the Taliban have opted to expand the use of IEDs quantitatively. Aware of the skills of their human resource pool, they have created in some areas a veritable cottage industry of IED production, a remarkable achievement in a cultural environment where manual work is not the preferred form of militant engagement. Similarly, the Taliban have been using more or less the same light

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[31] In most areas the Taliban would identify suitably conservative religious judges and sponsor them. For more, see A. Giustozzi, "The Local Politics of the Taliban," in *Local Politics in Afghanistan*, edited by Conrad Schetter, (Hurst, forthcoming).
[32] See J. Nathan in Giustozzi, *Decoding the New Taliban*.

weaponry since the beginning of the war, perhaps with an increase in the use of recoilless guns in recent years and with the introduction of heavier anti-aircraft guns (14.5mm as opposed to the 12.7mm almost exclusively in use in the earlier years) and greater numbers of sniper rifles. Little effort has been made to secure more advanced weaponry on the black market, even when it was relatively easily available.[33] These choices reflect a recruiting base of men with limited skills, as well as the tendency of commanders to view advanced and heavy weaponry as prestige weapons that should not be used wastefully.[34] IEDs, by contrast, were used more effectively because nobody had an interest in treasuring them.

Much has been said about Taliban tactics being wasteful of the lives of their fighters, although it has to be considered that many of the casualties inflicted by ISAF were Taliban allies, such as mobilized community youth, rather than core Taliban, particularly in southern Afghanistan. As a result, it is easy to overestimate Taliban losses. Still, it is clear that the Taliban have been willing to take heavy casualties in order to contest the ground with ISAF and the Afghan security forces. Not doing so would have hindered the Taliban's objective to convey an image of aggressiveness.

This attitude can be seen clearly in their efforts to bring the war to Afghanistan's cities. This effort has achieved some startling successes in terms of high-profile attacks in the city center of Kabul, but it has cost the Taliban and their Pakistani allies heavy casualties. The hit teams, particularly the mixed Pakistani-Haqqani network ones, almost invariably got wiped out, even in the event of success.[35]

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[33] Personal communication with ISAF officers, 2009-10; Matt Dupee, "The Taliban Acquisition of Anti-Aircraft Platforms," *The Long War Journal*, November 2, 2010; Ben Gilbert, "Afghanistan's 'Hurt Locker': Facing Off with IEDs," *Minnpost*, 10 February 2010.

[34] Based on accounts by British army officers.

[35] "Haqqani Network," http://www.understandingwar.org/themenode/haqqani-network; Dressler, *The Haqqani Network* (Washington: Institute for the Study of War, 2010).

A key aspect of Taliban risk management is maintaining their sanctuaries in Pakistan. For example, the leadership has come under pressure from the Pakistani army to convince the Tehrik-I Taliban Pakistan (Movement of the Pakistani Taliban, or TTP) to abandon its stance against the Pakistani authorities; having failed that, the Taliban had to reluctantly distance themselves from the TTP, although they do not appear to have severed every contact.[36] They have so far avoided openly declaring their rejection of the TTP, despite Pakistani insistence. In order to secure their sanctuaries, the Taliban cannot object too strongly to Pakistani directives, but at the same time they are reluctant to sever any link to the TTP, which according to some sources controls important Taliban weapon depots. Resentment against the Pakistani army and what the Taliban considers the army's exploitative and opportunistic attitude towards them is widespread within the Taliban; the leadership, however, cannot afford to let this have repercussions. They tend to use soft tactics to resist Pakistani pressure, such as postponement and delay. In 2010, for example, faced with Pakistani pressure to agree with the Pakistani peace plan for Afghanistan, the Taliban raised issues of insufficient representation within the future coalition government. For the Taliban, the political risk deriving from a direct clash with the Pakistanis overrides any other consideration.[37] (See Appendix F: Regional Powers and U.S./Allies.)

Discussion Questions

1.   What does the Taliban do to ensure that their efforts remain successful in militarized zones despite centralized leadership?

2.   Have the Taliban implemented a cohesive strategy since 2001? Who and what has been the primary driver of their strategy?

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[37] Sources within the Pakistani military, 2010; interviews with Taliban commanders and sympathizers, 2009-10.

3. Pakistan continues to have a significant impact on the conflict in Afghanistan. Are there seams and gaps that can be exploited to diminish this influence?

4. What mitigating factors drive cooperation and partnership between the Taliban and other groups? How can these be exploited by ISAF?

IV. ISAF/OEF Strategy and Taliban Adaptation

Having underestimated the spread of the insurgency until at least 2006, ISAF/OEF has struggled to develop a coherent counterinsurgent strategy. Different ISAF commanders have shifted the focus back and forth, sometimes placing it on close air support, sometimes on clean-up operations. This has been particularly problematic because they typically lacked the human resources to hold territories wrested from the enemy. The pace of formation of the Afghan security forces was increased gradually after 2005, but the basic structure and orientation of training remained the same. The army in particular was being trained as light infantry, mostly designed for clean-up operations. Despite their numerical growth, army and police still appeared rather ineffective at holding territory during 2010, particularly when not combined with a strong ISAF contingent.[38]

Beginning in 2006, ISAF started experimenting with solutions to the problem of holding territory, mostly focusing on irregular militias or paramilitary forces to be based in the villages. These have run the gamut from Auxiliary Police to Afghan Public Protection Force to Afghan Local Police. Each iteration brought its own challenges, particularly on the issue of how the militia force could be integrated into the Afghan security apparatus. The idea was to tap into the same reservoir of conflict and rivalry among communities that the Taliban were exploiting. However, the problem turned out to be how to exercise a sufficient degree of command and control over these forces, and the Ministry of Interior repeatedly failed to live up to its task of supervising the militias.[39]

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[38] Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop*; Paul Wood, "US Troops Show Concern over Readiness of Afghan Army," *BBC News,* 16 October 2010; Heidi Vogt, "An Afghan Army, Struggling Ethnic Divisions Threaten Soldiers' Solidarity in Fighting the Taliban," *Associated Press*, August 6, 2010.

[39] Lefebvre, *Local Defence in Afghanistan.*

As a result, throughout 2002-10, the focus of ISAF's effort has been luring the Taliban into a war of attrition, in which the overwhelming tactical superiority of American and NATO infantries coupled with close air support would eventually wear them down and cause them to crack. This was achieved by dispatching small patrols and building seemingly isolated outposts in enemy territory. Although the enemy reacted with repeated attacks and took high casualties, by 2007 it was clear that the Taliban was not wearing down but instead growing stronger. At this point, ISAF started targeting enemy commanders for killing, and from 2010, capture, through night raids. Although it did not reduce the Taliban's numbers, this tactic seems to have achieved greater success in weakening the ability of the enemy to fight, since young replacement commanders did not usually have the same skills as their predecessors.[40]

One of the reasons why the Taliban were not weakened by ISAF tactics until at least 2010 is their tactical adaptation and evolution. As the leadership observed the heavy casualties and minimal impact of their original attacks on patrols and outposts, it started pushing for the adoption of asymmetric tactics. An internal debate on the merits of the new tactics appears to have gone on for some time. A decision to implement them clearly took place in 2007, but it took several years for this to be adopted across the provinces, as many commanders resisted. It appears that the Taliban even had to create a parallel structure specializing in IEDs in response to the reluctance of existing commanders to integrate the IEDs in their operations.[41] It is important to point out that the conditions of

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[40] Scott Baldauf, "Small US Units Lure Taliban into Losing Battles," *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 31, 2005; personal communications with diplomats and ISAF officers, 2008-9; Andy Bloxham, "Afghan War Logs: The Secret Special Forces Hit Squads Hunting Taliban Leaders," *The Telegraph*, 26 Jul 2010; Thomas Harding, "Quarter of Senior Taliban killed by SAS in 'Kill or Capture' Targeting," *The Telegraph*, 1 September 2010; Nick Davies, "Afghanistan War Logs: Task Force 373 – Special Forces Hunting Top Taliban," *The Guardian*, 25 July 2010.
[41] Interviews with Taliban members and sympathizers, 2009-10; ISAF reports on the targeting of IED cells inside Afghanistan.

utilization of IEDs in the post-2001 conflict differed markedly from the utilization of mines in the 1980s. In the 1980s, mines were ready-made in Western, Chinese, and other factories, while after 2001 the Taliban had to manufacture IEDs themselves. In the 1980s, the Soviets and their allies were not able to survey the roads and retaliate against the insurgents laying mines, while after 2001 drone surveillance became a major concern for the IED-laying teams. ISAF anti-IED technology was also much more sophisticated than the Soviet one.

ISAF's targeted killing had an impact from 2007 on Taliban operations; its gradual escalation in 2007-09, however, once again allowed the Taliban to adapt by further decentralizing their command and control, particularly in southern Afghanistan where most targeted killing was concentrated. After the targeting of Taliban commanders intensified greatly in 2010, the Taliban did face difficulties in adapting, particularly because of the sudden character of the escalation. Although the decentralized character of Taliban operations helped them replace commanders easily, their shadow governance structure, which they had been steadily developing since 2006, were badly damaged by the targeting; replacing shadow governors proved much more difficult than replacing military commanders.

The role of external support in fostering Taliban adaptation is unclear, but there are reports that the Pakistanis increased their financial support in 2010. And although some IED advisers from Iraq were reported to be training Taliban cadres in Pakistan in 2009, the design and evolution of IEDs appears to mostly occur locally.[42]

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[42] "Bigger, Badder IEDs in Afghanistan," http://defensetech.org/2010/03/16/bigger-badder-ieds-in-afghanistan/; Paul McLeary, "Enemy Adapts To Counter IED Tactics," *Aviation Week*, Apr 27, 2010; interviews with Taliban members and sympathizers, 2009-10.

Until 2009, ISAF/OEF's almost exclusive preoccupation has been with "kinetic" effects, a legacy of many years of conventional training. As a result, operational analysis prior to 2009 was mainly focused on how to improve tactics and minimize casualties, such as by feeding information to the US Department of Defense and the industry for the development of better armored vehicles. Information gathering, even of the "atmospheric" type, was almost non-existent until 2006 and then developed only slowly until 2009. Arguably, only the dramatic sacking of ISAF's commander Gen. McKiernan in 2009 prompted it into a serious analytical reconsideration of ISAF tactics and strategies in Afghanistan. Several reviews, mostly ordered by Washington, took place, highlighting weaknesses and failures. This eventually led to a revised targeting policy, with greater emphasis on capturing enemy commanders alive as a source of information, and to a tightening of the rules of engagement in order to avoid civilian casualties. The practice of using patrols and isolated outposts as bait for the insurgents was gradually abandoned and appears to have outlived its usefulness.[43]

The changes brought about by Gen. McChrystal in 2009 were more clearly based on an analysis of the Afghan environment than his predecessors' changes had been; his successor, Gen. Petraeus, made further changes, somewhat loosening the rules of engagement and investing additional resources in the targeting of enemy commanders, particularly shadow governors. ISAF's operational design may have been sound in purely military terms at this point, but its flaw remained a weak or nonexistent integration with the political dimensions of the conflict. The Helmand and Kandahar 2010 operations, for example, were implemented with the awareness that the government's administration and police forces were not in a position to fill any gap created by ISAF in the enemy's presence on the ground. Nor did the military strategy seem to

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[43] Woodward, *Obama's Wars*; Hastings, "King David's War"; personal communications with ISAF officers, 2010.

factor in the Afghan political leadership's growing unease with Washington and its plans. The threat represented to the viability of Afghan army and police by political factionalism is similarly being conveniently ignored, although this arguably could represent a greater threat to the stability of Afghanistan than the insurgency per se.[44]

Discussion Questions

1.   Considering that ISAF and its allies are vying for legitimacy in the eyes of the population, what advantages and opportunities can we exploit, relative to the insurgents' culnerabilities, to encourage strategic, operational, and tactical success?

2.   How and why did post-2007 Taliban forces grow stronger from an increase in the use of close air support and the build-up of combat outposts? Other than IEDs, what asymmetrical strategies were employed by the Taliban?

A. *Operation Mushtarak*

A good example of ISAF's new and improved operational planning is *Operation Mushtarak,* which began in February 2010. The operation included a lengthy planning process and was in many ways the most ambitious operation planned by ISAF up to that point. *Mushtarak* was considered by ISAF and by many external observers as a major improvement on previous efforts, in particular because of the extensive preparations made both for the operation and for holding the ground afterwards. In order to establish a government presence as soon as possible in the area targeted by the operation (the town of Marja in Nad-i Ali district), efforts were made to recruit experienced government administrators for the task, albeit with limited results. Mobile police units

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[44] Ibid.

(ANCOP), better trained than the standard Uniformed Police, were deployed to hold territory after the cleaning phase was over, although even in this case they performed below expectations. Information gathering before the operation was extensive, with the result that that ISAF was better informed about the area and the Taliban operating there than on previous occasions. It seems to have missed the presence of an underground network of Taliban, however, which harassed ISAF troops for several months after the successful roll out, even in the little town of Marja itself. [45]

B. ISAF and Its Adaptation After 2009

From 2002-09, ISAF gave the impression of being more concerned with the safety of its own soldiers than with the achievement of strategic military and political goals or with the safety of Afghan civilians. The accusations in this regard might be unfair (on a historical scale, ISAF is probably one of the best behaved occupation forces ever) but must be seen as part of the operating environment. The effort to impose tighter and tighter rules of engagement has been going in the direction of factoring in these types of concerns, but the intermediate and lower levels of command within ISAF have not been fully cooperative in this effort. Resentment among junior officers for what they felt were excessively tight rules of engagement probably contributed to Gen. Petraeus's decision to relax them somewhat when he took over in 2010.[46]

Post-2009, ISAF/OEF's operational planning was much more sophisticated and professional than the Taliban's; almost invariably, this resulted in ISAF/OEF's forces emerging victorious from engagements.

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[45] See, among others, Jeffrey Dressler, *Operation Moshtarak* (Washington: Institute for the Study of War, 2010).

[46] Erica Gaston, "The War Over Afghan Civilian Casualties," *Foreign Policy: The Afpak Channel*, March 8, 2011; *Hope to Fear: An Afghan Perspective on Operations of Pro-Government Forces in Afghanistan* (Kabul: Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2008).

Even in those instances where unexpected Taliban resistance was met, the post-2009 version of ISAF/OEF had the ability to rapidly adapt their operations to the new challenge, as in the case of Pashmul discussed above. This was due to their sophisticated command and control structure, even if the multitude of daily tactical situations made it easier to exercise command in serious engagements than control in all circumstances.[47]

In contrast to the Taliban, ISAF/OEF have been consistently well resourced, especially since 2009. ISAF was deploying 32,000 to 33,000 combat troops by the end of 2010, which together with about 70,000 Afghan soldiers and 60,000 police in the field were facing a maximum of 40,000 full-time insurgents. This is far from the 10:1 superiority recommended by counterinsurgency textbooks to achieve a decisive numerical advantage. Such superiority is probably unachievable, however: ISAF's troop commitments are only likely to decline in the future, and the attrition rates of the Afghan forces (32 percent for the army and 23 percent for the police as of February 2011) will prevent those forces from growing indefinitely. The NATO Training Mission started talking in 2010 about forming a new leadership for the Afghan security forces, but they did not have a viable plan to achieve that quickly enough as of 2011.[48]

Only since 2009 has ISAF/OEF demonstrated an ability to adapt to the challenges posed by the insurgency. The weaknesses of the Taliban have been known for a long time; monitoring Taliban communications

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[47] Personal communication with ISAF officers and civilian officials, 2008-10. The way ISAF/OEF developed their military strategy was, until 2009, similar to the Taliban's: out of their tactical self-confidence and awareness of their extreme superiority, a strategy was developed which attempted to maximize those tactical advantages. However, at least until 2009, this tactically driven strategy had little chance of succeeding, as the insurgents generally had the tactical initiative against a force mix which was conventional to over 95 percent and only marginally composed of SOF. There was little to prevent insurgents to engage tactically only when it suited them and break off every time the odds were not in their favor.

[48] John Wendle, "Fighting The Taliban: Afghan Army Faces Attrition Crisis," *Time Magazine*, 2 March 2011.

highlighted their crisis of growth in 2007 as well as the crisis of discipline in late 2008, when the Taliban could not effectively control the mass of new recruits flocking to the movement, particularly in Kabul's region. But whether ISAF really acquired an ability to seize any opportunity offered by weaknesses shown by their enemy in 2010-11 is not clear. Tactically, ISAF certainly acquired greater flexibility with the arrival of a large SOF contingent in 2010 and has been pursuing the Taliban relentlessly in a number of provinces. The expanding SOF contingent allowed ISAF to bring the war to the Taliban's turf in the mountains and therefore wrest the initiative away from them.

Strategically, ISAF's military focus remained a problem. The need of a political approach to the insurgency was still generally understood as offering some form of reintegration path to surrendering Taliban. The continued reliance on foreign troops to bring pressure on the insurgents has had significant costs in terms of public relations, particularly inside Afghanistan, and has made an improvement in the perception of foreign troops and of their role difficult to achieve.[49]

C. Taliban in Kunduz 2006–2010

One way to illustrate these trends of interaction, adaptation, and reassessment is to focus on a particular example. The Taliban in Kunduz from 2006-2010 provides just such a strategic and operational overview, with the added benefit of an operationally and strategically successful ending. This vignette suggests two important lessons in countering interaction and adaptation: disruption operations and counternetwork operations can have operational and strategic effects; and, when the pressure was off the Taliban in this region, they lost their adaptive capabilities and their skills eroded over time.

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[49] Hastings, "King David's War"; David Isby, *Afghanistan: Graveyard of Empires* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2010): 291.

The appearance of the Taliban in Kunduz was the result of long and determined efforts that started in 2006 with the dispatch of political agents tasked to contact locals and particularly former members of the movement and convince them to join the insurgency. These efforts were not successful initially, but by 2008 their persistence was beginning to pay off, and the Taliban managed to mobilize a new generation of young fighters. A veritable mass mobilization occurred in 2009 within some Pashtun communities of the province, particularly in Chardara district. Riding this wave of popular support, the Taliban managed to bring the war to almost every corner of this multi-ethnic province, invading Tajik, Uzbek and Turkmen areas. Although the Taliban could recruit a few Tajik commanders on their side, by and large the Taliban of Kunduz remained a Pashtun movement. Their encroachment on non-Pashtun territory brought about a reaction by what was left of the old militias of Jamiat-i Islami, Junbesh-i Milli-ye Islami, and other groups, which remobilized to push the Taliban back. The situation had stabilized by early 2010, with the Taliban in control of most Pashtun villages and the militias in control of most of the Tajik, Uzbek, and Turkmen villages.

The Taliban's luck, however, was about to run out. US SOF entered the scene during the summer and autumn of 2010, hitting the local Taliban very hard and virtually exterminating their local leadership. The Taliban in Kunduz had not been under heavy pressure before, since the local ISAF-German garrison had not been proactive in fighting them and the Afghan police was also ineffective. This sudden escalation not only decapitated the network locally but also threw the Taliban itself into disarray. They had become used to dictating the pace and timing of conflict in the region; the speed and ferocity of the SOF attacks disrupted this cozy situation.

The Taliban's strategic and operational decision making process is not particularly fast, not least because decisions are usually taken after debates and require consensus. Up until this point, however, they had

certainly seemed to have been faster in taking decisions than Kabul, ISAF, or Washington (or to be more precise, the combination of them). The Taliban's decision making and lengthy processes of implementation has been highlighted as a particular weakness. This was not a problem until 2009, when ISAF became more proactive and the Taliban struggled to keep up with the pace. Unable to adapt quickly in Kunduz, the Taliban started losing ground, and even the Afghan police was able to regain the initiative against them. With the exception of some of the better trained, more radical Taliban groups, supported by foreign elements, who tried to fight back, the bulk of the Taliban had surrendered or fled Kunduz by February 2011.[50]

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[50] A. Giustozzi and Christoph Reuter, *The Insurgents of the Afghan North*.

V. Conclusion

Insurgencies are dynamic processes of adaptation and counteradaptation. There should always be an expectation that insurgents will try to adapt to whatever counterinsurgency effort is mobilized against them; while demanding a major investment of energy and resources, adaptation might actually ending up making the insurgents stronger. Any counterinsurgency effort should therefore be based on an assessment of the insurgents' capabilities and potential. The counterinsurgent should be careful about not pushing the insurgency down a road that, although difficult to pursue, might turn it into a superior organization. As of 2011, the indications were that the growing pressure exercised on the Taliban might be achieving exactly that, while the Kabul government forces, sheltered by a massive international presence, failed to keep the pace.

Tactical encounters in a guerrilla war do not have the same significance as they have in a conventional conflict: they are not primarily meant to defeat the enemy militarily or achieve strict military aims. What the insurgents try to achieve by challenging the enemy militarily is to show that the monopoly of violence has been broken and that there is competition over who is the legitimate government of the country. Tactical encounters, therefore, have a symbolic significance, particularly when the enemy is widely perceived as being far superior in terms of resources and technology, which is certainly the case in Afghanistan. Therefore, indulging in the celebration of tactical successes, while useful to boost the morale of the conventional army facing the insurgency, is misleading in terms of analyzing the dynamics of the conflict. The thinking has to be in terms of the impact on local perceptions: whom the villagers see as the dominant force locally. Tactical encounters are only the tip of an iceberg of activities that include armed propaganda, intimidation, coercion, population control, and administration, which military intelligence agencies often fail to detect or detect belatedly.

Discussion Questions

1.	What factors contribute to the success or failure of armed groups in general?

2.	What distinctive or unique approaches have the Taliban implemented to make their legacy successful?

3.	The Taliban's strong point of decentralization is also a weakness. Apart from targeted killings, how can ISAF and its allies exploit that weakness?

VI. Annexes

Annex A: Historical Context

Politically, Afghanistan was largely stable in the 1970s before the 1978 Communist coup, although not completely calm. Some small Maoist-leaning groups challenged government control in the Shamali region and other areas just north of Kabul but did not pose a serious threat. The Maoists recruited educated and semi-educated people who were often discriminated against within the government, especially Hazaras and Shiites. The pro-Soviet leftists were strong in the army and in the state bureaucracy, but weak in the villages. They did recruit many teachers, however, gaining some influence among the rural population. The Islamists recruited among the upper middle class for the sympathies of the urban population, sometimes in competition with pro-Soviet leftists, but had greater success in attracting young men of rural origins who were disturbed by the relative progressiveness of cities like Kabul and Jalalabad, where the universities were based. They tried to organize an uprising in select rural areas in 1975 but failed miserably. By 1978 they were a marginal force, with perhaps one thousand or so activists, most of whom were in exile in Pakistan.[51]

The Muslim clergy, who would play a very important role in the jihad movement, were quiet and fragmented in many local networks, without a real national leadership or an ability to mobilize nationally. Tribes and communities were also quiet and no local revolts were recorded during the 1970s, as the central state had convincingly demonstrated its willingness to repress any revolt ruthlessly.[52]

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[51] A. Giustozzi, "Transition Without End," working paper (London: Crisis States Research Centre, 2009); A. Guistozzi *Empires of Mud* (London: Hurst, 2009); Richard H. Shultz Jr. and Andrea J Dew, *Insurgents, Terrorists, and Militias* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2006): Chapter 6.

[52] A. Olesen, *Islam and Politics in Afghanistan* (London: Curzon, 1995).

The Communist government that seized power in 1978 ignited the conflict by antagonizing the more conservative strata of the population as well as the new Islamist-leaning Pakistani regime of Gen. Zia-ul Haq.[53] The leftists launched land reform and a series of progressive initiatives concerning female emancipation, which created turmoil and some violent resistance. The regime reacted indiscriminately and set out to wipe out the top layers of the clergy and tribal aristocracy, believing that they had a hand in organizing the resistance. The armed forces often reacted brutally to attacks on party activists and state officials, bombing villages.

Rather than weakening the opposition, this indiscriminate overreaction energized it. Many thought that the regime was out to exterminate all perceived opposition, and Afghans felt driven to fight out of fear of being caught in the repression. The Soviet intervention at the end of 1979 was meant to stabilize the new regime, reorganize the security forces, and leave as quickly as possible. Instead, the regeneration of the Afghan armed forces proved a more complicated task than they had expected, as Soviet presence in the country aroused even further opposition and the Soviets were caught in the conflict.[54]

The Mujahideen "Way of War" in the 1980s

In 1978-80, it was common to observe Afghan Pashtun communities mobilize tribal *lashkars* (tribal armies) and move against government compounds with frontal, ill-organized attacks. The appearance of Soviet air power and relatively well-directed artillery fire made this tactic suicidal and triggered the evolution of the resistance. Although the lashkars allowed tribal leadership to maintain control over

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[53] Shahid Jared Burki and Craig Baxter, *Pakistan Under the Military: Eleven Years of Zia-ul Haq* (Lahore: Westview Press, 1991); Craig Baxter, ed. *Zia's Pakistan* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985).
[54] Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending*; G. Feifer, *The Great Gamble* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009); A. Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

the mass of the tribesmen, they were unsuitable against the Soviets. This failure paved the way for guerrilla war, which undermined tribal leadership's ability to maintain control, as the tribal elders had little relevant experience in this field and little understanding of the need for tactical adaptation, such as small unit tactics, underground work, and so forth.

At the start of the conflict, the jihadist opposition—calling itself the *mujahideen* or holy warriors—was decentralized and disorganized. Most of the armed groups were formed locally and mobilized by local communities, landlords, and strongmen. Organized Islamist input was marginal. After the intervention of the Soviet army, the mujahideen began adapting to new circumstances and a more challenging environment. This was facilitated by the desertion to the resistance of a number of Afghan army officers and the provision of training by the Pakistani army.[55]

All of these issues played in favor of the emergence of a new class of military professionals. The mujahideen originally came from social groups who had experience in either military tactics or underground work: former military personnel, political activists, and bandits. Over time, the most apt of these young men and boys who had joined the fight in 1978-1980 rose up the ranks of the opposition and attained leadership positions. This new social group gradually became a new social class, one with little memory of pre-war ways of life and a high awareness of their own importance. The original leadership, rooted in the roles they played as civilians before the outbreak of the conflict, was marginalized in most of the country.[56]

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[55] Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending.*
[56] A. Giustozzi, "The Missing Ingredient: Non-Ideological Insurgency and State Collapse in Western Afghanistan, 1979-1992," *Working Paper Series* 2 no. 11, (London: Crisis States Research Centre, LSE, 2007); Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud*; and O. Roy, "Nature de la guerre en Afghanistan," *Les Temps Modernes*, June, (1988); O. Roy, "Afghanistan: War as a Factor of Entry into Politics," *Central Asian Survey* Vol. 8 no. 4 (1988): 43-62.

In terms of tactical evolution, the mujahideen developed or refined guerrilla tactics and shaped their organization around their commanders.[57] From the squad leader to the front commander, the commanders became the core structure of virtually all the resistance groups and parties. At the local level, organizations became dependent on charismatic leaders who built armed groups around themselves and maintained full control over them. Little organizational development took place beyond this. The main exception was Hizb-i Islami, the main Islamist organization in the conflict, which tried to develop a sophisticated structure of centralized control. It established a UHF radio network, employed a kind of political commissar, and created a relatively complex bureaucracy in Pakistan to oversee the whole effort.[58] But even Hizb-i Islami struggled to implement its own strategy of creating a centralized insurgency, mainly due to the shortage of educated cadres.[59] In the absence of a political structure to support the resistance, the commanders started turning into "new khans," assuming the role of local strongmen and prioritizing local concerns and interests at the expense of any national strategy or aims.[60]

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[57] In most of Afghanistan by 1978, several generations had lived without having had any experience of warfare, except for compulsory military service. There was only a fading memory of how the previous wars had been fought; moreover, the military environment of the 1980s was different from that of the Anglo-Afghan Wars, for example, in particular due to the role of air power. For details see Richard H. Shultz Jr. and Andrea J Dew, *Insurgents, Terrorists, and Militias*, Ch. 6.

[58] For short profiles, see "Hizb-i Islami Gulbuddin" (Washington: Institute for the Study of War, 2010) http://www.understandingwar.org/themenode/hezb-e-islami-gulbuddin-hig; Omid Marzaban, "Gulbuddin Hekmatyar," *Terrorism Monitor* Vol. 4 issue 18 (2006); Muhammad Tahir, "Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Return to the Afghan Insurgency," *Terrorism Monitor* Vol. 6 issue 11(2008).

[59] Hizb-i Islami's structure was best developed where it could recruit sufficient numbers of such cadres, such as in Parwan and Kapisa provinces, in parts of Kabul province, in Wardak, Logar and parts of Nangarhar. It never had great success in the tribal areas of the southeast or in the west nor in northern Afghanistan, where few educated cadres were available.

[60] Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud*; the author's interviews with former mujahideen commanders, 2007-9.

The initial Soviet units that moved into Afghanistan at the end of 1979 were constituted of reserve forces mobilized in the Turkestan military region. These were some of the weakest units of the whole Soviet army, and their capabilities in terms of counterguerrilla operations were very limited. Starting in 1980, however, the Soviet army replaced the Central Asian reservists with better trained conscripts and an increasing number of Special Forces (*Spetsnaz*). Close air support improved with the deployment of growing numbers of Mi-24 Hind helicopter gunships, which were also assigned to the Afghan air force in substantial numbers, and Su-25 Frogfoot close air support aircraft, which proved effective and were even used to deliver laser-guided bombs.[61]

More important than the military dimension of the Soviet-Afghan counterinsurgency, however, was the political-intelligence dimension. The KGB rebuilt Afghan intelligence from scratch and allowed it to take control of most of the counterinsurgency effort. The main features of this effort included a larger and larger special force command under the Afghan Intelligence Service (Khadamat-i Atala'at-i Dawlati, or KhAD) that eventually relied on 60 battalions, thousands of political agents around the country, and the creation of a large militia force. The purpose of these units was to bring the war to the villages, the home turf of the insurgents, and to identify divisions and weaknesses within the ranks of the opposition.

The evolution of the Soviet-Afghan effort increased pressure on the insurgents; although the *Spetsnaz* were never able to completely close the supply lines coming from Pakistan, they were able to assist in partially choking off supplies to northern Afghanistan. This was the first region of Afghanistan where the pro-Soviet government began to gain the upper hand in 1985. The militias helped to marginalize the mujahideen in the

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[61] A. Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society in Afghanistan, 1978-1992* (London: C. Hurst & Co, 2000); Feiffer, *The Great Gamble*.

north and later also in the west. KhAD political agents succeeded in reducing the level of opposition in Kandahar as well as some other areas.[62]

The mujahideen struggled to adapt to this combination of military and political tactics; many chose instead to come to terms with the government and sign ceasefires or switch sides. A minority of mujahideen, however, did adapt, often driven by ideology, and that was enough to maintain a degree of threat even in the areas where the pro-Soviet government was strongest. Militarily, the mujahideen increasingly relied on Western manufactured and undetectable mines, anti-tank weaponry (eventually including guided missiles), long-range rockets and mortars, and anti-aircraft weaponry to counterbalance the technological escalation taking place on the government side. Tactical skills also evolved, mostly in specific areas and under specific commanders. Some commanders grew into regional commanders, able to coordinate operations on a large scale; their ability to mobilize junior commanders was always limited, even where the process went further, such as around Panjshir (Commander Ahmad Shah Massud) and around Herat (Commander Ismail Khan).[63]

The final collapse of the pro-Soviet regime was not the result of a mujahideen victory, but of the collapse of the regime's source of patronage, the Soviet Union. Fragments of the regime's militias and different factions of the mujahideen then confronted each other in a civil war that began in 1992 with occasional flareups of fighting and quickly degenerated into full-scale conflict. This phase consisted of a civil war among factions of similar strength, so we shall not examine it in detail.

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[62] Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society in Afghanistan*; M Hassan Kakar, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response, 1979-1982* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995). With some caution see also Chapters 21-22 in Christopher M. Andrew, *The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); V. Mitrokhin, *The KGB in Afghanistan*, Woodrow Wilson Center, 2002 www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/WP40-english.pdf.
[63] Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending*; Giustozzi, *Empires of* Mud; A. A. Jalali and L. Grau, *The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War* (U.S. Marine Corps Studies/Analysis Div, 1995).

What was going on was semi-regular militias, initially with the incorporation of some units of what had been the regular army of the pro-Soviet regime, confronting each other over the control of roads and urban centers.

Annex B: Afghanistan's Economic Environment

The assumption that simply pumping resources into a post-conflict country helps address problems quickly has been proven wrong, particularly in Afghanistan. The roots of this problem were created during the Soviet-Afghan conflict and have been exacerbated by more than 30 years of conflict. The bubble economy created after 2001 is important because it divided the country between the beneficiaries of the new setup—relatively few—and a majority who lost out because a massive inflationary process eroded their purchasing power. It also insulated the Afghan government from its natural constituency, the Afghan population.

Prior to the Soviet-Afghan war, Afghanistan's economy was very underdeveloped. State control discouraged private initiative and little financial accumulation occurred; the banking system was also state controlled. The government was dependent on external assistance for its development efforts, which primarily consisted of infrastructure extension as well as a few extractive and industrial projects; these were mostly run inefficiently and did not contribute significantly to state revenue. The state had gradually abandoned direct taxation after World War II, relying instead on custom revenues. This had a greater degree of cost effectiveness but also insulated the state from society, making it more resilient to turmoil and less responsive than ever to demands coming from society. This tendency was reinforced by the impact of external assistance, mostly of Soviet origin, with American help a close second.[64]

From 1978 onwards, Afghanistan's economy was transformed in a number of ways. A war economy developed in which the government was completely dependent on Soviet hand-outs and the opposition depended on American and Arab support; smuggling networks developed rapidly during the 1980s and by the 1990s were ready to provide sources of

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[64] Giustozzi, "Transition…"

revenue to factions in a civil war that regional powers and superpowers had little or no interest in supporting financially. Even the Saudis, Pakistanis, and Iranians, who kept supporting their Afghan allies in the 1990s, were nowhere as lavish in their support as they had been in the 1980s. [65]

The Taliban similarly received some support from abroad, but mostly relied on revenue they could raise through taxation and customs. By de facto legalizing the smuggling networks and taxing them, they raised sufficient revenue to run their own state administration, admittedly on the cheap.[66]

From 2001 onwards the situation again resembled that of the 1980s, with external aid and expenditure overshadowing anything else, except perhaps a booming narcotics trade. The bubbles created by aid money and direct expenditures of foreign armies and civilian agencies drove massive economic growth, with the building and contracting industries in particular growing multifold. Afghanistan's industrial sector and agriculture lagged behind; the high costs of labor and energy made it difficult for Afghan entrepreneurs to sell locally manufactured products competitively.

The insulation of the government from society was consolidated by a level of external financial inflows that far exceeded previous levels in real terms; however, the effects of these high levels of expenditure percolated down to society in a number of ways. First, employment was created, at least in the cities, drawing villagers away from the countryside; the rising cost of living also provided an incentive to either find salaried employment or rely on cash crops such as poppies. Although corruption was already in expansion in the 1990s, the new wealth further stimulated

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[65] B. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

[66] A. Rashid, *Taliban* (London: Tauris, 2000); Dorronsoro, *Revolution*.

the corruption of government officials, whose salaries were no longer sufficient to afford a decent lower-middle-class standard of living.

Perhaps the most significant impact was the changing mentality of the upper strata of the rural population. Those with resources were now less interested in redistribution and in developing a retinue of followers than in investing in profitable ventures, where returns were often exceptionally high, particularly for those well-connected to the Afghan government or foreign agencies. In a sense, capitalism arrived in Afghanistan for the first time, with a deep transformative impact that, in the short term, undermined a system of government based on the influence of elders and on some residual ability of communities to administer themselves.[67]

Discussion Questions

1. How could the Afghan government compete with the heavy-handed Taliban for tax revenue?

2. What provisions could the Afghan central bank make to inhibit the Taliban from collecting taxes from communities?

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[67] A. Giustozzi, "The Political Economy of International Post-Conflict Statebuilding in Afghanistan," in *The Political Economy of Post-Conflict Statebuilding: Power after Peace*, Edited by Mats Berdal and Dominik Zaum, (forthcoming 2011).

Annex C: Afghanistan—A Fragmented Society

The impact of external support on a society fragmented to start with and further fragmented by more than 20 years of war has been to excite rivalries and jealousies. The urban/rural divide and the role of the clergy are essential to understanding mobilization on the insurgents' side. A fragmented society with only limited experience of successful state-building in the past is particularly difficult to handle for any outside actors intervening in support of whichever elite is currently claiming to be the Afghan government.

Afghanistan has always been very fragmented socially due to the coexistence within its boundaries of many different communities, the weak central state, and the limited economic development that never managed to merge the communities into a national whole. There are an estimated 400 Pashtun tribes, each further sub-divided into rival communities and clans, and thousands of non-Pashtun communities, often distinct unto themselves. To the extent that economic and social development has taken place, it only had an impact in terms of merging communities in the cities, and even that was negatively affected by 30 years of internal conflict and the breakdown of the state in the 1990s. In these early stages of economic and social development, the impact has been to further complicate Afghanistan's fragmentation by creating social interest groups that intertwine with communities, ethnic groups, and tribes rather than combine them.[68]

Even a simplified picture of Afghan society shows that communities vary greatly in terms of their internal organization. In the southeast and in remote areas of the south and east, tribes have maintained their functionality, have leadership capable of mobilizing the community for collective action, and are quite autonomous from the Afghan state.

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[68] A. Giustozzi, *Afghanistan's 30 Years War* (Kabul: AREU, forthcoming).

Around the main cities and highways of the south and east, however, tribes have lost this ability and often maintain little more than a residual form of identity that some politicians try to tap into for political mobilization through the distribution of favors and patronage. In such areas, any collective action happens at the sub-tribal level, typically in communities of villages relatively isolated from other components of Afghan society.

Similarly, non-Pashtun communities tend to have a capacity for collective action when they are remote from the cities, but this can be implemented through different systems of self-organization. In some cases (Badakhshan, Hazarajat, Uzbek communities of northern Afghanistan), mobilization is achieved through a strongman who has the physical force and the resources to mobilize a retinue of armed men; this mobilization typically is not as inclusive as in Pashtun tribes.

In other cases, a collective leadership of elders can mobilize the youth (Tajik areas north of Kabul). Often the system is mixed: the elders have a say but only a strongman can effectively mobilize people. In part, these social structures existed before the war; however, 30 years of war have created a new class of "military leaders" or strongmen who in the presence of a weak state have been able to assume control of many communities or have gained a strong bargaining position vis-à-vis the elders.[69] According to the Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) database, maintained by Afghanistan New Beginning Program (ANBP) and the Disarmament Commission, there were 5,557 illegal armed groups as of late 2006.[70] The number might actually be higher now due to widespread insecurity. Strongmen with an armed retinue thus are a feature of the Afghan social landscape that is not going to disappear soon.

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[69] Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud*.

[70] A. Giustozzi (ed.), *DDR: Bringing the State Back In* (forthcoming); See also A. Giustozzi, "Bureaucratic Façade and Political Realities of Disarmament and Demobilisation in Afghanistan," *Conflict, Security & Development*, no. 2 (2008).

The urbanization of Afghanistan has further complicated this picture. All the main Afghan cities (Kabul, Herat, Mazar-I Sharif, Kandahar, and Jalalabad) have, to various degrees, been swollen by a wave of migrants from the villages as well as recent immigrants, mostly refugees from Pakistan and Iran. This wave has diluted the urban character of the cities, which had already been weakened during the war by successive waves of emigration of middle- and upper-class citizens. Generally speaking, the urban population is demoralized and not very active politically; they feel betrayed by the government but rarely have sympathy for the armed opposition. Heavily rigged elections have kept almost all of the urban intelligentsia out of parliament.

Finally, the importance of the Islamic clergy in Afghanistan cannot be underestimated. At the start of the 30 years of conflict, it was estimated that clerics and other religious figures (saints, holy figures, etc.) comprised about 2 percent of the population. That percentage is likely to have grown because of increased recruitment to religious schools in the 1980s, when the state educational system was pushed out of the villages and Arab countries funded a massive expansion of religious education for Afghans in Pakistan. Typically, the Afghan clergy has always been fragmented in small local networks, with just the mystic Sufi orders (Naqshandiyya, Qadiriyya, and Chestiyya) being organized in wider (but never truly national) networks. The emergence of clerical resistance parties in the 1980s (such as Harakat-e Enqelab among the Sunnis) helped unify various small clerical networks into a wider organization. The next crucial passage in the emergence of the clergy as a "social class" with strong political ambitions was the Taliban government of 1996-2001, which exerted a great effort to mobilize clerical networks countrywide to support the new government and represent it at the local level. The Taliban obtained a fair degree of success; however, not all clerical networks were responsive. In particular, Sufis tended not to link with the Taliban. The experience of

power and influence of the clergy in this period explain the later nostalgia for the Taliban among many mullahs.[71]

Discussion Questions

1.   Urbanized Afghans are typically the most educated and prosperous in Afghanistan. They are also the least active in the government, the military, and the insurgency. How has ISAF and the U.S. marginalized this group since 2001? What can be done to gain their support?

2.   What role has patrimolialism played in governance? Is this form of rule justified, consdering the historical clan/tribe system of governance?

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[71] Giustozzi, *Koran*, 43; Mirwais Wardak et al., *The Role and Functions of Religious Civil Society in Afghanistan* (Kabul : CPAU, 2007); Kaja Borchgrevink, *Religious Actors and Civil Society in Post-2001 Afghanistan* (Oslo: PRIO, 2008); Giustozzi, *Decoding the New Taliban*; specifically on Sufism, see Martin Lings, *What is Sufism?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); on Sufism in Afghanistan, see O. Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Annex D: Other Insurgent and Pro-Government Groups

A. Insurgent Armed Groups

Hizb-i Islami is the second-largest insurgent group in Afghanistan, accounting for perhaps 10 percent of the strength of the insurgency. Many former fighters of Hizb-i Islami or their relatives also fight in the ranks of the Taliban, particularly in areas where Hizb-i Islami has no organized presence. It operates mostly in eastern Afghanistan, reaching out to some areas around Kabul and the southeast. Hizb-i Islami's relations with the Taliban are often troubled, and the two groups have fought each other in the recent past; as of early 2011 they seem to have patched up their differences and are fighting together again.[72] Hizb-i Islami's strategy appears easier to analyze than the Taliban's. It does not have the financial resources to compete with the Taliban for the leadership of the insurgency, and its aim has been to enhance its military strength gradually in order to gain leverage at the negotiating table once time is ripe for an agreement. Hizb-i Islami could not afford to negotiate separately, because the Pakistanis oppose such a move and because the Taliban would not have much leverage in such a case. Hizb-I Islami does not want a military victory for the Taliban. Ideally, the party maneuvers for a political deal, where its role would be maximized.[73]

Various Salafi (Islamic fundamentalist) groups exist in eastern Afghanistan, particularly in Kunar and Nuristan provinces, and some have declared a jihad against the government and the foreign armies. Although Salafism is predominant at the popular level in these two provinces, the Salafis' military role is marginal. In the past they had troubled relations with both Hizb-i Islami and Taliban, but seemed in early 2011 to operate

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[72] Institute for the Study of War, "Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG)"
[73] Ibid.

together with them.[74] They account for less than 1 percent of the insurgency.

Al Qaida had a small presence in Afghanistan by late 2010, with probably tens rather than hundreds of cadres operating in Afghan territory. These cadres operated mainly as advisers, specialists, and trainers, giving them a greater value than their small numbers would suggest. Al Qaida cooperated closely with the Taliban, or at least selected commanders, but ceased sending relatively large teams of fighters into Afghanistan, in part because of the negative reactions that groups of foreign fighters were eliciting from both the general population and Taliban fighters alike.[75] It is difficult to judge Al Qaida's strategy in Afghanistan, but certainly they oppose negotiations and will try to do whatever they can to sabotage them. Their likely strategy is to keep the Afghan front open as long as possible in order to weaken the American enemy and prevent a future intervention in the Arab world.

Several Pakistani jihadist organizations fight from time to time in Afghan territory, most typically some factions of the Pakistani Taliban and Lashkar-e Taiba; their men are usually found not far from the Pakistani border. Their numbers vary greatly depending on the season and developments in Pakistan itself; on average their strength can be estimated around 3 to 4 percent of the insurgency as a whole, that is, never exceeding 2,000.[76] Pakistani jihadist groups are certainly more exposed to Pakistani pressure and might to a large extent share Pakistan's goals in

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[74] Personal communications with journalists in London and Jalalabad, 2008-10. On Salafism, see: Richard H. Shultz, *Global Insurgency Strategy and the Salafi Jihad Movement* (USAF Academy: USAF Institute for National Security Studies, 2008).
[75] Bill Roggio, "Analysis: Al Qaeda Maintains an Extensive Network in Afghanistan," *Long War Journal*, 29 July 2010; James Gordon Meek, "Al Qaeda in Afghanistan: Small in Numbers, Huge in Impact on Taliban," *New York Daily News*, 23 August 2010; Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster), 162.
[76] ANA briefing, April 2010.

Afghanistan; they would support a negotiated settlement if that was sponsored by the Pakistanis.

Central Asian jihadist movements are increasingly found in northern Afghanistan, where they appear to have been integrated into the Taliban structure and work to recruit young Afghan Uzbeks to the cause. The fighting strength of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (the largest of these groups) is probably no more than 1 percent of the strength of the insurgency.[77] They have shown no interest in a peace that could deny them access to Central Asia. The presence of Chechens is reported, although they are more likely to be tens than hundreds; they tend to serve as trainers and weapons specialists.

There are also some independent Afghan jihadists, who are not affiliated with any organization. They seem relatively abundant in western Afghanistan, where some receive support from Iran. On the whole, they probably do not account for more than 2 percent to 3 percent of the strength of the insurgency.[78]

Among the opposition groups, Hizb-i Islami is most likely to attract portions of the educated class, although the Taliban are also known to have made an effort. This radical Islamist group has been recruiting among university students since the 1970s and continues to do so. If the armed opposition attracts urban dwellers in any numbers, they are likely to come from the youth. Taliban presence and recruitment is reported in most universities, while Hizb-i Islami is strong among students, particularly in Jalalabad. There is also a stream of Taliban recruits among the non-educated urban youth, but these are mostly recent immigrants into the cities, who remain socially marginalized and have also been culturally alienated by the contrast between urban and rural mores.[79]

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[77] A. Giustozzi and Christoph Reuter, *The Insurgents of the Afghan North*.

[78] Personal communication with UN officials, 2010 and with members of the provincial council of Herat, 2010.

[79] Giustozzi, "Between Patronage and Rebellion: Student Politics in Afghanistan," briefing paper (Kabul: Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2010).

B. Pro-Government Armed Groups

The most significant armed groups emerging from Operation Enduring Freedom were Jamiat-i Islami, Junbesh-i Milli-ye Islami, and Hizb-i Wahdat. Jamiat-i Islami is a moderate Islamist group led by Professor Rabbani, loosely organized around a collection of strongmen, and mostly composed of Tajiks from the northeastern, western, and northern regions as well as the central region around Kabul; from 2002 onwards it has shown a tendency towards internal fragmentation. Junbesh-i Milli-ye Islami is a secular group gathered around Gen. Dostum, mostly composed of Uzbeks from northern Afghanistan and with regionalist claims; this group also has been weakening politically and militarily in recent years and has suffered many defections. Hizb-i Wahdat is a Shiite group originally of Khomeninist inclinations and then increasingly driven by Hazara nationalism, based in central Afghanistan; this group has splintered into several rival factions.

Many local military leaders linked to the factions above are now on the loose and dedicated to criminal activities; some collaborate with the insurgency. The best-known example is Ghulam Yahya, a former commander of Jamiat in Herat, who until his death in fall 2009 was emerging as the leading Taliban commander in the province. Among Pashtuns, pro-government armed groups have almost entirely been absorbed into the police. Some local military leaders have been incorporated in a range of government-sponsored militias that started forming in 2009.[80]

Several other groups were minor players in terms of their influence and military power. Probably over 6,000 inactive militias are currently present in the country, often indistinguishable from criminal gangs.

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[80] See M. Lefebvre, *Local Defence in Afghanistan: A Review of Government-backed Initiatives* (Kabul: Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2010).

Hundreds of private security companies exist with anywhere between 40,000 to 70,000 armed guards, many of whom are unregistered. Afghanistan's police are often staffed by militias linked to political factions, especially but not exclusively in southern Afghanistan. These police-militias are often keen enemies of the Taliban, but are undisciplined and can have a contentious relationship with local people, which contributes to increasing hostility toward the government amongst the population.[81]

The Afghan army is considered by many sources—government, military, and local populations—to be more disciplined than the police, although many of its officers do have a background in the anti-Taliban factions and maintain some allegiance to them. The militias have not been able to infiltrate the army, and former militiamen have only been admitted on an individual basis. Although the army's interaction with the local population is not nearly as difficult as the police force's, questions about their motivation to fight have been raised. Moreover, the Afghan army is completely dependent on ISAF's support, both in terms of logistics and firepower (close air support) and, more worrying, for leadership rather than just advice or training. This makes their sustainability after ISAF's withdrawal difficult to predict.[82]

Discussion Questions

1.   Considering the wide array of ideologically and opportunistically driven combatants in Afghanistan, including Chechens, Pakistani proxy groups, various Taliban offshoots, Iranian paramilitants,

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[81] A. Giustozzi and Mohammad Ishaqzada, *Policing Afghanistan* (Kabul/Berlin: Afghanistan Analysts Network, forthcoming).

[82] A. Giustozzi, *Unwarranted Hope: A Force in Fragments -- Reconstituting the Afghan National Army* (Brussels: ICG, 2010).

Al Qaeda, Hizbi-i Islami and the Haqqani network, what opportunities exist for exploiting said combatants' seams and gaps?

      2.   What has been the impact of other armed opposition groups on the Taliban's strategy, identity, and influence?

Annex E: The Afghan Government
The Bonn Agreement and the Ruling Coalition

The 2001 Bonn agreement (officially the Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions) was reached as the Taliban regime was being overthrown by a joint offensive of US forces and anti-Taliban factions. The agreement established an interim government, the Afghan Interim Authority, which had a six-month mandate, which was supposed to be followed by a two-year transitional authority. The new interim authority featured a coalition among all anti-Taliban groups. The most prominent was Jamiat-i Islami, which had already taken military control of Kabul as well as portions of northeastern, northern, central, and eastern Afghanistan. The Jamiatis agreed to Hamid Karzai taking the interim presidency, probably because they judged him a weak pliable figurehead whom they could control and use in handling the Pashtun half of the population, among which they had little influence.[83]

However, the Bonn coalition started disintegrating relatively rapidly, with significant tensions emerging as early as 2002. Karzai and his closest allies, encouraged by their Western allies, moved to gradually expand their influence and break up Jamiat's monopoly over the security sector. From 2003 onwards, Jamiat's hold over the security sector started to erode, although it was never eradicated. The anti-Jamiat camp, however, was divided between technocrats with a penchant for institution building and Karzai's own group, which gradually showed a greater and greater interest in building a patrimonial system around the president himself and his family. Personal interests played a role in these developments, but there was also a genuine debate on what system of government would be most effective in managing Afghanistan. Among

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[83] J.F. Dobbins, *After the Taliban* (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2008).

Westerners, there was by no means unanimity in favor of institution building, even if the principle was never openly challenged.[84]

The political situation continued to deteriorate. From 2005 onwards, President Karzai, by then elected by popular mandate and therefore on more solid ground in terms of international legitimacy, increasingly displayed irritation towards his Western patrons and advisers. He apparently resented them for putting pressure on him to take steps that he felt undermined his internal base of support and for providing what he believed was unsound and unrealistic advice. The rift deepened during the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign when the Democrats started attacking President Karzai and his patrimonial system. Leaks of information and diplomatic incidents during 2009 consolidated Karzai's lack of faith and trust in his American partners and strengthened his belief that they would eventually move to undermine or replace him. Karzai reacted to these developments by intensifying his efforts to build an autonomous power base, sometimes even trying to tap xenophobic and anti-Western feelings among the population. [85]

However, Karzai did not have everything his own way. It proved very difficult to reduce the influence that Jamiat-i Islami had established over the security apparatus (army, police, and intelligence) in 2001-02. Changing individuals at the top of the structure did not yield many results. Although by 2010 it could not be said that Jamiat enjoyed the same kind of near-monopoly over key positions it had in 2002, it was still strongly overrepresented. Its position in the Ministry of Interior was strengthened as a result of the appointment of Bismillah Mohammadi, one of its members, as minister in 2010, while President Karzai and his allies were trying to weaken it in the Ministry of Defense and in the National Directorate of Security. Political appointments and political purges did not

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[84] A. Giustozzi, "The Political Economy of International Post-Conflict Statebuilding in Afghanistan."
[85] Ibid.

have positive repercussions on the security forces. Some turmoil was reported among Pashtun police officers, who accused Bismillah of bringing in Jamiatis and allies, as well as among Tajik and Hazara officers and troops in the army, who in turn resented the appointment of Pashtuns as their superiors by Karzai's allies.[86]

The viability of the security forces as effective organizations was also affected by political turmoil. In autumn 2009, the country seemed about to enter a phase of more direct confrontation between Jamiat and Karzai's supporters due to a huge rift over the rigged presidential elections. Recruitment into the army and police collapsed as a result. Large pay raises and the resolution of the political crisis helped avert a full-blown crisis, but the episode highlighted the potential impact of political rivalry on the security forces.

At the time of writing in summer 2011, many government officials are poorly motivated in their fight against the Taliban for a variety of reasons. In the large majority of cases, this is not due to any sympathy for the Taliban. Although collaboration with the insurgents exists within the police and the provincial administrations, the problem primarily lies with the lack of employment opportunities in Afghanistan. Many government officials entered government service out of practical financial considerations, which in turn means a modest inclination to take personal risks. The Taliban's campaign of assassinations, every year taking the lives of hundreds of government officials and other pro-government individuals, has a significant impact in discouraging people from working for the government and encouraging those who do to keep a low profile. During the Marja phase of *Operation Mushtarak* in early 2010, it proved very difficult to convince government officials to volunteer for the job of manning the new district administration of Marja, despite the incentives

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[86] Personal communications with police officers and with foreign diplomats, 2010.

offered.[87] Moreover, in a province like Kandahar, where the assassination campaign has been particularly intense, about two-thirds of the positions in the provincial administration are vacant.

At the top levels of government, a laid-back attitude towards the conflict seems to be predominant; the government is mainly concerned about its political survival and has little interest in decisively ending a conflict that is bringing an unprecedented amount of external support to Afghanistan. It wasn't until 2010 that the Afghan Ministry of Interior began to tackle the outflow of trained police officers towards private security companies, which has been a major problem in trying to increase the capacity of the police force. Many government officials own private security companies or are linked to them, which might be one reason for this slow response.[88]

While there is a consensus that corruption and ineffective government agencies are a major source of support or at least tolerance for the insurgents, the Afghan government has not shown any willingness to fight corruption. Instead, they are trying to hamper any internationally led effort in that direction. Corruption has been used as a tool of co-optation, to buy political support, and it is now very difficult for the government to weed it out. [89]At the same time, the government does not want the conflict

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[87] On northern Afghanistan, see A. Giustozzi and Christoph Reuter, *The Insurgents of the Afghan North*; on Kandahar, see Joshua Partlow and Karen DeYoung, "Afghan Government Falls Short in Kandahar," *The Washington Post*, November 2, 2010; on Operation Mushtarak, see http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/moshtarak1.pdf.
[88] A. Giustozzi and Mohammad Ishaqzada, *Policing Afghanistan* (Kabul/Berlin: Afghanistan Analysts Network, forthcoming).
[89] Minna Jarvenpaa, *Making Peace in Afghanistan* (Washington: USIP, 2011); Ray Suarez "Interview with Col. Nagl and Brian Katulis," *PBS Newshour*, 31 August 2010 (www.cnas.org/node/4925); C. Wadhams and C. Cookman, "There's No Success Without Political Progress," *Center for American Progress*, 26 February 2010 www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/02/afghanistan_progress.html; S. Wilson and R. Chandrasekaran, "Obama Makes Personal Diplomacy Part of Afghan Strategy," *Washington Post*, 9 May 2010.

to escalate out of control and is worried about maintaining and expanding its external base of support in the event of a Western disengagement.

Discussion Questions

      1.   What effect did the Bonn agreement have on Afghanistan's political system? How did a multinational NATO leadership environment influence those effects?

      2.   How did the disintegration of Jamait-I Islami affect the security climate?

Annex F: Regional Powers and U.S./Allies

A. Pakistan

All the regional powers surrounding Afghanistan see developments as affecting their status and geopolitical interests. Pakistan is the most obvious case. Despite having long been an ally of the United States, the Pakistani military establishment felt bitter because of the deterioration in relations that followed the end of Soviet presence in Afghanistan and the U.S. reaction to its nuclear program. As a result, the Pakistanis stopped trusting the Americans. They believe that U.S. presence in Afghanistan destabilizes the whole region and that permanent U.S. military bases in Afghanistan could eventually be used against Pakistan, or at least against Pakistani interests.

After the fall of the Taliban regime at the end of 2001, the Pakistanis felt that Washington paid little attention to their interests in Afghanistan and did not help Islamabad place its clients within the Afghan ruling coalition; some low-profile efforts to launch a Taliban political party faltered in 2002 after attracting little support in Washington or Kabul. Washington believed that guarantees that Afghanistan would not develop a powerful army would reassure the Pakistani army, but the Pakistanis were irked by India's rapidly growing influence in Afghanistan. The main anti-Taliban factions, brought to power by U.S. intervention in 2001, were perceived by the Pakistanis as politically close to India. Some analysts suggest that the Indians might have tried to provoke the Pakistanis into a reaction that would spoil the Washington-Islamabad alliance: for example, India reopened consulates along the Afghan-Pashtun belt, bid for road-building contracts near the Pakistani border, and deployed paramilitary forces to protect them.[90]

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[90] Sumit Ganguly and Nicholas Howenstein. "Pakistan and Afghanistan: Domestic Pressures and Regional Threats: India-Pakistan Rivalry," *Journal of International Affairs* 63, no. 1 (2009): 140.

As a result, factions within the Pakistani army and its security service, the InterServices Intelligence, began to believe that in order to regain leverage for themselves and for their Taliban proteges, they had to demonstrate that Afghanistan could not be stabilized without involving Pakistan. Originally, the plan to reorganize the Taliban was probably modest, restricted to pressuring Kabul and Washington. The Taliban were initially so weak that the Pakistani army either had to mobilize on their behalf or allow Pakistani jihadist groups and networks of Taliban sympathizers in Afghanistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) to carry out armed raids inside the country. Pakistani appetite seemed to have grown once the prospects for a full-scale insurgency appeared more promising, starting in 2003. At that time, the Pakistani army became more involved in the conflict, increasing its level of direct financial support for the insurgents and even engaging ISAF and Afghan security forces along the border between the two countries.

The Afghan Taliban leadership continues to reside in Pakistan, mostly unthreatened. Most Taliban leaders arrested by the Pakistanis were eventually released and none appears to have been killed. This is in direct contrast to the fate of Al Qaida leaders, many of whom were killed in Pakistani territory, even if some (notably Bin Laden himself) seems to have lived under some form of protection in Pakistan.[91]

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[91] On the content of Wikileaks material concerning the Pakistani role, see Dan Murphy , "WikiLeaks Shocker? In Kabul, Pakistan Support for Taliban Is Surprise," *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 26, 2010. More generally on Pakistan, see Victoria Schofield, *Afghan Frontier: Feuding and Fighting in Central Asia* (New York: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2003); Imtiaz Gul, *The Most Dangerous Place: Pakistan's Lawless Frontier* (New York: Viking Adult, 2010). Also see fata.gov.pk

B. India

India may have the strongest interest of any other regional power in a stable and independent Afghanistan, which would likely be a natural enemy of Pakistan by virtue of the long-standing border dispute between those two countries. Since 1947, successive Afghan governments have taken up the issue of the border, and even President Karzai has flirted with the issue of claiming lost Afghan territories.[92] Suggestions that Afghanistan renounce its demands for the return of the Pashtun territories lost at the end of the 19th century are not realistic, as whatever sense of national identity Afghanistan has is based on the idea of *Pashtunistan*— belonging based on ethnicity. However, India does not share a border with Afghanistan and cannot afford massive levels of financial aid to offset Pakistan's ability to interfere directly in much of Afghanistan.[93] Its active intervention, therefore, has been limited.

C. Iran

The other regional power that has been very active in Afghanistan after 2001 is Iran. The Iranians welcomed the removal of the Taliban regime, which they viewed as too close to the Saudis.[94] The Iranians first approached the Taliban in 2005, initially with low-profile help, mainly aimed at establishing contact. Since then, relations between the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and selected Taliban commanders have warmed, and the level of support appears to have increased relentlessly in 2008-09. Reports emerged in 2010 that Taliban leadership had approached the Revolutionary Guards for Iranian support to the Taliban as a whole, as

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[92] Sherard Cowper-Coles, *Cables from Kabul* (London : Harper, 2011).

[93] Jayshree Bajoria, "India-Afghanistan Relations," Council on Foreign Relations, 22 July 2009; personal communication with UN officials and diplomats, 2006-2009.

[94] The Saudis were among the few governments that had recognized the Taliban, and were widely believed to have provided support to them.

opposed to selected commanders in the field. Reports also suggest that the Revolutionary Guards have been training Taliban fighters since 2009.[95]

D. Russia

In comparison, Russia has generally maintained a low profile in the post-2001 conflict. Moscow seems to view Afghanistan as an opportunity for extracting some concessions from Washington on other fronts, rather than as an area of direct interest. In 2009-10, with Central Asian Islamists turning up in northern Afghanistan and starting to infiltrate Tajikistan, Afghanistan acquired a new importance to Moscow and some greater cooperation with the Afghan security forces started.

E. American and Allied Interests

The United States entered Afghanistan in 2001 for obvious reasons; no government could have avoided retaliating for attacks on the motherland. With the rapid demise of the Taliban in early 2002, however, U.S. aims in Afghanistan became more blurred. Washington appears not have had a well-defined plan for Afghanistan beyond establishing a friendly government. This helps explain why the growing Taliban insurgency that started in 2003 initially received scant attention in Washington. Even after the insurgency appeared to be a serious threat in 2006, the United States did not mobilize considerable resources for Afghanistan for another two years. Moreover, even then there was no coherent, holistic plan on how the newly available resources should be spent, which meant that little was achieved in terms of stemming the rise of the insurgency. Finally, Washington paid little attention to institution

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[95] Diplomatic sources in Kabul, October 2009 and April 2010; Maseh Zarif and Ahmad Majidyar, "Iranian Influence in Afghanistan: Recent Developments," *IranTracker*, 21 August 2009 http://www.irantracker.org/analysis/iranian-influence-afghanistan-recent-developments; Greg Bruno and Lionel Beehner, "Iran and the Future of Afghanistan," Council on Foreign Relations, 6 February 2009. Also see entry on the Pasdaran at globalsecurity.org.

building in Afghanistan, relying instead on personal connections with President Karzai and other key players to maintain a rapport; in turn, Karzai's own patrimonial inclinations aroused few objections in Washington.[96]

The attitude in Western Europe was very different from the American approach on most counts. The Europeans had no reason for being in Afghanistan other than the desire to maintain a constructive relationship with the U.S. within NATO; as a result, they were only prepared to commit a limited number of resources and energy to the war.[97] As the conflict escalated, the Europeans started regretting their sometimes high-profile involvement and downsized their role. By 2010, most European players in Afghanistan wanted to find a way out of the UN-endorsed peacekeeping operation that had unexpectedly turned into a war. Apart from the British and the Danes, the Europeans had never fully committed to combat in Afghanistan. In private and increasingly in public, this was played out as a shift in strategies; the dominant thinking in 2010 was to move the effort toward training Afghan policemen and soldiers and to gradually withdraw the European combat units.[98]

To the extent that they were committed to the counterinsurgency effort, each European army had its own doctrine. The British and the French particularly guarded their COIN traditions. Even then, each new commander, particularly in the less centralized British system, introduced his own version of how to fight the war. This was also true of the Americans: in the absence of clear political directives coming from Washington, each U.S. commander stressed different aspects of the counterinsurgency effort. [99]

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[96] Seth Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires* (New York: Norton, 2009).
[97] The same applies to other American allies present in Afghanistan, such as the Canadians and the Australians.
[98] Personal communications with Western diplomats, 2009-11.
[99] Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop*; personal communications with British army officers and diplomats, 2009-11.

With OEF playing a marginal role in Afghanistan after 2008, ISAF became by far the dominant foreign player. ISAF had a bureaucratically driven mission without its own aims until 2009, when it became more goal oriented after acquiring stronger leadership under first Gen. McChrystal and then Gen. Petraeus. Moreover, ISAF has transitioned from being largely reactive with long delays to being increasingly proactive and has made efforts to seize the initiative from the Taliban and break the momentum of the insurgency.

There is some inherent tension between the goals of the military and those of the politicians, which at times has surfaced dramatically, in particular with the dismissal of Gen. McChrystal from his job in 2010. Short of any external constraints, the military seemed to be inclined to fight until they are confident that they can claim victory; the politicians are more in a hurry and want the war wrapped up relatively quickly. Budgetary worries, including the estimated war cost for the United States of US$120 billion in 2010, add to the politicans' sense of urgency, but there are also strategic reasons for disengaging: with almost the whole US armed force tied up in Afghanistan, a serious crisis occurring anywhere else in the world would be hard to respond to. Indeed, early 2011 developments within the Arab world highlighted how Washington's strategic concerns do not end in Afghanistan.[100]

The Taliban, probably advised by allies inside Pakistan, are aware of this gap and feel encouraged to stay the course. They seem to expect that the military pressure coming from ISAF simply will not be sustainable in the medium and long term. They also try to maintain a high level of violence in order to demonstrate that the increased military pressure is not achieving its aims. They are ready to pay a political cost for

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[100] Woodward, *Obama's Wars*; Michael Hastings, "King David's War," *Rolling Stone*, February 2, 2011.

it, for example by appointing radical commanders who will be difficult to control later but are keen to fight and ready to risk their lives.[101]

Discussion Questions

1.   What is Pakistan's interest in Afghanistan in regards to India?

2.   Between Pakistani, Indian, Iranian, and Russian national interests in Afghanistan, who has the most to lose and gain from the current conflict?

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[101] Linschoten and Kuehn, *The Enemies We Create*.

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