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## The Terrorism Trap: The Hidden Impact of America's War on Terror

John Akins

*University of Tennessee*, jakins4@vols.utk.edu

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**The Terrorism Trap: The Hidden Impact of America's  
War on Terror**

A Dissertation Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

John Harrison Akins  
August 2019

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## ABSTRACT

Nearly two decades after the declaration of the War on Terror, global terrorist attacks have increased. Beginning in 2005, the levels of domestic terrorism have drastically increased while international terrorism has not. This is a result of U.S. counterterrorism policy shifting towards “disaggregation” in which the U.S. government would focus on breaking up the global al Qaeda network into disconnected groups and rely on partner states’ militaries to target them. In particular, partner states’ focused their counterterrorism operations on the “ungoverned spaces” on their periphery, regions with a history of conflict with the central government and limited government presence in which it was feared al Qaeda and al Qaeda affiliated groups would use as safe havens. Domestic terrorism within partner states rose as a result of revenge attacks from the targeted communities and groups in the periphery in response to the offensive military actions of the state, especially when they resulted in civilian casualties. The increase in domestic terrorism led to further U.S. pressure to expand the counterterrorism operations in the periphery, exacerbating the underlying conditions that led to the outbreak of domestic terrorism. This led partner states to sink deeper into a terrorism trap. This study uses quantitative analysis of a global dataset and case studies of Pakistan, Yemen, Mali, and Egypt to demonstrate and test the terrorism trap theory.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

As morning broke on September 12, 2001, countless men, women, and children awoke to a brave new world, a world that would be re-shaped by the fear of al Qaeda and terrorism and America's global quest to defeat it. In those early hours following the catastrophic events of the previous day, however, little did they know of the global repercussions which would follow from the momentous decisions a handful of individuals within the Bush administration would make in the coming days—hundreds of thousands of lives lost, millions displaced, societies and nations across the globe thrown into upheaval, and the world seemingly no safer from the lingering threat of terrorism nearly two decades later. But some senior American officials were becoming cognizant of the global impact U.S. actions would have. Exactly one week after the al Qaeda attacks, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld transmitted a message to commanders within the military stating broad U.S. objectives to be pursued in developing plans for counterterrorism campaigns against al Qaeda and its supporters. He concluded his message with a bland and understated turn of phrase, one which would be profoundly prophetic: “[A]s we continue to go after terrorism, our activities will have effects in a number of countries. We have to accept that, given the importance of the cause” (Feith, 2008, 57).

Within governments, policy circles, academia, media, and even around countless kitchen tables, there has been an exhaustive analysis and debate over the United States' military misadventures in Afghanistan and Iraq and the resulting chaos within both countries. In recent years, there also has been increased focus on the conduct and impact of the less publicized side of direct American action—covert operations, intelligence

gathering, and targeted killings. With U.S. counterterrorism increasingly relying on the cooperation of other states in the Global War on Terror, what is less well understood is the impact of this cooperation on partner states, especially within their own borders.<sup>1</sup>

U.S. national security has long been reliant on the political and military cooperation of partner states. During the Cold War, the containment strategy toward the Soviet Union was based on gaining the military cooperation of allied states on the periphery of the Soviet bloc and developing their military capabilities to stymie Communist expansion (National Security Council, 1950). In this regard, the War on Terror has been no different. The 9/11 Commission Report found, “Practically every aspect of U.S. counterterrorism strategy relies on international cooperation” (9/11 Commission, 2004, 379). Douglas Feith, the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy from 2001-2005, similarly observed, “There was a general appreciation after 9/11 that for some purposes it would be necessary and for all purposes it would be desirable to have foreign partners.”<sup>2</sup>

In the name of fighting al Qaeda and terrorism, partner states have re-organized their security forces, arrested high-value targets, conducted military operations, shared intelligence, passed stricter anti-terrorism laws, increased border security, and implemented a wide variety of other counterterrorism policies due to U.S. demands and with U.S. support. While U.S. policymakers and military officials often have referred to

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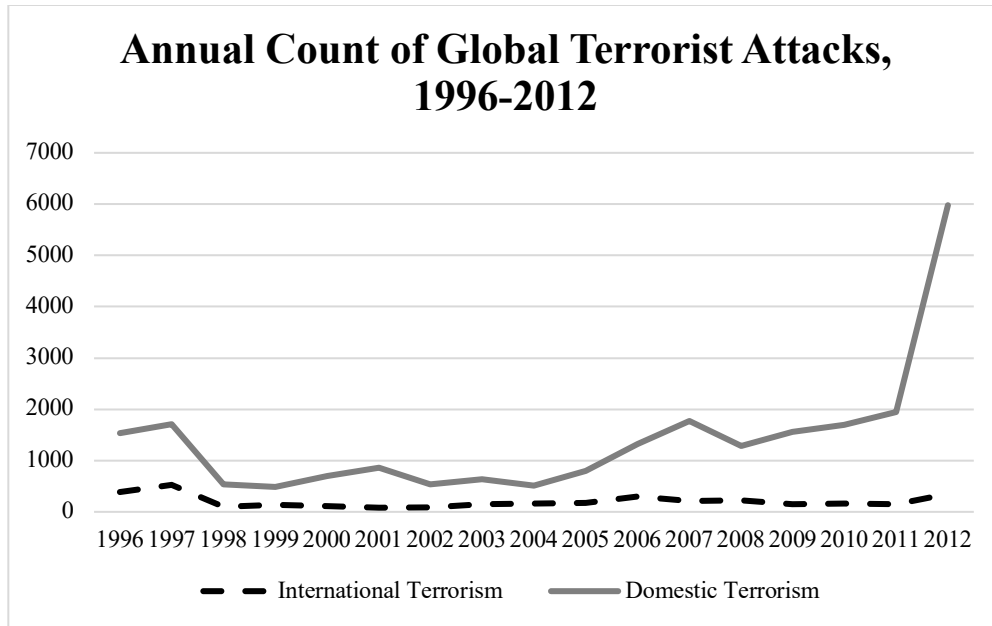
<sup>1</sup> In this analysis, I use the term “partner states” specifically to refer to states who largely cooperated with the United States for counterterrorism efforts within their own borders. I am not referring to treaty allies and coalition partners, such as European states, who supported the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and other counterterrorism activities outside of their own borders.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Douglas Feith, former Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, Washington, DC, October 31, 2018.

U.S. troops in Afghanistan and Iraq as confronting terrorism on the frontlines of the Global War on Terror, it is equally true that our partner states also have been manning the war's frontlines and bearing the overwhelming brunt of its costs in terms of blood and treasure. Scholars have taken up the question of why some states are more cooperative than others with the United States in counterterrorism (Henne, 2016; Tankel, 2018). But what has been the domestic impact of this cooperation?

### **The Puzzle**

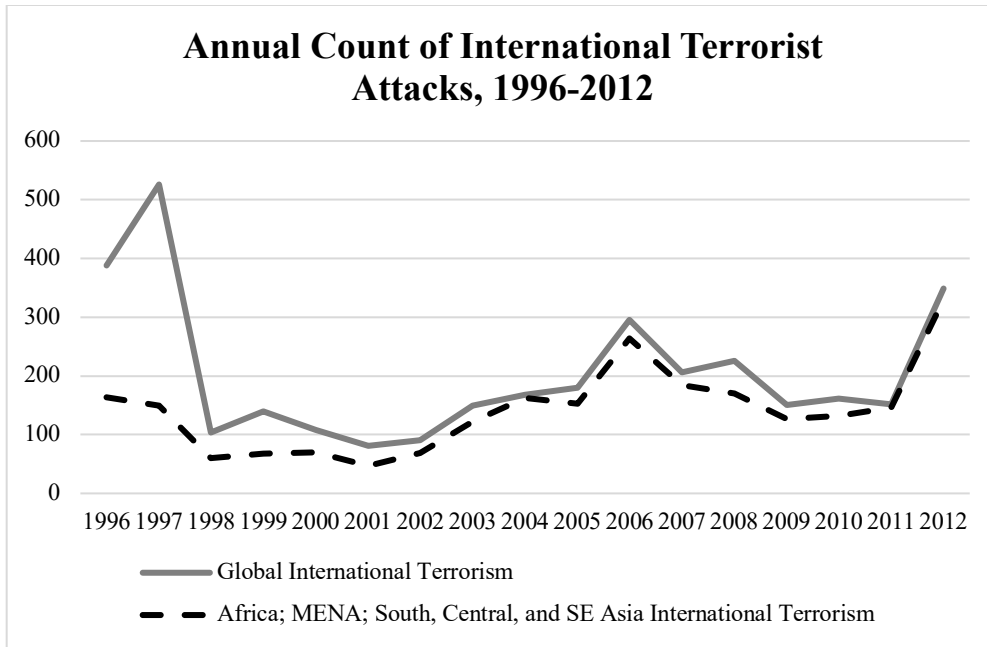
After nearly two decades of the Global War on Terror and despite massive expenditures, the results have been decidedly mixed. The levels of terrorism and political violence in many theaters of the war have increased dramatically, with global deaths from terrorist attacks increasing nine-fold (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2015, 4). According to data derived from the Global Terrorism Database maintained by the University of Maryland's National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), global terrorist attacks increased from 941 in 2001 to 6,328 in 2012 (Enders, et. al. 2011; Gaibullov, et. al. 2017). If only incidents of international terrorism are examined, defined as attacks in which the terrorist and victim are different nationalities, the number of attacks has increased from 81 in 2001, following a period of decline during the late 1990s in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union, to 349 in 2012. An examination of acts of domestic terrorism—attacks in which the terrorist and victim share a nationality—reveals a similar pattern but a much more dramatic increase. In 2001,



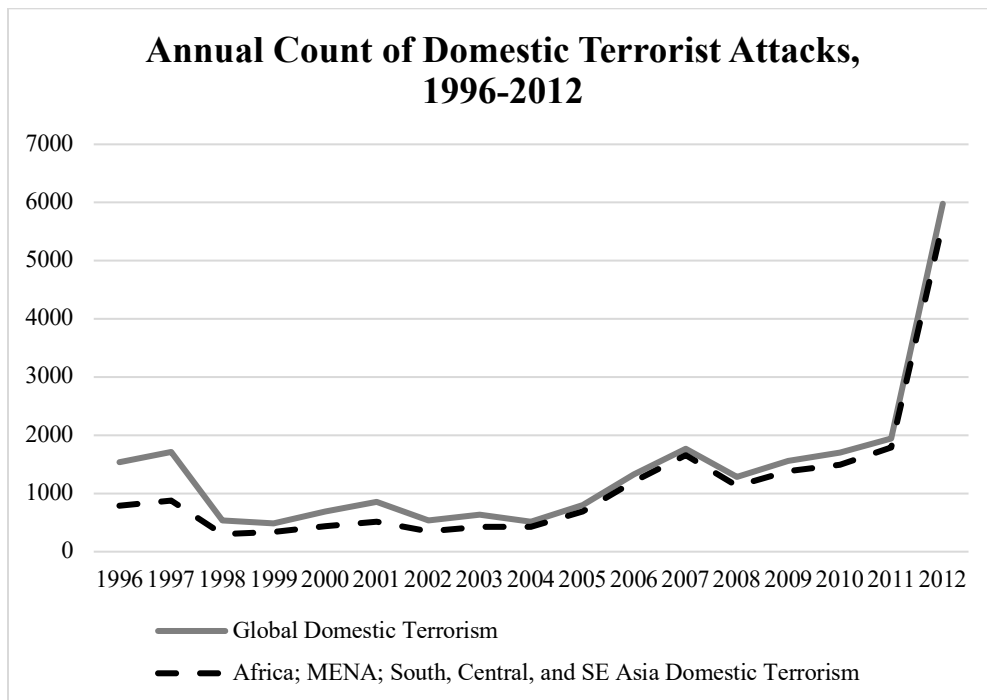
**Figure 1.1 Annual Count of Global Terrorist Attacks, 1996-2012 (Enders, et. al. 2011; Gaibulloev, et. al. 2017)**

global domestic terrorist attacks added up to 860. By 2012, the number of global domestic terrorist attacks had climbed to 5,979. Figure 1.1 shows these two trends in global terrorism from 1996-2012.

If we disaggregate the levels of terrorism by region, it shows a shift away from Latin America as the region experiencing the highest rates of terrorism toward Africa, MENA, South Asia, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia, regions of the world where Muslim societies are concentrated. This became the epicenter of terrorist violence. Figure 1.2 below shows the trends in international terrorism, the explicitly stated target of U.S. counterterrorism policy, from 1996-2012. After 2001, international terrorism increasingly occurred within the Muslim world but never eclipsed the total numbers stemming from the political disorder that followed the end of the Cold War in the 1990s. The disaggregated data on domestic terrorism displays a similar shift. In 2001, 59.6%, or 513,



**Figure 1.2 Annual Count of International Terrorist Attacks, 1996-2012 (Enders, et. al. 2011; Gaibullov, et. al. 2017)**



**Figure 1.3 Annual Count of Domestic Terrorist Attacks, 1996-2012 (Enders, et. al. 2011; Gaibullov, et. al. 2017)**

attacks occurred within Muslim regions of the world but by 2012, 94.4% of domestic terrorist attacks originated within Muslim societies, eclipsing any previous levels of domestic terrorism. Figure 1.3 shows this trend in domestic terrorism from 1996-2012.

It does make sense that domestic terrorism rates would be higher than international terrorism as it is far easier to commit an act of domestic terrorism simply because of proximity. It is not apparent however why domestic terrorism would increase so dramatically while international terrorism does not. Scholars argue that Western nations are more susceptible to terrorism because of interventionist and militaristic foreign policy, such as the United States after 9/11 (Neumayer and Plumper, 2011; Savun and Phillips, 2009). While this may explain an increase in international terrorism, especially against the United States and its interests abroad, it does not explain why domestic terrorism within the Muslim world has significantly increased under the War on Terror. Relying largely on cross-national comparison, scholars have pointed to more static domestic explanations for the outbreak and frequency of domestic terrorism, such as the nature of the political system, levels of poverty, or the presence of marginalized ethnic or minority groups (Ash, 2016; Choi and Piazza, 2016b; Enders, Hoover, and Sandler, 2016; Ghatak, Gold, and Prins, 2017; Piazza, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2017). These theories are unable to account for the shifting trend in domestic terrorism beginning in 2005.

The answer can be found by looking past the direct actions of the U.S. government after 9/11 and examining how U.S. counterterrorism policy impacted the domestic security policies and actions of partner states. After the high costs and difficulty

of unilateral military action in Afghanistan and Iraq, U.S. officials increasingly recognized the need to work with and through partner states to target al Qaeda. In 2005, U.S. counterterrorism policy officially shifted towards “disaggregation” in which the U.S. government would focus on breaking up the global al Qaeda network into disconnected groups and rely on local security forces to target them (Kilcullen, 2016). In particular, partner states’ focused their counterterrorism operations on the “ungoverned spaces” on their periphery, regions with a history of conflict with the central government and limited government presence in which it was feared al Qaeda and al Qaeda affiliated groups could use as safe havens.

I argue that U.S. counterterrorism policy, focusing on the threat of international terrorism from al Qaeda, shifted the domestic security policy of partner states to be more militarily offensive in targeting the periphery where the deployment of the military was seen as an unwelcome intrusion by the local population. These counterterrorism operations against international terrorist operatives in these regions served as a catalyst for increased levels of domestic terrorism from the periphery caught up in these operations, especially in response to civilian casualties which helped motivate revenge attacks and drive recruitment for local groups whose primary target was the government and other domestic targets. Despite al Qaeda core’s continuing embrace of a transnational ideology focused on targeting the “far enemy” of the United States and pushing for its affiliate organizations to do the same, the overwhelming number of terrorist attacks by al Qaeda affiliates after 9/11 operating in these peripheral areas have been against local targets within their region of operation as a violent backlash to military operations. This

demonstrates both the weakness of al Qaeda core's operational influence over its affiliates and the influence of local political dynamics as a motivating factor in these attacks. As I argue, partner states' counterterrorism operations by the military as part of the War on Terror helped to create the very conditions leading to an increase in domestic terrorist attacks against the state.

From the perspective of U.S. government officials, however, the offensive actions taken to target al Qaeda and its affiliates were necessary in protecting U.S. national security interests, particularly given the heightened sense of danger within the American consciousness from international terrorism and the next major attack against the homeland (Braithwaite, 2013; Davis and Silver, 2004; Gadarian, 2010; Woods, 2011). Countless politicians announced from their pulpits the need to fight the terrorists "over there" so we don't have to fight them at home. The resulting increase in terrorism is therefore interpreted through the frame of a connected and unified al Qaeda network and considered to be a threat to the United States, especially if terrorist groups internationalize their rhetoric or even commit international attacks if they see this furthering their own domestic agenda (Napps and Enders, 2015; Addison and Murshed, 2005). This has the effect of retroactively justifying the initial counterterrorism policies of the United States and subsequent counterterrorism efforts of its partner states, leading to continued and often increased support for additional counterterrorism operations. This creates a "terrorism trap," as the actions of the government feed the very conditions that served as the original catalyst for increased domestic terrorism. In its mission to defeat al Qaeda and international terrorism, the United States government unwittingly exacerbated



the underlying drivers of domestic terrorism within its partner states, helping to explain the temporal and geographic shift after 2005.

In identifying this causal relationship, I am not arguing that it is the sole cause for terrorism under the auspices of the Global War on Terror. The issue of terrorism, like so many other concepts studied by the social sciences, is an extremely complex social and psychological phenomenon with many and varying influences. Scholars have identified a variety of factors that interact and overlap with one another to drive the outbreak, frequency, and severity of terrorist attacks. I am interested, however, in understanding the influence of U.S. counterterrorism policy on the domestic security environment of partner states in order to address the puzzle outlined above. In particular, I want to demonstrate how this cooperation served to stimulate the worsening cycle of terrorism and political violence that would soon follow government actions. This helps to create a trap for partner states in which the increase in terrorism both justifies the original operation and leads to future counterterrorism operations, provoking more violence from the targeted regions. This constructive and necessary exercise can help scholars and policymakers better understand the broad ramifications of U.S. foreign policy within other states. It demonstrates the need to re-evaluate the policies and conduct by both the United States and partner states and re-conceptualize the meaning of success within the on-going global fight against terrorism. A further elucidation of this dynamic is vital to better grasp the relationship between the United States and its counterterrorism partners moving forward. Any lessons learned from this scholarly analysis of the War on Terror will be of great relevance for scholarship on terrorism more broadly and policymakers continuing to

work to coordinate with partner states to counter evolving security threats to the United States and other societies around the world.

Further, I am not making any normative or moral claims about the United States' or other states' behavior as part of their counterterrorism efforts. Rather, I am trying empirically to understand the unintentional impact of counterterrorism cooperation with the United States on partner states' domestic security. This study will show that the failure of U.S. counterterrorism efforts, beyond the military invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, is less a result of how effectively the government was able to implement or support partner states' efforts or the extent to which other countries cooperated on counterterrorism but rather bound with the nature of the counterterrorism policy itself. This strategy was too often insensitive to the local dynamics into which it was implemented and was premised on a faulty understanding of al Qaeda and its relationship with its affiliate groups. As violence emerged in response to the deployment of military force by the United States' partner states, this policy remained essentially unchanged as U.S. officials continued to press for the same failed military approach in a rapidly changing conflict environment. Senior U.S. officials over the past two decades have remained too focused on stopping a potentially cataclysmic terrorist attack against the United States without concern for the resulting impact of these actions in the regions within which they occurred. Rather than stemming the tide of terrorism, this "disaggregation" policy had the result of increasing domestic terrorism within the United States' partner states and undermining the U.S. government's own stated counterterrorism objectives. Analysts and policymakers have not fully appreciated the

distinction between international and domestic terrorism and the varying effects of different types of counterterrorism efforts, often conflating all types of cooperation into a single category (Henne, 2016). Therefore, the impact of America's War on Terror within partner states around the world has been hiding in plain sight.

### **The Global War on Terror: A New International Security Paradigm**

After the attacks by al Qaeda on September 11, 2001, the United States declared its Global War on Terror with the goals of targeting and eradicating the threat of international Islamic terrorism, sparking a critical juncture in U.S. foreign policy. Standing before Congress ten days after the attacks, President George W. Bush announced, "Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated... But the only way to defeat terrorism as a threat to our way of life is to stop it, eliminate it, and destroy it where it grows" (Bush, 2001). Al Qaeda was perceived to be only the tip of the spear of a broader international "jihadi" movement whose aim was to violently challenge the prevailing international order (Mendelsohn, 2009). Vice Admiral Thomas Wilson (2002, 3), the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, stated in his February 2002 testimony in front of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, that the U.S. was facing a "struggle over globalization." He further argued, "[Our adversaries] equate globalization to Americanization and see the US as the principal architect and primary beneficiary of an emerging order that undermines their values, interests, beliefs, and culture. They blame the US for 'what's wrong' in the world, and seek allies among states,

groups, and individuals who worry about US hegemony and are unhappy with the present or perceived future” (Ibid., 3-4). Al Qaeda’s global network was thrust to the forefront of American consciousness as both an immediate and existential threat to the country, one that would fundamentally alter not just the United States’ but many other governments’ priorities, approaches, and perspectives about security. According to the former Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs Maura Harty (2003, 5), “Nobody wanted to appear to be not putting security first,” without a significant concern for the long-term implications of these efforts.

The focus on counterterrorism overwhelmed other policy priorities and became the “organizing principle for U.S. foreign policy” (Steinberg, 2002; Walt, 2002). The attention of many government agencies became firmly fixed on hunting down al Qaeda and its operatives around the globe (Ducey, 2004). With this “CT obsession,” former CIA Director General Michael Hayden (2016, 290) described the CIA’s priorities as “CT-CP-ROW. Counterterrorism, counterproliferation, the rest of the world.” Many different foreign policy areas were subsequently “securitized” and drafted into the fight against terrorism, such as economic and development aid. In the months following 9/11, President Bush also signed into a law a number of significant pieces of legislation to strengthen the government’s hand in fighting terrorism domestically (White House, 2003, 7). Counterterrorism even became a frame to implement new policies for seemingly unrelated policy areas—from fighting the drug trade to energy and free trade (Bush, 2001b; Obama, 2006; Rampton, 2001; Zoellick, 2001). By 2017, the United States had spent a total of \$2.8 trillion on the War on Terror, comprising 16% of the total

discretionary budget of the government (Stimson Study Group on Counterterrorism Spending, 2018). These expenditures have encompassed a wide range of activities, including military deployments, intelligence activity, homeland security initiatives, and foreign assistance to partner states. The fight against terrorism led to a fundamental re-organization and new understanding of U.S. security priorities as the government leveraged every tool in its broad arsenal.

***The Fox and the Hedgehog: Understanding Terrorism after 9/11***

Found among the fragments of poetry penned by the 7<sup>th</sup> Century BCE Greek poet Archilocus is the line, “The fox knows many things; the hedgehog one big thing.” Isaiah Berlin (1953) used this phrase heuristically to classify philosophers and other historical intellectuals into two theoretical categories: those who view the world through one, defining frame and those that employ a wide variety of different experiences and perspectives in their writing which cannot be boiled down to a single, overarching idea. This oft-cited aphorism of ancient wisdom also can encapsulate two competing ideas about the modern problem of terrorism and how it is understood today: 1) a complex social phenomenon influenced by a wide variety of social factors; or 2) its religious roots within Islam as a defining frame.

Despite early neglect of the topic within the study of conflict, scholarly research increasingly has demonstrated that to fully grasp the issue of terrorism one must be like the fox and understand many things. Terrorism was initially a peripheral topic within the study of conflict confined to the study of well-known cases such as the IRA in Northern

Ireland or the ETA in Spain's Basque country. Crenshaw's (1981) work is an early attempt to move away from a historical and contextually-based perspective and move towards general theories identifying a common pattern of causation, focusing on concrete grievances, a lack of political opportunity paired with precipitating events, and psychological motivations. Ross (1993) further develops a theory of causation in his model of terrorism based upon structural features, rather than psychological or rational choice theories, within the state, examining population type, regime type, level of modernization, social cohesion, political unrest, and social grievances.

Following 9/11, the study of terrorism blossomed as academic journals and researchers "chased the headlines," with implicit and explicit nods to the policy implications of their work (Silke, 2001; Silke and Schmidt-Petersen 2017; Young and Findley, 2011, 413). Much of this research focused on identifying the underlying causal mechanisms of terrorism. They examined issues centered on grievances such as varying types of political discrimination, social marginalization, economic conditions, international politics such as interstate rivalry or economic sanctions, and the impact of globalization (Abadie, 2006; Ahmed, 2003, 2007, 2013; Bandyopadhyay and Younas, 2011; Enders, Hoover, and Sandler, 2016; Findley, Piazza, and Young, 2012; Krueger and Maleckova, 2003; McLean, et. al., 2018; Newman, 2006; Pape, 2005).

Given these causes, scholars have studied how best to combat terrorism through policies of greater political and economic equality, respect for physical integrity rights, and the use of law and order, arguing that democracies, especially well-established democracies, experience fewer terrorist attacks (Abrahms, 2007; Aksoy, Carter, and

Wright, 2012; Azam and Thelen, 2010; Choi, 2010; Eyerman, 1998; Findley and Young, 2011; Walsh and Piazza, 2010). Scholars also examined the effectiveness of terrorism as a tactic in achieving political goals, showing that groups that incorporate terrorism are less likely to be successful than other forms of political violence (Abrahms, 2006, 2012; Fortna, 2015; Thomas, 2014). Horowitz (2010) also demonstrates that group characteristics, such as the group's age and linkages with other groups that previously have adopted strategic innovations in terrorist tactics, can explain the adoption of terrorist tactics, especially suicide terrorism. Other scholars have focused on how the opportunities to commit terrorism have led to an increase in the outbreak and frequency of attacks. They look to democracies as having a higher likelihood of experiencing terrorism given the domestic characteristics of democratic regimes such as increased ability to mobilize and higher domestic audience costs (Ash, 2016; Chenoweth, 2010, 2013; Eubank and Weinberg, 1994, 1998, 2001; Hoffman, 2006; Li, 2005; Pape, 2005; Piazza, 2010, 2017; Wilkinson, 2001; Young and Dugan, 2011). Scholars also argue that terrorism is incubated in weak or failing states, with more stable regimes experiencing less terrorism (Coggins, 2015; Kis-Katos, Liebert, and Schulze, 2011; Piazza, 2008; Plummer, 2012).

In the examination of terrorism, a foundational problem that plagued the literature was establishing a definitive definition of the topic under study (Forst, 2009; Hoffman, 2006; Phillips, 2015; Young and Findley, 2011). This problem was, in part, driven by the early domination of qualitative case study work, in which working definitions were largely adapted to the specific cases examined. This created a wide variety of definitions

that were often context dependent. As the field increasingly moved towards quantitative analysis, the issue of definition became a more pressing problem. Hoffman (2006, 40) provides the following definition in his authoritative study of the subject: “The deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in pursuit of political change.” Forst (2009, 5) offers a more specific definition: “Terrorism is the premeditated and unlawful use or threatened use of violence against a noncombatant population or target having symbolic significance, with the aim of either inducing political change through intimidation and destabilization or destroying a population identified as an enemy.” The Global Terrorism Database (GTD) has had a significant influence on the working definition of terrorism as many quantitative studies rely on this database for their models. For inclusion in the GTD, according to its codebook, the event must be intentional, entail violence or the threat of violence, and perpetrated by sub-state actors. In addition, an event must possess two of the following three criteria:

- (1) The act must be aimed at attaining a political, economic, religious, or social goal.
- (2) There must be evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some other message to a larger audience (or audiences) than the immediate victims.
- (3) The action must be outside the context of legitimate warfare activities (START, 2018).

The main attributes of terrorism that run through many of these definitions are that terrorism involves an act of violence by a non-state actor with a broader political goal beyond the attack itself and aimed at government officials, civilians, or other non-combatants, which can include soldiers and military officials not involved in on-going combat operations. This will serve as the working definition for this study.



A further issue with much of the scholarly literature on terrorism following 9/11 was the focus on international terrorism, largely threatening Western or American interests, and neglecting domestic terrorism that accounts for the great majority of terrorist attacks around the world (Azam and Thelen, 2010; Bapat, 2011; Braithwaite, 2015; Drakos and Gofas, 2006; Krueger and Maleckova, 2003; Lai, 2007; Li, 2005; Li and Schaub, 2004; Marineau, et. al., 2018; McLean, et. al., 2018; Neumayer and Plumper, 2011; Piazza, 2008; Piazza and Walsh, 2009). Some studies even conflated international terrorism and domestic terrorism into the same empirical model (Abadie, 2006; Choi, 2010, 2011; Lehrke and Schomaker, 2016). In a 2009 article, Sanchez-Cuenca and de la Calle (2009) outlined the problems associated with the study of domestic terrorism. They were mainly issues with reliable data and, with the focus on qualitative case studies making cross-national comparative analysis difficult, the lack of a clear definition.

Following Sanchez-Cuenca and de la Calle's article, scholars increasingly began to differentiate domestic terrorism from international terrorism in their analysis, especially following the publication of Enders, Sandler, and Gaibullov's (2011) dataset dividing the Global Terrorism Database between domestic and international terrorist attacks. These studies sought to isolate endogenous causal factors of domestic terrorism, such as economic conditions (Enders, Hoover, and Sandler, 2016), political and economic marginalization of minority groups (Choi and Piazza, 2016b; Ghatak, 2016; Ghatak and Gold, 2017; Ghatak, Gold, and Prins, 2017; Piazza, 2011, 2012), the repressive actions of the government (Avdan and Uzonyi, 2017; Piazza, 2017), regime

type (Ash, 2016; Bandyopadhyay and Younas, 2011; Dreher and Fischer, 2011; Kis-Katos, Liebert, and Schulze, 2011; Walsh and Piazza, 2013), and party system (Piazza, 2010).

Many analyses of domestic terrorism focus on discrimination against minority groups as a key causal factor. Piazza (2011, 2012) points to the connection between relative economic deprivation of minority groups and significantly higher chances of domestic terrorist attacks. He finds minority economic discrimination to be a stronger predictor of domestic terrorism than general levels of economic development or poverty. Ghatak and Gold (2017) introduce a curvilinear relationship between domestic terrorism and economic discrimination of minorities, showing that the highest and lowest developed nations are the least vulnerable to terrorism. Choi and Piazza (2016b), on the other hand, argue that political exclusion of ethnic groups is a more consistent predictor of domestic terrorism than either general political repression or economic discrimination. Ghatak, Gold, and Prins (2017) show that domestic terrorism increases when minority groups are politically excluded in democratic states, giving them greater opportunities for mobilization. Hansen, Nemeth, and Mauslein (2018) further examine varying local conditions within a state and the impact on levels of domestic terrorism. They argue that the outbreak of domestic terrorism is more likely in wealthier and more populated regions when there is an excluded group present, a trend more pronounced in democracies. Napps and Enders (2015), Bapat (2007), and Addison and Murshed (2005) also demonstrate a causal link between domestic and international terrorist attacks, as groups reliant on domestic terrorism can subsequently engage in acts of international terrorism if they feel

it can aid their domestic objectives or find it necessary to move their operations into neighboring states. Within this broad research agenda, it is clear that a full understanding of terrorism requires the consideration of a wide variety of influences and causal factors. A single idea is unable to fully and comprehensively encompass the many intricacies and nuances underlying the phenomenon of modern terrorism.

On the other hand, the myriad of academic arguments has had limited impact on swaying many U.S. and Western public perceptions following the 9/11 attacks, fueled by political rhetoric and the media. This was wedded to the view of the hedgehog that knows one big thing—terrorism is an Islamic problem. Following the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the increased focus on security, there has been a tendency to perceive acts of terrorism through this religious prism and associate Muslim-majority regions and societies with terrorism (Alsultany, 2012; Bankoff, 2003; Nacos and Torres-Reyna, 2007; Powell, 2011; Shaheen, 2003; West and Lloyd, 2017). The perception of Islam and its connection to terrorism underlie a broader view that Muslim societies are inherently more violent than Western societies, understanding Muslim-majority countries' increased levels of terrorism as stemming from attributes of their Islamic faith, even if only a fundamentalist interpretation of it, and emblematic of the Islamic injunction for *jihad*, an Islamic concept meaning to struggle for one's faith.

In Samuel Huntington's (1996) controversial theory of a clash of civilizations, an idea coined earlier by Middle East historian Bernard Lewis, Islamic culture possesses both "bloody borders" and "bloody innards" due to its history of glorifying violence, absolutist beliefs, and demographic explosion resulting in a youth bulge. Huntington

argues that these attributes explain its proclivity towards violence. Islam, further, is thought to be inherently incompatible and antithetical to Western values and thus represents both a violent and cultural threat to the United States and Western civilization, helping to breed further fear and hostility (Ahmed, 2010; Das, et. al., 2009; Kalkan, Layman, and Uslaner, 2009; Saleem and Anderson, 2013; Saleem, et. al, 2015; Sikorski, et. al., 2017; Terman, 2017). This sentiment against Islam infected public opinion and the public debate around terrorism (Beydoun, 2018; Nacos and Torres-Reyna, 2007; Powell, 2011; West and Lloyd, 2017). The hyperbolic language used by politicians to portray the enemy in the War on Terror was meant to help build public support for counterterrorism efforts, support that was more difficult to gain with nuanced and complicated arguments. This tendency to use hyperbole has been observed by scholars of U.S. foreign policy as a way to promote and defend U.S. policies, especially involving potentially controversial security issues (Holsti, 2004).

Subsequent research has thoroughly critiqued and challenged this simplistic view of Islamic societies spanning three continents, hundreds of languages and cultures, and a billion and a half people (Ahmed, 2007, 2010, 2013, 2018; Fox, 2001, 2002; Sen, 2006). Scholars, in particular, have pointed towards circumstantial factors besides the Islamic religion that results in Muslim-majority states experiencing higher levels and incidents of intra-state violence than other religions in the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Toft (2007) points to three causes: the historical timing of the emergence of the state system, the geographic proximity of Islamic holy sites and large oil reserves, and the relationship between Islam and politics. Ahmed (2013) argues that the social and political context

through which Islam is interpreted is important in understanding the variation in the outbreak of violence. He points out that many Islamic terrorist groups emerged from segmentary lineage tribal societies locked in a pattern of conflict with their central government, such as al Qaeda and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (Yemeni), al-Shabaab (Somali), the various Taliban groups (Pashtun), al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (Kabyle Berbers), Boko Haram (Kanuri), Ansar Dine (Tuareg), and the Caucasus Emirate (Chechens). These communities largely lived outside of direct government control, relying instead on tribal structures for law and order in place of state institutions, and historically interpreted Islam through a tribal frame that included codes of honor stressing hospitality and revenge. Gleditsch and Rudolfson (2016) further show that the comparatively high level of conflicts in Muslim-majority states is a product not of an increase in conflict within Muslim society but a decline in conflict in other regions.

Many influential people did grasp some level of nuance in seeing terrorism as an aberration from or perversion of Islamic teachings. Even President Bush (2001) in his speech to Congress after 9/11 stated,

I also want to speak tonight directly to Muslims throughout the world. We respect your faith. It's practiced freely by many millions of Americans and by millions more in countries that America counts as friends. Its teachings are good and peaceful, and those who commit evil in the name of Allah blaspheme the name of Allah... The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends. It is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them.

Even those with this nuanced perspective still uncritically viewed terrorism through a religious frame, with its sources to be found in understanding the fundamentalism found in Salafi or Wahhabi Islam and the religious concept of jihad. They viewed the issue of

terrorism and the rising violence within the Muslim world as stemming from, according to former White House counterterrorism advisor Richard Clarke, “a civil war within Islam” and “for majority Muslim nations...an existential struggle” (Clarke and Papadopoulos, 2008, 8). Clarke see the problem as “a struggle by a violent minority to wrest control from those now in power, in the process to gain as much popular support as possible, until they obtain control of the instruments of state power, after which they will use them to impose their will regardless of popular opinion in their nations or international standards of human rights” (Ibid.). This ideological struggle was accelerated by the increasing influence of globalization within Muslim societies (Ahmed, 2007). U.S. Senator Joe Lieberman stressed this same point in addressing the global audience at the 2003 Munich Security Conference, stating,

It was at first a civil war within the Islamic world, between the militant and violent minority and the moderate and peaceful majority, and it was important to strengthen the moderate majority in waging war against the fanatical minority. Al Qaeda was the immediate enemy, but was surely not the only target in the war against terrorism (Department of State, 2003b, 7).

In order to challenge terrorism in this view, it was necessary to engage in a “battle of ideas” and promote a “moderate” form of Islam and modern ideas of secularism within Muslim societies. Representing this mainstream idea, Fareed Zakaria (2010) argued, “Victory in the war on terror will be won when a moderate, mainstream version of Islam—one that is compatible with modernity—fully triumphs over the world view of Osama bin Laden.” This view of a moderate Islam being an acceptable version of the faith still implicitly understood religion, though a violent interpretation of it, to be the motivating principle behind terrorism, echoing the idea that terrorism was the

manifestation of a “civil war” occurring within Islam itself between fundamentalist and modernist interpretations.

### *America’s Quest for Allies*

While the War on Terror dramatically impacted U.S. policies and perceptions, it had a broader effect on many other countries, especially in the Muslim world. U.S. government officials understood al Qaeda and international terrorism to be a global challenge that transcended national borders. Scholars have examined a variety of ways in which U.S. security and counterterrorism policy has impacted a state’s domestic politics and the levels of terrorism after 2001. Bell, Clay, and Martinez Machain (2017) examine the impact of the presence of non-invasion U.S. troops on the political decisions of the host states’ government in relation to human rights. For states that are important to U.S. security interests, they argue that the presence of U.S. troops leads to the government being less responsive to the broader population, given the security provided by U.S. military presence and the accompanying financial benefits such as rent payments for bases or other military assistance. Therefore, respect for physical integrity rights in these states will decline. Choi (2011) and Rogers (2013) argue that U.S. military interventions increase the level of terrorism because it can both destabilize the political system, which terrorist groups take advantage of, and result in local people viewing the U.S. invasion as an act of aggression against their country, responding with terrorist attacks against the superior U.S. forces. Martinez Machain and Morgan (2013) further show that governments with the backing of U.S. force are more risk-tolerant for conflict. However,

these scholars only focus on the deployment of U.S. military forces and the resulting impact on the host nation.

While the U.S. government took a number of unilateral operations to target al Qaeda, the expansive geographic reach of potential theaters of operation precluded the possibility of the United States relying solely on direct action. It was necessary to work with and through partnered states to share the burden of counterterrorism due to issues of legitimacy, expediency, and legality, especially for operating within partner states' borders. This has been a key aspect of the United States' counterterrorism efforts. Speaking at an October 29, 2018 event at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, DC, Charles "Cob" Bloha, the Director of the U.S. State Department's Office of Security and Human Rights, called partnered operations "a fact of life" but also "a very good thing" given their ability to keep boots off the ground, lighten the burden of U.S. responsibility, and draw upon the local expertise of partner states' security forces about the conflict environment. The real challenge for U.S. officials was pressuring critical states, such as Pakistan and Yemen, to cooperate when their governments' threat perceptions, political interests, and objectives did not align with the United States. As a former senior State Department official recognized, "When you're relying on a foreign government to do your bidding, policy becomes really, really tricky."<sup>3</sup>

Scholars sought to elucidate the puzzle behind variation in states' cooperation, or lack of cooperation, with the United States in its partnered counterterrorism efforts. These

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with former State Department official, Washington, DC, January 2019.



arguments largely have taken three different approaches: focusing on (1) United States' policy, (2) characteristics of the partner states, and (3) the interaction between the U.S. and partner states. Basing his argument in the English school of international relations, Mendelsohn (2009) focuses on the behavior of the United States as the global hegemon and whether its actions in the fight against terrorism were in line with the norms and principles upon which the international system was based. Underlying his argument is the understanding that al Qaeda and the broader "global jihadi movement" fundamentally challenged the legitimacy of the prevailing international order of the state-based Westphalian system as "[al Qaeda's] tentacles took root around the globe" to establish an international Islamic Caliphate which erases international borders as a product of Western interventions and colonialism (Ibid., 89). Within this theory, states will fall in line with the United States to challenge al Qaeda, acting together against this global threat. Despite traditional fears that the hegemon can upset the international order, leading to traditional balancing behavior, states will back a hegemonical management approach and join a hegemonic-led effort to confront the challenger and protect the international order.

Yet, this support is premised on the United States' behavior not violating the main organizing principles of the international system identified by Bull (1977): 1) Constitutional normative principles (states as primary political organization); 2) Rules of coexistence (restricts violence between states and respect for a state's sovereignty/nonintervention); and 3) a state's desire for self-preservation (leading to interstate collaboration and cooperation to support the perpetuation of the system).

Actions in violation of these principles, such as the U.S. invasion of Iraq, result in states' refusing to cooperate with the United States' counterterrorism operations. Given his focus on the international system, Mendelsohn's book largely focuses on states' cooperation within international regimes, UN conventions, and other U.S.-led counterterrorism efforts to combat terrorism which are mediated through the international system, rather than bilateral cooperation between the U.S. government and partner states.

Many scholars also have examined characteristics and trends within partner states to explain cooperation or lack of cooperation with the United States, such as the tension between a capitalist market system and Islamic society (Mousseau, 2002) and Islamic societies' rejection of globalization or anger at the United States (Finnemore, 2009; Keohane and Katzenstein, 2007; Voeten, 2004). Byman (2006) focuses on capacity issues, pointing out structural weaknesses of partner states hindering their ability to cooperate with the United States in domestic counterterrorism operations. Given that terrorism emanates from the weakest states, the U.S. government necessarily aligns itself with states lacking effective government presence throughout their territory and facing severe capacity issues and structural weaknesses that stymie their ability to fully cooperate on counterterrorism. Wainscott (2017) specifically examines Morocco's counterterrorism policy of co-opting religious institutions in the wake of the 2003 bombing in Casablanca in order to control both the religious sphere and opposition to the government. She argues that the narrative of the War on Terror, especially following Morocco's own experience of terrorist attacks, was an opportunity to exert greater domestic control through bureaucratic reform and win favor with the United States.

Henne (2016) also looks at variation in partner states' relationship with religious institutions to explain their positions in relation to security policies connected to contentious religious issues, using quantitative analysis and case studies of Pakistan, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. States with a close relationship between political and religious institutions will be less likely to cooperate with the United States because of the political pressure religious groups are able to place on the government given the political gains that can be made by advancing religious causes and promoting religious groups' policy demands. On the other hand, states with a distant relationship between political and religious institutions are insulated from this political pressure and are more likely to cooperate with the United States. The underlying premise of his argument is that Islamic groups are opposed to counterterrorism cooperation with the United States.

Scholars also examine how interaction between the U.S. and partner states can alter the conditions for cooperation or non-cooperation. Bapat (2011) points to incentives that the promise of U.S. foreign assistance give in playing up the threat of international terrorism and the disincentives that U.S. foreign assistance provides to actually target international terrorist groups, seeing their continued presence as the key to the continued flow of U.S. funds into the government coffers. Similarly, Boutton (2014) argues that states that receive U.S. foreign aid and are also involved in an interstate rivalry will use the foreign aid to arm themselves against their rival rather than pursuing counterterrorism operations. They thus have the same incentive identified by Bapat (2011) to maintain the status quo with international terrorist groups operating within their borders in order to continue to receive U.S. assistance. States that receive U.S. assistance but are not

involved in an interstate rivalry, on the other hand, are more likely to pursue counterterrorism operations in line with U.S. counterterrorism goals.

In his interactive examination of counterterrorism cooperation, Tankel (2018) argues that variation in cooperation with the United States can even exist temporally and geographically within a single partner state. He focuses on the threat perception of governments and finds the key determinants of cooperation with the United States to be the extent to which a state's own perception of security threats is shared with the United States. This is compounded with the utility of the terrorist group to the partner state, with states more willing to cooperate against groups that do not serve a particular purpose. He further demonstrates that this process of identifying a shared threat between allies is a dynamic process and can result in states cooperating in operations against certain groups within its border while simultaneously refusing to target or even supporting other groups, especially groups used by the state for various political or security reasons.

In Tankel's analysis, partner states are not with the U.S. or against it but often times both, simultaneously helping and hindering U.S. counterterrorism. This explains, for example, Pakistan's targeting of Taliban groups active within Pakistan but resisting U.S. pressure to act against Taliban groups using its territory as a base of operations for activity within neighboring Afghanistan. In choosing whether or not to cooperate, partner states must balance their relationship with both the United States and various militant groups within their borders. This reflects a broader narrative that state cooperation under the auspices of the War on Terror is not a unique phenomenon but part of the long-standing understanding that, independent of religion or other characteristics, states will

simply pursue their own rational self-interests. States will cooperate with the U.S. on counterterrorism when it is in their interest to do so and not cooperate when it isn't. Lieber and Alexander (2005) argue, for example, that Turkey's refusal to provide troops on the ground in Iraq to support the U.S. invasion was reflective of their own security interests in the context of regional political dynamics and pressure from domestic politics.

Partner states, therefore, are more likely to cooperate with the United States when the target of counterterrorism operations is jointly perceived as a threat, seeing cooperation to be in their own strategic interests. While realist and neorealist scholars view alliance formation as a means of balancing against more powerful states as defined by factors such as GDP, military strength, population, and territory (Morgenthau, 2006, Waltz 1979), Walt (1987) argues that states will instead form alliances, defined as formal or informal security cooperation, to balance against threats as opposed to power alone. He defines threat in four ways: aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive capabilities, and perceived aggressive intentions. The framing of his theory is a product of the Cold War in which security was framed through interstate competition within a state-based international system and definitions of power based in state-level measures, minimizing the influence of non-state actors.

Following 9/11, the U.S. government's threat perception was reversed, viewing non-state actors as its primary threat, absent the traditional power attributes of a state. They, therefore, increased their focus on weak states within the international system in which it was thought al Qaeda and its allies would take advantage of as bases of

operation or receive material support. Aggregate power, using Walt's (1987) definition of threat, became largely immaterial for U.S. security after 9/11. The perception of al Qaeda as the United States' primary threat was based on the group's perceived offensive capabilities and aggressive intentions rather than their material strength. Interstate cooperation under the War on Terror was shaped by the interpretation of this threat. As Tankel demonstrates, the closer a partner state's threat perception of al Qaeda and terrorism was to the United States the higher likelihood they cooperated in its counterterrorism efforts. This idea of threat perception is also implicit to Henne's theory. When the religion-state relationship is close, Islamic institutions influence the government in terms of security priorities and would view U.S. cooperation and intervention as a greater state threat than Islamic terrorist groups committed to *jihad* against Western targets. There are issues with applying Walt's balance of threat theory to the post-9/11 era, such as dealing with the misperception of threat and the information problem inherent with dealing with non-state actors. However, it is a useful heuristic to help understand alliance formation under the War on Terror.

While there has been intense scholarly focus in understanding various aspects and consequences of the War on Terror and counterterrorism cooperation, it less clearly understood what the impact of cooperation with the United States has been for partner states' domestic security policies and the connection between this cooperation and the increasing levels of political violence. Similarly, much of the research on terrorism is unable to fully explain the increase in domestic terrorism within Muslim societies

following 2005, as scholars have largely focused on either international terrorism or endogenous causal factors for domestic terrorism.

## **Methodology**

In order to address the theory presented here, I employ a mixed-methods approach that uses both large-N quantitative analysis and qualitative case studies based on original data from interviews and archival research. A mixed methods approach has been recognized by a number of scholars as advantageous for a number of reasons (George and Bennett, 2005; Kohli, et al., 1995; Lieberman, 2005; Lijphart, 1971; Munck, 2001). Quantitative analysis, employing an “effects of causes approach,” allows the study to test the average effect of counterterrorism operations by the military on domestic terrorism across all applicable states, relying on large numbers of observations (Mahoney and Goertz, 2006, 229). A small-N study alone would be prohibitive in capturing the impact that U.S. counterterrorism policy has had broadly. Relying upon a large sample of data, I am able to test a more generalizable theory outside of particular case studies or specific contexts, addressing the problem of selection bias that can exist with case study selection (Ragin, 1987). A statistical model also allows me to examine the unique impact of counterterrorism operations, controlling for other relevant factors associated with relevant features of the state such as socioeconomic measures, regional effects, and regime type (Lijphart, 1971). A full description and explanation of my statistical models and their findings are found in Chapter 6.

Statistical methods help to demonstrate covariance, but are unable, despite some statistical techniques, to comprehensively demonstrate causation, whether U.S. counterterrorism policies are a contributing factor to the increase in domestic terrorism or the levels of domestic terrorism are a cause of U.S. support. Quantitative methods are limited by their reliance on highly simplified models of complex social phenomena, where the findings are only as good as the model being used. To address the weaknesses inherent in quantitative analysis, I pair it with qualitative case study research, a “causes of effects” approach (Mahoney and Goertz, 2006, 229). Qualitative analysis and systematic process tracing allow me to demonstrate the causal process of my theory (George and Bennett, 2005; Ragin, 1987; Hall, 2003).

My qualitative research strategy was to approach the problem from three different perspectives which mirror the causal steps within the theory—U.S. government officials focused on counterterrorism and security issues, officials within partner states shaping and implementing their governments’ counterterrorism strategies, and the terrorist groups themselves. By connecting these three perspectives, I am able to construct a causal chain from U.S. counterterrorism policy to partner states’ counterterrorism efforts in line with U.S. policy to the impact of this cooperation on terrorist groups’ motivations and behavior. To this end, I relied on a wide range of primary source documents from each perspective, poring over thousands of government documents, legislation, diplomatic cables, government and NGO reports, memoranda, communications, letters, emails, interviews, public statements, oral histories, speeches, and recordings from a variety of archival sources. These included: the George W. Bush Presidential Library; the National



Security Archives at George Washington University; the 9/11 Commission Papers at the National Archives; the Donald Rumsfeld Papers; the FOIA Reading Rooms at the Department of State, Department of Defense, Department of Justice, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the CIA, and the DIA; Bin Laden's Bookshelf at the Office of the Director of National Intelligence; the CIA's Abbottabad Compound Material; the Taliban Communications Archive at the Danish Institute for International Studies; the Global Terrorism Research Project at Haverford College; the Harmony Program of the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point; the National Archives of India; the Asian Reading Room at the Library of Congress; the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training; and WikiLeaks. This was supplemented by 56 semi-structured, elite interviews in the United States and Pakistan. My interview strategy focused on individuals who were involved in the decision-making process of counterterrorism policy at multiple levels of the both the United States and Pakistani governments as well as people who were involved in the implementation of this policy and witnessed the impact of these efforts on the ground.

In building the terrorism trap theory, I first use primary sources to demonstrate both the importance of understanding local political dynamics in understanding the trends in terrorism after 2001 (see Chapter 2) and the shift in U.S. counterterrorism policy in 2005 that led to the increase in domestic terrorism in partner states (see Chapter 3). I employ four case studies of key partner states of the United States in the War on Terror. First, I examine Pakistan as an illustrative case study of the causal mechanism (see Chapter 5). Pakistan is arguably one of the most important partners the United States has

had in its counterterrorism efforts given its strategic location on Afghanistan's eastern border. An in-depth analysis of Pakistan's interaction with the United States on counterterrorism and the resulting domestic impact allows for a comprehensive illustration of the theory's casual mechanism, based in primary source documents, interviews with both leading U.S. and Pakistani policymakers, and relevant secondary literature. I have selected Pakistan as an illustrative case study for a number of theoretical reasons. First, Pakistan experienced the War on Terror as a critical juncture in terms of its relationship with the United States. Beginning in 1990, President George H.W. Bush suspended military aid, and the vast majority of economic aid, to Pakistan due to its continued pursuit of nuclear weapons, culminating in the first successful Pakistani nuclear test in May 1998. U.S. military support was re-introduced in 2002 as part of the War on Terror, with the U.S.-Pakistan bilateral relationship being jumpstarted after a decade of neglect. Secondly, Pakistan has had a problem with terrorism for the past few decades and therefore domestic security policy has been at the forefront of the government's list of priorities. Given these two factors, I am better able to isolate the influence of U.S. policy on Pakistani security policy after 2001 with Pakistan shifting its counterterrorism focus to its "ungoverned spaces" on periphery, which terrorist groups could use as a safe haven. Third, because of Pakistan's strategic position in South and Central Asia, it has been an important part of U.S. security policy in the region, but the United States largely has relied upon the Pakistani government to conduct counterterrorism operations within its borders.

I provide additional evidence for the theory using shorter case studies of Yemen, Mali, and Egypt (see Chapter 7). Similar to Pakistan, all three cases possess “ungoverned spaces” in which government control is limited and peripheral communities within these regions have faced a history of marginalization by the central government. Further, all three have been wrapped up in U.S. counterterrorism efforts as U.S. officials have feared al Qaeda-linked terrorist groups could exploit these states’ peripheral areas. However, like Pakistan, the U.S. largely has relied upon partner states’ cooperation for conducting counterterrorism operations within their borders. More importantly, these cases display variation across the cases prior to the eventual adoption of an offensive military approach—from the duplicity of the Yemeni government to Egypt’s use of traditional law enforcement and Mali simply not acting against terrorist groups within its borders given low state capacity. This further helps to isolate the effects of domestic counterterrorism operations by the military on the levels of domestic terrorism.

Through systematic process tracing, the four case studies lay out the sequence of successive steps underlying the terrorism trap theory. First, I provide a historical overview of each peripheral region and what characteristics led them be labeled an “ungoverned” area, including the historical interactions with the central government. This provides a “scene setter” for each region to understand the social and political environment into which U.S. counterterrorism policy and partner states’ own counterterrorism efforts were introduced, a necessary introduction to understanding the resulting impact of these actions. Secondly, I examine the initial perceptions and policies pushed by U.S. officials in interactions with their counterparts abroad and the resulting

counterterrorism actions of the partner states, leading up to the initial deployment of military forces. Third, I demonstrate the violent backlash to the introduction of military force for domestic counterterrorism operations, resulting in an increase in domestic terrorism.

The time frame of this analysis covers the years 1996-2012, primarily due to data restrictions. In my statistical models, the primary explanatory variable, domestic counterterrorism operations by the military, is derived from the State Department's annual *Patterns of Global Terrorism* (1996-2003) reports and *Country Reports on Terrorism* (2004-2017). These reports are only available beginning in 1996. For my dependent variables, the division of the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) into international and domestic terrorism, at the time of writing, was only completed up to 2012 (Enders, et. al., 2011; Gaibulloev, et. al., 2017). This 16-year time period does allow me to compare pre- and post-9/11 counterterrorism policies and the impact of policies implemented by both the Bush and Obama administrations. Focusing on past administrations also allows me greater access to key declassified government documents related to counterterrorism and the access and ability to conduct more open interviews with leading policymakers from both administrations. While I discuss the implications of the growing threat from the Islamic State in the final chapter and how it connects to the terrorism trap theory, the resulting impact of the Trump administration's counterterrorism policies and its relationships with the United States' partner states will be the responsibility of future researchers.

The remainder of the study will be outlined as follows: Chapter 2 will examine the disconnect between al Qaeda core and its affiliate organization in order to highlight the importance of understanding the affiliates' local political and social contexts as the main influences on their behavior; Chapter 3 focuses on U.S. counterterrorism policy under the War on Terror and how it shifted to pressure partner states to target safe havens within their borders using military force, a key aspect of my argument; Chapter 4 is an overview of the logic of the study's theory and provides hypotheses to be quantitatively tested; Chapter 5 presents an in-depth case study of Pakistan that illustrates the casual mechanism of the terrorism trap theory through systematic process tracing; Chapter 6 reports the statistical findings and analysis; Chapter 7 contains the shorter case studies of Yemen, Mali, and Egypt as further evidence for the theory; and Chapter 8 presents the study's main findings and their broad implications with policy recommendations in establishing more effective short-term and long-term approaches to counterterrorism.

## CHAPTER TWO

### WHAT'S IN A NAME? AL QAEDA AND ITS AFFILIATES

In the final year of Barack Obama's presidency, he issued a letter to Congress asserting his authority under the 15-year-old Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) to continue and expand U.S. counterterrorism operations "against "al-Qa'ida, the Taliban, and associated forces...with the assistance of numerous international partners" (White House, 2016). This letter was meant to inform Congressional leadership of expanded airstrikes and support for regional military operations in Somalia, arguing that this was necessary "to counter the terrorist threat posed by al-Qa'ida and associated elements of al-Shabaab." This was not the only such action taken by President Obama, using the broad language of the 2001 AUMF to authorize air strikes in Libya, Iraq, and Syria over the previous year against al Qaeda affiliates and the continued support of partner states' militaries involved in counterterrorism efforts.

The continued use of the 2001 AUMF, legislation inextricably tied to the al Qaeda attack on 9/11, helps to demonstrate that U.S. counterterrorism policy under both Bush and Obama administrations was premised on an understanding that al Qaeda and its affiliate organizations presented a unified threat to the United States. As the War on Terror progressed and the understanding of al Qaeda included an ever-broadening network of groups, government officials shaping U.S. counterterrorism policy and actions understood the fundamental nature of the threat from al Qaeda to have remained constant. As demonstrated in repeated public statements by officials in both administrations, they maintained the perspective that the emergence of new groups and the increase in violence were linked with the same organization that attacked the United States on 9/11 and were

motivated by al Qaeda's transnational "jihadist" ideology. In order to understand the local impact of counterterrorism operations by partner states in motivating the behavior of terrorism groups, however, it is first necessary to challenge this assumption and analyze the nature of the al Qaeda network and the relationship between al Qaeda core and its affiliates.

In this chapter, I first provide a broad overview of the emergence of al Qaeda and its transnational ideology and demonstrate how the understanding of the al Qaeda organization has shifted overtime, primarily relying upon the UN Security Council's 1267 Committee reports. I then discuss the emergence of al Qaeda's affiliate organizations. Challenging the view of al Qaeda as a coherent network, I demonstrate the affiliates' distinct and often contradictory motivations from al Qaeda core, often grounded in their local conflict environments. Next, I explore how the historical conflict between center and periphery led to the perception of peripheries as safe havens for terrorist groups, which contributed to the conditions within which affiliate groups emerged and subsequently drew the United States' attention as part of the War on Terror. This background lays a needed foundation for understanding the response to post-9/11 counterterrorism operations and provides further evidence for the necessity of viewing the affiliates through their local political and social contexts, including their use of Islam, as distinct from the international forces driving al Qaeda core.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The phrase "al Qaeda core" will be used to refer to the core group of individuals that directly served under Osama bin Laden and the other al Qaeda leadership, representing a discrete and formal organization distinct from affiliate organizations.

## **Al Qaeda: “America’s Greatest Enemy”**

There is no word more associated with terrorism today than “al Qaeda”—a group that has dominated the world’s attention since 9/11 and deemed “America’s greatest enemy.”

However, in the early 1990s, al Qaeda was something that only a few members of the U.S. intelligence community were aware of or considered an imminent threat. The group, whose name means “the base” in Arabic, emerged from the chaos of the Soviet military invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. The Communist Afghan government that had taken power the previous year in a coup under the leadership of the Ghilzai Pashtun Nur Muhammad Taraki was soon under siege from domestic opposition due to its brutal Marxist land reform efforts, abolishment of Islamic law, and execution of political rivals. Following Taraki’s assassination in October 1979 by rivals within his Ghilzai clan, the Soviet Union installed the Tajik Babrak Karmal into the Afghan presidency and dispatched thousands of Soviet troops to support the communist government. An anti-Soviet insurgency, known as the *mujahedeen*, quickly exploded. The mujahedeen would famously gain international support from the United States, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia in a devastating war that would last until the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, leaving 2 million Afghan dead and 7 million displaced (Coll, 2004; Feifer, 2009).

In order to invigorate the anti-Soviet fighters, the various groups operating under the umbrella of the mujahedeen adopted a religious frame by taking up a call of “jihad” to protect a Muslim land against the atheist forces of the Soviet Union. This was done with the encouragement of its international backers, especially Pakistan’s ISI and the United States’ CIA who used the madrassa networks in Pakistan’s northwest border region to



recruit Pashtun fighters for this religious cause. This religious posturing was further encouraged by Pakistan's military dictator at the time, General Zia-ul-Haq who was a devoted follower of the Deobandi Jemaat-e-Islami. During the Soviet war, he only allowed exiled Afghan political parties and militant groups committed to a religious "jihad" in Afghanistan to operate inside Pakistan, barring any secular or Afghan nationalist groups framing the fight as a national liberation movement given long-standing Pakistani suspicion of Afghan nationalists laying claim to the Pashtun areas of northwestern Pakistan in a united "Pashtunistan" (Bezhan, 2014; Rashid, 2008).

This religious message not only resonated among local Pashtun but also among Muslims from many different parts of the world, especially those struggling against communist governments in their own countries. Osama bin Laden was one ethnic Yemeni who heeded this call. He was one of 56 children of a construction baron in Saudi Arabia who was the wealthiest non-Saudi in the kingdom and whose grandfather had come to Saudi Arabia from the Hadramaut region of southern Yemen. Bin Laden used his family fortune to help establish an organization known as Maktab al-Khidamat (MAK) in Peshawar, Pakistan in the mid-1980s to provide support, housing, and training for foreign recruits, especially Arabs, of the mujahedeen. MAK was just one organization of many through which recruits could fight against the Soviets and ultimately played a minimal role in the war. The Afghan resistance welcomed the Arab fighters, who subsequently became known as "Afghan Arabs," only as a means of gaining access to their seemingly endless oil wealth, putting up with their inexperience and cultural insensitivity (Weinbaum, 2003, 2). U.S. diplomats in Pakistan were aware of the contempt that many

Afghans held for Arabs operating in their midst, describing them as “high-grade tourists who were a lot more trouble than they were worth” and were “completely useless” (Eastham, 2003, 3; Goodson, 2003, 1). The Afghans kept them away from any real fighting, treating them with “kid-gloves” (Eastham, 2003, 3; Tomsen, 2003, 3).

With the withdrawal of the Soviet forces in 1989, members of MAK, which transformed into al Qaeda after joining with Ayman al-Zawahiri of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, sought to use the group’s recruiting network and assets to assist in other regions of the world where Muslims were suffering such as Kashmir and Palestine, turning the organization global. In this effort, the leadership of al Qaeda, including bin Laden, was influenced by the writings of the late Egyptian Sayyid Qutb of the Muslim Brotherhood who saw the decline and suffering within Muslim society caused by the decadence and corruption of secular governments backed by the U.S. government, a perspective informed by his own time studying in the United States. For bin Laden, this was of particular relevance for his home nation of Saudi Arabia following the stationing of American troops within the kingdom in 1990 during the Gulf War. A number of religious scholars such as Safar al-Hawali, whose PhD was supervised by Sayyid Qutb’s brother Muhammad Qutb, saw the support of the U.S. government for the Saudi state as undermining Islamic society from within and was outspokenly critical of the Saudi royal family, public positions that often led to their arrests. Bin Laden’s openly critical position of the Saudis led the Saudi government to strip him of his citizenship in the mid-1990s.

During the 1990s, bin Laden left Saudi Arabia and was taking refuge within Sudan, whose Arab-dominated government following General Omar Hassan al-Bashir’s

1989 coup had an extremely open immigration policy for fellow Arabs and Muslims. As a result, this African nation quickly became a haven for a range of Islamic fundamentalist groups. While operating from Sudan, the CIA began to take notice of al Qaeda, especially with the creation of ALEC station in 1996 whose 25-person staff of operations officers and analysts was specifically tasked to monitor Osama bin Laden. With al Qaeda's operations becoming an increasing concern, the United States and Saudi governments were pressuring Sudan to expel him. The U.S. government, according to the U.S. Ambassador to Sudan at the time, was pushing for bin Laden's expulsion from Sudan rather than taking him into custody as they didn't yet have an indictment against him (Carney, 2003, 5). When the Sudanese government finally forced bin Laden to leave, he left for Afghanistan where the Taliban had gained power in 1996 during the civil war that erupted after the Soviet exit. Bin Laden's son Omar reported that he became "hugely embittered" and blamed the Americans for his expulsion (Bergen, 2011, 21).

Three months after relocating to Afghanistan, bin Laden made his first public statement on August 23, 1996 declaring war against the United States in a text titled, "Declaration of war against the Americans occupying the land of two holy places [Saudi Arabia]" (Ibid., 22). Two years later, al Qaeda further stated their war with the United States was based on three core grievances: 1) the stationing of the U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia; 2) the negative impact of U.S. sanctions against Iraq; and 3) U.S. support for Israel (Riedel, 2010, 59). Bin Laden in particular saw the stationing of hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa over the previous decade as a new colonizing strategy within the Muslim world. After U.S. troops were

deployed to Somalia in 1992, bin Laden stated, “The Americans have now come to the Horn of Africa, and we have to stop the head of the snake” (Bergen, 2011, 20). During the 1990s, al Qaeda began to attack U.S. targets within the region such as the 1992 bombing of two hotels in Yemen housing U.S. soldiers awaiting deployment to Somalia, the 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, and the 2000 USS Cole attack in Yemen. Reflecting this objective, Robert Pape (2005, 102-125), in his comprehensive study of suicide terrorism *Dying to Win*, argues that one of the most robust predictors of al Qaeda members resorting to acts of suicide terrorism between 1995 and 2003 is coming from a country with a U.S. military presence.

As a result of bin Laden’s ideological frame, al Qaeda primarily focused its efforts in targeting the “far enemy” of the United States and other Western nations that the group argued had occupied Muslim lands and killed Muslim civilians. In this struggle, according to bin Laden, American citizens were culpable given that the “American people should remember that they pay taxes to their government, they elect their president, their government manufactures arms and gives them to Israel and Israel uses them to massacre Palestinians” (Bergen, 2011, 27-28). In referencing al Qaeda’s motivations for attacking the United States on 9/11, bin Laden explained, “The enemy invaded the land of our umma, violated her honor, shed her blood, and occupied her sanctuaries” (Lawrence, 2005, 156). Bin Laden (2001) further stated of the 9/11 hijackers, “They are [the umma’s] vibrant conscience that sees it as imperative to take revenge from the evildoers and transgressors and criminals and terrorists that terrorize the true believer.” Bin Laden interpreted the current international order, with the United

States as the hegemon, as a continuation of Western colonialism over the Muslim world. A 2003 statement by al Qaeda declared, “The Muslim countries today are colonized...The ruler of a country is the one that has the authority in it...The real ruler is the Crusader United States. The subserviency of [Muslim] rulers is no different from the subserviency of the amirs or governors of provinces to the king or president. The rule of the agent is the rule of the one who made him his agent” (Pape, 2005, 118).

In order to affect any change in the political landscape within the Muslim world, it was first necessary to cripple the United States and remove it as a source of support for governments within the Muslim world, seen to be doing the United States’ bidding. Only after this was accomplished could al Qaeda and its supporters direct their attention towards targeting Muslim governments and reforming Muslim society, seeing any efforts against local governments as a distraction from al Qaeda’s primary goal and a waste of vital resources. Bin Laden wrote:

The plague that exists in the nations of Muslims has two causes: The first is the presence of American hegemony and the second is the presence of rulers that have abandoned Islamic law and who identify with the hegemony, serving its interests in exchange for securing their own interests. The only way for us to establish the religion and alleviate the plague which was befallen Muslims is to remove this hegemony which has beset upon the nations and worshippers and which transforms them, such that no regime that rules on the basis of Islamic law remains. The way to remove this hegemony is to continue our direct attrition against the American enemy until it is broken and is too weak to interfere in the matters of the Islamic world...The focus must be on actions that contribute to the intent of bleeding the American enemy. As for actions that do not contribute to the intent of bleeding the great enemy, many of them dilute our efforts and take from our energy. The effect of this on the greater war in general is clear, as is the resulting delay in the phases leading to the establishment of an Islamic caliphate, God willing (Mendelsohn, 2015, 66-67).

A letter from al Qaeda leadership further describes their military strategy of focusing on the United States through the metaphor of a tree:

The Ummah's enemies today are like a wicked tree. The trunk of this tree is the US. The diameter of this trunk is 50 centimeters. The branches are many and vary in size... We want to bring this tree down by sawing it while our abilities and energy are limited. Our correct way to bring it down is to focus our saw on its American trunk... If sawing continued into the depth of the American trunk until it falls, the rest will fall, with Allah's permission (al Qaeda, 2017, 2).

Bin Laden and other al Qaeda leaders were pushing for their followers, according to a former Libyan who worked with al Qaeda's leadership, to "forget about the 'near enemy'; the main enemy is the Americans" (Bergen, 2011, 24). Al Qaeda core maintained a policy of avoiding confrontation with local governments as a means of preventing the escalation of local violence and preserving resources to target the U.S. and its Western allies. In the wake of Pakistani military operations in Waziristan in 2004 and 2005 meant to target foreign fighters, for example, al Qaeda fighters in the region chose to flee rather than directly confront the Pakistani soldiers (Gunaratna and Nielsen, 2008).

This strategy would have the further advantage of focusing on a single enemy against whom Muslims of different nationalities and sects could unite together, with al Qaeda's leadership fearful that intra-religious fighting could alienate potential supporters. Ayman al-Zawahiri (2014) stated in a 2014 interview with *As-Sahab*, al Qaeda's media branch, "We would like to advise our brothers that in order to succeed any armed opposition must mobilise public support. Experience has shown that without this support combat does not turn into victory or success. Thus they must avoid any action, and even though it may be legal they should abandon it, if it should alienate the Ummah from them." He added in the interview that al Qaeda's approach is "to bring together the

Ummah and to unify it around the message of unity, and [to] work towards the return of the rightly guided caliphate which is founded on the consultation and agreement of Muslims... We could not join the Ummah together if our vision was a vision [of] absolute power over it, the usurper of its rights, committing aggression towards it, or the overpowering of it.” Understanding the criticism al Qaeda was receiving within the Muslim world because of the targeting of Muslim civilians by its affiliates, bin Laden stressed in a tape recording, “The Muslim victims who fall during the operations against the infidel Crusaders are not the intended targets” (Bergen, 2011, 300).

Countless scholars and writers have used a variety of methods and theoretical approaches to analyze exhaustively the history, ideology, leadership, organizational structure, and tactics of al Qaeda (Ahmed, 2013; Bergen, 2011; Brisard and Martinez, 2005; Byman, 2015b; Coll, 2004; Esposito, 2003; Gerges, 2005; Gunaratna and Oreg, 2015; Habeck, 2006; Hegghammer, 2010; Koschade, 2006; Mendelsohn, 2015b; Riedel, 2010; Scheuer, 2011; Stollenwerk, Dorfler, and Schibberges, 2016; Wright, 2006; Wu, Carleton, and Davies, 2014). This introduction to al Qaeda is not meant to be a comprehensive account of the terrorist organization, its leadership, or its ideology, all topics others have already covered with great thoroughness and expertise. Rather, it is meant to highlight key ideas and themes that help to lay a foundation for the subsequent discussion of a lesser studied aspect of the group—the nature of the al Qaeda network and its relationship with its affiliate organizations. Unpacking this relationship is necessary to understanding the resulting behavior of these disparate affiliates that fall under the al Qaeda umbrella, their varying motivations for committing violence, and the

resulting impact of counterterrorism policies and actions by both the United States and its partner states.

### *The Shifting Definition of al Qaeda*

Given the ambiguous nature of al Qaeda and the perceived threat it posed, the definition of what constituted its network shifted over time. The UN Security Council's 1267 Committee, its vehicle for implementing global sanctions against terrorist organizations, has had a changing definition of what constitutes "al Qaeda" and its "associated" or "affiliated" forces after its role was expanded in 2001. While never formally being delegated or mandated to establish an official definition of al Qaeda and its network, the 1267 Committee has played a significant role in shaping a working definition of the al Qaeda organization and its network of affiliates. This was due to its responsibilities for maintaining a Consolidated List of individuals and groups involved with or connected to al Qaeda, monitoring sanctions against them, and providing recommendations to the UN Security Council on counterterrorism issues related to the al Qaeda threat (Mendelsohn, 2015).

Prior to 9/11, al Qaeda was viewed by various intelligence agencies as a formal organization based out of Afghanistan with a clear leadership structure and membership ranging from only a few dozen to just under 500 individuals (Abbas, 2014, 78).<sup>5</sup> Following the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, al Qaeda operatives fled abroad to find additional bases of operations in weak and failed states from which to plan attacks against

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with former senior ISI official, Islamabad, Pakistan, December 2018.



Western targets working under direct orders from the leadership of al Qaeda core within a clear chain of command (1267 Committee, 2004a). As al Qaeda core came under increasing pressure from the United States and its allies, these operatives increasingly acted autonomously and without orders, seeking to find local allies with whom to work. In its 2002 reports, the 1267 Committee (2002a, 2002b) began to view al Qaeda as a network of loosely connected cells and “like-minded radical groups” absent a centralized command and operating autonomously in 40 countries around the world. The defining feature of these cells was that they consisted of known volunteers who were trained in Afghanistan in the 1980s and 1990s. With the loss of Afghanistan as al Qaeda’s main base, this network spanning the global was seen to be the key to al Qaeda’s future planning and operations. It, however, became increasingly clear that there had been a number of different groups active in Afghanistan, with al Qaeda just one of many operating in the country. By July 2003, the definition of al Qaeda’s network had narrowed to focus only on individuals who had trained specifically at al Qaeda camps, leaving unanswered the question of how to view other militants who had fought or trained in Afghanistan with other groups, some of whom were involved in militant activity (1267 Committee, 2003).

The “like-minded” groups within the al Qaeda network, according to the 1267 Committee, often operated without direction from al Qaeda core. Its 2004 report argued, “The nature of the threat has changed...the Al-Qaida leadership is dispersed. But if the leadership is less able to direct, plan, and execute attacks, they have many supporters who are eager to do so. These terrorists form groups that do not wait for orders from above but

launch attacks when they are ready, against targets of their own choosing” (1267 Committee, 2004, 4). As the nature of the al Qaeda network shifted away from an organized group, there was early optimism about a growing American “victory” against al Qaeda and its affiliates in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. President Bush (2006) stated in an October 2006 press conference, “Absolutely, we’re winning. Al Qaeda [is] on the run...Most of Al Qaeda that planned the attacks on September the 11<sup>th</sup> have been brought to justice.”

By 2005, the 1267 Committee (2005a) drastically broadened its definition of al Qaeda beyond that of a defined organization or network to an ideology. Al Qaeda had evolved into “a global network of groups unbound by any organization structure but held together by a set of overlapping goals.” It further argued that the “threat continues to evolve as Al-Qaida increasingly represented an idea of violent opposition to a whole range of local and global circumstances rather than a coherent group with fixed goals” (Ibid., 6). Harun Fazul, who was responsible for planning the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, likewise stated in 2009, “We have become an idea and we are no longer a group” (Soufan, 2018). Even Bin Laden’s successor Ayman al-Zawahiri (2014) stated of al Qaeda’s expansion in 2014, “Al-Qaeda is a mission before it is an organization or group and, in this sense, it is expanding more.” Members of the Bush administration in the early days of the War on Terror were already pushing to define the enemy as an “ideology” rather than a discrete organization. According to former Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith, senior leadership in the White House worried about narrowing the conception of the enemy and therefore

narrowing the government's options and the scope of action they were able to take in order to prevent future attacks by a wide range of potential non-state actors.<sup>6</sup>

In its September 2005 report, the 1267 Committee now defined the al Qaeda network as consisting of three distinct groups: 1) the old core leadership; 2) militants trained by al Qaeda in Afghanistan; and 3) new recruits who have embraced al Qaeda's message locally (1267 Committee, 2005b, 7-8). The old leadership, such as bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, was still active in issuing video and audio tapes but "their opportunity to exert any meaningful direction, as opposed to influence, is seriously limited" (Ibid., 7). The second group consisted of "several thousand graduates of the Afghan camps" being "hunted down," but this network "nonetheless provides a significant backbone to the Al-Qaida structure, as well as experience and guidance for newly radicalized recruits" (Ibid., 8). The third group, the new recruits, were a "growing generation of supporters who may never have left their countries of residence but have embraced the core elements of the Al-Qaida message" (Ibid., 7). These new recruits:

have become or are being radicalized by world events or by extremists in their communities who have already been seduced by the Al-Qaida message, or even by terrorist websites and in chat rooms on the Internet. Members form cells locally without any direction from or contact with a central leadership... They are bound to the Al-Qaida leadership by an overall unity of purpose but remain independent, anonymous and largely invisible until they strike. They can be found in most areas of the world, in Muslim and non-Muslim countries alike, and comprise people from a wide range of social and educational background, age and ethnicity (Ibid., 8).

The Committee understood this third group to be the "main threat posed by Al-Qaida today" (Ibid.). The Committee also recognized that for the new generation of recruits

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Douglas Feith, former Undersecretary of Defense for Policy; Washington, DC, October 29, 2018.

local dynamics can overshadow any influence from the core leadership as “Al-Qaida does not offer a coherent ideology, and Bin Laden and the various groups that make up the loose Al-Qaida network have major theological differences” (1267 Committee, 2006, 7).

The CIA’s 2006 National Intelligence Estimate similarly understood the “global jihadist movement” to have evolved into three distinct categories: al Qaeda and its core leadership; al Qaeda affiliates; and “unaffiliated groups, cells, and individuals that have been inspired by the jihadist message and subscribe to a loosely defined global, anti-US agenda” (Central Intelligence Agency, 2006, 12). It reported the diminished influence and operational control of bin Laden and other al Qaeda leaders, with the removal of the leadership having “less impact” given that “Bin Ladin’s hands-on operational leadership has become less necessary” as “regional network leaders have proven themselves capable of functioning with limited direction” (Ibid., 17). Despite recognizing this evolution, the CIA report still maintained that “al-Qa’ida will continue to pose the greatest threat to the Homeland and US interests abroad by a single terrorist organization” (Ibid., 5). John Brennan (2011), when serving as President Obama’s Homeland Security Advisor, later argued that, alongside al Qaeda core and its affiliate organizations, the United States faced a direct threat from al Qaeda’s “adherents,” defined as “individuals, sometimes with little or no direct physical contact with al-Qa’ida, who have succumbed to its hateful ideology and who have engaged in, or facilitated, terrorist activities here in the United States.” The 1267 Committee recognized, “Al-Qaida as a movement has continued to flourish, inspired by a general message of resistance to actual or perceived injustice...The inclusiveness of the Al-Qaida message, as disseminated through the internet, allows a

wide range of potential supporters to see in it a reflection of their own personal grievances” (1267 Committee, 2008, 7). Al Qaeda had become a catch all brand for affiliate groups with little actual connection to the core leadership in order to commit attacks in its name within their own local political environment. These affiliates were inspired by local grievances “with no need to see their actions as part of a wider political programme” (Ibid.; Turner, 2010).

Amidst this changing perspective, journalist Peter Bergen (2011, 197-213) began discussing “Al-Qaeda 2.0” to describe the expanding al Qaeda network and former CIA officer Marc Sageman (2008) classified the shifting al Qaeda threat as a “leaderless jihad,” especially in inspiring attacks within the West. To represent his conception of the on-going al Qaeda threat, Bergen (2011, 197), who made his name by producing the first television interview with bin Laden in 1997, pessimistically quotes in his 2011 book *The Longest War: The Enduring Conflict Between America and al-Qaeda* the following passage from Albert Camus’ *The Plague*, “The plague bacillus never dies or vanishes entirely...it can remain dormant for years and years in furniture and linen chests...it waits patiently in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves and...perhaps the day will come when, for the instruction of mankind, the plague will rouse its rats again and send them forth to die in a well-contented city.”

Pushing against the idea of an organized terrorist network, Sageman (2008, vii), a trained psychiatrist, focused on assessments of individual motivations to commit acts of terrorism and argued:

The present threat has evolved from a structured group of al Qaeda masterminds, controlling vast resources and issuing commands, to a multitude of informal local

groups trying to emulate their predecessors by conceiving and executing operations from the bottom up. These ‘homegrown’ wannabes form a scattered global network, a leaderless jihad. Although physically unconnected, these terrorist hopefuls form a virtual yet violent social movement as they drift to Internet chat rooms that connect them and provide them with inspiration and guidance.

In a public spat, one that was even covered by the *New York Times* (Sciolino and Schmitt, 2008), terrorism expert Bruce Hoffman (2008) rejects Sageman’s conception of the al Qaeda network. He sums up Sageman’s description of a “leaderless jihad” as simply “bunches of guys” and an analysis that ignores an organizational perspective and remains too focused on the individual. In a response piece in *Foreign Affairs*, Hoffman calls this a “fundamental misreading of the Al Qaeda threat.” Representing the opposite position of Sageman, he argues that al Qaeda core under the leadership of bin Laden is a “remarkably agile and flexible organization” and still very much the main threat to the United States—“Only by destroying the organization’s leadership and disrupting the continued resonance of its radical message can the United States and its allies defeat al Qaeda.” The reality of the situation is perhaps somewhere in between these two opposing opinions. Despite debates over the reality of the threat from “homegrown terrorists” within Western societies and their connections with al Qaeda, Bergen (2011, 205-213) notes that, as al Qaeda shifted to “al Qaeda 2.0,” the most successful attacks continued to be perpetrated by organized affiliate groups within the al Qaeda network.

The 1267 Committee’s difficulty in arriving at a definitive definition of al Qaeda is an illustrative example of many policymakers’ struggle to comprehend the evolving threat. Mendelsohn (2015, 620) observes the ambiguity in the 1267 Committee’s language in its reports discussing al Qaeda’s relationship with its affiliates:

The report does not clearly identify the groups that are following al-Qaeda's directives. Though it is quick to use the terms 'franchise' and 'start-up' operations, whereby groups with little or no direct contact with the central leadership can become affiliates, it says little about how much these other groups need to resemble al-Qaeda, who they are, whether all jihadi groups bent on using violence are followers of al-Qaeda, and if some are not, what accounts for this divergence.

Despite outlining this changing nature of the al Qaeda network, the Committee continued to discuss "al Qaeda" as a singular threat in its subsequent reports and insist that "the threat from Al-Qaida as a global terrorist movement persists, and it is likely to become harder to assess and harder to deal with" (1267 Committee, 2012b, 5; 2013; 2014a; 2014b).

### *Al Qaeda and Its Affiliates*

Following the early years of the War on Terror, existing groups in various parts of the Muslim world pledged loyalty to al Qaeda alongside new groups emerging under the umbrella of an ever-expanding network. Scholars have recognized a variety of strategic motivations and incentives for militant groups to adopt the al Qaeda brand. It has been shown that strategic cooperation and alliances between terrorist groups increases their longevity (Phillips, 2014) and lethality (Horowitz and Potter, 2014; Pearson, Akbulut, and Lousnbery, 2017). Following targeted counterterrorism measures after 9/11, however, al Qaeda leadership faced severe restrictions on their freedom of movement and access to finances. As a result, al Qaeda core's material support was limited for emerging affiliates, and it increasingly provided only its name, reputation, or broad ideas with affiliates operating independently from al Qaeda core leadership (Fishman, 2008).

Therefore, there were largely issues of perception that continued to drive the adoption of the al Qaeda brand. It has been shown how militant and terrorist groups can strategically shift ideologies and behavior to support their operational and strategic interests and ultimately are more concerned with survival than ideological purity (Abrahms, 2008; Bloom, 2007; Stern, 2003; Walter, 2017). The al Qaeda brand could lead to greater perceived effectiveness and legitimacy, more global media exposure, and, therefore, a strengthening of both internal and external support increasing a group's chances of survival.

Through the activity of its affiliates, al Qaeda's presence appeared to stretch around the globe as it attempted to spark a "global jihad" or, as David Kilcullen (2010, 165-227), a former counterterrorism advisor for the U.S. government, argues, a "globalized Islamist insurgency" against the prevailing world order dominated by the United States. This seemingly was in line with al Qaeda's 1998 declaration of war against the United States which called for all Muslims to join together in jihad under the leadership of Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda's leadership. Kilcullen (Ibid., 170-174) identified a wide range of theaters into which al Qaeda wanted to expand: the Americas, Western Europe, Australasia, Iberian Peninsula and Maghreb, Greater Middle East, East Africa, the Caucasus and European Russia, South and Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. In his argument, the al Qaeda organization ultimately served to link different militant groups using the tools of globalization—communication, finances, and the Internet—to coordinate their efforts and advance a shared ideology and political goals. Kilcullen (Ibid., 175-180) further identifies a number of different factors in common that help to



link al Qaeda and their affiliated organizations: a shared fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic ideology against mainstream views of the religion, linguistic and cultural links in Islam and Arabic (though most of the groups did not speak Arabic), personal history through participation in the Afghan mujahedeen, family connections as many al Qaeda operatives married into local populations, financial links, operational and planning links, propaganda, and shared techniques.

Scholars argued that al Qaeda core's shift to relying on affiliated groups to conduct attacks was part of a "franchising strategy" by its leadership (Mendelsohn, 2015b). The evolving nature of the al Qaeda network and its affiliate groups, the 1267 Committee saw, helped "al Qaeda" as an organization survive as it breaks down "into its constituent parts," even though the core leadership had been devastated and largely made irrelevant in regard to the operations of affiliate groups (1267 Committee, 2009b; 2011, 8). Scholars have interpreted this strategic shift as a demonstration of al Qaeda's continued strength and relevance, giving al Qaeda "more members, greater geographic reach, and a level of ideological sophistication and influence it lacked ten years ago" (Farrall, 2011; Riedel, 2007). Mendelsohn (2011, 2015b) and Ceslo (2014), on the other hand, argue that al Qaeda's franchising strategy, a strategy the group adopted only gradually after 2001, was in fact a sign of the organization's growing weakness, especially as franchises pursued their own local agenda outside of al Qaeda core's control or influence.

In outlining this strategy, the 1267 Committee recognized the core leadership's ambition "to play a more direct role in determining strategy while encouraging local

groups to do whatever they can as opportunity arises at the tactical level” (1267 Committee, 2007a, 7). Confronting coordinated counterterrorism efforts, al Qaeda core adapted their tactics and relied on increasingly sophisticated yet undirected broadcasts and web postings to inspire attacks from affiliated organizations by suggesting types of targets and provide general motivation for recruitment efforts (Cronin 2010; Ibid.). In 2008, Ryan Crocker, the former U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan (2004-2006), Iraq (2007-2009), and Afghanistan (2011-2012), stated, “Their top-level leadership is still out there, but they’re not communicating and they’re not moving around. I think they’re symbolic more than operationally effective” (Mazzetti, 2008). Kilcullen (2016, 123) explains, “In a leaderless resistance movement, symbolic figures (sometimes anonymous, sometimes acting openly but without detectable links to the movement) issues general guidelines for action, which self-recruited, independent groups and individuals act upon without further coordination or communication.” In these messages, bin Laden portrayed himself and al Qaeda as possessing the “sole desire...to help the poor and oppressed against the tyrants who rule over them” (1267 Committee, 2007b, 7). These messages, which had begun to lose prominence in 2009 given countermeasures by Western nations and a decline in media coverage, also increasingly attempted to appeal to individuals facing economic and social deprivation and inspire lone wolf attacks by homegrown terrorists within the West (1267 Committee, 2009a, 6; 2014a, 5). This taps into what Hegghammer (2010/11) identifies as the “foreign fighter ideology” which had emerged within the Muslim world in the 1980s. This pan-Islamic ideology, as argued by Hegghammer, helped to cultivate an ambiguous but shared sense of religious duty to fight against Western nations and their

allies who have attacked the *ummah* and occupied Muslim territory, a universal duty not bound by specific territory.

Despite efforts by al Qaeda core, the 1267 Committee recognized that it had been unsuccessful in asserting its influence over affiliates, many of whom were founded by local actors, and “unable to focus their supporters on key operational issues or guide them towards specific action” (1267 Committee, 2008, 7). These efforts were further weakened following the May 2011 killing of bin Laden by U.S. Navy SEALs in Abbottabad, Pakistan (1267 Committee, 2012a, 2012b). Mendelsohn (2019) identifies three factors that limit the effectiveness of transnational terrorist organizations in achieving any of their internationally focused goals: 1) the strength of local nationalism and tribalism in defining the motivations and conflict agendas of affiliates and potential recruits; 2) overly ambitious goals without realistic strategic plans; 3) schisms within the transnational movement over divergences in preferences and strategies, particularly between foreign and local fighters. All these factors undercut the effectiveness of al Qaeda core to exert influence over its affiliates and therefore diminished the threat the organization posed to the United States and its interests.

The disconnect between al Qaeda core and its affiliates was heightened with the increased seclusion of al Qaeda’s leadership, especially bin Laden, as a means of avoiding detection. After 2005, when bin Laden moved into the Abbottabad compound in Pakistan, he lived without internet or phone access, wary of using any kind of technology that could allow U.S. signals intelligence to track his location. He instead relied on an intricate system of couriers to communicate with the outside world and was limited in the

amount of funds he had access to (Coll, 2018, 551-556). Other al Qaeda leadership found refuge in the isolated and mountainous Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The former head of CIA counterterrorism operations Robert Dannenberg stated that al Qaeda members “retreated to the tribal areas because they felt safer there and they were willing to sacrifice the ability to communicate efficiently with their networks for their own safety” (Bergen, 2011, 254). This, combined with international sanctions, also hampered al Qaeda core’s ability to organize and raise funds (Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 2010, 6). In a letter to the Masked Brigade, a breakaway faction seeking closer ties to al Qaeda core, al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb’s Shura Council (2012, 4), for example, complained of the lack of communication and support from al Qaeda core, writing:

Our dear brothers, we find it a strange contradiction in your message, the idea of separating from the leadership of the Islamic Maghreb and instead connecting with the leadership in Khorasan [Afghanistan/Pakistan]. The great obstacles between us and the central leadership are not unknown to you. They are far greater than any obstacles imaginable with the closer, local leadership that borders you. For example, since we vowed our allegiance up until this very day, we have only gotten a few messages from our emirs in Khorasan, the two sheikhs, bin Laden (God rest his soul) and Ayman (God preserve him). From time to time we also received messages from the two sheikhs Attiyat Ullah and Abu Yahia al-Libi (God rest their souls)... We only bring this up so that our brothers understand that the idea of adhering to the central leadership rather than the local leadership is not realistic.

A former member of al Shabaab similarly stated, “Essentially, al-Shabaab wanted to remain important in the global jihad arena, and Al-Qaeda gave them the brand approval, despite Al-Shabaab having no real ties to the AQ core [as of 2015] aside from general guidance and advice” (Maruf and Joseph, 2018, 260).

After 2005, there was a sharp decline in Western casualties from “Al-Qaeda-claimed” terrorist attacks even as the al Qaeda network was appearing to be expanding (Cronin, 2010). The perception of al Qaeda’s continued activity, capacity, and threat to the United States and its national security interests was driven by local affiliates acting independently and often without direction from al Qaeda leadership. It was recognized that the affiliates, which accounted for the lion’s share of perceived al Qaeda attacks and whose targets were often local, “pursue autonomous agendas even as they draw on Al-Qaida branding” (1267 Committee, 2013, 6; Oullet, Lacroix-Leclair, and Pahlavi, 2014; Ramirez and Robbins, 2018). A January 2010 Senate Foreign Relations Committee (2010, 2) report stated, “Many groups acting under Al Qaeda’s banner are only loosely affiliated with the leadership. More often, they raise their own money and plan and execute attacks independently. Operational decisions are routinely made at the local level, rather than by bin Laden or Zawahiri.” In his May 28, 2014 commencement speech at West Point, even President Barack Obama (2014b) publicly recognized:

Our counterterrorism efforts were focused on al Qaeda’s core leadership...Four and a half years later, as you graduate, the landscape has changed. We have removed our troops from Iraq. We are winding down our war in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda’s leadership on the border region between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been decimated, and Osama bin Laden is no more...[T]oday’s principal threat no longer comes from a centralized al Qaeda leadership. Instead, it comes from decentralized al Qaeda affiliates and extremists, many with agendas focused in countries where they operate. And this lessens the possibility of large-scale 9/11-style attacks against the homeland.

A number of scholars and policymakers recognized that affiliate groups, providing only nominal pledges of loyalty to al Qaeda core, emerged independently and largely acted in response to their own local conflict dynamics, often at odds with al Qaeda core’s transnational priorities. Thomas Hegghammer (2009, 256) argues that the

classification of groups as “Jihadi-Salafi” obscures “arguably the most significant political rift in the world of militant Islamism...namely the question of whether to focus the struggle on the near or far enemy.” Despite arguing for a global Islamist insurgency linked together and instigated by al Qaeda, Kilcullen (Ibid., 182) also writes that the movement “comprises a group of aligned independent movements, not a single unified organization. Global players link and exploit local players through regional affiliates—they rarely interact directly with local players but sponsor and support them through intermediaries.” Barak Mendelsohn (2009, 59) further observes the tension between transnational ideology and local politics within the al Qaeda network, “Consequent to the war in Iraq, it appears that al Qaeda has managed to complete the transition from local to global jihad. The transition is largely psychological. Most attacks are being carried out by local groups in their own countries, mainly inside the Muslim world.”

This divide between al Qaeda core and its affiliates had been a lingering issue plaguing this relationship from the earliest years of the War on Terror. Al Qaeda’s leadership was consistently frustrated with its lack of influence over the operations of affiliates, who even acted contrary to direct orders from bin Laden and other al Qaeda leaders as these groups maintained a local focus and pursued an independent agenda. A member of the long time al Qaeda affiliate in Indonesia Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) stated as early as 2002 that its relationship with al Qaeda core was “that of an NGO with a funding agency. The NGO exists as a completely independent organization, but submits proposals to the donor and gets a grant when the proposal is accepted. The donor only funds projects that are in line with its own programs. In this case, al-Qaeda may help fund

specific JI programs but it neither directs nor controls it” (International Crisis Group, 2002, 30). Another JI member similarly stated, “[W]e can ask [al Qaeda] for an opinion, but they have no authority over us. We are free. We have our own funds, our own men. We are independent, like Australia and the U.S. But when it comes to an operation, we can join together” (Rassler and Brown, 2011, 10).

Al Qaeda core similarly had difficulties in influencing the operations of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) under the leadership of Jordanian Abu Masab al-Zarqawi who had fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the late 1980s. The group became an al Qaeda affiliate in 2004 and was a major concern for the U.S. as a result of their efforts to further destabilize Iraq in the midst of the U.S. invasion. Zarqawi, who had fought with bin Laden in Afghanistan, was initially reluctant to become an al Qaeda affiliate given his concerns about losing operational autonomy and the ability to remain focused on his regionally-defined goals (Byman, 2015). Zarqawi, along with his influential deputy Abi Ali al-Anbari, viewed the group’s fight through the prism of the sectarian politics of Iraq and the Middle East and opposing Iraq’s Shia government, along with its Sunni collaborators (Hassan, 2018). AQI would target Shia communities in order to provoke a violent response against the Sunnis. They also would indiscriminately target Sunni neighborhoods in the hopes of provoking a sectarian war between the Shia and Sunni and further demonstrate the weakness of the government in protecting them. Many of the attacks involved increasingly levels of brutality, including torture, mutilation, rape, beheadings, and the targeting of children. In this way, AQI was hoping to give the Sunni population little choice in backing them (Kilcullen, 2016, 31-32, 41).

Al Qaeda's core leadership, on the other hand, remained focused on targeting the "far enemy" of the United States and other Western nations and was increasingly frustrated with AQI's brutality towards fellow Muslims, seeing intra-religious conflict as detrimental to their ultimate goal of uniting Muslims against the West. In letters intercepted by U.S. forces in July 2005, al-Zawahiri (2005, 10) was urging Zarqawi to refrain from targeting Shia and executing hostages on television, writing, "Many of your Muslim admirers amongst the common folk are wondering about your attacks on the Shia...Among the things which the feelings of the Muslim population who love and support you will never find palatable are the scenes of slaughtering the hostages." In letters to Zarqawi uncovered in the 2011 Abbottabad raid, bin Laden further ordered fighters in Iraq "to stay away from anyone who is fighting the crusaders during this phase, regardless of whether they are atheists, secular Ba'thists, or infidels" (Dorell, 2016). Bin Laden specifically ordered Zarqawi to refrain from targeting Muslims, stating that al Qaeda's nominal affiliate "had clear instructions to focus his fighting against the invader occupiers, starting with the Americans" (Ibid.). Given the lack of control over AQI's operations which continued to target both Shia and Sunni communities in Iraq with extreme brutality, al Qaeda core's leadership wished to "sever its ties" (Byman and Williams, 2015). They would eventually disassociate with the group after it had adopted the mantle of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and moved its operations into Syria during its civil war, against the wishes of al Qaeda core. An al Qaeda spokesman stated in 2014 that the Islamic State "is not a branch of the al-Qaeda group...does not have an



organizational relationship with it and [al-Qaeda] is not the group responsible for their actions” (Sly, 2014).

Broader than AQI’s sectarian conflict, al Qaeda core remained concerned with affiliate groups focusing their attacks on local targets which led to the deaths of fellow Muslims. They were concerned that these attacks would alienate the groups from local bases of support, undermining al Qaeda’s long term goals to politically unite Muslims against the “far enemy.” According to analysis of the documents found at bin Laden’s Abbottabad compound by the Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point, the al Qaeda leader “was burdened by what he viewed as the incompetence of the ‘affiliates’, including their lack of political acumen to win public support, their media campaigns and their poorly planned operations which resulted in the unnecessary deaths of thousands of Muslims” (Lahoud, et. al., 2012, 2).

Al Qaeda core even cited restrictions within Islamic law for the killing of innocent Muslims and chastised their affiliates for their poor understanding of Sharia and religious doctrine within Islam. An undated letter recovered from the Abbottabad compound read,

We remind our brethren, the Mujahidin, everywhere, May God bless them all, to disseminate and spread the word about the significance of forbidding the shedding of Muslim blood. We must be cautious not to shed it and to protect and defend it from being shed unjustly. It is a must to stop any reason that might lead to the spilling of Muslim blood, the plundering of their property, or the ravaging of their honor...I call them to issue orders to all battalions and companies fighting in the field to prevent explosions and using methods that kill generally and indiscriminately in Muslim mosques or similar, general gathering places, such as markets, streets, playgrounds, or whatever the target it may be, so as to control the situation, as a precaution, and to avoid mistakes and [collateral] damage (al Qaeda, 2016, 3).

Another 2010 letter from bin Laden (2010, 2) read, “You may have recently heard on the news about the targeting of worshippers in mosques and markets, especially in Pakistan and Afghanistan. According to the news, the most recent attacks had been attributed to some mujahidin groups in those two countries. Per Islamic Law, it is unlawful to target mosques or public places. Hence, one cannot justify the killing of many innocent people in mosques and public places for the sake of killing one enemy.” Similarly, al Qaeda core sent a December 3, 2010 letter to the leader of the TTP, Hakimullah Mehsud, deeming their attacks against fellow Muslims as a “negative deviation from the set path of the Jihadists Movement in Pakistan” and claimed that their religious justification is “unacceptable” and “contains political and Shari’a mistakes” (al Qaeda, 2010, 1). They in particular denounced the fact that the group “is killing more people, taking them as shields without basing their action on the Shari’a, killing the normal Muslims as a result of martyrdom operations that takes place in the marketplaces, mosques, roads, assembly places, and calling the Muslims apostates” (Ibid.). In a December 2009 letter, al Qaeda leadership similarly chastised al Shabaab and al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb for targeting fellow Muslims and encouraged them to conduct operations against Western targets, such as embassies, ambassadors, and commercial interests, “in non-Islamic African countries to avoid Muslim casualties,” though recognizing the need to “be careful not to injure non-targeted Crusaders and idolaters” (al Qaeda, 2009, 5). Another letter dated August 7, 2010 concerning al Shabaab further pressed, “Please talk to the Somali brothers about reducing the harm to Muslims at Bakarah Market as result of attacking the headquarters of the African forces” (al Qaeda, 2010b, 2).

Al Qaeda core also was concerned affiliate groups escalating conflict with local governments which they argued was a distraction from the primary goal of targeting the United States, “spreading their efforts too thin and opening up less important fronts” (Ibid.). The al Qaeda leadership was clear in communicating “the importance to distinguish between: A- Jihad for which we prepared all the requirements, identified its time and place, considering all the local, regional, and international powers. B- Some operations that our brothers conducted as an act of self defense and in response to some operations that the government conducted against them” and concerned “to avoid finding ourselves drawn into a full war for which we did not plan to on this particular day or that we haven’t prepared elements for its success” (al Qaeda, 2017, 9).

In a letter to al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) leader Nasir al-Wuhayshi in Yemen, al Qaeda core argued that the group needed to avoid fighting the Yemeni government, stating “it is not in our interest to rush in bringing down the regime” (al Qaeda, 2012, 3). Moreover, it explicitly ordered, “Do not target military and police officers in their centers unless you receive an order from us. Our targets are Americans, who kill our families in Gaza and other Islamic countries” (Ibid., 5). Instead, al Qaeda core stated that the group needed to work towards establishing a truce with the Yemeni government and focus on operations against the United States, a position al Qaeda core had previously stressed to AQAP—“We need to extend and develop our operations in America and not keep it limited to blowing up airplanes...Al-Qaida concentrates on its external big enemy before its internal enemy” (Ibid., 4; al Qaeda, 2010c, 2010d). Al Qaeda core even saw affiliates’ engagement in local trade to raise revenue as “very

dangerous and contradictory to the mission of the state.” A 2010 letter explained, “People working for the state should be concerned only with security and justice. Employees of the state should not compete for trade because this can destroy the Islamic state and movement and create a gap between the state and the people” (al Qaeda, 2010b, 5).

As a senior Yemeni diplomat told me, “al Qaeda is not the same everywhere. They operate according to the environment.” In our discussion, he, in particular, saw AQAP as a “local” group focused on territory acquisition, raising revenue, dealing with issues of governance, and contesting the sovereignty of the local government. He described AQAP as operating like another Yemeni tribe making business deals and tribal alliances and driven by “political and economic grievances” in Yemen’s south. When I asked about AQAP’s connection with al Qaeda core’s internationally focused ideology against the “far enemy”, he answered, “Where’s the ideology there? It’s a power struggle.”<sup>7</sup>

Akbar Ahmed, a former senior member of the Civil Service of Pakistan who held a number of postings on the frontier including political agent in FATA’s South Waziristan Agency, also pushed back against the idea of al Qaeda core’s transnational ideology motivating the various Taliban groups operating within the Tribal Areas— “Nobody is thinking about that in Waziristan. They are thinking, ‘You attacked our mosque so we will take revenge.’ It’s purely local.”<sup>8</sup> General Abdullah Dogar, the former Pakistani brigade commander in Waziristan, similarly argued that the Tehreek-e-Taliban

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Yemeni diplomat, Washington, DC, October 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Akbar Ahmed, the Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies, American University, Washington, DC, December 7, 2018.

Pakistan (TTP) emerged as a result of “internal problems” within FATA rather than being motivated by a transnational ideology. The group, he explained, only moved out of Waziristan when the military moved into the region. As the TTP was unable to fight the Pakistani army “head on,” they primarily moved to targeting Pakistan’s “soft spots,” especially soldiers’ homes in revenge for their own homes being targeted in the military operations.<sup>9</sup> Using survey data from Pakistan, Karl Kaltenthaler and William Miller (2015) further demonstrated that local support for the Pakistan Taliban was primarily driven by Pashtun ethnic affiliation rather than adherence to a religious ideology or other international factors.

By December 2012, the 1267 Committee recognized that “[t]he Al-Qaida responsible for the attacks of 11 September 2001 has disappeared” as the affiliates within the fractured movement underwent geographic and generational change and now had a “greater focus on local issues and less capability and motivation to mount attacks on a global scale” (1267 Committee, 2012b, 5). In 2012, for example, Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau released a video demonstrating that the group’s main motivation for conducting attacks against local targets was revenge for the brutality of the Nigerian military’s counterterrorism operations and demanding that the government withdraw the military, repair destroyed mosques, and provide compensation to local families affected by the fighting. As one journalist based in the region noted, the group’s “grievances were always deeply rooted in the local politics of Boko Haram’s native Borno State” and was “hardly the stuff of global jihad” (Bavier, 2012). Understanding the local nature of the

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with General Abdullah Dogar, former brigade commander in Waziristan, Washington, DC, April 23, 2012.

affiliates' operations, the Committee's 2014 report argued that the "greatest threat continues to emanate from groups towards people either under their control, as with ISIL and Boko Haram, or close to their operating areas. The vast majority of killings, atrocities and kidnappings are committed in Member States where Al-Qaida-associated groups are active" (1267 Committee, 2014b, 4).

Table 2.1 below lists fifteen al Qaeda affiliates with their country of origin in parenthesis and provides a basic breakdown of all attacks claimed by them from their founding to 2017, using data from the Global Terrorism Database (START, 2018). The categories of attacks are: (1) Domestic: domestic attacks in which the targets are the same nationality as the group's country of origin; (2) Int'l (Domestic): attacks against international targets within the group's country of origin; (3) U.S. (Domestic): attacks specifically against U.S. targets within the group's country of origin; (4) Int'l (Regional): attacks against international targets within regional or bordering states of the group's country of origin; (5) U.S. (Regional): attacks specifically against U.S. targets within regional or bordering states of the group's country of origin; and (6) Int'l (US/Europe): attacks against international targets within the United States and Europe.

It is clear from Table 2.1 that domestic targets bear the brunt of al Qaeda affiliates' terrorist attacks, accounting for 85.1% of the total attacks committed by the affiliate organizations. Attacks or attempted attacks within the United States or European countries or against U.S. targets abroad, on the other hand, account for only 0.5% of the affiliates' total attacks. Terrorist attacks within Europe and the United States were largely committed by U.S. and European nationals acting as "lone wolves" with loose or no

**Table 2.1 Terrorist Attacks by al Qaeda Affiliates (Up to 2017)**

<i>Group Name (Country of Origin)</i>	<i>Year Founded</i>	<i>Domestic</i>	<i>Int'l (Domestic)</i>	<i>U.S. (Domestic)</i>	<i>Int'l (Regional)</i>	<i>U.S. (Regional)</i>	<i>Int'l (US/Europe)</i>
Taliban (Afghanistan)	1994	6799	624	46	55	2	0
TTP (Pakistan)	2007	1322	66	2	0	0	1
Haqqani Network (Afghanistan)	1980	58	26	5	2	0	0
Al Qaeda in Iraq/Islamic State (Iraq; Up to 2014)	2004	1088	29	9	36	2	1
Al Nusrah Front (Syria)	2012	228	23	4	27	0	0
Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (Yemen)	2009	974	45	5	11	3	2
Al Shabaab (Somalia)	2006	2196	697	2	419	2	0
Ansar Dine (Mali)	2012	33	21	0	0	0	0
Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (Algeria)	2007	174	6	0	82	2	0
Boko Haram (Nigeria)	2002	2065	25	0	82	0	0
Ansar al-Sharia (Libya)	2011	57	8	2	0	0	0
Caucasus Emirate (Russia)	2007	44	0	0	0	0	0
Imam Shamil Battalion (Russia)	2017	2	0	0	0	0	0
Jemaah Islamiyah (Indonesia)	1993	50	7	2	19	0	0
Abu Sayyaf (Philippines)	1991	464	46	5	17	0	0

**Source:** Global Terrorism Database (START, 2018)

affiliation with groups overseas (Ahmed, 2010, 2018). Most of the attacks directed against American targets (95.8%) occurred within the groups' country or region of origin. The Taliban has the highest number of attacks targeting the United States. However, the vast majority of these are against U.S. military forces and other U.S. representatives within Afghanistan and, therefore, are connected with the U.S. military invasion. Of the affiliates' other international terrorist attacks, 96.4% are directed against regional targets, both within the groups' countries of origin or within neighboring countries. The large number of international terrorist attacks by al-Shabaab were directed against Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda and were a result of these countries' military operations within Somalia. Within Ethiopia and Kenya, al Shabaab also recruited heavily from these two countries' own marginalized and discriminated Somali populations. Similarly, many of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb's international terrorist attacks were connected to the anti-AQIM counterterrorism operations by Malian, African Union, and French military forces after the group moved into the vast deserts of northern Mali as a safe haven. Distinct from al Qaeda core's emphasis on targeting the United States and other Western nations, it's clear that affiliates largely direct their operations against local governments and local populations, with the vast majority of their victims being fellow Muslims. While groups draw upon and "position themselves strategically within a globalized discourse," it is a fallacy to solely focus upon rhetoric or suspected links with al Qaeda core without considering their local conflict environments which shape their motivations and behavior (Dowd and Raleigh, 2013, 505).



There has been a tendency to rely too often on the broadest conception of al Qaeda and its network and overinflate its threat in order to justify counterterrorism actions and policies, score political points with fear-inducing rhetoric, or because government officials and politicians simply fear being wrong. Many partner states also possess their own reasons for adopting the al Qaeda frame for domestic conflicts such as legitimizing the use of military force or gain financial backing from the United States (Ahmed, 2013, 289-299; Byman, 2006; Dowd and Raleigh, 2013; Pokalova, 2018). Governments often were interested in getting domestic political opponents labeled al Qaeda-linked international terrorists in order to justify actions taken against them (Rosand, 2004). In a November 2001 statement to U.S. media, Russian President Vladimir Putin (2001) described the situation in the North Caucasus through the frame of al Qaeda:

What we definitely have [here]—and it is an established fact not contested by the special services of the United States—is the fact of the links between some international terrorists already active on the territory of Chechnya with international criminal terrorist organizations, including bin Laden’s al-Qaeda... These are simply people practically belonging to one organization. They were trained together in the same terrorist centers. They consider bin Laden to be their teacher. He trained them on his bases in Afghanistan. They fought together against the Soviet troops in Afghanistan and so on.

At the 2003 Munich Security Conference, the Russian Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov stated that the attacks committed by Chechen terrorists in Russia are the moral equivalent to the 9/11 attacks by al Qaeda within the United States. He further highlighted the connections between Chechen militant groups and al Qaeda, stating that he had “irrefutable evidence” that a Chechen leader met with “terrorist number one Usama bin Laden” (State Department, 2003, 17-18).

After September 11, 2001, China similarly began to frame unrest among its discriminated Uyghur population in Xinjiang as international terrorism in order to justify highly repressive state actions against the Uyghurs within the vast western province (Pokalova, 2013). In November 2001, the Chinese government published a list of incidents of violence over the previous decade and retrospectively labeled them acts of Islamic terrorism committed by various Uyghur organizations (People's Republic of China, 2001). In this list and paper released just prior to a visit by President Bush, the Chinese government argued that the Xinjiang-based East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) received training and financial support from al Qaeda and was "a major component of the terrorist network headed by Osama bin Laden" (McGregor, 2002; People's Republic of China, 2002). Chinese officials pushed the Bush administration to officially designate the ETIM, based in Xinjiang, as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, which the State Department did in August 2002 to help generate Chinese support for the Iraq invasion (State Department, 2002). This designation provided the Chinese government justification and cover for an increased crackdown on the Uyghurs and Islamic practices in China (Holdstock, 2015; Tyler, 2004). Even the military government of Myanmar saw the War on Terror as an opportunity to "bolster relations with the United States by getting credit for cooperation on the [counter terror] front" by claiming that two organizations from the Muslim Rohingya, considered one of the most persecuted minority groups in the world, had connections with al Qaeda, without offering any evidence to support these claims (Allchin, 2017). This further was meant to give the Myanmar military a freer hand in on-going operations against the minority group by

portraying them as “a fifth column of dangerous Islamist extremists with links to al-Qaeda” (Ibid.).

Similar to incentives for governments to invoke the al Qaeda threat, al Qaeda core itself was incentivized to strategically frame Islamic militant groups in conflicts across the Muslim world as part of their network in order to bolster the group’s perceived global reach, whether or not these claims were accurate (Byman, 2014; Pokalova, 2018). In August 2006, for example, the Egyptian Islamic Group (EIG) denied “on the whole and in its details” a statement by al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri that EIG had joined the al Qaeda network, calling it “a flagrant contradiction of reality.” In a statement posted to its website, the group emphasized that “Al Jama’ah al-Islamiyah and the Al-Qa’ida organization are in a profound disagreement on the way they look at the reality, the goals they target, and the strategies they plan” (State Department, 2006t). The head of EIG’s Shura Council, Karam Zuhdi, even appeared on Egyptian and Arab satellite television to reiterate these points.

Some U.S. policymakers did voice support for the conclusion that the al Qaeda core was largely decimated by the United States’ and its partner states’ counterterrorism efforts, and affiliated groups were responsible for many of the attacks driving perceptions of al Qaeda’s persistent capacity and global reach (Ahmed, 2013, 317; Hoffman, 2013). In 2011, U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta acknowledged that there were perhaps only ten to twenty al Qaeda leaders remaining, adding “we’re within reach of strategically defeating al Qaeda” (Stewart, 2011). However, the following year he stated in a speech at the Center for a New American Security in Washington, DC, even though

“al-Qaeda’s leadership...[has] been decimated...the threat from al-Qaeda has not been eliminated” (Panetta, 2012). His diagnosis of this “cancer” focused on the affiliate organizations, stating, “We have slowed a primary cancer but we know that the cancer has also metastasized to other parts of the global body” (Ibid.). He specifically cites the “spreading al-Qaeda presence” in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Mali, and Nigeria.

As the perceived threat from al Qaeda increasingly shifted onto the shoulders of its affiliate organizations, scholars and policymakers did not fully grasp either the causes or the motivations of the affiliates’ behavior and the resulting implications for counterterrorism policy. Studies focusing on the effectiveness of U.S. counterterrorism often only examined one part of a broader picture, without considering the role played by partnered operations or the increasing prominence of domestic terrorism. Lehrke and Schomaker (2016, 761), for example, argue that increasing defensive counterterrorism measures in the United States and other Western nations successfully resulted in a decrease in terrorist attacks within these countries after 9/11, while redirecting attacks to the “frontline wars of the War on Terror.” Their interpretation of this empirical finding is premised on the assumption that the priority of terrorist groups, especially al Qaeda-affiliated groups, maintained a primary goal to strike at the United States. It does not consider the impact of partner states’ counterterrorism operations or the emergence of groups whose behavior was focused on and shaped by local political conditions. The study also does not disaggregate international terrorism from domestic terrorism. Young and Findley (2011b) similarly argue that foreign aid is an effective tool in reducing international terrorism by ameliorating the underling conditions that lead to terrorism.

However, they do not consider domestic terrorism in their models. With foreign aid being used as a tool to influence partner states to cooperate with U.S. counterterrorism priorities, its effect similarly could be to increase partner states' counterterrorism cooperation with the United States and lead to an increase in affiliates' terrorist attacks on local targets as a backlash to partnered military operations. Given the tenuous nature of the links between al Qaeda core and its affiliates who are more focused on their local conflict environments, it becomes that much more important to understand the historical, social, and political contexts within which they emerge and the resulting conflict dynamics that serve as the primary drivers of the affiliates' campaigns of violence.

### **Center versus Periphery**

Under the War on Terror, the focus of U.S. counterterrorism efforts increasingly was directed toward regions thought to be potential "safe havens" for al Qaeda and al Qaeda-affiliated groups. These areas, such as the southern islands of the Philippines, southern Yemen, the northern deserts of Mali, the northeastern states of Nigeria, Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, and southern Somalia, are on the periphery of states in which a combination of weak government institutions and difficult terrain allowed terrorist groups to emerge and operate outside the bounds of state control. Akbar Ahmed (2013) recognizes that many Islamic terrorist groups dominating global headlines, such as the Taliban groups, al Shabaab, Boko Haram, al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Abu Sayyaf, Ansar Dine, Ansar al-Sharia, the PKK, the Islamic State, and many others, emerged from long-standing conflicts between communities within

these peripheries and their central governments. This same center versus periphery conflict dynamic is evident in non-Muslim regions as well including the terrorist campaigns by the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, the Basque ETA in Spain, and Corsican groups in France. Among the 67 groups (as of December 2018) designated by the U.S. State Department (2018c) as “Foreign Terrorist Organizations,” 39 are based within such peripheral societies.

From time immemorial, governments have faced the challenge of extending their writ over the often intractable peoples residing in the difficult mountains, deserts, jungles, and forests of the periphery. These regions and their inhabitants historically were left to govern themselves according to local tradition. They remained outside the broader political developments of the far away capitals that nominally ruled them given the fierce independence of the inhabitants and the difficult nature of the terrain limiting access to outsiders. For example, Waziristan, the mountainous heart of British India’s Tribal Areas and future home of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, was described by the former British governor of the North-West Frontier Province Sir Olaf Caroe (1958, 391) as “a fortress built by nature for herself, guarded by mountains which serve it in the office of a wall.” In a more foreboding warning, a desert region of southern Yemen was give the name *Hadhramaut*—“death has come” and the under-governed and underdeveloped deserts stretching from Yemen’s al-Jawf and Marib Governorates to Shabwah Governorate was called *Muthalith al-Sharr*—Triangle of Evil. Similarly, for the Tuareg of the Sahel region, a British traveler wrote in the 1920s, “The Tuareg are so little known even to-day that their very existence is almost legendary” (Lord Rennell of Rodd, 1966, 189). There

were periodic attempts throughout history to conquer these areas, such as the failed 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century military incursions of the Mughal emperors against the Pashtun tribes controlling the passes of the towering Hindu Kush mountains, but these efforts were met with stiff resistance, with governments leaving the tribes to their own steady rhythm of life.

European colonialism hit these societies like a juggernaut. Backed by modern armaments, European armies keen to assert imperial control over these regions met tribal resistance with overwhelming force. Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of British India at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, observed of the stiff resistance by the Pashtun of the Tribal Areas, “No patchwork scheme—and all our present recent schemes, blockade, allowances etc., are mere patchwork—will settle the Waziristan problem. Not until the military steam-roller has passed over the country from end to end, will there be peace. But I do not want to be the person to start that machine” (Howell, 1979, 35-36). Other imperial officers were not so hesitant to apply overwhelming military force where it was deemed necessary to subdue the tribes of the periphery. The governor general of French Algeria in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Thomas Bugeaud argued that the massacres of the Berber tribes in the Kabylie region was “necessary to strike terror among these turbulent and fanatical montagnards [mountain people]” with members of parliament calling for a “war of extermination” (Brower, 2009, 23). Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, these tactics against tribal populations in the periphery were mirrored by the Russian empire in the Caucasus, the Spanish against the Rifian Berbers in Spanish Morocco, the Italians in

Libya and Somalia, and the Netherlands in the Aceh region of the Dutch East Indies (Ahmed, 2013, 160-173).

The precarious situation of the periphery would continue as the European empires one by one fell in the years following World War II. Through accidents of history and the haphazard borders drawn by European colonial powers in Asia and Africa, often absent of local knowledge, the newly independent governments faced a daunting challenge in governing the mosaic of differing ethnicities, cultures, religions, and tribes under their rule. These peripheral regions often found themselves within independent states whose governments were dominated by opposing and even hostile groups. A number of post-colonial governments were dominated by a single ethnic group or clan and provided benefits only to their own ethnic or tribal constituency, discriminating against other groups seen to be domestic rivals in the process (Horowitz, 1985, 185-228).

Officials were especially concerned with the periphery as a source of early opposition to the government. Many of the peripheral regions held little influence in the colonial capitals and therefore remained outside of the corridors of power in the newly independent states. Further, the populations of these regions often possessed an ethnic or tribal identity, language, political and social traditions, a defined territory, and, in some cases, a religion distinct from the dominant population of the state which often monopolized political power to the benefit of their own group. Political theorist Will Kymlicka (1996) defined such groups as “national minorities” in that they hold common characteristics of a nation but do not possess political sovereignty. Many of these peripheral populations quickly faced repressive policies by the newly established



governments with the goal of assimilating the periphery to a national identity, often through violence. This was meant to establish control over the region as part of the state-building process following independence (Balthasar, 2017; McDowall, 2004). These communities saw little change in their political status following the transition from colonial rule to independence and quickly challenged the legitimacy and sovereignty of the newly independent state, launching opposition movements and in some cases violent rebellions.

In Pakistan's southwestern Balochistan Province, for example, Prince Abdul Karim, the brother of the Khan of Kalat (one of Balochistan's princely states under British rule) immediately challenged the legitimacy of the new Pakistani state and launched a rebellion in July 1948 to establish an independent state of Kalat. Karim saw the new government simply as a vehicle for the Punjabi domination of Balochistan. In a letter to his brother, he wrote, "From whatever angle we look at the present Government of Pakistan, we will see nothing but Punjabi Fascism. The people have no say in it. It is the army and arms that rule... There is no place for any other community in this government, be it the Baloch, the Sindhis, the Afghans or the Bengalis, unless they make themselves equally powerful" (Siddiqi, 2012, 61). It would take the Pakistani military two years to defeat Karim and his forces. These problems continued within Balochistan, which saw a further four rebellions erupt over the next half century. The policies of the Pakistani government and consistent political and economic marginalization, combined with the strength of local identities, has instilled the idea that "deep down the Baloch

don't consider themselves Pakistanis.”<sup>10</sup> In an interview with *BBC Hindi* (2016), Baloch activist Mazdak Baloch, who has been in exile in India since 2016, likewise stated, “We are not Pakistani. We are not of any concern for Pakistan. We are Pakistan’s colony.” He said in an earlier interview, “Call me a dog, but not a Pakistani. I am a Baloch.” He went on to explain: “Because there is no education, there are no jobs. A common Balochi can find only menial job. Islamabad has appointed Pakistani Muslims in all important positions in Balochistan. Its army has created a mess in the entire region. The economic resources of our land are plundered” (Tripathi, 2016).

Given this lack of internal legitimacy, Jackson (1990) classifies post-colonial states within the developing world as “quasi-states.” He argues that many states that gained independence in the wave of decolonization following World War II did so as a result of international political changes and came into existence solely through international and legal recognition rather than internal movements or processes. This undermined the legitimacy of state institutions from the perspective of the populations they governed, especially for minority or peripheral groups that saw few benefits from the new state. Their institutions were alien imports built on Western models without consideration of local context. This was exacerbated by geographic borders drawn haphazardly by European officials only cognizant of their own political interests or bargains between regional powers and disinterested in local social, political, and geographic conditions.

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Malik Siraj Akbar, Pakistani journalist, Washington, DC, October 22, 2018.

These often hastily drawn borders divided ethnic groups, tribes, clans, and even families, and, in the difficult terrain of the periphery where the porous borders were unmonitorable, locals often disregarded them. In what would be an exercise of futility, T.E. Lawrence drew his own map for the borders of the newly independent Middle Eastern states after World War I and presented it to the British cabinet in 1918. It took into consideration local political interests, tribal patterns, and existing commercial routes. His map, which today hangs in the Imperial War Museum in London, was ignored and bears little resemblance to the Middle East that was shaped by the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916. Similarly, Sir Cyril Radcliffe, a British lawyer, was dispatched to British India and given only five weeks to decide the line of Partition dividing the new states of India and Pakistan. British authorities saw it as an advantage that he had never been to India, knew nobody there, and had no local knowledge of the social and political landscape so that he would be unbiased toward any communal group, making his task even more difficult to accomplish in such an abbreviated period of time.

The governments of “quasi-states” often possess only the mere trappings of domestic political sovereignty. They pursue the interests of a small group of elites that dominate political and economic structures, lack the capacity and political will to provide socio-economic benefits or protect civil and human rights for the entire population, and lack a recognized legitimacy among many segments of their population. For peripheral areas, the government often administered them through precarious alliances with local tribal elites without any resulting benefits trickling down to the broader population. For these quasi-states, as Jackson argues, “empirical statehood” as opposed to mere juridical

statehood is still in a process of being built. Their existence is bolstered not only by international recognition but often through international financial and military support given the states' strategic roles in international and regional politics, propping up and perpetuating weak governments despite being perceived domestically as illegitimate by large segments of their own populations.

As a means of establishing government control, many governments were concerned to establish a unified political identity for the entire nation, based in the characteristics of the dominant group in power. They, therefore, implemented strict policies of assimilation promoting the language and culture of the dominant group to the detriment of local identities in the periphery, which were often viewed with contempt as being lawless and backward. For nomadic groups, the government also pursued forced settlement programs as means of both asserting control and increasing the ability to extract taxes and other revenue from the region (Scott, 1999). Many of these policies were combined with harsh discriminatory practices and violence against civilians by state security services that saw little real development or rights extended to the region. These efforts by the government directly clashed with the strong identity and autonomy of the local communities within the periphery, many of whom were organized along tribal lines with social interactions shaped by codes of honor which emphasized revenge. The heavy-handed approach of the government, particularly when leading to the deaths of innocent members of the tribe, instigated a deadly pattern of revenge and rebellion and helped to further de-legitimize the state in the eyes of the peripheral communities.

### *Tribal Codes of Honor*

The demand for revenge against slights of honor and other crimes was a key aspect of regulating behavior within tribal societies outside the legal institutions of a state. Any individual within the society was fully aware according to the prevailing code that a transgression on his part that violates the honor of another will be answered by subsequent acts of revenge against the transgressor or his clan by the victim or his clan, the knowledge of which can help keep behavior in check, with clan members knowing they could be the victim of a revenge attack due to a relative's transgression against another's honor. A Pashtun proverb states, "He is not a Pukhtoon who does not give a blow in return for a pinch" (Ahmed, 1975, 57). More serious crimes within society such as murder, rape, or theft, especially any attacks against women, can institute brutal cycles of revenge and counter-revenge that can stretch across generations. There is another saying among the Pashtun capturing this problem— "The Pukhtoon who took revenge after a hundred years said, I took it quickly" (Ibid., xvi-xvii). A Somali proverb similarly captures the ever-present role of blood feuds in society: "Me and my nation against the world. Me and my clan against my nation. Me and my family against the clan. Me and my brother against the family. Me against my brother" (Mazzetti, 2013, 137).

The potential for acts of revenge to devolve into deadly cycles of violence underlines the important role that elders in tribal society traditionally play as mediators operating through councils of elders. They negotiate between the involved parties within a feud and attempt to settle the dispute through the payment of blood money, especially in the case of murder, by the transgressor's family, sub-clan, or clan to the victim or his

family, sub-clan, or clan. Elders will at times arrange marriages between members of the two parties involved as means of turning rivals into allies through the bonds of matrimony. The elders' ability to serve in this important role within highly egalitarian societies was dependent on maintaining respect within the tribe based on personal characteristics as traditional authority is not institutionalized or derived from any official legal status.

Revenge under the codes of honor was traditionally balanced against hospitality towards guests. This demand for hospitality not only meant protecting guests and treating them with honor but also often representing their interests in negotiations for the settlement of disputes, as was the case for the Taliban's role in negotiating with the U.S. government to turn over Osama bin Laden. Hospitality, in fact, was seen as the paramount aspect of the code and often trumped tribal rivalries. As a British author noted in the 1920s, the Tuareg "will give water in the desert to their worst enemy" (Lord Rennell of Rodd, 1966, 236-237). British anthropologist G.W. Murray (1935, 212-213) similarly finds of the Sinai Bedouin in the 1930s, "There is a higher law than that of blood-revenge. As in the Highlands of Scotland, even a murderer is safe *as a guest* in the tents where he seeks refuge... One of the worst of all crimes in Arab eyes is to 'blacken a man's face' by breaking the Law of the Tent, *haqq el-beit*, by killing or injuring someone who has sought protection in it."

The impulse for blood revenge exists even today, shaping civil violence within these societies (Ahmed, 2013; Boehm, 1986; Caton, 1986; Miakhel, 1995; Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015). A former Afghan government official stated in 2012, "The culture in

the U.S. is about policy, it is about mutually rational interests. Revenge is at time more important in this part of the world, more important than any political or economic interest” (Nordland, et. al., 2012). This narrative of revenge appears within violence emanating from other tribally-based societies as well, such as the Chechens confronting Russian military forces (Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2006). In June 2000, the first Chechen suicide bombers, two teenage girls, explained their decision to drive a truck full of explosives into a Russian army base in Chechnya by stating, “Sisters, the time has come. When the enemy has killed almost all our men, our brothers and husbands, we are the only ones left to take revenge for them. The time has come for us to take up arms and defend our home, our land from those who bring death to our home. And if we have to become *shakhids* for Allah we will not stop. *Allah Akbar!*” (Murphy, 2011, 140). Similarly, following a January 2001 suicide bombing against an Istanbul police station by the Kurdish PKK, which described itself as a “revolutionary revenge organization,” the police chief stated, “[This is] revenge. What else can a suicide bombing be?” (Ahmed, 2013, 126; *BBC News*, 2001). A psychological study of terrorism by Emma Grace (2018) finds that the narrative of revenge for group grievances permeates many terrorist groups’ messaging and ideology, especially in gaining support.

This is the historical and social background for many of the peripheries with which the U.S. was concerned after 9/11, including safe havens specifically identified by the 9/11 Commission (2004, 366-367).<sup>11</sup> In the current parlance of the War on Terror,

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<sup>11</sup> The codes of honor for tribal groups living in peripheral areas that have been caught up in the War on Terror include: *Pashtunwali* (Pashtun of Afghanistan and Pakistan); *Gabyilah* (Yemenis); *Urfi* (Sinai Bedouin); *Namus* (Kurds of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria); *Xeer* (Somalis); *Asshak* (Tuareg of Mali); *Pulaaku* (Fulani of northern Nigeria); *Ada* (Kanuri of northeastern Nigeria); *Nokhchalla* (Chechens); *Adat*

these regions have been deemed “ungoverned spaces” due to the absence of effective state control and the potential of being exploited by al Qaeda and its affiliates. As scholars have rightly pointed out, the emphasis on maintaining effective and recognized state control over the entirety of a state’s sovereign territory is a relatively recent phenomenon within the modern international system, and the absence of state institutions in a region does not necessarily mean an absence of governance (Clunan and Trinkunas, 2010; Murtazashvili, 2019; Stremlau, 2019; Taylor, 2016). Many peripheral regions instead have instead relied on self-governance through these local traditions as an alternative structure to poor governance by state institutions, often contesting state authority within the periphery.

While the underlying role of blood revenge and other tribal traditions was to dictate social relations within the tribe given the historical absence of regular state institutions, outside intrusions and military interventions increasingly pushed retaliatory acts against external enemies, particularly representatives of the government seen to be responsible for attacks against their communities. Government attempts to control the region resulted in policies either to eradicate local traditions and extend state power into the periphery, often by the barrel of a gun, or to co-opt and institutionalize the role of the local elders, undermining their authority and legitimacy in the broader community given the tendency to view them as corrupt and their unwillingness to share their benefits with non-elites (Akins, 2018b; Zahab, 2012). With the rise of militancy and on-going military operations in these regions, these tribal structures have been decimated with militants

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(Avars of Dagestan); *Sara Adat* (Tausug of the southern Philippines); and *Maratabat* (Maranao of the southern Philippines).



pursing revenge attacks unimpeded by traditional checks on such behavior and sparking cycles of rebellion and violence with government forces.

In a case study of militant violence in the Caucasus' Dagestan region, for example, Ratelle and Souleimanov (2017) argue that militants' embrace of an extreme Islamic ideology was a by-product of mobilization driven by blood revenge against repressive government forces and opposition to traditional elites. Many Dagestanis saw the Russians co-opting unelected and corrupt elites with little interest in providing any socioeconomic benefits to the broader population in order to maintain control over the region. In the 1990s, these elites, under the pretext of fighting against "Wahhabism", targeted their political opponents, leaving no meaningful outlet for political opposition (Ware and Kisriev, 2009). A 2009 survey of young men in the North Caucasus found the most pressing concerns that motivated support for militant activity were poor economic conditions and a corrupt and ineffective government, with little support for fundamentalist views of Islam (Gerber and Mendelson, 2009). Local security forces also engaged in widespread abuses against the population such as kidnappings, torture, blackmail, rape, and beatings, often on unfounded charges of terrorism against young men who have "Wahhabi beards" (Ratelle and Souleimanov, 2017, 582). One interviewee of Ratelle and Souleimanov (2017, 581) stated, "Not only do they [corrupt elites and *silovki*, members of law enforcement agencies] not let us feed our family as they monopolize federal transfers and give jobs to their friends and relatives, they also harass us to extract bribes and money. If we don't pay, we can disappear or get beaten up for no reason. What kind of justice do you think it is." According to Ratelle and Souleimanov,

the militants' rhetoric and behavior was more reflective of the Dagestani society's code of honor stressing revenge than the tenets of a fundamentalist Islamic ideology. The embrace of an Islamic ideology was a vehicle for Dagestanis to express dissatisfaction with and challenge the local system of governance. Within neighboring Chechnya, Souleimanov and Aliyv (2015) similarly find that blood revenge served as the organizing principle of militant mobilization, rather than a fundamentalist Islam. Insurgents, rather, embraced Islam as an opposing ideology to the government and was seen by militants to be compatible with their impulse towards revenge, often conflating religion and tribal traditions without distinction.

Indeed, as Akbar Ahmed (2013, 27-34) argues, these tribal-based Muslim societies often viewed Islam through their prevailing social traditions, synthesizing the two into a "tribal Islam." At times, the demands of their tribal identity outweighed Islamic teachings. To demonstrate the struggle between religion and tribalism among the Pashtun in Pakistan and Afghanistan, Hassan Abbas (2014, 14) quoted the following story told to him by a tribal elder describing the Pashtun's adoption of Islam: "When some Arab preachers came to introduce Islam to the area centuries ago, the Pashtun leadership responded by presenting the central features of the *Pashtunwali* code and asked them if Islam was compatible with these values. It was only after the preachers agreed not to interfere with *Pashtunwali* that Pashtuns joined the fold of Islam." This story reflects the Pashtun proverb: "Pashtuns accept half of the Quran." A Baloch scholar told me that if you don't understand the interaction between Islam and "tribal norms"

then “you don’t understand these regions.”<sup>12</sup> In May 2010, the AQAP ideologue Anwar al-Awlaqi likewise observed, “The cradle for Jihad today are the tribes. In Afghanistan there are tribes. In Iraq there are tribes. In Somalia there are tribes. Even in Pakistan there are tribal areas and non tribal areas and we find that the cradle for Jihad are the tribal areas, and so is the case in Yemen” (Koehler-Derrick, 2011, 97).

### ***Conclusion***

Despite the overwhelming attention that al Qaeda has garnered over the past twenty years, there has been a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the al Qaeda threat and the relationship between al Qaeda core and its affiliate organizations. As demonstrated above, the various affiliate organizations represent a distinct threat from al Qaeda core and operate according to their local political and social contexts. Many of these affiliates emerged within peripheries that had a history of rebellion against oppressive governments. As a result of these historical conditions of the periphery, these regions were left with limited government presence given their inaccessibility or in a state of open warfare, both conditions ripe for potential exploitation by groups like al Qaeda.

With the advent of America’s Global War on Terror, however, even the smallest whiff of an al Qaeda connection was enough to steer the many and vast tools of U.S. counterterrorism towards countless groups around the world, often without appreciating the local political environment. Lawrence Wilkerson, the former chief of staff to

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Dr. Abdul Basit Mujahid, chairman, Balochistan Intellectual Forum, Islamabad, Pakistan, December 14, 2018.

Secretary of State Colin Powell, recounted one CIA briefing on the al Qaeda threat in the early years of the War on Terror he attended in which the analyst “threw up this butcher board with hundreds of other groups...I mean, localized terrorists with no global capabilities to speak of and no global intent, like al Qaeda did.”<sup>13</sup> As will be shown in the following chapter, the focus on al Qaeda eventually shifted to the wide range of the group’s affiliate organizations and the peripheral areas from which they emerged and operated, pushing for partner states to deploy their militaries to confront the terrorist threat. However, officials within the U.S. government did so without fully appreciating the complex political situations in which they quickly would entangle themselves and the resulting impact of their actions.

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Lawrence Wilkerson, former chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell, Falls Church, VA, November 22, 2018.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **“THE MISSION DETERMINES THE COALITION”: THE U.S. AND ITS PARTNER STATES IN THE WAR ON TERROR**

On October 18, 2001, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld (2001e) stood at the podium during a Pentagon press briefing on progress made against al Qaeda and the Taliban. In his opening remarks, he announced:

And let me reiterate that there is no single coalition in this effort. This campaign involves a number of flexible coalitions that will change and evolve as we proceed through the coming period. Let me reemphasize that the mission determines the coalition, and the coalition must not determine the mission.

In this proclamation, Rumsfeld was stressing the fact that U.S. senior leadership would not be hampered by the restrictions of coalition and alliance politics in order to act in ways they deemed necessary to protect the national security of the United States.

Rumsfeld and others within the President Bush’s senior security team also understood that they would not be able to act unilaterally in its campaigns against international terrorism. There was a need to balance these two demands. Therefore, they would find the partners necessary for the success of the mission at hand.

As Rumsfeld stated, the United States sought partner states to assist with and support U.S. counterterrorism priorities, seeking to leverage these relationships to protect U.S. national security. This encompassed a wide range of activities and varying levels of cooperation, including partner states undertaking domestic counterterrorism operations, under the framing of a long-term war campaign, in contrast to pre-9/11 perceptions of terrorism as a criminal act. The bilateral relationship with key partner states grew in prominence as U.S. counterterrorism policy shifted to a policy of “disaggregation” in

which the United States relied on partnered military operations to target al Qaeda's current or potential safe havens. This chapter will, first, compare the United States' approach to the problem of terrorism before and after 9/11, helping to demonstrate how counterterrorism was framed by the U.S. government under the War on Terror. It will then discuss the role of partner states in the United States' counterterrorism efforts as the struggle against al Qaeda and its network expanded outside of Afghanistan and Iraq. Finally, this chapter demonstrates how U.S. counterterrorism policy shifted towards targeting current or potential safe havens with partnered military operations.

### **Terrorism Before the War on Terror**

Prior to 2001, terrorism against the United States and its interests was not considered to be an act of war but a criminal act (Albright, 2004, 6; Boykin, 2003, 8; Schultz and Vogt, 2003; Schoomaker, 2003, 1; State Department, 1996; Wilcox, 2003, 2). Like other types of crime, each terrorist attack was responded to "onto its own," often without making broader connections between attacks or establishing an overarching and comprehensive strategy (Kerr, 2003, 6). It was something to be managed, not defeated.

With the U.S. government defining terrorism as criminal acts, counterterrorism measures focused on bringing the specific individuals responsible before a court of law to answer for their crimes through legal prosecution (Boykin, 2003, 8; Richter, 2003, 4). Terrorism investigations, absent of the framing of the War on Terror, were narrower in scope and aimed at uncovering specific details of which individuals were directly responsible for the bombings and how they carried out the attack. The 1986 *Public*

*Report of the Vice President's Task Force on Combatting Terrorism* argued, "Our principles of justice will not permit random retaliation against groups or countries. However, when perpetrators of terrorism can be identified and located, our policy is to act against terrorism without surrendering basic freedoms or endangering democratic values...Violent terrorist acts are crimes. Accordingly, the United States will make every effort to investigate, apprehend and prosecute terrorists as criminals" (Office of the Vice President, 1986, 9). The United States military likewise shared this perspective with the 1987 U.S. Army *Terrorism Counteraction Field Manual* stating:

Terrorist acts are criminal acts, whether committed in peacetime or wartime...Even in an internationally recognized war or conflict (conventional, limited, or civil war), a terrorist act is a criminal act. Only combatants can legitimately attack proper military objectives...Terrorists, by definition, do not meet the four requirements necessary for combatant status (wear distinctive insignia, carry arms openly, commanded by someone responsible for their actions, and conduct their operations in accordance with the law of war) (Department of the Army, 1987, 9).

The opening lines of the FBI's 1999 report *Terrorism in the United States* similarly reads, "In accordance with U.S. counterterrorism policy, the FBI considers terrorists to be criminals...Terrorists are arrested and convicted under existing criminal statutes. All suspected terrorists placed under arrest are provided access to legal counsel and normal judicial procedure, including Fifth Amendment guarantees" (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1999, i). Further demonstrating this approach, an August 3, 1995 statement by the White House Press Secretary announced:

President Clinton welcomes the arrest and return to the United States today of a suspect charged in the World Trade Center bombing. The United States is determined to bring to justice those who perpetuate terrorism directed against Americans. The President applauds the law enforcement authorities involved for their deft handling of the case...The Administration's aggressive counter-

terrorism policy has resulted in an unprecedented number of terrorist suspects being returned to the United States for trial from Jordan, Egypt, Pakistan, the Philippines, and elsewhere. The President said, 'once again we have shown that terrorism will not pay' (White House, 1995).

In 1995, President Bill Clinton signed Presidential Decision Directive 39 outlining a U.S. counterterrorism policy that saw terrorism as both a crime and a threat to national security (White House, 1995b). This expanded the focus of counterterrorism efforts by enhancing protections and deterrence both home and abroad while allowing for a stronger response to terrorist acts. Clinton sought an expansion of legal authorization from Congress to act against terrorists, such as making it easier to deport individuals accused of terrorist activity and target terrorist funding. The following year, Congress (1996) passed the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act granting the Secretary of State the authority to designate groups as Foreign Terrorist Organizations and block any of their assets within U.S. banks or other financial institutions. In 1997, Secretary of State Madeline Albright designated thirty groups as part of the new list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations.

Despite this criminal perspective within the government, officials recognized the utility of limited military force as a deterrence but recognized the risks of doing so. The 1986 *Public Report of the Vice President's Task Force on Combatting Terrorism* also argued, "Military actions may serve to deter future terrorist acts and could also encourage other countries to take a harder line. Successful employment, however, depends on timely and refined intelligence and prompt positions of forces. Counterterrorism missions are high-risk/high-gain operations which can have a severe negative impact on U.S. prestige if they fail" (Office of the Vice President, 1986, 13). The *National Security Strategy*



released in December 2000 saw military force as an option of last resort, stating, “Whenever possible, we use law enforcement, diplomatic, and economic tools to wage the fight against terrorism. But there have been, and will be, times when those tools are not enough. As long as terrorists continue to target American citizens, we reserve the right to act in self-defense by striking at their bases and those who sponsor, assist, or actively support them, as we have done over the years in different countries” (White House, 2000, 29). General William Boykin (2003, 8), the former Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence, argued that “grabbing one terrorist every few months did not do much in the long run.”

However, these discussions of military force for counterterrorism were based in the use of isolated, “one-off” operations, rather than an overarching war against non-state enemies (Pickering, 2003, 2). This was the case for Operation Infinite Reach in 1998, involving cruise missile strikes against the al Shifa pharmaceutical factory in Khartoum, Sudan and al Qaeda bases in Khost, Afghanistan in response to the embassy bombings in East Africa. According to Ambassador Peter Tomsen (2003, 5), the former Special Envoy to Afghanistan, this operation was ineffective and “just PR!” The 2000 *National Security Strategy*, released on the eve of 9/11, still described terrorism as a “crime” at its core (White House, 2000, 29). The military was in an “adjunct and supporting role providing support as needed to law enforcement,” according to former State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism Phillip Wilcox (2003, 2). Prior to 9/11, the military’s role in counterterrorism largely was a niche issue that only concerned special forces in limited operations. Conventional military forces, including their supporting intelligence

apparatus, played no significant role in addressing the problem of terrorism.<sup>14</sup> They were thought to be ineffective as a response to the religious extremist groups responsible for much of the terrorist activity in the 1990s given the difficulty in locating them.

Within the confines of the CIA, counterterrorism was considered “first among equals” and weathered a “little better” than other areas of focus in terms of resource allocation with the personnel and budget cuts implemented after the fall of the Soviet Union, in part because of its clear focus (Berkowitz, 2003; Carvey, 2003, 4; Snider, 2003, 3). The CIA, however, never formulated a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy, despite some efforts by its Counterterrorist Center (CTC) (Hanback, 2003, 3; *Ibid.*, 5). Similarly, the DIA’s own counterterrorism efforts was “rather ad hoc,” according to the director of DIA’s Joint Intelligence Task Force–Combating Terrorism which worked with CTC (Ducey, 2004, 2). In the first year of the Bush administration, terrorism continued to be just one concern among many (Pickering, 2003, 2; Walker, 2004, 1). In early 2001, the Deputy Secretary of Defense told Joan Dempsey (2003, 4), then serving as the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence for Community Management, during a briefing on the quadrennial intelligence community review that “counterterrorism would never be an issue and that no money would be available for it.” Dempsey (*Ibid.*) further acknowledged that at this time “no one in the U.S. government had homeland security as a priority” and “homeland security was just one of a number of issues against which the [intelligence community] had little capability.”

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with a former U.S. Military Intelligence officer; Washington, DC, October 2018.

On December 4, 1998, however, the CIA Director George Tenet (1998, 1, 2) sent a memorandum to his deputies saying that the U.S. “must now redouble our efforts against Bin Ladin himself, his infrastructure, followers, finances, etc. with a sense of enormous urgency... We are at war. I want no resources or people spared in this effort, either inside CIA or the Community.” However, there was little follow through with other leadership in the intelligence community, replying that “they cannot redirect resources for counterterrorism because they have other priorities” (Dempsey, 2003, 9). Around 1998, there also was a memorandum informally circulated within the Pentagon written by Tom Kuster, then Deputy Director of the Counterterrorism Division within the office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, which pushed for a “more proactive and offensive strategy by the Department of Defense in combating international terrorism” (9/11 Commission, 2004, 121; Bodner, 2004). This memorandum, in particular, argued for a comprehensive shift in U.S. counterterrorism policy and “a possible need for large-scale operations across the whole spectrum of U.S. military capabilities...to take up the gauntlet that international terrorists have thrown at our feet” (9/11 Commission, 2004, 121). This strategy was considered to be “too aggressive” by the Assistant Secretary and the proposal went no further (Newberry, 2004, 2). From a broader national security perspective at this time, counterterrorism was of secondary concern to more traditional, state-based security threats to the U.S., such as Russia or Iran (Dempsey, 2003, 9-10). A former interrogator for U.S. military intelligence in the Middle East told me that prior to 9/11, “Terrorism

was nothing we were thinking about or even looking at, at that time... We were focused on state actors.”<sup>15</sup>

## **The Endless War**

The War on Terror flipped national security on its head. No longer were the strongest states the threat upon which the U.S. was most concerned, as in the Cold War. Rather, non-state actors, emerging from and operating in the weakest states, became the greatest threat. America’s attention was, in effect, firmly focused towards the bottom of the global hierarchy. In particular, everything became about al Qaeda with the conduct of the subsequent war remaining decidedly fixed on this organization and what was perceived to be its global network of supporters. As Barbara Sude, a former CIA analyst focused on al Qaeda during the 1990s and early 2000s, stated, “Policy-maker appetite became insatiable for everything about al-Qaeda” (Bergen, 2011, 37). With this focus on al Qaeda, the United States rejected traditional law enforcement as a solution and embraced a war footing to confront the problem.

President Bush and senior officials in his administration were chomping at the bits for a decisive military response to the 9/11 attacks. On Air Force One, just an hour after the second tower in New York City collapsed, President Bush reportedly said, “We’re going to find out who did this and we’re going to kick their asses” (Bergen, 2011, 51). Three days later, standing atop the rubble of the World Trade Center at Ground Zero, he proclaimed by bullhorn, “I can hear you. The rest of the world hears you. And the people

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

who knocked these buildings down will hear from all of us soon” (Ibid., 53). Donald Rumsfeld (2012, 341-342) recalled his advice for the President in the days following the attack:

I also advised the President in the days following that I believed our nation’s response should not primarily be about punishment, retribution, or retaliation. Punishing our enemies didn’t describe the range of actions we would need to take if we were to succeed in protecting the United States. The struggle that had been brought to our shores went beyond law enforcement and criminal justice. Our responsibility was to deter and dissuade others from thinking that terrorism against the United States could advance their cause. In my view, our principal motivation was self-defense, not vengeance, retaliation, or punishment. The only effective defense would be to go after the terrorists with a strong offense.

After the 9/11 attacks, the government also had the political backing of the American public to pursue a military option against al Qaeda. An NBC News poll on September 12, 2001, for example, found that 83 percent of the American public supported “forceful military action” against terrorists, and Newsweek polling from October to December 2001 averaged 88 percent positive support for a military response to terrorism (Larson and Savych, 2005, 95-97). Ambassador Robert Oakley (2003, 2), a former State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism, U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, and Special Envoy to Somalia in the 1980s and 1990s, understood that pursuing a military response to acts of terrorism was not only about having accurate information about the culprits’ locations but generating enough political support for the operation, the lack of which partly explains the absence of military operations following the USS Cole bombing. He stated, “In order to make a big hit, you not only need to have intelligence, but you also need to have enough political arguments.”

On September 14, 2001, Congress passed the Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) with only one vote against the bill. In only 243 total words, the law authorized the President

to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons (107<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2001a, Section 2).

The AUMF does not specify any geographic or temporal bounds to these actions or specifically name al Qaeda, purposefully leaving the language vague so as to be able to target the Taliban government in Afghanistan and any other affiliated organization or state. The legislation essentially authorized an open-ended and endless war. It, further, does not outline any mechanism for oversight by or consultation with Congress in deploying forces for counterterrorism operations. With the general nature of the law's language, it has been used as legal authorization for military deployments and military assistance in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Libya, Kenya, Niger, Cameroon, Uganda, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Djibouti, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt, Cuba, and Kosovo. The AUMF also was used to authorize U.S. drone and air strikes in Yemen, Pakistan, Somalia, Libya, and Syria (Akins, 2018a).

The policy frame and rhetoric adopted by the U.S. government at the beginning of the War on Terror militarized the issue of terrorism, in stark contrast to pre-9/11 perspectives (Bush, 2001; Feith, 2003). While counterterrorism policy was officially run through the National Security Council, the Defense Department with their higher budget

and influence over the President had “the stronger hand” and took “the lead role, the pointy edge of the spear.”<sup>16</sup> The Pentagon became the point organization for many counterterrorism issues and began to encroach on areas of responsibility of other departments as it pertained to security issues, especially the State Department. In particular, authorities for the disbursement of security related foreign assistance was statutorily shifted from the State Department to the Pentagon, with the approval of the White House and Congress. In July 2002, Rumsfeld (2002c) also pushed for the Department of Defense to be involved in the selection and interviewing of candidates for Ambassador posts in key states such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Yemen.

Despite viewing itself at war, the United States leveraged a wide range of tools and policies on multiple fronts to deal with the problem of terrorism, from humanitarian and economic aid, public outreach and diplomacy, and intelligence sharing. The 2003 *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* stated:

This National Strategy reflects the reality that success will only come through the sustained, steadfast, and systematic application of all the elements of national power—diplomatic, economic, information, financial, law enforcement, intelligence, and military—simultaneously across four fronts. We will *defeat* terrorist organizations of global reach through relentless action. We will *deny* terrorists the sponsorship, support, and sanctuary they need to survive. We will win the war of ideas and *diminish* the underlying conditions that promote the despair and the destructive visions of political change that lead people to embrace, rather than shun, terrorism. And throughout, we will use all the means at our disposal to *defend* against terrorist attacks on the United States, our citizens, and our interests around the world (White House, 2003, 29).

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Richard Armitage, former Deputy Secretary of State, Arlington, VA, November 27, 2018.

The 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* recognized that there was “no ‘one size fits all’ approach, no ‘silver bullet’” to defeat terrorism (Department of Defense, 2006, 22). Like the previous administration, the Obama administration also discussed “a whole-of-government effort” as a necessary framework for combatting terrorism (Brennan, 2011).

The “whole of government” rhetoric, according to terrorism scholar Stephen Tankel, was simply “boilerplate language” that found its way into all counterterrorism policy discussions and strategies.<sup>17</sup> After 9/11, a number of senior Bush officials still considered a military-centric, manhunt approach as “the silver bullet against terrorism” (Naylor, 2015, 165). Despite paying lip service to more comprehensive approaches to counterterrorism, the U.S. government remained focused on a military-centric approach against terrorists classified as enemy combatants in a war (McIntosh, 2015; Schultz and Vogt, 2003). General Stanley McChrystal, the former JSOC and ISAF commander, argued, “One of the reasons people use the military is because it’s quick... You can’t get sometimes the legal system or the State Department or those other things to move that quickly and they’re not designed to... The military becomes the easy button... So it’s not evil or stupid, it just becomes expedient.”<sup>18</sup> Instead of capturing terrorists as criminals, President Bush signed a secret presidential directive on September 17, 2001 allowing the government to use targeted killings against al Qaeda or al Qaeda-linked groups or individuals without needing specific approval by the administration, along with

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<sup>17</sup> Statement by Stephen Tankel, Middle East Institute; Washington, DC, October 12, 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with General Stanley McChrystal, former JSOC and ISAF Commander, Washington, DC, January 8, 2019.



authorizing the government's rendition process at black sites around the world (Scahill, 2013, 20).

U.S. leadership saw military action against al Qaeda and its network in Afghanistan and Iraq not only as a reaction to the 9/11 attacks but as self-defense against future attacks. Justification for counterterrorism operations against al Qaeda would be framed as pre-emption against imminent threats. At a 2004 campaign rally in Colorado, President Bush stated, "We are fighting these terrorists with our military in Afghanistan and Iraq and beyond so we do not have to face them in the streets of our own cities" (Bush, 2007, 2701). In a 2013 speech at the National Defense University, President Obama similarly argued "under domestic law, and international law, the United States is at war with al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and their associated forces. We are at war with an organization that right now would kill as many Americans as they could if we did not stop them first. So this is just war—a war waged proportionally, in last resort, and in self-defense" (Klein, 2013). The Trump administration likewise cited the need for self-defense in the face of the al Qaeda threat following its first counterterrorism operations in Yemen (Starr and Browne, 2017).

The military option, therefore, remained a critical part of any counterterrorism strategy. In his 2002 commencement speech at West Point's graduation ceremony, President Bush (2002) stated, "The war on terror will not be won on the defensive. We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans and confront the worst threats before they emerge. In the world we have entered the only path to safety is the path of action. And this nation will act." According to a July 30, 2004 hearing recommendation memo

for the Armed Services Committee from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, one of the key messages the Bush Administration was pushing by 2004 was that “law enforcement approaches will not work against an enemy who has declared war and who has the means to visit war upon us **and** [sic] our allies” (Moore, 2004, 4). During a 2006 speech at the Council on Foreign Relations, then CIA director General Michael Hayden (2016, 219) emphasized that the United States was “without ambiguity” in a “state of war.” He quoted Germany’s Interior Minister Wolfgang Schaube to support his position, “The fact is that the old categories no longer apply. The fight against international terrorism cannot be mastered by the classic methods of the police. We have to clarify whether our constitutional state is sufficient for confronting the new threats” (Ibid., 219-220). Hayden later told a 2007 gathering of European Union ambassadors at the German Embassy in Washington, DC, “My countrymen, my government, my agency, and I believe that we are a nation at war. We are in a state of armed conflict with al-Qaeda and its affiliates. We believe this conflict with al-Qaeda is global in its scope. We also believe that a precondition for our winning this conflict is to take the fight to this enemy wherever he may be” (Ibid., 220). In contrast to the slower pace of intelligence work during the Cold War, intelligence agencies shifted their collection efforts to producing quickly actionable intelligence that could lead to kinetic operations against terrorist targets, understanding them to be imminent threats which needed to be taken out before they could strike (NSA Official, 2004, 2-3). According to the former Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Alan Eastham (2003, 15), “Before September 11, there was a pretty high threshold that had to be achieved before we would

shoot a missile. We would hesitate before action. Now, we would take action in a second.”

In the early years of the War on Terror, a string of high-level VIPs, many seen to be experts on the Middle East and the broader Islamic world, passed through the corridors of power in Washington pushing a military approach to terrorism. In September 2002, for example, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated to Congress, “The way to deal with terror was to deal with terrorist regimes and the way to deal with terrorist regimes among other things was to apply military force against them... The application of power is the most important thing to winning the war on terrorism” (*C-SPAN*, 2002). This perspective among senior officials within the Bush administration also was influenced by the late Middle Eastern historian Bernard Lewis. While Lewis advocated a proactive and interventionist policy of democracy promotion in the Middle East to bring it closer to Western values, he also stressed the need to use overwhelming force and strength to achieve American objectives in the region, an approach dubbed the “Lewis Doctrine” by the *Wall Street Journal* (Waldman, 2004). This view was based on his understanding of Arab tribal culture as only responsive to force historically and often resistant to change. Therefore, it was necessary to bring Arabs and the broader Middle East in line with Western modernity and secularism backed by military force to resolve the instability and disorder of the region.

Lewis saw these two phenomena—modernity and secularism—introduced to the Middle East by Europeans in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as slowly transforming the region but provoking a counter-response from fundamentalists who rejected them as alien to

Islamic civilization and underlying many of the Middle East's current problems (Lewis, 2002). In his book *What Went Wrong*, Lewis (Ibid., 159) forewarned, "If the peoples of the Middle East continue on their present path, the suicide bomber may become a metaphor for the whole region, and there will be no escape from a downward spiral of hate and spite, rage and self-pity, poverty and oppression, culminating sooner or later in yet another alien domination." Moreover, Lewis saw the War on Terror as the end of a centuries-old struggle between Christendom and Islamic civilizations, stating "I have no doubt that 11<sup>th</sup> September was the opening salvo of the final battle" (Lewis, 1990; *Prospect*, 2005). Bin Laden and al Qaeda, viewed through the frame of a civilizational clash, were challenging American power and dominance in the world, mocking the cowardice of the "crusaders" and attempting to force them out of the Middle East. It, therefore, was necessary to use a definitive exertion of American strength and power, without which the United States would only be inviting future attacks (Lewis, 2003).

In private dinners with Vice President Dick Cheney and other meetings with and lectures to the highest level of officials within the Bush administration, he was advocating for the use of military force to buttress democratization efforts in the Middle East, views which would appear in the *National Security Strategy* (White House, 2006). Democratization, Lewis surmised, would lead the region away from the fundamentalism espoused by bin Laden and his acolytes and stymie future threats and attacks against the United States. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz stated in 2002, "Bernard [Lewis] has taught us how to understand the complex and important history of the Middle East, and use it to guide us where we will go next to build a better world for generations

to come” (Cookson, 2018). Brent Scowcroft, the national security adviser under Presidents Gerald Ford and George H.W. Bush, summed up Lewis’ advice: “It’s that idea that we’ve got to hit somebody hard. And Bernard Lewis says, ‘I believe that one of the things you’ve got to do to Arabs is hit them between the eyes with a big stick. They respect power’” (Goldberg, 2005). Vice President Dick Cheney said in 2003 on *Meet the Press*, “I firmly believe, along with men like Bernard Lewis, who is one of the great students of that part of the world, that a strong, firm response to terror and to threats to the United States would go a long way, frankly, toward calming things in that part of the world” (Cookson, 2018).

### ***Defining the Enemy and the Scope of the War***

Almost immediately after 9/11, senior members of the Bush administration were pushing for a broadening of the War on Terror beyond Afghanistan and al Qaeda. The October 2001 White House briefing memo for the Afghanistan strategy even acknowledged this as its goals for the campaign, including the need to “collect intelligence for the worldwide campaign against terrorism” and warnings about long-term military commitments in Afghanistan “since the U.S. will be heavily engaged in the anti-terrorism effort worldwide” (White House, 2001, 1). Former Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith, who played a leading role in constructing the strategic frame for the War on Terror, stated that “defining the enemy was a major strategic challenge” and “part of

the reason it was called the War on Terrorism and not the war on al Qaeda was that we saw the network of enemies as broader than al Qaeda.”<sup>19</sup>

When the Twin Towers fell on September 11<sup>th</sup>, Feith was in Moscow to discuss a missile treaty with the Russian government. He was soon aboard a military aircraft, the only method of travel available given the grounding of commercial flights. He traveled back to the United States with other senior Department of Defense officials, including the head of strategy and plans for the Joint Chiefs of Staff Lieutenant General John Abizaid and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Peter Rodman, who similarly were caught abroad. Feith and the other officials on the flight huddled together on a KC-135 and began to map out the first strategic policy response to the al Qaeda attack. Aware that President Bush had already informed the Principals within the administration that “we are at war,” they focused on the question of with whom the United States was at war. They saw it necessary to define the enemy as “an activity” as opposed to a discrete organization of terrorists in order to avoid limiting the administration’s future options for action. In regard to the war’s aim, however, they understood the impossibility and inappropriateness of pledging “the elimination of terrorism” and instead formulated the phrase, “The elimination of terrorism as a threat to our way of life.” To accomplish this, the response needed to be offensive, not as a retaliation but in order to prevent future attacks, and “addressed by the military, rather than as a law enforcement problem” (Feith, 2003, 2). Feith (2008, 50) argued in a policy memo that the U.S. had to confront:

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Douglas Feith, former Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, Washington, DC, October 29, 2018.

the entire network of states, non-state entities, and organizations that engage in or support terrorism against the United States and our interests, including the states that harbor terrorists. All those organizations and states constitute a threat, joint and severally. The United States cannot tolerate continued state support for terrorism, regardless of whether a specific tie can be established to the perpetrators of the World Trade Center and Pentagon outrages. The objective is not punishment but prevention and self-defense.

He submitted these ideas to an approving Rumsfeld, forming the framework for the Department of Defense's initial counterterrorism policies.

There was pushback within the administration from individuals such as Secretary of State Colin Powell, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, and White House Counterterrorism Advisor Richard Clarke in regard to the scope of America's counterterrorism campaign, especially when the subject of invading Iraq came up. In the early days of the War on Terror, Powell and the senior leadership of the State Department advocated for a focused military campaign against only those responsible for the 9/11 attacks.<sup>20</sup> They argued a narrower campaign limited to al Qaeda targets in Afghanistan would be more acceptable to U.S. allies and keep the U.S. response more in line with a traditional law enforcement approach. Powell (2004) cautioned against expanding the War on Terror outside of Afghanistan and the al Qaeda, stating on PBS *NewsHour* in March 2004, "I recommended to the president that our focus had to be on al-Qaida, the Taliban and Afghanistan. Those were the ones who attacked the United States of America on 9/11."

This idea of a limited scope of engagement ultimately lost out to a more comprehensive military strategy, as advocated by Vice President Dick Cheney and senior

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Richard Armitage, former Deputy Secretary of State, Arlington, VA, November 27, 2018.

officials within the Pentagon—Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, and Douglas Feith. Key members of the President’s national security team were committed to a broad interpretation of the war and its aims as informed by memories of the Gulf War in the early 1990s and the limiting effect of the its coalition-based planning and operations. Following the invasion of Kuwait by Sadaam Hussein’s Iraqi forces in 1990, the United States, working through the United Nations, formed a 39-country coalition to liberate Kuwait. President George H.W. Bush understood the importance of bringing to bear international pressure, led by the United States as the sole hegemon of the post-Cold War international order, to stress the legitimacy of the United Nations. In order to build the coalition among a wide variety of states with their divergent political interests in relation to Iraq and the broader Middle East, the war aims of the coalition had to be carefully negotiated within this context. This resulted in clearly defined war aims restricting offensive military action to Kuwait alone and impeded efforts to continue the fight against Sadaam’s forces within Iraq itself (Allison, 2012, 63-77).

In an April 1999 letter to then Governor Bush, Rumsfeld (1999, 5) argued in the context of NATO, “War is best not run by committee. If a consensus for the best course of action is not achievable, then the result is gradualism, and gradualism doesn’t work. From the press, it appears that it currently requires clearance for each military action, first from the military arm of NATO, then the political arm of NATO, and then the 19 NATO capitals. The inevitable delays in authorization, such as for the A-10 aircraft, the Apache helicopters and the target sets, work to the advantage of the other side.” In the early policy planning discussions after 9/11, as Douglas Feith explained to me:



One of the thoughts at the fore of Rumsfeld's mind – and I assume this was true also for Cheney and ultimately President Bush – related to the Gulf War of 1990-1991. The aim of the Gulf War had been negotiated. It was the basis of the U.S.-led coalition. That war aim was limited to the expulsion of the Iraqi force from Kuwait. When the issue arose whether the coalition should destroy Saddam's army, U.S. officials argued that that went beyond the coalition's limited war aim. That was at the fore of the minds of U.S. officials ten years later, after 9/11. Officials didn't want to tie our own hands by trying to predict in this post-9/11 world of uncertainty what was going to happen next and how things were going to unfold and how we might have to adjust our war aims. We were conscious of uncertainty. Rumsfeld did not want to define our war aims or define our specific operations so precisely that it would create commitments to Congress or to our allies that would tie our hands and make it harder to take appropriate action if and when things happened that we couldn't anticipate.<sup>21</sup>

Grasping a broad interpretation of the War on Terror, U.S. officials communicated to their international counterparts the need for offensive action as a means of preventing future attacks against the United States by al Qaeda or any of its affiliate organizations. In a December 2001 news briefing in Brussels following a meeting with NATO defense ministers, Rumsfeld (2001c) stated in response to a question about the extent of global operations in the War on Terror, "You have no choice but to take the battle to the terrorists, wherever they may be. And so I think the answer to your question is, it really isn't out of area, if you will. The only way to deal with a terrorist network that's global is to go after it where it is." At the June 2003 Munich Security Conference, Paul Wolfowitz stated to the global leaders present that terrorism as something "to live with" was made obsolete by the 9/11 attacks. Rather than simply punishing terrorists, he similarly pressed for a policy of prevention, "We have to take the war to the enemy. We need to hunt them down relentlessly, but we also need to deny them the sanctuaries in

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Douglas Feith, former Undersecretary of Defense for Policy; Washington, DC, October 29, 2018.

which they can safely plan and organize, deny them of the financial and material resources they need to operate” (State Department, 2003b, 3-4).

On September 23, 2001, President Bush signed Executive Order 13224, which identified twenty-five terrorist groups and individuals that the U.S. government and its partner states should target as part of the War on Terror, granting the government the ability “to disrupt the financial support network for terrorists and terrorist organizations” (Bush, 2001c). Steve Kashkett (2003, 7), then serving as senior advisor to the State Department’s Coordinator for Counterterrorism, stated, “The designation process was expedited post 9/11, and entities that had previously been undesignated were quickly designated. The [U.S. government] concluded that it was vital to designate any entity remotely related to Al Qaeda.” This list eventually grew to 293 identified targets as of October 2018 (State Department, 2018).

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks and the failure of the intelligence communities to prevent such a devastating loss, there was a real fear at all levels of government that another major terrorist attack or attacks were imminent, and nobody wanted to be responsible for failing to notice any threat, however minor, or take the necessary actions to stymie such an attack. This fear was heightened with intelligence reports in October 2001 of al Qaeda pursuing nuclear weapons to use against the U.S. (Woodward, 2002). Lawrence Wilkerson recognized that the intelligence community, after being “burned” over the 9/11 attacks, “assumed what I would call a military posture towards intelligence.” He explained,

Military posture is to worst case everything. It’s understandable for the military. They’re going to have to bleed and die over it so they’re going to worse case

it...The intelligence community—mainly the CIA—is supposed to tell the president or other people they advise, this is probably what’s happening or going to happen. And this is with an 80% surety, 85% surety. Not this is the worst thing that can happen. That’s the military’s outlook...So what was thrown into the White House, in Vice President Cheney’s office, as raw intelligence were worst-case threats from all over the world. I mean, there was somebody in almost every country in the world that looked like, smelt like, felt like al Qaeda. And they were going to attack the United States.<sup>22</sup>

Even bin Laden recognized the tendency for the U.S. government to overreact to the perceived threat of al Qaeda, stating in December 2004:

All that we have mentioned has made it easy to provoke and bait this [U.S.] administration. All we have to do is to send two Mujahideen to the furthest point East to raise a piece of cloth on which is written al-Qaeda, in order to make the [U.S.] generals race there to cause America to suffer human, economic and political losses without achieving for it anything of note...So we are continuing this policy of bleeding America to the point of bankruptcy. Allah willing and nothing is too great for Allah (Scheuer, 2005).

### ***Looking Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq: Partner States and the War on Terror***

In President Bush’s speech to Congress on September 20, 2001, he stated, “We will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime” (Bush, 2001). The military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq were “sunk costs” to bolster the legitimacy of military threats in convincing other Muslim states to cooperate with the U.S. government in counterterrorism efforts, a point stressed by Vice President Dick Cheney in briefing after

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Lawrence Wilkerson, former chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell, Falls Church, VA, November 21, 2018.

briefing (Butt, 2019; Fearon, 1997). On September 30, 2001 in the run up to the invasion of Afghanistan, Secretary Rumsfeld (2001, 2) wrote to President Bush, “A key war aim would be to persuade or compel States to stop supporting terrorism. The regimes of such States would see that it will be fatal to host terrorists who attack the U.S...If the war does not significantly change the world’s political map, the U.S. will not achieve its aim.” In October 2001, the briefing memo “U.S. Strategy for Afghanistan” was being circulated among the senior leadership of the White House, which further helped set the tone for subsequent counterterrorism actions. The main aim was to “end the use of Afghanistan as a sanctuary for terrorism. Do so in a manner that signals the world that harboring terrorism will be punished severely” (White House, 2003, 1). Among the broader goals for the military strategy against the Taliban was: “Making an example of the Taliban increases U.S. leverage on other state supporters of terrorism...Success will build U.S. public confidence for action in other theaters” (Ibid., 4). In a nod to the tactics to be relied upon, the briefing document unequivocally states, “Al-Qaida’s and the Taliban’s main assets are people. They must be destroyed” (Ibid., 1).

During deliberations on the U.S. response to 9/11, Douglas Feith (2008, 52) later wrote that a military campaign in Iraq would similarly allow for the U.S. to “confront—politically, militarily, or otherwise—other state supporters of terrorism.” A White House (2002, 10) briefing document for a presentation supporting the Iraq invasion reflects this thought, arguing, “Regime change will remove a source of support for international terrorism, and will serve as an object lesson to other state supporters of terrorism. After Afghanistan, many states that had supported terrorism started to indicate willingness to

cooperate with us. The salutary effect of our victory of Afghanistan has begun to wear off, however. Success in Iraq will re-invigorate it.” A January 2003 intelligence assessment on the consequences of regime change in Iraq by the National Intelligence Council (2003, 5, 6) further argued,

For many Arabs and Muslims, however, an Iraqi defeat would be a jarring event that would highlight the inability of existing regimes to stand up to US power...The defeat of Iraq probably would encourage some governments...to continue close security relations with the United States and would enhance strong US ties with other states...Much would depend, however, on how domestic populations in the region viewed the US role in Iraq. Some governments...for political reasons would de-emphasize public forms of cooperation with the United States even if they were willing to cooperate privately.

This cooperation would become important as the U.S. government expanded the War on Terror into other states, such as the Philippines, Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen, with whom the United States was not at war. In order to target al Qaeda beyond the war zones of Iraq and Afghanistan, it was recognized that it would be impossible for the United States to act unilaterally.

Counterterrorism cooperation by the United States’ partner states can broadly be classified into foreign and domestic cooperation. On the foreign front, the United States government made efforts to build a coalition of international partners operating outside of their borders to target Taliban and al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan, aided by NATO invoking Article 5, and support the Iraq invasion, to varying degrees of success. This was meant to bolster the perceived legitimacy of these operations as a collective action in line with the norms of the international system (Mendelsohn, 2009). It also focused on working with key regional states to procure right of access in terms of air space and troop and supply movements through its territory, such as Uzbekistan, Turkey, and Pakistan.

By June 2002, there were 69 states contributing varying levels of support to this front of the War on Terror, with a military coalition of 20 states deploying a combined 16,000 troops for combat operations (Department of Defense, 2002). For many nations within these coalitions, this support had little tactical impact, with many states contributing only a handful of soldiers in non-combat roles or providing logistical support.

The domestic front, on the other hand, focused on partner states' counterterrorism cooperation within their own borders. The U.S. government pressured partner states to pass new and strengthen existing anti-terrorism laws, arrest suspected al Qaeda operatives, share intelligence, counter extreme ideologies, target terrorist financing, and increase border control (Department of State, 2001a, 2; White House 2003, 4). This cooperation became increasingly vital with U.S. counterterrorism efforts shifted outside of Afghanistan and Iraq as U.S. military operations pushed al Qaeda into new regions. To take the fight directly to al Qaeda, the U.S. would be targeting belligerent groups operating within states with which the U.S. was not at war, making unilateral military operations legally, politically, and logistically difficult. The 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* argued that the 21<sup>st</sup> century military was “shifting emphasis...[f]rom nation-state threats – to decentralized network threats from non-state enemies. From conducting war against nations – to conducting war in countries we are not at war with (safe havens)” (Department of Defense, 2006, vi).

The U.S. government, therefore, needed much stronger partnerships with key states within the Muslim world, relying on them to take the lead in counterterrorism operations against terrorist threats within their borders. In March 2003, Department of

Defense and Department of Justice officials interpreted the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreements, the vehicle for reimbursing countries such as Pakistan for their logistical support of U.S. military operations, to also “permit DoD to pay a supplying country for logistic support, supplies, and services that the country provides to *its own* forces in carrying out a military operations for DoD, *if* U.S. forces benefit by not having to provide the support, supplies or services to conduct the operations themselves” (Zakheim, 2003b, 1). While fighting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and in growing anticipation of the expanding focus of U.S. counterterrorism, the Department of Defense was also concerned to protect its congressional authorization “to train and equip military forces of other friendly nearby regional nations” for counterterrorism operations without geographic limitations. In an October 7, 2003 letter from Undersecretary of Defense Dov Zakheim to Secretary Rumsfeld, he outlined an effort by DoD to push back against Congressional efforts to limit its authorization for military support to only the New Iraqi Army and the Afghan National Army, stating such limitations would “complicate our efforts” in other areas such as the “ongoing train and equip mission in Georgia” and “DoD’s ongoing and highly successful Counterterrorism training in Yemen” (Zakheim, 2003, 1).

Before the declaration of the War on Terror, key agencies in the U.S. government already recognized the importance of working with local authorities in confronting the issue of international terrorism (Anderson, 2003, 1; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1999; Office of the Vice President, 1986; U.S. Department of the Army, 1987). Host nations possess a number of key advantages, such as local knowledge, greater perceived

legitimacy within a target community, and proximity. *The U.S. Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* stated, “The host nation doing something tolerably is normally better than us doing it well” (Petraeus, 2006, 41). Further, with the War on Terror focused on non-state actors operating within a state’s sovereign territory, cooperation with the host nation, even at a minimal level, was a necessity. The 2002 *National Security Strategy* laid out the need to work with and through partner states:

to encourage our regional partners to take up a coordinated effort that isolates the terrorists. Once the regional campaign localizes the threat to a particular state, we will help ensure the state has the military, law enforcement, political, and financial tools necessary to finish the task... While our focus is protecting America, we know that to defeat terrorism in today’s globalized world we need support from our allies and friends. Wherever possible, the United States will rely on regional organizations and state powers to meet their obligations to fight terrorism. Where governments find the fight against terrorism beyond their capacities, we will match their willpower and their resources with whatever help we and our allies can provide (White House, 2002, 6, 7)

The White House’s (2003, 2, 3) *Progress Report on the Global War on Terrorism* further stated, “Our best defense against terrorists is to root them out wherever they hide—in the Iraq and Afghanistan theaters and throughout the world—and preempt acts of terror by using all the tools of statecraft. We will continue to invigorate traditional alliances and build new partnerships to carry this effort forward... We are on the offensive, denying access to safe havens, funding, material support, and freedom of movement.”

Though U.S. government officials saw Operation Enduring Freedom degrading al Qaeda’s operations and effectiveness in Afghanistan during the first months of the war, they were concerned that the weakened group would reorganize in other regions, which would require the cooperation of a wide range of partner states to target. In February



2002, Vice Admiral Thomas Wilson (2002, 14), then serving as the DIA director, observed:

the Al Qaida network has not been eliminated, and it retains the potential for reconstitution. Many key officials and operatives remain and new personalities have already begun to emerge... The organization could also splinter into a number of loosely affiliated groups, united by a common cause and sharing common operatives. Their capability to conduct simultaneous or particularly complex attacks would likely be degraded, but they would continue to be a lethal threat to our interests worldwide, including within the U.S.

On the ground in Afghanistan, U.S. military leadership was aware by spring 2002 that al Qaeda was leaving the country and finding safe haven in “under-governed areas” elsewhere. General Stanley McChrystal, who originally arrived in Afghanistan in May 2002, stated that at this time, “We were already heavily focused on the idea that almost all of the leads on al Qaeda were focused into Pakistan.”<sup>23</sup> The U.S. government eventually saw al Qaeda connecting many disparate groups around the world, operating “in more than 80 countries” (Department of Defense, 2006, 22). By 2006, the U.S. intelligence community was communicating its concern for a “global Salafi jihadist movement” encompassing “al-Qaida, affiliated and independent terrorist groups, and emerging networks and cells” sharing a common goal of establishing an Islamic Caliphate and removing U.S. influence from the Muslim world (Central Intelligence Agency, 2006, 5, 13).

The CIA’s 2006 National Intelligence Estimate specifically identified 17 countries in which this global jihadist movement had spread: Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia, Burma, Chechnya, Dagestan, Eritrea, Indonesia, Iraq, Kashmir,

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with General Stanley McChrystal, former JSOC and ISAF Commander, Washington, DC, January 8, 2019.

Kosovo, Palestine, Philippines, Somalia, Tajikistan, and Thailand. The CIA report saw four factors leading to the spread of the “jihadist movement”: “(1) Entrenched grievances, such as corruption, injustice, and fear of Western domination, leading to anger, humiliation, and a sense of powerlessness; (2) the Iraq jihad; (3) the slow pace of real and sustained economic, social, and political reforms in many Muslim majority nations; and (4) pervasive anti-US sentiment among most Muslims—all of which jihadists exploit” (Ibid., 6). In particular, it identified the Iraq invasion as a “cause celebre for jihadists, breeding a deep resentment of US involvement in the Muslim world and cultivating supporters for the global jihadist movement” and helped “foster a perception that US counterterrorism policies are a cover for efforts to subjugate Muslims” (Ibid., 5, 12). The CIA further warned that, during the next five years, “US or Western military involvement in a predominately Muslim country would be likely to ratchet up sympathy for jihadists and could produce another jihadist conflict. Some governments not involved in the conflict probably would face public pressure to reduce cooperation with Washington” (Ibid., 28).

This concern was heightened by fears of foreign fighters beginning to return home from fighting U.S. forces in Iraq and maintaining connections with their former comrades, as happened following the Soviet withdrawal in Afghanistan. In March 2005, Mossad Chief Meir Dagan shared with U.S. diplomats and a visiting Congressional delegation that Israel had evidence that foreign fighters from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Syria, and Yemen had returned to their home countries, as well as sharing assumptions that Saudi fighters had returned to Saudi Arabia (State Department, 2005g). Dagan

further expressed his lack of confidence in these states to have sufficient capacity to deal with the domestic threat these militants posed. Two years later, the head of Egypt's State Security Investigative Service Hassan Abdul Rahman shared his concern with FBI Deputy Director John Pistole over the "aftermath of Iraq." He stated, "Iraq is an enormous terrorist training camp. We are very concerned about what will happen when those terrorists who are Egyptian return from Iraq... We had a major problem in the past with mujahideen returnees from Afghanistan, and are concerned about a similar phenomenon post-Iraq" (State Department, 2007i).

***"Disaggregation": U.S. Counterterrorism Policy in Bush's Second Term***

With the costs and unpopularity of the Iraq war steadily mounting higher and higher and the perceived "global jihadist network" spreading, the Bush administration began to shift towards a new counterterrorism strategy at the beginning of Bush's second term based in "disaggregation" (Kilcullen, 2016). The new focus would be on dismantling the global al Qaeda network and breaking it into smaller and disconnected regional groups that could be handled primarily by the security forces of local governments. Lawrence Wilkerson explained that the awareness of the expanding al Qaeda network and safe havens as a problem among senior leadership within the Bush administration and how to approach it was "gradual and then the policy caught up with it and shifted." He continued, "I think the principle impetus for that was not just clearer strategic thinking. It was the physical cost of the unilateralism."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with Lawrence Wilkerson, former chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell, Falls Church VA, November 21, 2018.

Following a December 3, 2001 meeting, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair (2001) sent President Bush a paper—“The War Against Terrorism: The Second Phase”— that was already outlining the need to influence key partner states to deploy their military forces domestically, bolstered by U.S. support, in order to target al Qaeda and other extremist groups operating in their peripheries. In the Philippines, for example, Blair (Ibid., 4) argued that “the key policy should be to provide, equipment, CT training and...to improve the capacity of the Philippines armed forces to deal with Islamic extremist groups in the south. We should be ready to join them in hitting terrorist concentrations and terrorist camps in...air operations.” Similarly, in Somalia, the “classic failed state”, Blair (Ibid.) saw the “need a) to interdict UBL fugitives on their way there and prevent supplies from reaching terrorist groups—that will require amongst other things the presence of coalition patrol vessels off the Somali coast b) to identify AQ cells and eliminate them through military strikes and covert operations.” For Yemen, he stated, “The approach you took during Saleh’s visit to Washington is the right one. We need to set out clear expectations for Yemeni action against terrorism. There may be a scope for practical assistance on CT and defence cooperation if we are sure the Yemenis are genuinely committed to this. We should offer to mount...air operations against terrorists. Our strategy should be to work with the Yemenis if we can, but to leave them in no doubt if they fail to take the necessary action, they run the risk of others doing it for them” (Ibid., 5). In Indonesia, Blair argued, “We should help Indonesian efforts to deal with Lashkar Jihad through CT assistance and intelligence cooperation. We should also be

ready, with Indonesian support/collaboration, to take military action against known terrorist training camps” (Ibid.).

After the policy shift in Bush’s second term, the U.S. military increased its efforts in supporting the capacity of partner states through military assistance and training (Department of Defense, 2006, 11-12; Mazetti, 2013; Scahill, 2013). The 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* recognized, “Recent operations demonstrate the critical importance of being organized to work with and through others, and of shifting emphasis from performing tasks ourselves to enabling others. They also underscore the importance of adopting a more indirect approach to achieve common objectives. The Department must help partners improve their ability to perform their intended roles and missions” (Defense Department, 2006, 17). Military assistance, further, was a signal that states should rely on offensive action in pursuit of international terrorists within their borders (Bandypadhyay, Sandler, and Younas, 2011). According to a former U.S. military intelligence officer, “We were expecting them to take the strong, hard approach that we were taking... We were expecting that harder stance via military force. Those countries are not necessarily that way, especially if the United States tells them to do it because a lot of them view us as pawns, as part of their game, and other countries viewed us as bullies.”<sup>25</sup> U.S. officials consistently pressed officials within the partner states to increase their cooperation and step up their counterterrorism actions within their borders, captured in the well-known mantra “do more.”

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with a former U.S. Military Intelligence officer, Washington, DC, October 2018.

The U.S. government leveraged a number of programs and funding streams to support partner states' domestic counterterrorism efforts (Rand and Tankel, 2015). The U.S. Department of Defense, for example, created the Regional Defense Counterterrorism Fellowship Program to “provide coalition counterparts with the training and education necessary to establish and maintain effective counterterrorism programs in their home countries” (White House, 2003, 19). Under the Department of State, the U.S. government used the Foreign Military Financing Program for counterterrorism efforts, which “focuses on military professionalism and the equipping of often beleaguered armed forces throughout the world” and provides “a direct infusion of badly needed resources used to combat terrorism” (Ibid.). In addition to these global programs, the U.S. government implemented a number of region and country-specific programs. The Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) was focused on building the military capacity of Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti, especially in confronting al Shabaab after its emergence in 2005. Similarly, the U.S. European Command's Counter-Terrorism Initiative helped to build the internal security forces of states within the Trans-Sahara region “necessary for policing their national territories” (Department of Defense, 2006, 12). In 2005, the U.S. government set up the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership to assist Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia in “their immediate and long-term capabilities to address terrorist threats and prevent the spread of violent extremism” (State Department, 2018b). In 2009, the Department of Defense instituted the \$3 billion Pakistan Counterinsurgency Capability Fund, to be dispersed over a period of five years, “to help

the Pakistani forces develop specific capabilities—counterinsurgency capabilities,” according to General David Petraeus’ April 2009 testimony to the House Armed Services Committee, as the Pakistani military was continuing to battle Taliban and al Qaeda forces in FATA (Schmitt and Shanker, 2009).

The emphasis on counterterrorism and security, along with the money the U.S. government was willing to provide to it, became the dominant agenda when engaging with the United States and the primary means by which states were able to gain U.S. government attention, even in achieving other strategic goals. In a September 29, 2003 meeting with U.S. embassy officials in Djibouti, ministers from Somaliland, a breakaway state of northern Somalia, presented the U.S. diplomats with a paper titled “Somaliland’s Mission for Collaboration with the International Anti-Terrorist Activities” and stressed that the Somaliland government is “categorically opposed to all acts of terrorism” (State Department, 2003d). The ministers requested counterterrorism assistance and hoped to establish a military relationship with the U.S. in order to gain financial backing to fight terrorism and piracy in the region. This was part of the government’s ongoing effort to gain international recognition after declaring its independence in the wake of the Barre regime’s collapse in 1991. Chad had a similar strategy in its engagement with the United States. During a February 2007 meeting of country representatives within the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership, Chadian General Adoum Gabgalia emphasized the threat that Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda posed to Chad, with another Chadian representative unequivocally telling the Americans, “Give us the money; we have the courage to do the job” (State Department, 2007f). A former U.S. counterterrorism official

similarly observed of assistance to Yemen, “When [al Qaeda] starts creating problems in Yemen, the U.S. money starts flowing. For [Yemeni President] Saleh, al Qaeda is the gift that keeps on giving. They are his number one fund-raiser to get Saudi and US money” (Scahill, 2013, 236).

### *Ungoverned Spaces in the Crosshairs*

The preventive mindset of U.S. officials would not only influence direct U.S. actions, such as the military invasion of Iraq, but also U.S. relations with partner states. With the increased emphasis on partner state’s domestic counterterrorism cooperation, the focus of these operations overwhelmingly fell on the “ungoverned spaces” of the periphery to prevent their use as terrorist safe havens. The 9/11 Commission (2004, 366) identified a wide array of operational conditions which an “international terrorist operation” relies on:

- time, space, and ability to perform competent planning and staff work;
- a command structure able to make necessary decisions and possessing the authority and contacts to assemble needed people, money, and materials;
- opportunity and space to recruit, train, and select operatives with the needed skills and dedication, providing the time and structure required to socialize them into the terrorist cause, judge their trust-worthiness, and hone their skills;
- a logistics network able to securely manage the travel of operatives, move money, and transport resources (like explosives) where they need to go;
- access, in the case of certain weapons, to the special materials needed for a nuclear, chemical, radiological, or biological attack;
- reliable communications between coordinators and operatives; and
- opportunity to test the workability of the plan.

While a number of other factors must be present for these operational conditions to be met, the key underlying condition that makes them possible is the presence of “ungoverned spaces” as a base of operations. Scholars argue that terrorism and violence



is incubated in weak or failing states as a result of the increased opportunities provided to groups for organization, training, recruitment, and attacks (Coggins 2015; Kis-Katos, Liebert, and Schulze 2011; Piazza 2008; Plummer, 2012). The extent to which a government does or does not maintain effective control of its territory, however, is often not uniform throughout the state, with terrorists able to take advantage of the absence of government presence in the periphery. When terrorist groups are able to have a base outside of government control, its operatives are able to meet, plan, and coordinate face to face, making their operations more efficient and more deadly (White House, 2003).

Even before the War on Terror, this was an issue that senior leadership in the Bush administration was becoming aware of, along with the potential problems stemming from them. Rumsfeld (2001f, 1) noted after a May 21, 2001 meeting with the former Secretary of State George Shultz, “There are a growing number of places that are not being governed. For example, Indonesia, Pakistan, half the Muslim world, Africa, Ukraine, Colombia. This is a new type of issue we have to deal with.” The saliency of this concern was heightened after 9/11 and the fear that al Qaeda could exploit these regions. The CIA Director’s 2003 Worldwide Threat Briefing (2003, 1) stated, “[W]e cannot lose sight of those national security challenges that, while not occupying space on the front pages, demand a constant level of scrutiny. Challenges such as the world’s vast stretches of ungoverned areas—lawless zones, veritable ‘no man’s lands’ like some areas along the Afghan-Pakistani border—where extremists find shelter and can win the breathing space to grow.” The 2004 *National Defense Strategy of the United States* further stated, “The absence of effective governance in many parts of the world creates

sanctuaries for terrorists, criminals, and insurgents. Many states are unable, and in some cases unwilling, to exercise effective control over their territory or frontiers, thus leaving areas open to hostile exploitation. Our experience in the war on terrorism points to the need to reorient our military capabilities to contend with such irregular challenges more effectively” (Department of Defense, 2004, 2-3).

In the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. government didn’t have a specific and stated policy to address terrorist safe havens as a distinct issue from state sponsorship but was simply one issue among many at which senior officials were looking. The attention of the Bush administration initially was less focused on controlling ungoverned peripheries and more focused on the larger missions in Afghanistan and Iraq and global renditions of identified al Qaeda operatives. With the toppling of the Taliban government and on-going U.S. military operations in Afghanistan, there was a growing concern among officials that al Qaeda operatives were departing the country and seeking new safe havens from which to operate, pushing their staffs to devise new ideas and policies to address the changing threat (Rumsfeld, 2002a). Officials within the U.S. government increasingly shifted their efforts on identifying specific peripheral regions which could serve as terrorist safe havens, areas with a lack of effective government control, on-going anti-state insurgencies, or marginalized and discriminated Muslim populations (O’Connell, 2004, 2).

In December 2001, Colin Powell saw Somalia’s instability made the country “ripe for misuse by those who would take that chaos and thrive on the chaos. That’s why we’re really looking at Somalia—not to go after Somalia as a nation or a government, but to be

especially sensitive to the fact where Somalia could be a place where people suddenly find haven” (Sipress and Slevin, 2001). In an April 22, 2002 letter to Vice President Dick Cheney, Rumsfeld (2002b) saw a major problem in “areas not being governed...from Afghanistan, to Somalia, to Indonesia, to Colombia,” and pushed “to get some folks thinking about this.” A January 2003 DIA (2003, 3) intelligence report found, “After Al-Qaida’s loss of Afghanistan as a base of operations, it has attempted to re-deploy to the Sahel and Maghreb regions of Africa.” As evidence, the report cited the killing of the Yemeni Imed Abdelwahid Ahmed by Algerian security forces on September 12, 2002, arguing he had been dispatched by al Qaeda to assess the suitability for the region as a base of operations. In addition to visiting the deserts of southeastern Algeria, Ahmed traveled to Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and Chad. The DIA also discussed two other members of al Qaeda leadership with a Mauritanian background, hinting that their regional connections could make it a potential al Qaeda base. Similarly, U.S. officials feared that al Qaeda could take advantage of the Philippine government’s on-going domestic war with Abu Sayyaf, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the southern Moro region, using reports of suspected links between these organizations and al Qaeda and sightings and the arrest of an “Arab terrorist” in the south as justification for incorporating this conflict into the War on Terror (Ahmed, 2013, 272-274; *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, 1999; State Department, 2005). Douglas Feith summed up these concerns by stating, “What we did by going into Afghanistan, as somebody put it, was stomp our foot into a pool of water. The water splashed out and we got a small pool over there and another over here. The

new small pools were not connected.”<sup>26</sup> A former U.S. intelligence official similarly stated, “After 9/11 the U.S. thought we’d squeezed the toothpaste in Afghanistan and these guys were just going to squirt into all these different ungoverned spaces” (Tankel, 2018, 239).

The 2004 *National Military Strategy* identified an “arc of instability stretching from the Western Hemisphere, through Africa and the Middle East and extending to Asia.” It continued: “There are areas in this arc that serve as breeding grounds for threats to our interests. Within these areas rogue states provide sanctuary to terrorists, protecting them from surveillance and attack. Other adversaries take advantage of ungoverned spaces and under-governed territories from which they prepare plans, train forces and launch attacks” (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2004, 5). The report further stated that the U.S. military needed to “reduce threats to the United States, its allies and its interests” and would “work to deny terrorists safe haven in failed states and ungoverned regions. Working with other nations’ militaries and other governmental agencies, the Armed Forces help to establish favorable security conditions and increase the capabilities of partners” (Ibid., 9-10).

The 9/11 Commission Report, released in 2004, officially recommended expanding the U.S. counterterrorism strategy to target potential safe havens through cooperation with partner states. The report argued, “The U.S. government must identify and prioritize actual or potential terrorist sanctuaries. For each, it should have a realistic strategy to keep possible terrorists insecure and on the run, using all elements of national

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Douglas Feith, former Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, Washington, DC, October 29, 2018.

power. We should reach out, listen to, and work with other countries that can help” (9/11 Commission, 2004, 367). The Commission identified six current or potential safe havens for international terrorist groups:

- western Pakistan and the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region
- southern or western Afghanistan
- the Arabian Peninsula, especially Saudi Arabia and Yemen, and the nearby Horn of Africa, including Somalia and extending southwest into Kenya
- Southeast Asia, from Thailand to the southern Philippines to Indonesia
- West Africa, including Nigeria and Mali
- European cities with expatriate Muslim communities, especially cities in central and eastern Europe where security forces and border controls are less effective (Ibid., 366-367).<sup>27</sup>

The Commission further pressed, “In the twentieth century, strategists focused on the world’s great industrial heartlands. In the twenty-first, the focus is in the opposite direction, toward remote regions and failing states. The United States has had to find ways to extend its reach, straining the limits of its influence. Every policy decision we make needs to be seen through this lens” (Ibid., 367).

To implement the 9/11 Commission’s recommendation, Congress passed the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, signed into law by President Bush on December 17, 2004 (108<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2004). In regard to terrorist safe havens, this act found that

it should be the policy of the United States—(1) to identify foreign countries that are being used as terrorist sanctuaries; (2) to assess current United States resources and tools being used to assist foreign government to eliminate such sanctuaries; (3) to develop and implement a coordinated strategy to prevent terrorists from using foreign countries as sanctuaries; and (4) to work in bilateral and multilateral fora to elicit the cooperation needed to identify and address

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<sup>27</sup> European cities with Muslim communities have a different dynamic than the other safe havens outlined by the 9/11 Commission falling under the center versus periphery frame explored here. Therefore, European cities as safe havens is not part of this analysis.

terrorist sanctuaries that may exist today, but, so far, remain unknown to governments (Ibid., Section 7102b).

The law further required that subsequent drafts of the State Department's annual *Country Reports on Terrorism* (previously known as *Patterns of Global Terrorism* from 1996-2004) provide an overview of efforts made by partner states in eliminating terrorist sanctuaries and how the U.S. government has aided these efforts.

The 2005 *Country Reports on Terrorism* was the first to include a dedicated section on "Terrorist Safe Havens" (State Department, 2005). The report stated,

The most intractable safe havens worldwide tend to exist astride international borders or in regions where ineffective governance allows their presence...Denying safe haven to terrorists requires a regional approach based on coordinated action by partner governments working with the United States as well as with each other, and by regional and multilateral institutions...Efforts to build partner capacity and encourage partner states to cooperate more effectively with each other at the regional level are key to denying terrorists safe haven (Ibid.).

The State Department report further outlined how designated terrorist groups have utilized specific safe havens in various parts of the world, mentioning the peripheries of Mali, Mauritania, Somalia, the Southern Philippines and Sabah, Malaysia, Indonesia, Mediterranean, the Caucasus, the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, northern Iraq/southeastern Turkey, Yemen, the Colombia border region, the Triborder region between Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay, and Venezuela. The report outlined efforts made by the local governments, or lack thereof, in asserting control over the safe havens to mitigate their potential exploitation and directly challenging terrorist groups within the regions. In northern Mali, for example, the report finds that the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (which would become al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in 2007)

used the sparsely populated and poorly controlled deserts for “recruiting, training, and smuggling activities.” The report also notes that:

the government has maintained a limited military presence in the north since the negotiated end of a rebellion by elements of the Tuareg population in 1996. The size of the country and the limited resources of the Malian government hamper the effectiveness of military patrols and border control measures. There have been no confrontation between the military and the GSPC in 2005, and the government has not taken any steps to modify its military force posture in the region or directly confront GSPC elements in the north because of the perceived potential to create unrest (Ibid.).

This put increased focus on a wide range of peripheral regions within the Muslim world, especially in those areas specifically identified in the 9/11 Commission Report, and emphasized the importance of supporting the military capacity of partner states to ensure their ability to counter the terrorist threat within their borders. U.S. government officials, for example, were pressuring the Pakistani government to deploy troops to FATA to capture Taliban and al Qaeda fighters fleeing across the international border and using the mountainous border region as a safe haven for operations in Afghanistan. In January 2007 testimony to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, the Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte singled out Pakistan as al Qaeda’s new base of operations and warned that al Qaeda members “are cultivating stronger operational connections and relationship that radiate outward from their leaders’ secure hideout in Pakistan, to affiliates in the Middle East, North Africa and Europe.” He added, “We have captured or killed numerous senior al-Qaeda operatives, but al-Qaeda’s core elements are resilient. They continue to plot attacks against our homeland and other targets with the objective of inflicting mass casualties” (*BBC News*, 2007b). Citing Pakistan’s cooperation, U.S. officials even put pressure on Iran during a January 2002 meeting in

Geneva to secure its international border against al Qaeda fighters fleeing west (State Department, 2002b).

In Somalia, as violence began to increase with the emergence of al Shabaab, the “youth” militia of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), the U.S government sought to find regional allies in the frontline states of Ethiopia and Kenya, given the absence of a viable Somali government, to militarily confront the declining security situation. They feared that al Qaeda would use the region as a safe haven, with U.S. officials in Kenya pointing to “between 12 and 15 highly professional [al Qaeda] terrorists at large in the region,” which they argued demonstrated al Qaeda links with the ICU and al Shabaab (State Department, 2005m). The U.S. government initially relied upon CIA-backed local Somali warlords to hunt down suspected al Qaeda members, provoking a violent backlash from the ICU, but eventually backed an Ethiopian military invasion in 2006. One American official stationed in Ethiopia stated, “The idea was to get the Ethiopians to fight our war” (Mazzetti, 2013, 149). In a June 2006 meeting with the Ethiopian Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer promised the U.S. would “push from behind.” She continued, “We still don’t want to be in the lead, but will have a stronger presence” (State Department, 2006g).

The disbursement of military assistance and strengthening of military-to-military relationships began to be directed towards governments not only where al Qaeda operatives were suspected of operating but where they could potentially operate but weren’t present in yet, such as a number of Sub-Saharan African countries. Senior U.S. officials were concerned to prevent al Qaeda from shifting to new safe havens and “re-



creating in a new location what they had had in Afghanistan.”<sup>28</sup> David Kilcullen, one of the architects of the disaggregation strategy, further argued that “disaggregation” approach was meant to limit the ability for al Qaeda to inject its cause into and exploit local conflict environments in order to aggregate a wide range of actors into a movement of “global jihad” (Kilcullen, 2016, 9).

This strategy would gain further weight with the Democrats gaining control of both the House and the Senate in the 2006 mid-term election by campaigning against the increasingly unpopular war in Iraq and bringing U.S. troops home (Gartner and Segura, 2008; Grunwald, 2006). The new Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid stated, “In Iraq and here at home, Americans have made clear they are tired of the failures of the last six years” (Kuhnenn, 2006). The Democrat-controlled Congress was less willing to allow the Bush administration to rely on the deployment of U.S. troops overseas to combat terrorism, especially in future counterterrorism operations, increasing the political pressure to rely on the cooperation of partner states to confront threats abroad.

### ***Campaigning against Bush’s War: Obama’s Counterterrorism Policy***

Following the 2008 presidential election, the newly elected President Barack Obama publicly sought to re-shape the U.S. counterterrorism strategy. The Obama administration moved away from the ideological underpinning of Bush’s foreign policy and ended policies and rhetoric aimed at democratization in the Middle East and the broader Muslim world. He even eschewed the use of the phrase “War on Terror.” Mirroring the

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Douglas Feith, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, Washington, DC, October 29, 2018.

Democrats' electoral strategy in the 2006 mid-term elections, he campaigned against Bush's Iraq invasion (the "bad" war) and the deployment of U.S. forces abroad. Obama stated on the campaign trail in February 2008, "There was no such thing as Al Qaeda in Iraq until George Bush and John McCain decided to invade. They took their eye off the people who were responsible for 9/11, and that would be Al Qaeda" (Associated Press, 2009).

The Obama administration narrowed its counterterrorism efforts back to Afghanistan (the "good" war) and other safe havens where al Qaeda affiliates were operating such as Pakistan's FATA, southern Yemen, and southern Somalia. Obama expressed concern to the journalist Bob Woodward (2010, 123) about al Qaeda and its affiliates operating in these safe havens, stating "What you've seen is a metastasizing of al Qaeda, where a range of loosely affiliated groups now have the capacity and the ambition to recruit and train for attacks that may not be on the scale of a 9/11, but obviously can still be extraordinarily...One man, bomb...which could still have, obviously, an extraordinary traumatizing effect on the homeland." Even though Obama moved away from the war rhetoric of the Bush administration and stopped using the phrase "War on Terror," his administration still understood itself to be at war with al Qaeda and its affiliate organizations.

In his administration's view this constituted the main threat to the United States, blaming Bush for focusing too much on Iraq (Obama, 2009b; White House, 2010; Woodward, 2010). The White House communications director Dan Pfeiffer (2009) stated that the policies of the former administration led to al Qaeda "regenerated in places like

Yemen and Somalia, establishing new safe-havens that have grown over a period of years.” In many ways, however, the counterterrorism focus of the Obama White House would be a continuation of many of the policies implemented in Bush’s second term, with a greater difference in counterterrorism policies between Bush’s first and second term than between the two presidencies.

In the early months of the new administration, President Obama dispatched his senior level security officials across Washington, DC to emphasize the need to target terrorist safe havens used by al Qaeda and its growing network of affiliates to a number of different policy and media audiences. They argued that the “persistent enemy” of al Qaeda was spreading its “tentacles...far and wide,” according to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and being regenerated in numerous safe havens in Somalia, Yemen, Pakistan, the Maghreb, and elsewhere with the government needing to pursue a “continuing effort” (Mullen, 2009; Panetta, 2009, 15; Senate Armed Services Committee, 2009, 63; Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 2010). The 2010 *National Security Strategy* further stated, “Where al-Qa’ida or its terrorist affiliates attempt to establish a safe haven—as they have in Yemen, Somalia, the Maghreb, and the Sahel—we will meet them with growing pressure. We also will strengthen our own network of partners to disable al-Qa’ida’s financial, human, and planning networks; disrupt terrorist operations before they mature; and address potential safe-havens before al-Qa’ida and its terrorist affiliates can take root” (White House, 2010, 21). This was motivated not just by actionable intelligence concerning al Qaeda activities within various safe havens but even the perceived potential for such activities. At a July 7, 2009 event on AQAP at the

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2009), Shari Villarossa, the Deputy Coordinator for Regional Affairs in the State Department's Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, admitted that while her office didn't have any "concrete figures" or "travel data" concerning al Qaeda fighters moving into Yemen, "our concern is the potential."

They expressed the same concern that hitting al Qaeda hard in Afghanistan would increase the likelihood of the group shifting its operations to safe havens elsewhere and underlined the need for a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to address both current and potential safe havens, "kind of like a toothpaste in a tube" according to the newly appointed Director of National Intelligence Admiral Dennis Blair (Select Committee on Intelligence, 2009, 65; Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, 2009). The prioritization of targeting "ungoverned spaces" as safe havens for terrorist groups through partnered operations would also be a key aspect of the administration's new Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy emphasizing the role Pakistan's FATA plays as a safe haven for planning attacks against U.S. forces in Afghanistan (See Chapter 6).

In June 2011, John Brennan (2011), then assistant to the president for homeland security and counterterrorism, outlined an increased focus on al Qaeda's network of affiliates and broadly targeting of its safe havens in his introduction to the administration's *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, a position he had been pushing since the early months of Obama's administration (Woodward, 2010, 227-228). He stated,

At the same time, ultimately defeating al-Qa'ida also means addressing the serious threat posed by its affiliates and adherents operating outside South Asia. This does not require a 'global' war, but it does require a focus on specific regions, including what we might call the periphery—places like Yemen, Somalia, Iraq, and the Maghreb. This is another important distinction that characterizes this strategy. As the al-Qa'ida core has weakened under our unyielding pressure, it has looked increasingly to these other groups and individuals to take up its cause, including its goal of striking the United States (Brennan, 2011).

A key aspect of this strategy was to continue to work through partner states:

Over the past two and a half years, we have also increased our efforts to build the capacity of partners so they can take the fight to al-Qa'ida in their own countries...it's why we must continue our cooperation with Pakistan... These kinds of security partnerships are absolutely vital... Around the world, we will deepen our security cooperation with partners wherever al-Qa'ida attempts to take root, be it Somalia, the Sahel or Southeast Asia (Ibid.).

Obama made a cornerstone of his counterterrorism strategy working with and through partner states to confront threats within their borders, increasing assistance to improve partner states' military capabilities for counterterrorism operations. He viewed this as a means of promoting legitimacy of and ownership by the partner states and create a more sustainable security framework to confront continuing and future security threats. This focus on partnerships also allowed the United States to avoid putting "boots on the ground", given Obama's electoral rhetoric opposing President Bush's invasion of Iraq. In its 2010 *National Security Strategy*, the Obama administration stressed that "when we overuse our military might...or act without partners, then our military is overstretched, Americans bear a greater burden, and our leadership around the world is too narrowly identified with military force. And we know that our enemies aim to overextend our Armed Forces and to drive wedges between us and those who share our interests" (White House, 2010, 18). The 2015 *National Security Strategy* added, "Specifically, we shifted

away from a model of fighting costly, large-scale ground wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in which the United States—particularly our military—bore an enormous burden. Instead, we are now pursuing a more sustainable approach that prioritizes counterterrorism operations, collective action with responsible partners, and increased efforts to prevent the growth of violent extremism and radicalization that drives increased threats” (White House, 2015, 9).

To accomplish this, he argued it was necessary to work with the partner states the U.S. had rather than trying to reform them, further distancing himself from Bush’s policies focused on democratization efforts. The U.S. government, for example, later announced that it would continue to work with Egypt on counterterrorism and security in Sinai despite the military coup that overthrew President Morsi in 2013. Obama (2013) stated at the UN General Assembly in New York, “Our approach to Egypt reflects a larger point: The United States will at times work with governments that do not meet, at least in our view, the highest international expectations, but who work with us on our core interests.”

The 2010 *National Security Strategy*, though, re-asserted the U.S. government’s right “to act unilaterally if necessary to defend our nation and our interests” (White House, 2010, 22). Obama shifted away from the reliance on very loud and public displays of force as a deterrence and rely on kinetic operations without international attention, putting more emphasis on the use of special forces and drone strikes as means of being strong on terrorism without a large military footprint in situations where it was feared that a partner state couldn’t or wouldn’t act. In its operation against al Qaeda, John Brennan

stated that the Obama administration needed “to use a scalpel, not a hammer” (Rozen, 2010). CIA director Michael Hayden stated of the drone program in November 2008 that its purpose was to make “a safe haven feel less safe, we keep al-Qaeda guessing. We make them doubt their allies; question their methods, their plans, even their priorities...we force them to spend more time and resources on self-preservation, and that distracts them, at least partially and at least for a time, from laying the groundwork for the next attack” (Bergen, 2011, 346).

### ***Conclusion***

After the initial years of the War on Terror and costly U.S. invasions in Afghanistan and Iraq, there was a shift in U.S. counterterrorism policy to increase the focus on safe havens, where there was limited government presence, and rely upon and support actions of partner states to target these regions as a means of preventing attacks against the United States and its interests. As a result of pressure from the U.S. government and the focus on peripheral regions where government capacity was limited, there was an increase in the number of key states relying upon military force for domestic counterterrorism. This policy was not tempered by considerations of the conditions that led these peripheral regions to be labeled “ungoverned spaces” and the resulting impact and consequences of the use of military force within the context of the historical tensions between center and periphery. As will be discussed in the following chapter within a comprehensive overview of the logic of the terrorism trap theory, counterterrorism operations by the military inevitably resulted in a backlash from local communities in the

periphery, leading to an increase in domestic terrorism targeting the partner state. While the military operations by partner states were not necessarily the sole cause of the initial outbreak of violence, they helped to serve as a key catalyst for the drastic increase in domestic terrorist acts and anti-state violence.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE TERRORISM TRAP EXPLAINED**

Following the declaration of the Global War on Terror, the United States shifted its security priorities towards proactively targeting international terrorist groups, especially al Qaeda. These efforts included the use of direct military force in Afghanistan and Iraq, governments which the U.S. accused of providing a safe haven and support to al Qaeda. The United States increasingly shifted to focus on gaining cooperation from partner states to target international terrorists within their own borders given the high financial and political costs for direct military action (Henne, 2016; Tankel, 2018). The U.S. government applied political pressure, as well as the coercive shadow of potential U.S. military interventions (as demonstrated by Afghanistan and Iraq), to convince partner states' cooperation in pursuing domestic counterterrorism operations by their militaries. Given the conditions of the periphery where military force was applied, this led to backlash from the targeted region in the form of domestic terrorist attacks. As the government responded to this domestic terrorism with expanded military operations provoking further violence, partner states sunk deeper into a "terrorism trap," involving a deadly cycle of violence between militants and the military. This chapter presents a comprehensive overview of the logic of this theory in two parts, with hypotheses to be quantitatively tested. It first discusses the dynamics of counterterrorism cooperation between the United States and its partner states and secondly focuses on the domestic impact of the partner states' resulting military operations targeting terrorist groups in the periphery.

## **U.S. Counterterrorism Policy and Partner States**

Many scholars have recognized the influence that domestic political constraints have in shaping a state's foreign policy, such as political structures and domestic audience costs (Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson, 1995; Fearon, 1994; Putnam, 1988; Risse-Kappen, 1991). Gourevitch (1978), with his "second-image reversed," also recognizes that the international system and interstate relations can influence and shape a state's domestic politics. He argues that factors such as the international economy, international state system, and interstate war impact a state's domestic political development by both limiting and directing opportunities for market growth, trade, and political development. With conflict increasingly taking place on the intra-state rather than inter-state level (Fearon and Laitin, 2003), international politics also can impact the domestic conflict strategy of governments (Akins, 2018c; Carey, Colaresi, and Mitchell, 2015).

The Global War on Terror as the organizing principle of U.S. foreign policy had a profound impact on the domestic security policies of partner states around the world (Bandyopadhyay, Sander, and Younas, 2011; Bapat, 2011; Boutton, 2014; Dube and Naidu, 2015; Shor, et. al, 2014). The real challenge for the United States after 9/11 was pressuring critical states, such as Pakistan and Yemen, to cooperate when their threat perceptions, political interests, and objectives did not align with the United States. Scholars recognize that counterterrorism or counterinsurgency partnerships can be fundamentally understood as a principal-agent problem. This focuses on the challenges of one party (the principal) to induce another party (the agent) to act on its behalf due to the agent's increased efficiency, knowledge, or other crucial factors. This relationship is

especially problematic when the agent possesses interests or pursues actions which are contrary to the principal's interests (Laffont and Martimort, 2002; Stiglitz, 2002). Colonel Bryce Denno, a U.S. advisor to the South Vietnamese Army, stated in a 1963 memo,

It would be a miraculous coincidence if a host nation in a war of counterinsurgency were to share identical objectives with the U.S. or arrive at identical solutions to problems that arise. Hence, it behooves the U.S. to seek ways in which it can influence the host nation to act in a manner compatible with U.S. interests in a way which we are financing to a large extent and otherwise supporting (Ladwig, 2017, 23).

Local governments, whether through limited capacity or conflicting interests, can be as much an obstacle towards successful counterinsurgency as the insurgents themselves.

The U.S. government leveraged its expansive armamentarium to pressure states to cooperate with its counterterrorism mission, alternating between coercive threats and promises of aid. Studies show that more foreign assistance has been allocated to countries where U.S. security interests are paramount, similar to U.S. aid priorities during the Cold War (Aning, 2010; Azam and Delacroix, 2006; Bachmann and Honke, 2010; Bandyopadhyay, Sandler, and Younas, 2011; Boutton and Carter, 2013; Fleck and Kilby, 2010; Heinrich, 2013; Heinrich, Martinez Machain, and Oestman, 2017; Hill, 2006; Howell and Lind, 2009). This assistance increasingly shifted towards counterterrorism and militarization in order to bolster partners states' counterterrorism capabilities, especially when foreign states experienced terrorism (Heinrich, Martinez Machain, and Oestman, 2017). Using historical counterinsurgency alliances under the Cold War to derive lessons for contemporary challenges in the War on Terror, Ladwig (2017) identifies two methods of ensuring compliance between principal and agent. First, the U.S. uses inducement (the unilateral provision of aid and public statements of support)

and conditionality (making assistance contingent on cooperation with U.S. counterinsurgency policies). Using a game theoretic model, Bandyopadhyay, Sandler, and Younas (2011) also show that tied, or conditional, foreign aid, as opposed to general foreign aid, will increase the likelihood of a state pursuing a proactive counterterrorism campaign against international terrorist groups.

With the shift to “disaggregation” in the U.S. counterterrorism approach, the U.S. government used this pressure to emphasize to partner states the necessity of offensive counterterrorism efforts. Sandler (2015, 13) categorizes counterterrorism campaigns as either proactive or defensive. Alternatively, counterterrorism operations can be categorized as enemy-centric and population-centric (Kilcullen, 2007), or as Ladwig (2017, 17-20) refers to them “Iron Fists” and “Velvet Gloves”, respectively. The enemy-centric approach views offensively targeting an active militant group as the key to defeating an insurgency and fundamentally interprets the issue as a military problem (Beckett, 1988; Beckett and Pimlott, 1985; Klare and Kornblush, 1988). Sandler (2015, 13) further defines offensive, or “proactive,” counterterrorism operations as when “a targeted government directly confronts the terrorist group or its supporters. Proactive measures may destroy terrorists’ resources (e.g. training camps), curb their finances, eliminate their safe havens, or kill and capture their members.” Offensive operations, therefore, involved directly targeting the group and its members in order to degrade their ability to fight against the government. These campaigns, further, are meant to dissuade the civilian population from joining and supporting the militants (Arreguin-Toft, 2001; Downes, 2007; Kalyvas, 2006; Lyall, 2009).

A population-centric or defensive approach, on the other hand, focuses on severing the link between militant groups and their base of support through promoting the legitimacy of the government by protecting civilians from militants and addressing underlying grievances such as poverty and political reform (Hackworth and Sherman, 1989; Joes, 2004; Pauker, 1962). In the context of counterterrorism, Sandler (2015, 13) defines defensive counterterrorism as governments taking measures to

protect potential targets by making attacks more costly for terrorist or reducing their likelihood of success...Defensive measures have generally been reactive, instituted after some successful or innovative terrorist attacks...Other instances of defensive measures include target hardening, such as defensive perimeters around government building or embassies, or guards at key points of a country's infrastructure. Defensive measures can also take the form of issuing terrorism alerts, enacting stiffer penalties for terrorism offenses, enhancing first-responder capabilities, and stockpiling antibiotics and antidotes for biological and chemical terrorist attacks.

Governments often rely on both approaches simultaneously with strategies shifting and adapting throughout the life of the conflict (Kilcullen, 2009; Nagl, 2002).

As the War on Terror progressed beyond Afghanistan and Iraq, particularly after 2004, offensive action against safe havens by partner states' militaries became one of the main focuses of U.S. counterterrorism efforts, especially as al Qaeda affiliates began to appear and commit increasingly higher levels of violence. The U.S. government in particular prioritized targeting the "ungoverned spaces" on the periphery of strategic partner states, such as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan, southern Philippines, southern Yemen, southern Somalia, and the Maghreb region of West Africa. Due to combinations of difficult terrain, geographic isolation, low capacity of the government, unique administrative structures, and a history of internal conflict

within the region, an effective presence of state institutions was absent within these regions and thus exercised very little direct control over the inhabitants, conditions which provided opportunities for insurgency and political violence (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Jones, 2008).

Many of these targeted regions also possessed a population with a history of persecution and conflict with the central government, further limiting the influence and control of the government, even in periods of peace. As a result of these limitations, it was believed that al Qaeda was using, or could potentially use, these areas as bases of operation or safe havens outside the bounds of government control in order to plan terrorist attacks against the United States and its interests, especially after being driven out of Afghanistan. The conditions that made these regions exploitable by al Qaeda also made the use of military force for offensive action necessary as regular law enforcement had limited effectiveness or was completely absent making it extremely difficult to locate and arrest al Qaeda or al Qaeda-linked operatives operating in the region. In order to prevent future attacks, U.S. officials in their interactions with partner states' governments pressured them to conduct domestic counterterrorism operations in order to both target international terrorists and assert the writ of the government to prevent these regions from being exploited in the future. Offensive counterterrorism operations were further a signal of a state's willingness to fight against terrorism within their borders in order to avoid potential penalties or punitive actions from the U.S. government. This process is seen in Figure 4.1 below.



**Figure 4.1 Counterterrorism Cooperation between the U.S. and Partner States**

In the next chapter, I test the following hypotheses related to the relationship between U.S. counterterrorism policy and partner states deploying their militaries for domestic counterterrorism operations.

*Hypothesis 1:* States that receive U.S. military assistance, *ceteris paribus*, are more likely to have deployed their military for domestic counterterrorism operations.

*Hypothesis 2:* Conditional to U.S. pressure during the War on Terror, states that have a safe haven identified as a potential area of operation for al Qaeda, *ceteris paribus*, are more likely to have deployed their military for domestic counterterrorism operations.

*Hypothesis 3:* During the War on Terror, *ceteris paribus*, states are more likely to have deployed their military for counterterrorism operations.

I also test domestic factors that could influence a state's decision to deploy military forces for counterterrorism operations to demonstrate whether key states have a pre-disposition for deploying their militaries for counterterrorism operations given particular

state characteristics, leading to potential endogeneity problems, or their use of military force is conditional to influence from U.S. counterterrorism policy.

*Hypothesis 4:* States that have a safe haven, ceteris paribus, are more likely to have deployed their military for counterterrorism operations.

*Hypothesis 5:* States that have experienced a terrorist attack in the previous year, ceteris paribus, are more likely to have deployed their military for counterterrorism operations.

*Hypothesis 6:* States that have a marginalized minority population, ceteris paribus, are more likely to have deployed their military for counterterrorism operations.

### **The Terrorism Trap: Igniting Kilcullen’s “Accidental Guerillas”**

Colonel David Kilcullen is an anthropologist, former Australian military officer, and globally recognized expert in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency who has played a leading role in shaping U.S. counterterrorism efforts in the War on Terror. He served as a senior advisor to General David Petraeus in Iraq in 2007, helping to plan the Surge, and a senior counterterrorism advisor for the Secretary of State from 2007-2009, leading field assessment teams in Afghanistan and Pakistan. He has been on frontlines of the fight against terrorism, directly observing the behavior and tactics of militant and terrorist groups and helping to formulate strategy and policy. During his time as an advisor for the U.S. government, he witnessed U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan increasingly becoming bogged down in difficult insurgencies against local groups, despite the goal of intervening to target al Qaeda forces and international terrorism. In his 2009 book *The Accidental Guerilla*, he defined this phenomenon as the “accidental guerilla” syndrome (Kilcullen, 2009).



Kilcullen (Ibid., 34) sums up this cyclical process as follows: “[al Qaeda] moves into remote areas, creates alliances with local traditional communities, exports violence that prompts a western intervention, and then exploits the backlash against that intervention in order to generate support for its *takfiri* agenda.” This process possesses four distinct phases. The first is the *infection* phase in which al Qaeda “establishes a presence in a remote, ungoverned or conflict-affected area.” The second phase is *contagion* in which al Qaeda “uses the safe haven to spread violence and *takfiri* ideology to other regions.” The third phase is *intervention* by outside military forces to challenge the al Qaeda threat and “disrupt the safe haven.” The fourth stage is *rejection* as the “local population reacts negatively, rejecting outside intervention,” often allying with al Qaeda in the process (Ibid., 35). The fourth phase leads back to the first as the violent resistance to the intervention brings further attention to the region as a terrorist safe haven, starting the cycle all over again. He continues, “Al Qa’ida’s ideology tends to lack intrinsic appeal for traditional societies, and so it draws the majority of its strength from this backlash rather than from genuine popular support” (Ibid., 34). This is the process, as Kilcullen argues, that has driven the anti-American violence emanating from Iraq and Afghanistan. Similarly, Braithwaite (2015), Choi (2011), and Rogers (2013) argue that military interventions and troop deployments abroad can provoke international terrorist attacks as terrorist groups target the invading military to force them to exit the state and use the destabilized political environment as an opportunity to plan and execute attacks. Piazza and Choi (2018) further show that military interventions motivated by political or strategic concerns are more likely to lead to an international terrorist backlash than

humanitarian interventions, as political interventions foment greater local resentment against an outside, invading force.

This same logic can be applied to states using their own militaries for domestic counterterrorism operations in peripheral regions, something Kilcullen (2009, 210-244) acknowledges in his discussion of the “internal colonialism” of the Patani region in South Thailand and Pakistan’s FATA region. With the advent of the War on Terror, an al Qaeda presence or suspected al Qaeda links were similarly the catalyst for partner states’ domestic operations to “disrupt safe havens.” In line with U.S. counterterrorism priorities and under pressure from U.S. officials, the governments of partner states deployed their military forces for counterterrorism operations in the peripheral or “ungoverned” regions in which it was feared that al Qaeda could or had already established a presence to plan operations against the United States and other Western targets. The local population of these peripheries, however, viewed the military operations of the government as an outside invasion of their territory, helping to drive recruitment for militant groups as the population pushed back against the military to drive them out.

There was a perception that relying on partner states to conduct counterterrorism operations was a more advantageous approach. Soldiers operating within their own country were expected to be familiar with the local language and culture and more capable in gathering intelligence. Further, it was expected that the deployment of a partner state’s soldiers for domestic counterterrorism operations avoided the danger of a backlash from the local communities, whereas even “the best-behaved foreigners” can provoke a negative reaction to an external intrusion (Byman, 2006, 88). This argument,

however, doesn't consider linguistic, cultural, ethnic, or tribal variation within the partner states, which can undermine the military's effectiveness. In 2001, for example, over 71% of the Pakistani military was composed of Punjabis (Khan, 2014). Many of the Punjabi soldiers deployed to FATA in counterterrorism operations, the first significant military presence in the region since the military garrisons were removed in 1947, were unfamiliar with both the local terrain and Pashtun customs, language, and social structures. They were often unable or even unwilling to effectively extract and use information from local communities and local paramilitary forces (Kilcullen, 2009, 242-243). Even many of the Pashtun soldiers used in the operations in the Tribal Areas were from the settled areas of the North-West Frontier Province and were disconnected from the tribal customs and social landscape of FATA. The military, therefore, was limited in its ability to clearly identify what constituted threatening or suspicious behavior. In 2009 alone, it was reported that 1,150 civilians were killed in military operations that heavily relied on indiscriminate air power and artillery given the difficult terrain and unfamiliarity with the cultural landscape (Schofield, 2012).

These operations, therefore, faced several challenges due to the already tense and conflictual conditions of the center and periphery relationship. First, government security forces often lacked key information about the conflict environment especially concerning who is and isn't involved with or supportive of terrorist groups operating in the region as al Qaeda embedded themselves among the local civilian population (Kalyvas, 2006; Lyall and Wilson, 2009). This problem was made more difficult as the periphery often possessed a different culture or language. Many of the security forces deployed in

counterterrorism operations were from the state's dominant population, making it more difficult to extract accurate local information on terrorist activity as they have fewer contacts to local communities and are not familiar with the local language, traditions, power structures, and terrain. Combined with a historical pattern of tension and conflict with the central government, this created a perception among the communities of the periphery that the military operations constituted an unwelcome invasion of their territory. Compounding this issue, the security forces often committed a pattern of abuse and repressive tactics against the local population through the use of indiscriminate violence resulting in civilian casualties. The lack of reliable information about a difficult and unfamiliar terrain and cultural landscape and who was and wasn't involved in or supportive of terrorist activity made this behavior worse. The use of indiscriminate violence against civilians also frequently led to internal displacement of the local population, which has been shown to have a causal connection with an increase in suicide terrorism (Choi and Piazza, 2016a).

The security priorities of the War on Terror created a permissive environment and security narrative for states to pursue military operations against civilian populations within the periphery under the broad justification of targeting "terrorists," without due process and with political cover from the United States. In counterterrorism operations, partner states' governments were under pressure from the U.S. to target al Qaeda operatives, but the resulting counterterrorism operations also targeted local communities suspected of harboring them. These operations shifted the costs of the violence onto non-participants, with the costs of participating commensurate with not participating as

civilians were unable to avoid being targeted by choosing not to participate (Kocher, Pepinsky, and Kalyvas, 2011). The deaths or disappearances of civilians at the hands of government security forces, combined with repressive counterterrorism policies, led to anger within the targeted peripheral community. The indiscriminate killing of civilians led to an increase in domestic terrorism as individuals sought blood revenge against the government for the deaths of their relatives and fellow tribesmen (Ahmed, 2013; Piazza, 2017; Ratelle and Souleimanov, 2017). One former Chechen militant involved in the Second Chechen War explained, “In the beginning, no one was really willing to go to war...After all, we all had families, households, elderly parents to care for. But when your younger brother is killed in an air strike, what are you supposed to do? Stay home and watch TV? For us Chechens, there was no other choice but to take up arms and seek revenge” (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2015, 174). Another former militant further stated that “even those Chechens who hated [rebel Chechen leader] Dudayev ultimately drove into the war” due to the impulse for revenge against Russian military operations (Souleimanov and Aliyev, 2017, 46).

As a recruitment incentive, al Qaeda and al Qaeda affiliated groups not only exploited the historical struggle of these communities but also their increased grievances against the state as a result of these counterterrorism operations (Bueno de Mesquito, 2005; Findley and Young, 2007). An al Qaeda letter recovered in 2012 discussing the progression of violence in the Middle East recognized this phenomenon in connection to U.S. counterterrorism policy and sought to exploit it for their own purposes, stating,

Many governments in the region also made big mistakes when they ignored tribal attitudes. Those governments, and because of outside demands, would often kill

their own countrymen without given enough thought to the consequences of their actions. As outside pressure increased on those governments, those governments, in return, intensified their actions against their own tribes. That led many tribes in those countries to turn against the governments. If the Mujahidin treat the tribes well, the tribes will likely be on the Mujahidin's side. The tribal communities take the spilling of blood within its community very seriously (al Qaeda, 2012b, 2).

A subsequent letter from al Qaeda core's leadership observed specifically within Yemen,

The American pressure on the Yemeni Government made it make mistakes in dealing with the tribes and bomb the sons of the tribes in al-Mahfad and Shabwah. The ongoing pressure makes it vulnerable to bigger mistakes that will lead some of the tribes to gather against it. The US will continue its pressure on Ali Abdallah Salih to clash with his people until his card is completely burned with the people...If the mujahidin improve their dealings with the tribes, most likely the tribes will lean toward them; the blood's effect on the tribal societies is great (al Qaeda, 2017, 6).

Given the increase in anti-Americanism within the Muslim-majority societies, especially with much of the political rhetoric focused on the War on Terror as targeting Islam, the periphery as a potential pool of recruits for these groups was exacerbated by actual or perceived U.S. support for government forces (Berger, 2014; Blaydes and Linzer, 2012; Kull, 2011; Pape, 2005). However, many individuals who heeded this call to fight chose to join local groups whose fight was primarily directed against their local government rather than al Qaeda's focus on the "far enemy" of the United States, with recruitment patterns often based on personal relationships and local social or ethnic alliances (Hwang and Schulze, 2018; Jones, 2018; Ozerdem and Podder, 2012; Ugarte, 2008).

With the increasingly deadly campaigns of domestic terrorism devastating local society, partner states' governments were under increasing pressure, both domestically and internationally, to respond to these groups with further military force. As David Fidler (2014, 323) argues, "When the insurgency manifests itself as something beyond a

mere law-and-order problem, governments tend to militarize their responses because of the gap between the rising level of fear in the face of violence and terror and the actual capabilities of their police forces.” Therefore, these peripheral regions saw an increasing military presence, exacerbating the original conditions that served as a catalyst for the dramatic uptick in anti-state violence. The attention of the United States also fell on these regions as governments were quick to see the long arm of al Qaeda in order to gain the financial backing and support of the United States. With expanded military operations provoking increased levels of domestic terrorism, partner states became trapped in a back and forth cycle of violence with militants in the periphery. A former senior ISI official told me, “U.S. policymakers in their enthusiasm to vigorously pursue counterterrorism in partner states overlooked structural deficiencies in those countries.” He argued that this was the “dilemma of the countries supporting the United States” who “went overboard in pursuing al Qaeda.”<sup>29</sup>

Scholars have recognized that the use of offensive counterterrorism or counterinsurgency operations leads to an increase in violence while more conciliatory or defensive tactics are correlated with a decrease in violence. In an examination of the effectiveness of counterinsurgency strategies in the North Caucasus, Toft and Zhukov (2012, 786) identify two main strategies used: “(1) Denial, which operates by physically isolating insurgents and manipulating the costs of expanding fighting to new locations and (2) punishment, which uses offensive operations in contested areas to manipulate the costs of sustained fighting.” In testing these approaches against one another, they find

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with a former senior ISI official, Islamabad, Pakistan, December 2018.

that denial, which does not involve direct action against militants and can be equated to more defensive actions, is the most effective given its ability to limit insurgent options, halt the spread of violence within the state, and avoid punitive reprisals. Punishment, with its focus on “killing the enemy,” only serves to increase the risk of continued violence, especially in regard to conflict contagion between different areas within the state. They argue a strategy of punishment is counter-productive. Findley and Young (2007) similarly find that an “attrition” strategy relying on military force is less effective at ending insurgencies than a “hearts and minds” approach. Scholars also point to discriminate violence as more effective in stemming insurgent violence with indiscriminate violence serving to strengthen support for insurgencies (Downes, 2007; Kalyvas, 2006; Kocher, Pepinsky, and Kalyvas, 2011). By examining counterinsurgency operations against the Vietcong, Kocher, Pepinsky, and Kalyvas (2011) argue that aerial bombardment resulting in indiscriminate civilian casualties helped to establish control of the targeted areas by insurgents. The tactic reinforced participation in the insurgency by shifting the costs of violence onto non-combatants, who are no longer able to avoid the impact of counterinsurgency operations by not participating. Savun and Tirone (2017) further show that states receiving foreign aid focusing on governance and civil society, as opposed to military assistance supporting offensive counterterrorism efforts, experience fewer domestic terrorist attacks.

Focusing specifically on attacks against civilians, Avdan and Uzonyi (2017) show that indiscriminate killings by the government will trigger increases in domestic terrorism, an act of resistance that requires less opportunity than an organized insurgency.



When mass killings are in response to acts of political violence, this helps to fuel a cycle of domestic violence between the government and militant groups. Asal, et. al. (2018) similarly demonstrate that coercive counterinsurgency tactics by the government leads to subsequent increases in terrorism but only from groups of sufficient strength. They argue this outcome stems from the government's use of coercive violence alienating the civilian population that becomes a base of support for a militant group. It also incentivizes groups to engage in particularly brutal acts of terrorist violence to demonstrate their continued capacity to wage war and demonstrate to the government the costs of continuing to fight, especially in targeting civilians supporting the government. In an examination of Provisional IRA bombings from 1970-1998, Gill, Piazza, and Horgan (2016) demonstrate that discriminate counterterrorism operations by the government have no impact on the level of PIRA bombings however indiscriminate counterterrorism actions in which both PIRA members and civilians are killed results in an increase in PIRA bombings. Daxecker (2017) further unpacks this backlash argument connecting terrorism with public perceptions of government oppression that can be used as recruitment tools by terrorist groups or spur retaliatory attacks. She shows that "scarring" torture, in which governments' acts of torture create visible injuries, provoke increases in terrorism whereas "stealth" torture, acts in which no scars remain, does not. These arguments are in line with earlier findings that show statewide human rights violations and repression of civilian populations by the government can increase domestic terrorism (Piazza, 2017; Polo and Gleditsch, 2016; Walsh and Piazza, 2010). The use of indiscriminate violence and mass counterterrorism crackdowns against the population within these areas help

drive recruiting efforts among the affected civilian population for terrorist or insurgent groups due to increased grievances (Bueno de Mesquito, 2005; Findley and Young, 2007; Kocher, et. al., 2011). Terrorist groups can even exploit this expected reaction to oppressive measures by trying to provoke the government to commit indiscriminate violence that will increase the groups' support among a civilian base (Bueno de Mesquita and Dickson, 2007).

Given many of these emerging groups' opposition to U.S.-backed counterterrorism operations and the increase in terrorist activity, these groups and regions soon found themselves in the crosshairs of U.S. counterterrorism policy, seen to be a threat to the U.S. and their security interests. Indeed, many groups encouraged this level of international attention with their bombastic and internationalized rhetoric, a move that Pakistani General Abdullah Dogar who commanded a brigade in Waziristan referred to in a discussion on the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) as "delusions of grandeur."<sup>30</sup> Despite largely focusing on domestic targets, many of these militant groups did attack international targets within their state or region of origin. Though, these attacks were often in response to the behavior of foreign actors within their conflict environment, such as backing the government's military operations or militarily intervening themselves. Attacks against international targets were also a means for groups to demonstrate their own strength and resilience in pursuit of a domestic political agenda (Napps and Enders, 2015; Bapat, 2007; Addison and Murshed, 2005).

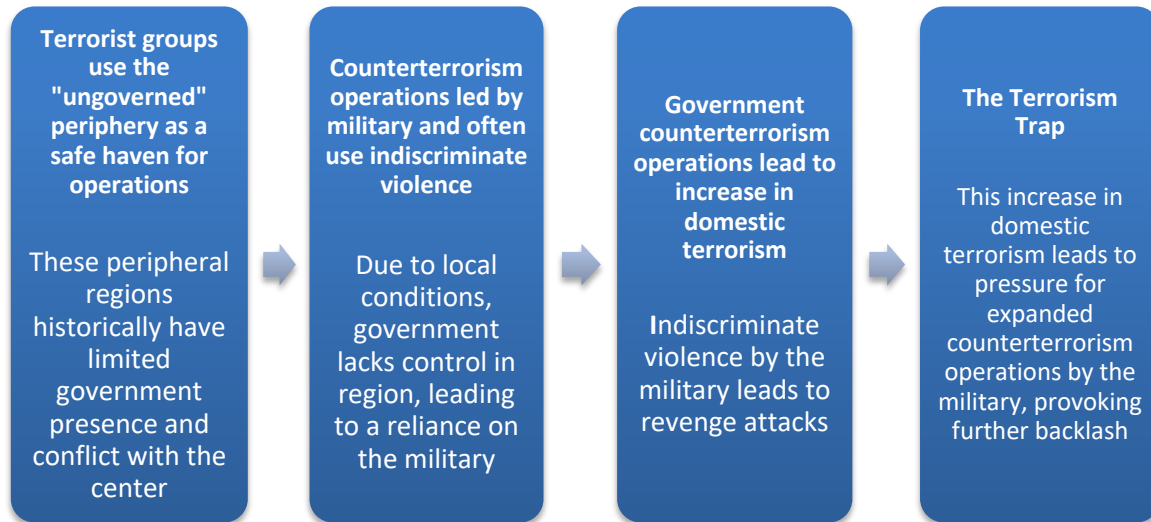
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<sup>30</sup> Interview with General Abdullah Dogar, former brigade commander in Waziristan, Washington, DC, April 23, 2012.

However, these internationally directed attacks, despite mostly occurring within the domestic or regional conflict zone, pushed the U.S. government to see these groups as a threat to the United States and its security interests. These actions increased U.S. pressure on partner states to challenge these groups through strong military means. This served as a further catalyst for acts of domestic terrorism, as groups sought revenge for the on-going military operations and used terrorist attacks as a demonstration of continued strength despite potential losses from the battlefield and diminishing levels of support (Ghatak, 2018; Hultman, 2007; Stanton, 2013). This behavior was at odds with al Qaeda core who pushed for its affiliates to confront the “far enemy” of the United States and other Western nations and avoid conflict with local governments, seeing this as a waste of resources. The resulting increase in terrorist attacks by the targeted groups was, therefore, driven by the changing dynamics of the local conflict environment. This led to a deadly cycle of violence entrapping governments in continuing the very behavior that helped to serve as a catalyst for the increase in domestic terrorism. This is the “terrorism trap” into which governments and societies fell, as governments counterterrorism actions exacerbate the very conditions that help to drive the campaigns of domestic terrorism. This process is seen in Figure 4.2 below.

In the following chapter, I test the below hypotheses connecting partner states’ counterterrorism behavior as part of their cooperation with the War on Terror with the level of domestic terrorism within their borders.

*Hypothesis 7: States that deploy their military for domestic counterterrorism operations, ceteris paribus, will experience higher levels of domestic terrorism.*



**Figure 4.2 The Impact of Domestic Counterterrorism Operations**

*Hypothesis 8:* States during the War on Terror, ceteris paribus, will experience higher levels of domestic terrorism.

*Hypothesis 9:* As states' broad counterterrorism cooperation with the United States increases, ceteris paribus, they will experience higher levels of domestic terrorism.

I test the following hypotheses reflecting internal characteristics of partner states that have the potential to influence the levels of domestic terrorism. I focus on factors scholars have argued have a causal relationship with domestic terrorism, such as minority discrimination, poverty, and regime type:

*Hypothesis 10:* States with excluded minority populations, ceteris paribus, will experience higher levels of domestic terrorism.

*Hypothesis 11:* As states' GDP decreases, ceteris paribus, they will experience higher levels of domestic terrorism.

*Hypothesis 12:* More authoritarian regimes, ceteris paribus, will experience higher levels of domestic terrorism.

U.S. and partner states' counterterrorism efforts focused on the threat of international terrorism from groups like al Qaeda. Therefore, I also test the relationship between U.S.

counterterrorism policy and the levels of international terrorism. This will help to demonstrate the effectiveness of U.S. counterterrorism efforts on its primary goal and whether counterterrorism actions have a different effect on international terrorism than on domestic terrorism.

*Hypothesis 13:* States that deploy their military for domestic counterterrorism operations, ceteris paribus, will experience higher levels of international terrorism.

*Hypothesis 14:* States during the War on Terror, ceteris paribus, will experience higher levels of international terrorism.

*Hypothesis 15:* As states' broad counterterrorism cooperation with the United States increases, ceteris paribus, they will experience higher levels of international terrorism.

### ***Conclusion***

Previous studies of terrorism often have relied on state-level variables that do not account for variation in domestic factors that contribute to the increase in violence, especially variation and changes in local conditions which have been shown to alter the strategy of militant groups and the opportunity or incentive to commit terrorist attacks or pursue other types of political violence (Ahmed, 2013; Ash, 2018; Hansen, Nemeth, and Mauslein, 2018; Koren and Sarbahi, 2018; Marineau, et. al., 2018). As U.S. policy shifted towards targeting terrorist safe havens, they necessarily focused on peripheral regions within weak states whose local conditions and historic relations with the central government provide terrorists the space to operate outside of government—the “ungoverned spaces” of the Muslim world often with a history of conflict and anti-state rebellion. The lack of government control in these areas and in certain cases an active

conflict environment provided al Qaeda an opportunity to use these areas as safe havens to plan operations against the United States and other Western nations, often through establishing links with the local community.

Following 9/11 and U.S. pressure on partner states to target al Qaeda in these areas, the partner states relied on the military in their counterterrorism operations, in part because of the absence and ineffectiveness of regular state institutions such as traditional law enforcement. The very conditions that make these regions susceptible to exploitation by international terrorist groups also make counterterrorism operations extremely difficult to conduct. As a result of this, the deployment of the military by partner states in these peripheral areas helped to serve as a catalyst for the increase in domestic terrorism targeting the state. This also created tensions between the United States and its partner states as U.S. priorities remain fixed on international terrorism, with partner states increasingly shifting their focus to challenging the immediate threat of domestic terrorism. The early military approach in line with U.S. counterterrorism priorities helped to sow the seeds of subsequent non-cooperation with the United States as anti-state violence from domestic militant groups increased, becoming the primary threat to the government rather than the presence of international terrorist groups who focused on Western targets (Tankel, 2018). The following chapter contains statistical analysis testing the above hypothesis before turning to the qualitative case studies.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **OUR MAN IN ISLAMABAD: PAKISTAN AND THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR**

On November 19, 2018, newly elected Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan (2018), in response to disparaging comments recently made by President Donald Trump, tweeted, “No Pakistani was involved in 9/11 but Pak decided to participate in US War on Terror.” Khan was clear about the costs of his country’s cooperation with the United States: “Pakistan suffered 75,000 casualties in this war & over \$123 bn [sic] was lost to economy...Our tribal areas were devastated & millions of ppl [sic] uprooted from their homes. The war drastically impacted lives of ordinary Pakistanis.” Like so many partner states drafted into America’s fight against al Qaeda, the previous two decades have left an indelible impact on Pakistan’s domestic political landscape, particularly given the key strategic role Pakistan played in U.S. counterterrorism efforts.

This chapter presents an in-depth case study of the U.S-Pakistani counterterrorism relationship as an illustrative case study of the theory’s causal mechanism. It demonstrates how U.S. counterterrorism policy shaped Pakistan’s resulting counterterrorism actions after 2001, shifting the government’s attention to the northwestern border region with U.S. officials pressing their Pakistani counterparts to pursue a military approach to the presence of al Qaeda and Taliban groups in the region. In line with the theory presented here, this chapter shows how the use of the military in Pakistan’s northwestern border region, given the prevailing conditions of this periphery, led to a violent backlash in the form of domestic terrorism. As terrorist violence intensified, U.S. officials continued to press Pakistan to “do more,” with the resulting

military operations by the Pakistani army exacerbating the local conditions that contributed to the dramatic rise in domestic terrorism, trapping the country in a deadly cycle of violence.

In order to systematically illustrate the causal process underlying the connection between partner states' use of military force for counterterrorism operations as part of the War on Terror and the rise in domestic terrorism quantitatively tested in the previous chapter, the case study will proceed as follows: First, I provide a general overview of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship prior to the War on Terror, helping to establish how the events on 9/11 helped to change the dynamics of this bilateral relationship. Second, I analyze the historical, political, and social environment of the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA) lying on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region leading up to 2001, the "ungoverned space" which became the focus of U.S. counterterrorism priorities within Pakistan. This "scene setter" is necessary in understanding the prevailing conditions into which the Pakistan military entered for the purposes of counterterrorism and why there was a violent backlash to the use of military force. Next, I examine the early interactions of U.S. and Pakistani officials and how U.S. counterterrorism priorities and U.S.-Pakistani cooperation progressed in the years immediately following the 9/11 attacks and the declaration of the War on Terror. This discussion shows how U.S. counterterrorism policy increasingly shifted to targeting terrorist safe havens in the periphery and the resulting difficulties the Pakistani military faced in operating in the border region. I then analyze how these counterterrorism operations by the military served as a catalyst for a violent backlash against the Pakistani state in escalating tit-for-tat violence between the



military and local tribal groups, culminating in the formation of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan in 2007 and the drastic increase in domestic terrorism. Finally, I show how the Obama administration increased the focus on FATA as part of its Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy. Despite the increase in the use of drone strikes to unilaterally target terrorists within the region, senior U.S. officials in the Obama administration still understood the need to have a military presence on the ground and continued to press for the Pakistani government to increase the use of military force, pushing Pakistan further into a terrorism trap as each military operation was met with a string of revenge attacks by the Pakistani Taliban.

### **The U.S.-Pakistan Relationship Prior to 9/11**

The War on Terror is merely the latest phase of a long and often fitful bilateral relationship between the two countries. The United States' interactions with Pakistan historically have been framed by broad international security paradigms—the Cold War and the War on Terror. The strength of this relationship, along with U.S. military assistance, rose and fell according to the saliency of U.S. interests in South Asia—rising with the implementation of the Cold War policy of containment in the 1950s and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s. As the urgency of these issues faded away, so too did U.S. engagement with Pakistan and the broader South Asian region, often using as an excuse for disengagement the concern that U.S. assistance would be used to bolster Pakistan's land forces for wars with India instead of confronting U.S. security priorities. One Pakistani journalist described U.S.-Pakistan relations as a “transactional,

Airbnb relationship,” with the United States government only interested in engaging with Pakistan when it was strategically advantageous to them.<sup>31</sup> This political reality rankles many Pakistani officials, who often bring up the history of American “treachery” and “betrayal” with American interlocutors.

With the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1988-89 and the fall of the Soviet Union, the former Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott (2004, 2) argued that the South Asian region fell victim to post-Cold War neglect as the U.S. government shifted its focus to former Warsaw Pact nations. In 1990, the U.S. suspended foreign assistance to Pakistan under the Pressler Amendment given the Pakistani government’s continued pursuit of nuclear weapons as a deterrence against India, with nuclear nonproliferation and Kashmir serving as the main points engagement during the 1990s (Milam, 2003; Oakley, 2003; Talbott, 2004). Abida Hussein, the Pakistani Ambassador to the United States at the time, stated that, with the end of the Cold War, the U.S. government “had about as much interest in Pakistan as Pakistan had in the Maldives” (Kux, 2000, 315-316). The May 1998 nuclear test in Pakistan’s Balochistan province resulted in the imposition of even tougher sanctions and was considered a “major sin” among the State Department leadership (Anderson, 2003a, 3; Camp, 2003, 3). These sanctions “cut very deep” into the U.S.-Pakistani relationship and further bred distrust of the Americans within Pakistan (Chamberlin, 2003, 2; Eastham, 2003).

After the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania by al Qaeda, which by then had shifted its base of operations to Afghanistan, the U.S.

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Malik Siraj Akbar, Pakistani journalist, Washington, DC, October 22, 2018.

understood that Pakistan needed to be engaged to have any success against al Qaeda, regardless of the tactics being pursued, given Pakistan's recognition and support of Afghanistan's Taliban government (Anderson, 2003; Armitage, 2004; State Department, 2000). Due to the Pressler amendment sanctions, the United States had little leverage or influence over Islamabad's policies towards Afghanistan or any other regional issue of concern to the United States. The State Department (2000b, 3) recognized that the U.S. government "needs to understand the limits of its own influence in Pakistan and calibrate its policies accordingly." In order to normalize relations with Pakistan, as well as India which was also under sanction due to its 1998 nuclear tests, the Bush administration in its first year had already decided to begin working towards lifting the sanctions.<sup>32</sup> However, Pakistan and the broader South Asian region were simply not a priority for senior leadership within the new administration (Rashid, 2008, 56-57).

The U.S.-Pakistan relationship immediately shifted with the 9/11 attacks, as terrorism and security overshadowed all other concerns. Senior U.S. officials understood immediately the critical role Pakistan would play in supporting the coming military invasion of Afghanistan, particularly given the importance of supply routes crossing Pakistani territory. The sanctions were quickly lifted in order to assist in gaining Pakistani cooperation, drastically accelerating a process that had already begun. The U.S. also pushed Pakistan to become pro-active in counterterrorism efforts within their own borders as al Qaeda and Taliban fighters fled across the international border in the wake of U.S. military operations. Pakistan quickly changed from a pariah state to a "darling" of

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with Christina Rocca, the former Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, Washington, DC, January 16, 2019.

the U.S. government, with President Bush eventually describing his relationship with Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf as “tight” (Ahmed, 2013, 135; Chamberlin, 2003, 5).

“With Pakistan before 9/11”, according to South Asian scholar and former State Department analyst Marvin Weinbaum, “counterterrorism didn’t ring any bells. If we go back before 9/11 and say what has been the change in terms of American domestic demands on Pakistan, well we go from 0 to 10 because there was no real relationship beyond the normal diplomatic ties with Pakistan prior to 9/11. They were off the radar for us...and then we just dump it on them.”<sup>33</sup> The many ups and downs of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship, both before and after 9/11, have been thoroughly documented and analyzed by policymakers, journalists, and scholars of South Asia (Coll, 2004, 2018; Fair and Watson, 2015; Haqqani, 2013; Hathaway, 2017; Hayden, 2016; Henne, 2016; Hilali, 2005; Kux, 2001; Markey, 2013; Rashid, 2008, 2012; Riedel, 2011; Schaffer and Schaffer, 2013; Tankel, 2018). They all share the same sentiment: this is no easy relationship.

### **The Federally Administered Tribal Areas: A Scene Setter**

It is the nature of the current security environment that little known places—whose names evoke images of dusty old books recounting the historical exploits of colonial officers among the tribes of these faraway and forgotten frontiers—have now become the

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Marvin Weinbaum, former analyst for the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research and director for Pakistan Studies at the Middle East Institute; Washington, DC, October 16, 2018.

focus of international politics. Among such regions, the mountainous and inaccessible Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan's northwestern border region with Afghanistan stands at the forefront of U.S. counterterrorism efforts—the “ungoverned space” *par excellence*. Since 9/11, the residents of this isolated region have lived with countless Pakistani Taliban attacks, hundreds of U.S. drone strikes, and on-going Pakistani military operations.

The Tribal Areas' association today with al Qaeda and the Global War on Terror has become engrained in the world's consciousness, with President Bush stating in 2007 that the region was “wilder than the Wild West” (Hunt, 2007) and President Obama (2009b) singling it out in March 2009 as “the most dangerous place in the world.” FATA is known within Pakistan as *Illaq-e-Ghair*, an Urdu phrase meaning “Foreign or Unknown Land” with connotations of backwardness, wildness, and lack of control by the state. To understand how the Tribal Areas became characterized as an “ungoverned space” under the War on Terror, it is vital first to understand the historical and social dynamics of the region beginning with the character of the Pashtun tribes' and their interactions with British colonial authorities. It was these interactions that laid the legal and institutional foundation for how the subsequent Pakistani government continued to interact with and govern the border region. Secondly, understanding this history is necessary for understanding the local backlash and subsequent increase in domestic terrorism that resulted from the deployment of the Pakistani military into the Tribal Areas.

### *A History of Rebellion: British Colonialism and the Northwest Frontier*

During the days of the Great Game, a chess match between Britain and the expansionist Russian Empire over position and influence among the mountains and steppe of Central Asia, British frontier policy was focused on keeping the region's tribes on side. The arch-Russophobe Lord Curzon, installed as the Viceroy of British India in 1899, was in particular concerned with the increasing rebelliousness of the Pashtun tribes of the northwestern frontier. Ever fearful of St. Petersburg's machinations, he was fearful that any unrest on the frontier could be exploited by the Russians to sow further political discord within India. He stated in a 1904 speech at Guildhall, London that with:

a land frontier 5700 miles in length, people by hundreds of different tribes...a single outbreak at a single point may set entire sections of that frontier ablaze. Then, beyond it...are the muffled figure of great European powers, advancing nearer and nearer, and sometimes finding in these conditions temptations to action that is not in strict accordance with the interests which we are bound to defend (Curzon, 1906, 37).

The Pashtun tribes ensconced in the towering and inhospitable peaks of the Hindu Kush mountains had long lived outside of the political control of the great South Asian empires and lived according to their own tribal traditions. Society was structured around the genealogical charter, with tribes (*qabail*) and clans (*khel*) defined by eponymous ancestors shaping the interactions and interests of local communities.<sup>34</sup> As a means of regulating behavior outside of state institutions, the people lived according to the Pashtun code of honor, *Pashtunwali* (the way of the Pashtun), with its demands for *badal*

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<sup>34</sup> The use of the terms "tribe" and "clan" is not without controversy, evoking as it does the orientalism and racism of colonial-era scholarship with its implications of savagery and backwardness. Understanding this background, I use the term merely to reference the organizing principle of Pashtun society which FATA inhabitants and other "tribal" populations of Pakistan themselves use.

(revenge) and *melmastia* (hospitality). Whenever an individual conducts a criminal act or transgresses against another's honor, he does so knowing the compulsion for the victim or the victim's clan to take revenge against the aggressor or the aggressor's clan, providing incentives to keep behavior in check often through intervention by tribal elders and negotiation in the *jirga* (council of elders). A British frontier report observed at the outset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, "It is well known that amongst the Pathans the avenger of blood is not only privileged but bound to slay any relative of the man who has committed the deed for which vengeance is sought. But Waziri [a Pashtun tribe] grey beards of ancient times ruled otherwise, with them actual murderer must be the only victim" (Government of India, 1901, 22).

Despite the ideals of the code in maintaining law and order, the region was plagued by a history of long-standing blood feuds between rival clans. Often times, local violence could spill into the adjacent settled areas, especially as the tribes conducted raids into neighboring communities as demonstrations of honor, to resist outside influence, or simply as a means of procuring meager resources from rivals (Ahmed, 2013; Howell, 1979; Tripodi, 2011). At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Winston Churchill (1901, 4), the future British Prime minister, was dispatched to the northwest frontier as a young journalist, where he spent six weeks with the Malakand Field Force as an observer. He observed of the region's tribes in one of his dispatches, "Tribe wars with tribe. The people of one valley fight with those of the next. To the quarrels of communities are added the combats of individuals. Khan assails khan, each supported by his retainers. Every tribesman has a blood feud with his neighbor. Every man's hand is against the

other, and all against the stranger.” A Pashtun army officer imparted to me the following proverb with a hearty laugh—“You cannot take a Pashtun by force to Heaven but you can take him willingly to hell.”<sup>35</sup>

The tribes fiercely protected their independence from external influence or intervention, masterfully dominating their terrain against any outside encroachment. Countless attempts throughout history showed the futility of direct military intervention as a means of pacifying the region—the Mughal Emperor Akbar the Great saw his armies destroyed, with 8,000 lives lost, in 1586 to the Yusufzai of the Peshawar Valley; Akbar’s grandson Aurangzeb dispatched an army to subdue the Afridi who controlled the Khyber Pass, a failed operation that cost the lives of 10,000 soldiers with a further 20,000 captured; and Britain’s own failed invasion to capture Afghanistan in which the Pashtun tribes of the kingdom’s eastern border killed the entire column of the Grand Army of the Indus, counting 18,000 individuals, during their hasty retreat from Kabul; save for one man, Dr. William Brydon, who staggered half-dead into the British fort at Jalalabad and famously announced, when asked where the rest of the army was, “I am the army.” Following this defeat, the British army marched 14,000 men onto Kabul, a force known as the Army of Retribution and laid waste to the city, burning large sections of it and committing untold violence against innocent villages and civilians along their march and within Kabul itself. After this, the British army exited Afghanistan, unable to hold it against continued resistance from the local tribes. A string of subsequent military failures over the next five decades and the great anger engendered among the Afghans by

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with Dr. Shahid Ahmed Afridi, former Pakistani army officer and counterinsurgency expert, Islamabad, Pakistan, December 17, 2018.



continued British military interventions punctuated the bloody lessons learned by the ignominious retreat of Grand Army of the Indus (Dalrymple, 2013; Hopkirk, 1990).

Within British India's Tribal Areas abutting Afghanistan, Lord Curzon was aware of the futility of military force that had been the cornerstone of the colonial government's frontier policy when he took up the position of Viceroy. Even before his arrival in the late 1890s, there was a growing recognition within the Foreign Department in Calcutta that the use of the military was contributing to unrest on the Frontier, as local tribesmen saw the British army as a provocation and met it with violent resistance, such as during the 1897 Frontier Revolt (Government of India, 1895, 1900). In recognition of this fact, the British colonial government issued new orders in 1898 to minimize the negative impact of the military's presence in the region: "No new responsibility should be undertaken on the frontier which was not rendered obligatory by actual strategical requirements; that unnecessary interference with the tribes should be avoided; and that concentration of the troops should be effected" (Government of India, 1906, 9).

Lord Curzon's government soon moved to replace the British army in the Tribal Areas "in favour of a policy of employing the tribes themselves as far as possible to protect our military interests" (Government of India, 1900, 17). In 1901, the British introduced a new administrative framework for the Tribal Areas—the 1901 Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR)—which superseded earlier, less comprehensive laws. Lord Curzon wrote that the new policy was intended to "promote a spirit of local harmony and co-operation by the enlistment, in the service of the British Government, but in the defence of their own country, of the wild but not intractable inhabitants of these regions"

(Ibid., 25). In April 1902, Lord Curzon (1906, 422) addressed a *darbar* (tribal court) of over 3,000 tribal leaders in Peshawar, the capital of the newly created North-West Frontier Province, to introduce the new British frontier policy:

Now the great desire of the trans-border tribesman is, I take it, to maintain his religion and his independence. The British Government have not the smallest desire to interfere with either...The policy of the Government of India towards the trans-border men is very simple, and it is this. We have no wish to seize your territory or interfere with your independence. If you go on worrying and raiding and attacking, there comes a time when we say, This thing must be put an end to: and if the tribes will not help us do it, then we must do it ourselves. The matter is thus almost entirely in your own hands. You are the keepers of your own house. We are ready enough to leave you in possession. But if you art out from behind the shelter of your door to harass and pillage and slay, then you must not be surprised if we return quickly and batter the door in.

Under the FCR, the British government would recognize the political authority of the tribal elders, known as *maliks*, and provide them “tribal allowances for keeping open the roads and passes, such as the Khyber and Kohat Passes and the Chitral Road, for the maintenance of peace and tranquility, and for the punishment of crime” (Ibid., 423).

Under the FCR, the recognized maliks exercised uncontested authority through unelected jirgas, basing their decisions on Pashtunwali, *riwaj* (tribal custom), and *Sharia*. In making their decisions, the maliks “are responsible to no one except to their own consciences and to the officer who receives their verdict” (Frontier Regulations Enquiry Committee, 1931, 24-25). This expedited judicial decisions but denied individuals living under the FCR’s jurisdiction the right of appeal, *wakeel* (lawyer), and *daleel* (argument)—the right to appeal a conviction, the right to legal representation, and the right to present evidence to argue one’s case. The FCR also contained a collective responsibility clause, permitting government authorities to punish a culprit’s entire

village, clan, or tribe for the actions of an individual. The government was legally allowed to seize property or displace whole villages at its own discretion and without compensation, warning, or explanation, as well as arresting and imprisoning people without charge. Under the shadow of Russian machinations, the sole purpose of the FCR, in the eyes of the British administrators, was to maintain law and order in this historically tumultuous region, without concern for the rights of local residents.

The local representative of government authority was the Political Agent (PA), a position originally established with the creation of the tribal agencies in the late 1890s along the newly demarcated Durand Line (the international border between Afghanistan and British India) as a means of introducing some semblance of political control. Under the FCR, the PA held almost limitless legal authority within his tribal agency and was responsible for granting and revoking the status of malik. The PA often was called *Badshah* (king) by the tribes under his charge because of the extent of his formal authority. However, the exercise of the PA's authority faced many practical limitations given the conditions of the frontier and autonomy enjoyed by the tribes. It was famously said that within the Tribal Areas British authority only extended to 100 yards on either side of the main road, beyond which lay the land of *riwaj*.

Therefore, the PA was forced to work with and through tribal structures, with the PA's authority based on his reputation among the tribes and his ability to negotiate. In pursuit of wanted criminals or militants within his Agency, the PA would apply pressure to the maliks of the area to hand over the wanted men. The maliks used their own standing within the tribe, lengthy negotiations, and appeals to honor to convince men to

turn themselves in but at times resorted to force with *lashkars*, tribal militias under the command of maliks. Lashkars are temporarily raised from among the men of a tribe to complete a specific task, such as challenging militants within the agency, and then disbanded. The maliks also were able to use local levies known as khassadari, a kind of tribal police force, whom the maliks selected for service and paid an allowance received from the government for participation. The khassadars' effectiveness as a police force was questionable as their selection was often based on patronage rather than merit or suitability for service, with certain posts even becoming hereditary without any concern for age or ability. PAs recognized that these local forces' interests as tribesmen often conflicted with the interests of the government, and they could be wary of acting decisively, especially if it led to the deaths of fellow Pashtun fearing the resulting blood feud (Leeson, 2003; Woodruff, 1954). The PA also possessed the legal authority to use force against rebellious tribesmen, though acts of violence against state interests were often a kind of petition for expressing dissatisfaction with policies or actions of the administration. Instead of using outside military force, the PA often relied on the Frontier Corps, a paramilitary force under his command recruited from among the local population. While the government reserved the right to deploy regular military forces if it felt circumstances dictated it, which did occur, British officials hesitated to do so, preferring to rely on these local forces.

Lord Curzon hoped the creation of a tribal militia system to back the authority of the PA and the maliks would promote the legitimacy of the administration and diminish the need for outside intervention, a policy supported by local political officers operating

on the frontier who understood the problems with outside military force (Government of India, 1906). The new militia system would rely on “as far as possible, the inhabitants of the locality in their own defense, and at the same time to establish a lien upon their loyalty by enrolling them in varying systems of organization as a tribal force” (Government of India, 1906b, 10-11). A 1923 General Staff note further stressed the importance of using irregular militias and avoiding the use of regular military force if possible:

Irregulars are...under the political authorities and as such their action is quite distinct from military action. This undoubtedly is understood by the tribesmen who accept, with comparative equanimity, action by Scouts or other political bodies which they would oppose more strenuously if attempted by an equal number of regulars...This reserve power, unnecessarily used or unnecessarily displayed, acts as an irritant...The regulars are merely [militias'] support whose assistance is called for when necessary...Regular troops cannot prevent the irregular and outlying forces being attacked; but they can, and should, be able to prevent them being overwhelmed (Government of India, 1924, 3-4).

In the following year, the Army Department recognized that military deployments were viewed by the local population as “a fresh invasion of tribal territory, and, as such, will tend to consolidate the tribes in opposition against us” (Government of India, 1924, 5).

Any use of force, even by the Frontier Corps, however, was an admission by the PA of his lack of political acumen and inability to negotiate effectively with the tribes. This could harm his reputation and create future security challenges as the political administration appeared to be ineffective, with the PA offering only hollow threats and promises and inviting others to oppose the local administration (Ahmed, 2004). If the military or even local paramilitary forces acted against the tribes, according to a former Pakistani Political Agent who consistently pushed back against the use of force during his

postings in FATA, “I’ve failed,” and the introduction of the army introduces “an unstable element into the political arena of the Agency,” which can cause further problems.<sup>36</sup> The threat of force often was more effective than its actual use given the potential for backlash from the tribes. The Mehsud tribe of South Waziristan Agency have a proverb stating, “The Political Agent should brandish his sword but not use it” (Afridi, 1980, 49).

***“Our Muslim Brethren”: The Tribal Areas in Pakistan***

Following Partition in 1947 and the creation of the state of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Pakistan’s founding father known as *Quaid-e-Azam* (the Great Leader), reversed the British policy of “forward defense” and withdrew the military garrisons from the border region as a needless provocation. Meeting with a grand jirga from the Tribal Areas in Peshawar in 1948, Jinnah (1948, 93) told them:

Keeping in view your loyalty, help, assurances and declarations we ordered, as you know, the withdrawal of troops from Waziristan as a concrete and definite gesture on our part—that we treat you with absolute confidence and trust you as our Muslim brethren...Pakistan has no desire to unduly interfere with your internal freedom.

He continued, “You expressed your desire that the benefit, such as your allowances and khassadari [militia stipend], that you have had in the past are receiving, should continue. Neither my government nor I have any desire to modify the existing arrangement except in consultation with you so long as you remain loyal and faithful to Pakistan” (Ibid., 94). The government maintained the administrative status quo that prevailed under the FCR, including the position of the PA, and organized the Tribal Areas as Pakistan’s Federally

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with Akbar Ahmed, the Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies, American University, Washington, DC, December 7, 2018.

Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). By the 1970s, FATA constituted seven tribal agencies: Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, North Waziristan, and South Waziristan.

In particular, the Pakistani government was wary of upsetting the precarious political balance within the Tribal Areas given the difficult relationship with Afghanistan. Its western neighbor challenged Pakistani membership to the United Nations and declared the Durand Line invalid, laying claim to the Pashtun-populated Tribal Areas and North-West Frontier Province. There were concerns that Afghanistan would use the post-Partition instability to sow discord in the region and lay the seeds for a united “Pashtunistan” (Bezhan, 2014). Like the British colonial government before it, the newly founded Pakistan government was concerned to maintain law and order in the region and used the FCR as a vehicle to suppress lawlessness, especially in counterterrorism operations after 9/11.

The structure of the FCR, however, kept FATA in an enforced stagnation and outside of the broader political and economic developments of the country, resulting in chronic underdevelopment. By 1998, for example, the literacy rate for men in FATA was 17.42% and for women only 3.00% (Akins, 2018b). The FCR also denied FATA residents basic constitutional rights with universal suffrage only extended to FATA in 1996, though political parties were banned from campaigning in the region until the 2013 general election. Prior to this, the only FATA residents allowed to vote were the government recognized maliks. Since the law’s inception, local voices have criticized it as “a retrograde measure” and “most unjust regulation” (*The Tribune*, 1917, 1921, 1922).

Contemporary civil and human rights organizations in Pakistan similarly critiqued the law for the negative impact it has had on FATA society, with the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (2005) calling it “a bad law nobody can defend.” The FCR continued to govern FATA until May 2018 when, in the wake of local protests, Pakistan’s parliament passed the FATA Interim Governance Regulation. This law replaced the FCR and is intended to serve as an interim step toward fully integrating FATA into the neighboring Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province (Firdous, 2018; *Pakistan Today*, 2018).<sup>37</sup>

### ***Rise of the Kashar: Contesting Political Authority in FATA***

The institutionalization of the maliks’ position under the FCR sharpened social inequalities and engendered intra-tribal conflict within this self-consciously egalitarian society. While elders’ status in Pashtun society was traditionally based upon the genealogical charter, their actual authority and influence within the tribe stemmed from personal qualities and characteristics, such as possessing honor, hospitality, generosity, bravery in battle, neutrality and fairness in decision-making, and the perception of working towards the good of the community and tribe (Ahmed, 1980).

With the FCR, on the other hand, the authority of the maliks was connected to state power and state interests, often being chosen not for their personal characteristics but their loyalty to the government. The Frontier Regulations Enquiry Committee (1931, 26) observed in the early 1930s that the jirga “does not derive its weight from any

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<sup>37</sup> The North-West Frontier Province was re-named the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province in 2010.



inherent importance possessed by the individuals composing it, but from the fact that they derive an authority from the administrative head of the district.” The maliks quickly faced opposition from the disenfranchised *kashar* (youth), consisting of a tribe’s youth, the poor, and junior or powerless lineages. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the *kashar* consistently challenged the political status quo of the FCR’s administrative structure which denied them a wide range of political and civil rights and economic opportunities. Soon after the FCR’s implementation, British political officers in Waziristan stated that the selection of maliks and distribution of allowances created “soreness” among the “men of no importance [who] were left out” (Government of India, 1906b, 7). Members of the *kashar*, in particular, accused the appointed maliks of incompetence and corruption who acted in their own self-interests rather than the interests of their community. One British colonial officer observed, “One of the chief reasons for the unpopularity of the Frontier Crimes Regulation is that unsuitable persons are made members of the jirga” (Ibid., 28). Field reports by British colonial officers continued to observe militant behavior by “younger tribesmen” targeting the maliks (Government of India, 1930, 1932). The *kashar*’s opposition to the FCR’s maliki system and calls for its abolishment continued following Pakistani independence as the new government maintained the status quo of the administrative structure from British colonial rule, limiting development and opportunity within the region (Akins, 2018b).

The maliks also faced strong opposition from religious leaders known as *mullahs* who jockeyed for their own power and influence within their areas. Emerging from the *kashar* class, *mullahs* were impoverished and disadvantaged by the administration of the

FCR. They had no position within the jirga and were financially dependent on the maliks to preside over local mosques and madrassas. To bolster their own standing and influence, they relied on charisma and Islamic rhetoric, framed through hostility to the government, in order to circumvent traditional tribal structures and attract followers, appeals which often quickly translated into acts of violence (Government of India, 1916). The mullahs often accused the maliks of being “government toadies” who “sold out” their tribe and religion in accepting their maliki allowance (Ahmed, 2004, 60). In 1977, for example, the PA in South Waziristan Agency warned of attempts by Mullah Noor Muhammad in Wana to undermine the maliks’ authority: “His first target was the institution of Maliki. He started condemning the Maliks openly and at times when he abused them on the pulpit. The idea was to weaken the institutional arrangements so that he could bulldoze his way by shattering all the norms and forms of administration” (Ibid., 59). Mullahs, using the language of *jihad*, often found themselves at the head of major rebellions against authorities, most famously by Mullah Powindah in the early 1900s and the Faqir of Ipi during the 1930s and 1940s. Maliks often pressed the government to allow them to handle the mullahs with their own tribal forces in order to avoid the deployment of military forces which would only serve as a further provocation for the mullah’s followers (Tripodi, 2011b).

Beginning with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, mullahs became ascendant in tribal politics. The Pakistani government under General Mohammed Zia-ul-Haq, a devoted follower of the Deobandi group Jamaat-e-Islami, supported a call to *jihad* among the Pashtun tribes to bolster the fight against the atheist Soviets. In particular,

Pakistan's ISI, working with the CIA, relied on and expanded FATA's madrassa network, using the *taliban* (students) drawn from the kashar as a recruiting ground for fighters in the Pashtun-dominated *mujahedeen*. Pakistani and American intelligence agencies provided the mullahs and their supporting forces with training, funding, and weapons. They now had the money and the guns to challenge and usurp the authority of the maliks. Despite traditional elders continuing to view the kashar with contempt, a Pashtun brigadier stated, "They were rather ridiculed, poor, insulted and humiliated. Now they are the power-brokers... The jihad against the Soviet Union changed everything. Suddenly these boys were given weapons and empowered" (Schofield, 2011, 70). Following the Soviet withdrawal, the Pakistani-backed Taliban, the successor to the mujahedeen, continued to rely upon these networks for recruiting fighters during the Afghan Civil War in the 1990s. This maintained the links between the Taliban government who took power in 1996 and the FATA tribes in spite of objections by the now weakened maliks (State Department, 2005). These links, however, were encouraged by the Pakistani government as it was seeking to promote strategic depth in Afghanistan against India (Rashid, 2000).

Despite the tensions that existed between different segments of FATA society and the political turmoil at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the neglect of the region from outside forces helped to maintain a steady rhythm of life. A Pakistani general later observed that, besides routine matters of law and order, "Up to 2001 FATA was very peaceful" (Schofield, 2011, 136). Though a forgotten remnant of the Afghan mujahedeen throughout the 1990s in the minds of many Western officials, the 9/11 attacks would

quickly bring the world's attention once again to the mountainous border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

### **Our Man in Islamabad: Pakistan and the Global War on Terror**

With the attacks on 9/11, Pakistan's strategic importance once again loomed large as the United States prepared to invade Afghanistan. The immediate mission of U.S. officials in the Bush administration, therefore, was to gain without delay the full cooperation of the Pakistani government in the War on Terror. The White House understood the path toward this cooperation lay with Pakistan's president General Pervez Musharraf, the Army Chief of Staff who had taken power in a 1999 military coup against the civilian government of Nawaz Sharif with the backing of the military command structure. U.S. diplomats in Islamabad recognized that, with Musharraf, "someone was finally in charge in Islamabad" and that Musharraf would be a "better manager" following the seemingly ineffective Nawaz Sharif (Eastham, 2003, 12; Sison, 2003, 2). Understanding Musharraf's and his supporting generals' tight control over the government, U.S. officials pushed for total cooperation in the War on Terror without conditions, with the early meetings and messages between U.S. and Pakistani officials setting both the tone and the priorities for U.S. counterterrorism efforts within Pakistan.

On September 12<sup>th</sup>, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, a physically imposing former military man known for his direct and expletive-laden speech, met with the Director General of Pakistan's ISI General Mahmud Ahmed at the State Department, as the General just happened to be in Washington, DC at the time for a long-scheduled

meeting with CIA director George Tenet. He told the ISI chief that the U.S. strongly suspected Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda, operating out of Afghanistan, were responsible for the 9/11 attacks, and he would soon be providing a list of demands from the U.S. government to be shared with Musharraf. Armitage stressed, “in no uncertain terms,” that the place he came to on September 10<sup>th</sup> no longer existed. As a result of the 9/11 attacks, Armitage stated, “this is an entirely different city, an entirely different country” and “you have to get on board. We will be coming at you to get cooperation.”<sup>38</sup> Armitage added, without diplomatic nuance, “Pakistan faces a stark choice; either it is with us or it is not; this was a black-and-white choice, with no grey” (State Department, 2001i, 4).

When the ISI director began to waver on Pakistan’s future commitment, Armitage stopped the meeting and pulled him into a smaller room adjacent to the Deputy Secretary’s large conference room for a private, one-on-one chat. Armitage pulled out his *Sitara-e-Pakistan* (The Star of Pakistan), one of the highest civilian honors the Pakistani government awards to individuals for service to Pakistan. Armitage had received it for his efforts on the ground in Pakistan during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in supporting the mujahedeen. He held up his award and flatly told General Ahmed, “Do you see this? No American will ever accept this again if we don’t get full cooperation. I’m going to give you a list of items and this is not a pick one. This is not a menu. You have to do all of these.”<sup>39</sup>

The following day, the newly appointed U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, Wendy Chamberlin, had a 40-minute meeting with President Musharraf following the

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Richard Armitage, former Deputy Secretary of State, Arlington, VA, November 27, 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

presentation of her credentials. In the meeting, Ambassador Chamberlin bluntly stated, according to a State Department cable, “the September 11 attacks had changed the fundamentals of debate. There was no inclination in Washington to engage in dialog with the Taliban...There was only one response to the terrible events: preventing the terrorists responsible from ever repeating such actions again. We were fairly sure as to who was guilty: UBL and his al Qaida network of terrorists” (State Department, 2001c, 1, 4). She firmly added that “America’s allies and friends were behind us...Clearly there was an operational need to go after the terrorists who launched these heinous attacks,” adding that the “United States was appreciative of Musharraf’s public statements” (Ibid., 2).

Despite complaining about America’s past “betrayals” of Pakistan, Musharraf already was anticipating the coming U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and its potential impact on re-shaping the political order in South Asia. Fearful of the Indian government manipulating the developing situation to its favor, especially in regard to Kashmir, he saw the need to cooperate with the U.S. government in order to manage the situation to Pakistan’s advantage, cooperation which would have the added advantage of re-starting the flow of U.S. dollars into Pakistan’s struggling economy. In a September 12<sup>th</sup> meeting with Pakistani military leadership and a few civilian advisers, according to the former Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar who attended the meeting, “We agreed that we would unequivocally accept all U.S. demands, but then later we would express our private reservations to the U.S. and we would not necessarily agree with all the details” (Rashid, 2008, 28). Musharraf assured the Ambassador Chamberlin, “I am with you and not against you” (Coll, 2018, 53). In a later telephone conversation with President Bush

during the planning for the Afghan invasion, Musharraf assured the U.S. president, “The stakes are high. We are with you” (Bush, 2010, 188).

On the same day as Chamberlin’s meeting with Musharraf, Armitage again met with General Ahmed and reiterated “the need for extraordinary action in this perilous time and the importance of Pakistan’s stepping up to U.S. requests in the fight against terrorism...underscoring the importance of Pakistan’s joining as full partner in this process” (State Department, 2001d, 2). To this end, he handed General Ahmed a nonpaper to be shared with Musharraf outlining seven action points drafted by Armitage and Secretary of State Colin Powell which the U.S. government expected of Pakistan. Concerned with costly delays from sending these demands through standard bureaucratic channels, Armitage and Powell drafted the points themselves without consulting anyone else in the administration. They had both served in combat and had long-standing relationships within the Pakistani government. They therefore “knew what we felt was right.”<sup>40</sup> These points included:

- Stop al Qaida operatives at your border, intercept arms shipments through Pakistan and end all logistical support for Bin Ladin;
- Provide the U.S. with blanket overflight and landing rights to conduct all necessary military and intelligence operations;
- Provide as needed territorial access to U.S. and allied military intelligence, and other personnel to conduct all necessary operations against the perpetrators of terrorism or those that harbor them, including use of Pakistan’s naval ports, airbases and strategic locations on borders;
- Provide the U.S. immediately with intelligence...;
- Continue to publicly condemn the terrorist acts of September 11 and any other terrorist acts against the U.S. or its friends and allies;
- Cut off all shipments of fuel to the Taliban and any other items and recruits, including volunteers en route to Afghanistan, that can be used in a military offensive capacity or to abet the terrorist threat;

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

- Should the evidence strongly implicate Usama Bin-Ladin and the al Qaida network in Afghanistan and the Taliban continue to harbor him and this network, Pakistan will break diplomatic relations with the Taliban government, end support for the Taliban and assist US in the aforementioned ways to destroy Usama Bin-Ladin and his al Qaida network” (State Department, 2001d, 3-4).

Armitage told General Ahmed that “the noose was tightening around Bin Ladin’s and al Qaida’s neck...this involves not only Afghanistan, but would encompass terrorist groups elsewhere” (Ibid., 4). Following this meeting and to further cement the importance of Pakistan in the War on Terror, Secretary Powell called Musharraf in Islamabad. In the six-minute phone call, according to a State Department memorandum, he “stressed terrorist attacks had to be dealt with directly by going after the organization responsible” (State Department, 2001h, 2). He added, “As one general to another, we need someone on our flank fighting with us. And speaking candidly, the American people would not understand if Pakistan was not in this fight with the U.S.” (Ibid.).

In a 90-minute meeting on September 14<sup>th</sup> with Ambassador Chamberlin and the embassy’s political counselor in the colonial-era Army House in Rawalpindi, Musharraf accepted all seven points “without conditions” (State Department, 2001e, 1). He also made “key personnel changes among senior military officers to firm up support for the War on Terror” (State Department, 2001j, 1). Musharraf, however, stressed that the U.S. should not alienate the people of Afghanistan and argued that the U.S. should implement an economic recovery plan after any military operations. He stated, “You are there to kill terrorists, not make enemies,” and added, with Pakistan’s political interests in mind, “Islamabad wants a friendly government in Kabul” (Ibid., 3). In subsequent interactions with Ambassador Chamberlin, Musharraf stressed that he would not allow Pakistani



troops to be deployed in Afghanistan to “fight fellow Muslims” or permit India to use Pakistani airspace should they join America’s invasion of Afghanistan (Chamberlin, 2003, 4).

Musharraf made a televised speech on September 19<sup>th</sup> in which he announced Pakistan’s intended cooperation with the United States in the War on Terror and their invasion of Afghanistan. In turn, officials in the highest levels of the U.S. government publicly embraced their man in Islamabad. During a February 13, 2002 press conference at the White House, President Bush (2002c, 220, 224) announced, “President Musharraf is a leader with great courage and vision, and his nation is a key partner in the global coalition against terror...I am proud to call him my friend.” Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz further stated at the 2003 Munich Security Conference that there was no leader that had “taken greater risks in the struggle against terrorism” or had “more at stake in the fight” than Musharraf (Department of State, 2003b, 7). Richard Armitage (2006), who served as the point person for relations with Pakistan in the early years of the War on Terror, said in a 2006 television interview, “I have been from the beginning a big fan of President Musharraf, notwithstanding the extralegal way in which he assumed power. I think he’s genuine in trying to improve the lives of the people of Pakistan. I’ve noted in the past under democratic governments and under martial law the people of Pakistan have been royally and liberally screwed. Regarding President Musharraf, there’s never been a taint of corruption to him.” There were also lingering fears among senior U.S. officials of the ensuing chaos and dangers of Musharraf’s fall from power within a nuclear-armed country, underlining the need to support his position (Bush, 2010; Defense

Intelligence Agency, 2003b; National Intelligence Council, 2003). In a November 2001 memorandum from Secretary of State Colin Powell to President Bush in preparation for his upcoming meeting with President Musharraf at the UN, Powell (2001, 1) wrote, “President Musharraf’s decision to fully cooperate with the United States in the wake of September 11, at considerable political risk, abruptly turned our stalled relationship around...Musharraf has abandoned the Taliban, frozen terrorist assets...These moves open up bold new possibilities in our relationship.”

For the Pakistanis, much of what they were asked to do initially by U.S. officials was limited to allowing equipment, trucks, and other logistical support for the NATO mission in Afghanistan to pass through Pakistani territory. Pakistan was the only realistic supply route for operations in Afghanistan, a fact known by the U.S. government since it began providing supplies to the mujahedeen forces in the 1980s (Department of State, 1988, 4). For this cooperation, the Pakistani government was paid generously by the United States at very little cost to itself. There were however bureaucratic delays in releasing payments to Pakistan for supporting the U.S. mission in Afghanistan. Rumsfeld (2001g, 1) sent a note to his senior staff within the Pentagon in December 2001, “I am at my wit’s end on why we don’t pay Pakistan. I want an answer on this by COB today. We simply must get this done. Please, one of you addresses, please let’s solve this. This is inexcusable.” Within a week, through pressure from Pentagon leadership, Congress passed legislation permitting direct Defense Department payments to Pakistan for support of Operation Enduring Freedom (Rumsfeld, 2001h). The U.S. government also canceled large amounts of the Pakistani debt, such as in August 2002 cancelling 91.4658% of the

principal of official development assistance which Pakistan owed to the U.S. government (Department of Agriculture, 2002).

In late 2001 and early 2002, Musharraf began to move against extremist groups within its border, such as announcing on television on January 12, 2002 that the Pakistani government was banning the Kashmiri groups Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad for having affiliations with al Qaeda. In a November 2001 meeting with Ambassador Chamberlin, he also promised that Pakistani officials would turn over any Arabs arrested at the border for “joint interrogation” by U.S. and Pakistani forces (State Department, 2001). A January 13, 2002 DIA background paper noted the Pakistanis had pursued a “crack down” and the “banning” of key militant groups with suspected links to al Qaeda, leading to high level arrests (Defense Intelligence Agency, 2002, 1). By 2003, the White House was reporting in its *Progress Report on the Global War on Terrorism* (2003, 3) that “Pakistan has taken into custody more than 500 extremists, including al-Qaida and Taliban members. These include senior al-Qaida operational leader Khalid Shaykh Muhammad, September 11 conspirator Ramzi bin al Shibh, and USS Cole plotter Khallad Ba’Attash.” It was later reported that a number of individuals arrested as part of this crackdown were quietly released (State Department, 2003f).

In December 2003, Vice Admiral L.E. Jacoby (2003, 1-2), the DIA director, began to question Musharraf’s “resolve” in attacking extremism in Pakistan, recognizing that he “probably fears that jihadis will turn on his government; they are angered at his support for the United States and have attempted to kill him several times...Under pressure, he is prone to sacrifice long-term objectives for short-term advantage.” Jacoby

also reported that Musharraf's crackdown "is aimed at domestic violence (Sunni-Shia) in Pakistan" (Ibid., 1). He pressed that Pakistan should increase its efforts at stemming international terrorist groups: "Pakistan must sustain and broaden its crackdown on extremist groups... These groups pose the greatest threat of sparking conflict and directly threaten US forces in Afghanistan. Musharraf will be cognizant of the threat they pose to his government and his life" (Ibid., 2). In October 2003, Brigadier General Doug Stone (2003, 8), then the U.S. Defense Representative in Pakistan, stated in his interview with the 9/11 Commission staff that within Pakistan, "Al-Qaida and other extremists are a cancer metastasizing all over this country. By not addressing this, we are effectively spray-gunning them into new areas. They are breeding faster than we can take them down." The 9/11 Commission's staff commented in the Memorandum for the Record of General Stone's (Ibid., 9) interview, "While the emperor is fiddling, al-Qaida is growing stronger in Pakistan." In the long run, the U.S. intelligence community remained optimistic, with a DIA report stating, "removing highly-visible leaders, prohibiting widespread public fundraising, and restricting the flow of new recruits will eventually reap large dividends." Even with both high-level and mass arrests conducted by Musharraf's government, in addition to announced madrassa reforms, there was a concern, however, that these efforts "will have no short-term impact on terrorist threats faced by US interests in Pakistan" (Defense Intelligence Agency, 2002b, 1).

The early counterterrorism successes and arrests of key al Qaeda figures by the Pakistani government, moreover, were all focused in the settled regions of the country. As the Taliban launched an organized insurgency against NATO forces in 2003, there

was a growing awareness among senior U.S. officials that FATA was being used as a safe haven for both al Qaeda and Taliban fighters to re-group outside of government control or reach from U.S. military forces, with the region remaining essentially untouched by Musharraf's early crackdowns on terrorists. Marvin Weinbaum observed: "Initially after 2001, we didn't realize or take seriously enough that the Taliban would have time to re-group and that they had not been dismantled as an organization or that they could now recruit new people."<sup>41</sup>

The ultimate message that would be delivered by U.S. officials to the Pakistani government concerning FATA was to "get control." Richard Armitage stated, "I can remember a conversation with Musharraf about stopping the border. He responded it's not possible. He said there are thousands of years that people have been moving back and forth. He wasn't wrong."<sup>42</sup> The U.S. government even provided \$24 million for the construction of roads in the region to "provide critical access to security forces" with any economic benefits for the region secondary to these security concerns (State Department, 2001f). The Americans also understood the importance of relying on Pakistan to deal with this region. Richard Armitage (2006) explained the impracticality of U.S. military incursions into FATA, in sync with the Pakistani impulse to use their own force:

You've been to the tribal areas. You know what that would have done to us? We'd have gotten bogged down in there just as the Pakistani army is bogged down in there. We felt that was their business. We were introducing or putting our nose under the tent of a rather volatile population...Pakistan has a somewhat better understanding of the tribal areas. And to the extent no strangers are welcome, they're marginally better than a U.S. stranger would be in the tribal areas, particularly one who's tramping about with weapons. This is a historically

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Marvin Weinbaum, former analyst for the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research and director of Pakistan Studies at the Middle East Institute; Washington, DC, October 16, 2018.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

volatile area, and I think we'd have been in real trouble if we had gone in large numbers in those areas.

In meetings with U.S. officials, however, Musharraf would often gloss over the issue of FATA and move onto the next subject, concerned that military efforts in FATA had a low probability of success and the inevitably difficult operations would divert Pakistan's limited resources from its primary threat from India. Former CIA director General Michael Hayden (2016, 205-206) recalled that "the Pakistanis always made it clear that if bin Laden or Zawahiri were ever located, for example, the potential blowback might prohibit a Pakistani response." While there was a "hope" the Pakistanis would send their military into FATA and "more or less clean up," Richard Armitage stated, "I don't think any of us expected 100% cooperation from the Pakistanis... We would, by cajoling, threatening, pointing out certain anomalies, sometimes get them to move on things... but you had to have real follow through if you made a threat, and this was a problem."<sup>43</sup> Brigadier General Stone (2003, 8) stated, "The army is the least corrupt, most honorable institution in Pakistan. They can help us but we have to exert maximum pressure on Musharraf to get him to give the order."

### ***Stirring a Hornet's Nest: The Pakistani Military Enters the Scene***

With the advent of the War on Terror and the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, FATA rose to the forefront of U.S. security concerns as al Qaeda and Taliban fighters fled across the Durand Line. The U.S. government was receiving a "steady stream of reporting" from its consulate in Peshawar that the border area was ripe with "jihadists" and "troublemakers."

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

However, officials in the administration were often unclear about “who came from Afghanistan and who were homegrown Pakistani.”<sup>44</sup> There were also varying accounts of the number of Arabs, Uzbeks, Chechens, and other non-Pashtun fighters within FATA, ranging from a few hundred to almost two thousand. Not willing to take any chances, the CIA began to monitor cell phones of any suspected foreign fighters taking shelter within Pakistan. What was at first a list of twelve numbers eventually grew to over a thousand, with the ISI chief of station in Peshawar Brigadier Asad Munir stating the “list grew like crazy” (Mazetti, 2013, 39). CIA officers were pressuring Pakistani officials to turn over foreign fighters and working with the ISI and other local authorities to arrest men they considered to be working with al Qaeda. Given the conditions within FATA, the ability for Pakistani authorities to apprehend fighters taking shelter among the region’s tribes was limited.

Muhammad Amir Rana, a member of the steering committee for Pakistan’s National Counterterrorism Authority, explained to me that before the War on Terror Pakistan primarily relied on policing and traditional law enforcement for counterterrorism as the threat emerged from sectarian groups within urban areas. He argued that “the police was quite effective in dealing [with] this threat.” However, after 2001, counterterrorism increasingly shifted to a military approach as the military “took the lead.”<sup>45</sup> On one hand, the use of the military to target foreign fighters in FATA was seen to be necessary as a result of the limitations of government rule in the region and pro-

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Muhammad Amir Rana, member of the steering committee for Pakistan’s National Counterterrorism Authority and president of the Pak Institute for Peace Studies, Islamabad, Pakistan, December 13, 2018.

Taliban sentiment among the local tribesmen, given the hospitality extended to the Taliban and other militants from Afghanistan under *Pashtunwali* and the financial benefits of hosting foreign fighters.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, Rana also observed that in relying on the military for counterterrorism efforts, “U.S. perception is quite narrow, very strict” and, as a result of U.S. pressure, Pakistan “didn’t have this luxury of time” to rely on traditional mechanisms through the maliki system and entered FATA “in full force” as “the U.S. was dependent on the Pakistan military.”

The Pakistani government used the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and the potential for U.S. military incursions into FATA as an opportunity to deploy its regular military forces into the region for the first time since a brief deployment in 1961. In May 1961, after Afghan troops disguised as civilians entered Bajaur Agency to support the Nawab of Dir, the government dispatched the First Punjab Regiment. However, the troops were quickly withdrawn after the tribesmen in Bajaur “violently objected to the presence of the regular Pakistan army” (Dupree, 2002, 540). In 2002, General Kayani stated to local Pashtun tribes, “You have a choice. Either we guard our borders and check foreign fighters or you accept the risk of a spillover from Afghanistan” (Schofield, 2011, 134). Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, the former Pakistani Foreign Secretary and Pakistani Ambassador to the U.S., recognized, “Pakistan has been right from the beginning jealously guarding its sovereignty. We were sensitive on that. So, we have never allowed foreign troops on our soil.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Imtiaz Gul, a Pakistani journalist, Islamabad, Pakistan, December 18, 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, the former Pakistani Foreign Secretary and Pakistani Ambassador to the United States, Islamabad, Pakistan, December 18, 2018.



As early as the September 15, 2001 meeting with Ambassador Chamberlin, Musharraf understood that relying solely on the ill-equipped Frontier Corps and other local militias controlled by the weakened maliks to seal the international border would be “insufficient for such an operation” (Coll, 2018, 55). It also was thought to be problematic that the Frontier Corps was comprised of Pashtun tribesmen who might be unwilling to act strongly against the Taliban out of fear of revenge killings or questionable sympathies due to tribal connections. U.S. troops deployed near the Pakistani border said they witnessed Frontier Corps soldiers allowing groups of Taliban fighters to cross the border without interference. General David Barno, the coalition commander in Afghanistan from 2003-2005 stated flippantly in an interview with journalist Steve Coll that “these guys are probably cousins” (Coll, 2018, 199). However, others in the U.S. government, such as Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan from 2003-2005, saw the presence of the Taliban in FATA as evidence of Musharraf’s and the ISI’s duplicity towards the Americans and sought to increase pressure on the Pakistani government to challenge the presence of the Taliban in FATA. Musharraf flatly denied these accusations (Coll, 2018, 203). Barno also pushed against this idea of complicity and stated that the Pakistanis “basically tolerated the Taliban in the tribal areas” given their “ability to control these areas was negligible” (Coll, 2018, 199).

The unreliability of FATA’s militia system and its inability to act quickly and effectively stressed the point for U.S. and Pakistani officials that there was a need to deploy regular Pakistani army units to FATA for counterterrorism operations in order “to

just squash them [the militants],” according to one Pakistani army officer (Smith, 2018, 71). The first small-scale military operation, Operation Kazha Punga, was a June 25, 2002 raid on a South Waziristan village suspected of housing around 30 al Qaeda fighters. The CIA passed the intelligence onto the Pakistani Army who quickly dispatched a company of troops to attack the compound, an operational failure resulting in two officers and ten soldiers killed.

At this time, a senior Pakistani official told Ambassador Richard Haass, the State Department’s policy coordinator for Afghanistan, that the army in its early operations “showed no reservations, taken risks and ignored the sensitivities of the local people.” This had “alienated our own people” making operating in FATA difficult given that the army required the cooperation of the local tribes (State Department, 2002c, 3). Wary of committing Pakistani troops to difficult counterterrorism operations in the region, the senior official reiterated that Pakistan had no specific information about an al Qaeda presence in FATA and the real issue was the on-going conflict between the maliks and mullahs, who he described as “al Qaeda sympathizers” but unable to shelter foreign fighters for more than a day or two. Haass, on the contrary, pressed that the “U.S. believed that al Qaeda and Taliban had been pushed out of Afghanistan and al Qaeda’s core was in Pakistan today...Al Qaeda had reconstituted and posed a threat as large as it had been on September 10. The al Qaeda presence in Pakistan was the single largest concentration anywhere” (Ibid., 3-6).

Despite hesitation on the Pakistan side, the next operation took place the following year, in June 2003, after the CIA suspected that al Qaeda fighters were

gathering at a camp in Mohmand Agency. General Ali Jan Orakzai, who commanded the Army deployments into Mohmand, relied on his own Pashtun tribal lineage to bolster the legitimacy and authority of this decision. As the Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid (2008, 277) observed, however, “A tribesman from FATA who boasted of his inside knowledge of the tribal mind, in fact Orakzai appeared totally insensitive to tribal needs.” A Pashtun officer who served under the General later remarked, “General Orakzai never lived in the Orakzai Agency. His relations live in Hangu [a settled district]. He is not a tribal *malik* or anything. He has no place in the local hierarchy” (Schofield, 2011, 142).

The movement of regular army units, instead of the local Frontier Corps, into Mohmand Agency antagonized the local population and immediately led to clashes with the tribes. General Hamid Khan, then the Inspector General of the Frontier Corps, recalled that as soon as General Orakzai joined his forces on the frontline, tribesmen opened fire on him from higher positions, forcing him to evacuate after 40 tense minutes. Khan had initially opposed the presence of the regular Army. He feared it would provoke a violent response from local tribes and pushed to have responsibility for clearing the Tribal Areas left to his paramilitary forces composed of local Pashtuns (Schofield, 2011, 143). He later stated, “You have to know when to send a tough signal. It is important to be firm, but you must not get into a cycle of violence. If you belittle the local people, or are too oppressive, antagonism towards the Army will grow” (Ibid., 170). By September 2003, 25,000 Pakistani troops were stationed in FATA. The following month, the XI Corps of the Pakistani army, backed by the Frontier Corps, launched Operation Angoor Adda against a suspected al Qaeda hideout in South Waziristan, based on intelligence

from the CIA operating from across the border. Despite nominally targeting al Qaeda, the army ended up targeting local tribes, provoking a tribal backlash. The XI Corps Commander, Lieutenant General Safdar Hussain, even declared, “We are going to sort out the Ahmadzai Wazirs” (Khan, 2012).

By early 2004, Musharraf was ready to drastically expand the Pakistani military’s presence in FATA for counterterrorism purposes, launching a series of operations in the region. In December 2003, he had survived two assassination attempts which the government had pinpointed as originating in South Waziristan (Rashid, 2008, 230-231). It was thought that bombings were committed by Taliban supporters in response to Ayman al-Zawahiri’s 2003 fatwa ordering Musharraf’s killing for cooperating with the United States. Following the assassination attempts, the CIA station chief in Islamabad, Rich Blee, repeatedly told Musharraf and others in the government, “You have to kill them or they’re going to kill us” (Coll, 2018, 209). Musharraf’s readiness was paired with the CIA’s early 2004 discovery of an al Qaeda operative’s notebook in Iraq from which they determined that al Qaeda was operating safe havens in South Waziristan. The U.S. offered increased military assistance, including helicopters necessary for troop movements, in order to support Pakistani operations into FATA. In March 2004, the U.S. government even granted Pakistan the status of “major non-NATO ally,” allowing Pakistan to purchase advanced U.S. military technology and strengthening the strategic and military relationship between the two countries.

The government initially had attempted to allow the maliks and traditional tribal structures to catch foreign fighters within FATA. However, the government quickly

decided it needed to rely on direction action by the Pakistani military given the slow response of the weakened maliks in turning over suspects (State Department, 2004). However, Waris Khan Afridi, a malik from Khyber Agency and former legislator, noted that despite pressure from the Pakistani government, “Tribal *lashkars* cannot be effective, because tribals are threatened with dire consequence if they take any action” (Tohid and Baldauf, 2004). Previous military operations in Waziristan also drew the ire of local maliks who said that further operations would be tantamount to a declaration of war on the Pashtun tribes. An Ahmadzai Wazir elder stated, “We were stabbed in the back. We were promised dialogue and development funds, but all the time plans for military operations against our tribes were well under way” (Gul, 2009, 24). There was a sense of “betrayal” by the local tribes who extended hospitality to many of the foreign fighters in the 1980s and 1990s at the behest of Pakistani government officials. As Pakistani journalist Imtiaz Gul found in speaking with locals in South Waziristan in the wake of these operations, the foreigners were initially considered “Muslim brothers and mujahedeen,” but, after 9/11, they were abruptly labeled “terrorists.” Gul continued, “The same state that had put them on track to tag them along for jihad against the Russians and had been telling them you have to take care of them, now had turned against them. So they could not internally reconcile that.”<sup>48</sup>

In January 2004, after receiving intelligence reports of around 200 Uzbek fighters at Shin Warsak near Wana, the Pakistan Special Services Group (SSG) mounted a raid on a compound in the area. After attacking the compound, the troops took around 30 people

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Imtiaz Gul, a Pakistani journalist, Islamabad, Pakistan, December 18, 2018.

into custody and found no Uzbeks present, blaming an intelligence failure. That evening the Wana Garrison was attacked in retribution, killing eight soldiers. A lieutenant general stated of the raid, “We made a mess of the whole thing. Our source was flawed and none of the troops acquitted themselves particularly well, including the SSG. Then our people made the attack on Wana even worse than it was. The Pakistan Army was trigger-happy. They opened up out of fright. But good trigger control is the sign of a professional army” (Schofield, 2011, 151). Following the deployment of military forces, Richard Armitage stated, “Our reaction was one largely of satisfaction that they were finally getting off their ass...but we didn’t realize they were going to get their ass kicked so badly.”<sup>49</sup>

Fighting intensified in March 2004 in the Wana area as the Pakistan army launched Operation Kalosha, supported by helicopter gunships and artillery. Musharraf went on television and mentioned a “high-value target,” alluding to al Qaeda’s number two al-Zawahiri as the target of the operation (Ahmed, 2013, 70). After facing stiff resistance, the army switched to indiscriminate bombing of villages and tribal compounds within the region, resulting in high civilian casualties (Abbas, 2014, 106). 130 people were killed, including 46 Pakistani troops. Pakistani soldiers also bulldozed to the ground the homes of Wazirs suspected of providing shelter to “foreign terrorists,” legally permissible under the FCR’s collective responsibility clause. According to Colonel David Smith (2018, 76), the former U.S. Army Attaché in Islamabad and senior director for Pakistan in the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, the military operations were “designed to punish the tribal groups decidedly hostile to the Pakistani state.”

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Richard Armitage, former Deputy Secretary of State, Arlington, VA, November 27, 2018.

However, there were no high value Taliban or al Qaeda leaders killed or captured as a result of the operation. In fact, by 2004, all of the key al Qaeda operatives captured by the Pakistani government were apprehended in Pakistan's major cities, such as Karachi, Peshawar, Quetta, Faisalabad, and Rawalpindi but not from the military operations in FATA (Bergen, 2011, 253).

In the midst of the operations in Waziristan, the clerics of Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) in Islamabad, which had close ties with FATA society through its attached madrassas, sent messages pushing the local tribesmen to fight against the Pakistani army as an invading force and even called for denying Islamic burial to Pakistani troops killed in the fighting (Mazzetti, 2013, 106). Lal Masjid imam Mohammed Abdul Aziz issued a statement, "Those killed in the battle against Pakistani forces are martyrs" (Hussain, 2010, 113). Umm Hasaan, the wife of Abdul Aziz, stated, "During the approximately 60 years that the country has existed, the tribal people have never been disloyal towards the Pakistani government." She argued that the Pakistani army's invasion of Waziristan provoked the local tribes. "They handed the mujahedeen over with bags on their heads to the unbelievers [kuffar], though their fighting had only been confined to Afghanistan. So what do they, then, expect in turn?" (Sheikh, 2016, 89). With local ire stirred by the Pakistan army operations, domestic terrorism increased as individuals joined local groups whose attacks were directed against the Pakistani government and Pakistani targets, as opposed to a transnational organization such as al Qaeda who concentrated its efforts toward the United States.

The limited success of the Pakistani military is in part derived from the many challenges of operating in FATA that negatively impacted its effectiveness in counterterrorism operations, similar problems faced by the British colonial army before them. As an intervening force in the region, the Army was disconnected from the administrative structure in FATA and was not answerable to the political administration under the PA, as was the Frontier Corps. This further weakened the maliki system and the standing of the PA, cutting off “the only vehicle for a dialogue with the tribes” (Rashid, 2008, 275). A former PA stated, “The political agent has been replaced by the army. Captains, majors, and colonels are dealing directly with the tribes, who don’t know the ABCs of the tribal area. They don’t know how to deal with them, with the result that it is a mess” (Naseemullah, 2014, 191). Pakistani analyst Shuja Nawaz (2009, 25) further noted, “The military raids have weakened the already eroded power of the tribal elders who, locked in negotiations with the political administration, saw these raids as a betrayal and a violation of the traditions and lost whatever influence they still had on the tribes.” This was especially problematic in relation to local tribes seeking redress or mediation for military actions through traditional political avenues. This often forced local tribesmen to revert to acts of violence or sabotage to express discontentment with military actions, a traditional method of lodging complaints against the government.

Exacerbating this divide between the military and local tribesmen, the Punjabi-dominated military was viewed as outsiders to the region. Many Punjabi soldiers didn’t know the local language and customs and were unfamiliar with the cultural landscape of FATA, with their deployment seen as an unwelcome invasion. There is a Pashto saying:



“Intruders are always unwelcome.” For many of the Pashtun of the mountainous border region, this sentiment extended to not just non-Pakistanis but non-Pashtuns as well, particularly Punjabis. A Punjabi major stationed in FATA stated, “You know, we Punjabis are the foreigners here on the frontier. Al Qa’ida has been here 25 years, their leaders have married into the tribes, they have children and businesses here, they’ve become part of local society. It’s almost impossible for outsiders, including the Pakistan army, to tell the terrorists apart from anybody else in the tribal areas, except by accident” (Kilcullen, 2009, 34). Local Pashtun would place blame on the “Punjabi” General Safdar Hussain, the commanding general of counterterrorism operations in the region, for stirring up militancy in the region (Abbas, 2014, 111). Even ethnic Pashtun officers from the settled areas of NWFP were viewed with suspicion by local Pashtun tribes in FATA and were similarly unfamiliar with the region’s cultural landscape. One Pakistani senior army officer remarked that they were essentially fighting an invisible enemy among the local population—“We never know where the next bullet is coming from” (Hussain, 2010, 77). A former Pakistani army officer involved in counterinsurgency operations in the border region told me, “It is difficult to identify friend or foe” as they possess the “same language, same dress.”<sup>50</sup> A further problem was the difficulty of operating in the terrain. A former brigade commander in Waziristan said that the terrain is so difficult that “you couldn’t see a man five meters away.”<sup>51</sup> The Pakistan Army was primarily designed for land warfare against the Indian military in the broad and flat plains of the Punjab and

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Dr. Shahid Ahmed Afridi, former Pakistani army officer and counterinsurgency expert, Islamabad, Pakistan, December 17, 2018.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with General Abdullah Dogar, former brigade commander in Waziristan, Washington, DC, April 23, 2012.

was ill-trained and unprepared for intense counterinsurgency operations in the mountainous terrain and harsh climate of FATA.

The combination of these factors led the military to rely heavily upon indiscriminate air power and artillery during military operations, often leading to collateral damage and high numbers civilian casualties. Pakistani scholar Hassan Abbas (2014, 120) likened the indiscriminate retaliatory actions of Pakistan's military to "shooting in the dark." A common attitude among Pakistani army officers was to treat civilian casualties from military operations as an unavoidable and inevitable part of its efforts to target the militants and simply "God's will" (Smith, 2018. 79). As journalist Steve Coll (2018, 209) also summed up from his interview with President Musharraf, "The campaign's tactics reflected Musharraf's neocolonial attitude toward Waziristan's Pashtuns: The only way to get their attention, he told the Americans repeatedly, was to hit the tribes ruthlessly." Under the consistent pressure and high expectations from senior U.S. officials, Pakistani officials also felt they didn't have the luxury of time to rely upon more traditional methods within the area that would help them avoid civilian casualties. The "hurried and forceful policy led to a lot of resentment," according to a former senior ISI official, with indiscriminate attacks by the military against villages and tribal compounds stoking the anger of local tribes.<sup>52</sup> The "scorched-earth" tactics of the military were a continuous point of resentment among local communities. A tribal malik in Waziristan, Behram Khan, warned, "The more you bomb, the stronger will become the sentiments against the Army. It is difficult for tribesmen to throw guests out of their

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<sup>52</sup> Interview with former senior ISI official, Islamabad, Pakistan, December 2018.

homes...Our culture does not allow us, and we are taunted for generations if we violate our customs” (Tohid and Baldauf, 2004).

A peace deal was brokered on April 24, 2004, in a ceremony between General Safdar Hussein and the local Taliban leader Nek Muhammad Wazir of the Ahmadzai Wazir. The Shakai Agreement allowed Pashtun militants to remain in FATA without government interference if they turned in their weapons and renounced terrorism. The government also promised to pay reparations to local communities affected by the fighting. The peace deal was signed in a madrassa, rather than a public forum, with Wazir’s men offering AK-47s to the Pakistani army, a traditional sign of surrender. Hussein, in turn, bestowed garlands around Wazir’s neck. The two men, in a sign of reconciliation, then hugged. The agreement was made directly with Wazir and his forces rather than negotiating through local maliks, further weakening their status and giving mullah-led militant groups greater perceived power within the tribal areas. When General Abdullah Dogar arrived as brigade commander in South Waziristan, the mullah remained “supreme,” with the PA “rendered ineffective” and maliks “driven underground.”<sup>53</sup>

The militants under Nek Muhammad Wazir saw them bringing the Pakistan army to its knees. From the perspective of the militants, the army came to Wazir’s territory to negotiate the agreement, a traditional sign of surrender in the tribal context. Wazir stated, “I did not go to them; they came to my place. That should make it clear who surrendered to whom” (Khattak, 2004). A fundamental problem with this agreement and subsequent peace deals as a strategy of the Pakistani government as that they were signed from a

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with General Abdullah Dogar, former brigade commander in Waziristan, Washington, DC, April 23, 2013.

“position of weakness,” without “a lot of public support” and lacked enforcement mechanisms.<sup>54</sup> Asad Munir, the former ISI station chief in Peshawar, also saw the peace deals as giving the Taliban an opportunity to re-group and spread into settled areas outside of FATA. He stated, “If [Pakistani troops] had just carried through with the operation in 2004, both in South and North Waziristan, the Taliban would not have spread. With every peace deal, they gained strength and controlled more areas, and people started to take them as the rulers because the state was not interfering” (Mazzetti, 2013, 107-108). The military, however, never exited FATA, remaining a presence among the tribes though largely within fortified barracks. While not directly challenging local militants and conducting few patrols, the military’s presence was enough to anger the local population.

The peace deal quickly fell apart, particularly with the government forcing over 6,000 merchant shops to close in order to leverage economic pressure on “uncooperative” tribesmen and with reports of a “massive mobilization” of troops in the area (Kronstadt and Vaughn, 2005, 23). Then, in June 2004, Pakistan suspended the peace agreement and launched air operations against three militant compounds in South Waziristan followed by a sweep operation involving over 20,000 troops. Musharraf was aware of the impending backlash to these operations from the local tribes and the potential for violence to spread to other areas. He stated in an interview, “But it can have a fallout—these people have contacts elsewhere in the country and they can retaliate in the rest of the country in the form of bomb blasts, attacks on important persons and installations—

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with Marvin Weinbaum, former analyst for the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research and director for Pakistan Studies at the Middle East Institute; Washington, DC, October 16, 2018.

and so we have to guard against that” (*Dawn*, 2004). In 2004, there were altogether 35 military operations resulting in over 250 deaths and 600 individuals captured without any high-value targets among them but with reports that air strikes resulted in large numbers of civilian casualties (*Ibid.*). A spokesman for the Pakistan Army, Major General Shaukat Sultan, announced the military operations in South Waziristan provoked a series of bombings and other terrorist attacks in Karachi and other parts of the country, including a suicide bomber killing an intelligence officer in Kohat, an attack on a high level Pakistani army commander’s motorcade, and a suicide bombing attempting to kill the Prime Minister-designate (Congressional Research Service, 2004; *Reuters*, 2004).

Despite the early failures of the Pakistan army and stiff local resistance to its deployment, senior U.S. officials would continue to communicate the need for a strong military approach to target al Qaeda and Taliban forces and control the periphery. While U.S. officials expressed their appreciativeness of the Pakistani government in putting troops into the field “at great cost to their military,” there were no high-level meetings between U.S. and Pakistani officials at this time without the “encouragement to do more in the Tribal Areas.”<sup>55</sup> In early 2005, senior officials within the White House were concerned to keep pressure on Musharraf and the Pakistani government to continue military operations in FATA, scheduling a series of phone calls between the two heads of state to hammer home the point (Mazzetti, 2008, 2013, 171). Pakistan’s military efforts against al Qaeda in FATA between 2004 and 2006, as senior U.S. officials later came to believe, were also partly for show with operations being conducted in anticipation of U.S.

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<sup>55</sup> Interview with Christina Rocca, former Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, Washington, DC, January 16, 2018.

delegation visits in order to “pre-empt the conversation” and demonstrate cooperation.<sup>56</sup> U.S. military leadership in Afghanistan, likewise, was concerned that Pakistan was not doing enough to control the Tribal Areas across the Durand Line, blaming Pakistan’s lack of complete commitment for increased attacks against U.S. and NATO forces. The Bush administration was wary of applying too much pressure given Musharraf’s delicate political position. Yet, during a March 2005 visit to Islamabad, President Bush directly pressured Musharraf to do more against terrorism in addition to encouraging him to accelerate Pakistan’s transition towards democracy (Coll, 2018, 222-223).

In 2005 and 2006, the fighting increasingly shifted into North Waziristan, with the army targeting camps believed to be used by foreign fighters, as well as limited operations in Bajaur and Khyber Agencies. In March 2006, the Pakistani army launched Operation Saidgai to target training camps outside of Miranshah in North Waziristan from which it was feared foreign fighters, including “Arabs and Chechens,” were operating. Within the operation, the army destroyed the Darul Uloom Fareed Gulshan-e-Ilm madrassa led by Maulvi Abdul Khaliq, thought to be a “key Al Qaida facilitator” (State Department, 2006). Abdul Khaliq and Maulana Saqiq Noor ordered immediate retaliatory attacks against the military and its camps, leading to a week of revenge attacks within the area.

Following the operations at the outset of 2006, the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad observed in a cable, “In the Embassy’s judgment, the Pakistan Military’s strikes on March 1-2 stirred up a hornet’s nest that the military was underprepared for” (State

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

Department, 2006l). U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Ryan Crocker told David Kilcullen, who was then dispatched by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to assess the counterterrorism situation in Pakistan and find ways to support Pakistani military operations, “Dave, I’m sitting on a powder keg here, and you’re lighting matches” (Coll, 2018, 221). Despite this warning from the Embassy, U.S. officials back in Washington continued to push for offensive action, providing increased military capabilities such as approving the sale of F-16s in June 2006. The government’s reasoning behind the sale was their use in counterterrorism operations: “Given its geo-strategic location and partnership in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), Pakistan is a vital ally of the United States...This proposed sale will contribute to the foreign policy and national security of the United States by helping an ally meet its legitimate defense requirements. The aircraft also will be used for close air support in ongoing operations contributing to the GWOT” (Defense Cooperation Agency, 2006). The Pakistani government assured a visiting Congressional delegation that the F-16s were being used in South Waziristan Agency “for counterterrorism purposes in the frontier regions not as part of a conventional deterrent” (State Department, 2008g, 2008h).

In May 2006, Henry Crumpton, the State Department’s Counterterrorism Coordinator, met with Pakistan’s Director of Military Operations Brigadier Nasser Janjua, along with Pakistan’s National Security Advisor and Foreign Secretary at the time. Brigadier Janjua explained to Crumpton the challenges facing military operations in FATA given “the deep tribal loyalties and traditions” of the region. He continued by stating “the mere presence of 80,000 Pakistani troops on tribal lands is considered an

affront to tribal sovereignty. This prolonged military presence, along with collateral civilian casualties in search-and-destroy operations, are being exploited by al Qaida and Taliban forces.” He also expressed concern that despite Pakistan’s “serious commitment to dislodge Islamic militants from the FATA...this commitment was not recognized by civilian [U.S. government] officials” (State Department, 2006i). A State Department cable later that month reported that a redline among the tribal leadership is a “bigger PAK army footprint in FATA” and that there is a “tribal demand for pullout of troops” (State Department, 2006j).

By this point, Musharraf and the Pakistani military leadership were communicating to U.S. officials their hesitance to continue the use of regular military forces to assault the Taliban within FATA, due to the violent backlash it was provoking within FATA.<sup>57</sup> Lieutenant General Tariq Waseem Ghazi stated to senior Pentagon leadership, “Shock and awe is fine for you if you fly in from the U.S. or Canada. Shock and awe is no good for us when we have to live with the tribal areas as part and parcel of Pakistan” (Coll, 2018, 286). Musharraf and his generals hoped to be able to increasingly rely upon the Frontier Corps and tribal allies within FATA through re-establishing the authority of the maliks, harkening back to the traditional British colonial strategy of indirect rule (State Department, 2005, 2006k). In September 2006, following another peace agreement signed between the Taliban and Pakistan army in North Waziristan, a grand jirga of tribal elders from Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, North Waziristan, and South Waziristan agencies met in Peshawar and pushed for the government to

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Ambassador Richard Boucher, the former Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, Washington, DC, February 25, 2019.



withdraw the entirety of its security forces in FATA, then numbering around 80,000, and replace it with a local force raised from the Pashtun tribes themselves, in line with the administrative structure of the FCR. The elders argued that the security situation in FATA worsened as a result of the “unnecessary military operations” against foreigners. The jirga stated, “In our customs and traditions, we can die but never even think of handing over our guests to their enemy. Tribal people fought against their own security forces for almost three years in North Waziristan Agency but did not compromise on their traditions” (*The News*, 2006).

General Ali Jan Orakzai, now governor of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), championed the appeasement of militant groups in FATA as the only means of containing the violence from spilling over into settled areas. Orakzai argued to Musharraf that once peace was established and tribal autonomy was restored, he could win the tribe’s long-term loyalty to the Pakistani state through providing jobs and other government services severely lacking in FATA. The government’s plan was based on the understanding of the ineffectiveness of the military approach urged by U.S. government officials. This was based on the traditional approach to the tribal areas practiced by the British Indian and Pakistani governments over the past century, essentially bribing the tribes for their loyalty. There is a famous adage of British authorities, one heavily steeped in crude, colonial-era stereotypes, that sums up the proper approach to governing the northwest provinces of India: “Rule the Punjabis, intimidate the Sindhis, buy the Pashtun, and honor the Baluch.”

Shortly after the September 2006 peace deal in North Waziristan, Musharraf visited Washington, DC. At a private dinner at the White House, President Bush told the Pakistani president, “We got real concerns about this, whether it’s going to work.” Musharraf responded, “I want to try it. If it doesn’t work, I’m prepared to end it” (Bergen, 2011, 260). Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who was also at the dinner, heavily criticized the peace deal, saying the Pakistanis had cut a deal “with the terrorists,” not tribal leaders (Coll, 2018, 231). In an October 13, 2006 message to the national security advisor Stephen Hadley, Rumsfeld (2006b, 1) wrote, “I think someone needs to talk to Musharraf—either the President, Abizaid, or I should tell him the deal made in north Waziristan isn’t working and is not likely to work. The level of activity has gone up, not down.” There were reports that cross border attacks against NATO forces in Afghanistan had rose by 300% since the implementation of the peace deal (Mazzetti, 2008). Frances Townsend, a counterterrorism advisor in the White House, stated of these peace deals, “I think that over time we were getting diddled. It took us a while before we figured that out. By the second one, I had had it. Obviously I didn’t win that debate inside the administration, but after what I saw about the first peace agreement, I had no patience for the second one. Complete waste of time” (Bergen, 2011, 260).

By the following year, the White House increasingly was connecting events in FATA with the theater of operations in Afghanistan and concerned that Pakistan was allowing al Qaeda and the Taliban time to re-group under the guise of the recent peace agreement and publicly stating that “more aggressive steps need to be taken” in FATA (Bohan, 2007). In fall 2006, the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, Ronald Neumann had

transmitted to Washington his assessment and recommendations for on-going U.S. operations, stating, “We are not winning in Afghanistan; although we are far from losing. We still can win” (State Department, 2006m, 1). He continued,

In short, a revitalized enemy with its leadership secure in Pakistan mounted a major counter-attack before our work in governance, building the [Afghan National Army], standing-up a real police force, and economic development had adequately taken hold...Intelligence suggests that the Taliban’s Pakistan-based leadership continues to believe it can prevail. Our vital national security interests dictate that we prove them wrong (Ibid., 4-5).

As part of his recommendations for “important big things we need to do now”, he included, “Make sure we see real progress in Pakistan to stop the Taliban and take out Taliban leadership” (Ibid., 2). Despite the ever-present U.S. perception that Pakistan needed to “do more,” General Ehsan ul Haq, Pakistan’s Chief of Defence Staff, pushed back against this view in 2007, stating “Tribal areas are 1/20<sup>th</sup> of the size of Pakistan but we have 85,000 Pakistani troops deployed in the tribal areas. It is double the troop deployment in Afghanistan” (Gunaratna and Nielsen, 2008, 800-801).

In March 2007, Vice President Dick Cheney and Deputy Director of the CIA Stephen Kappes visited Islamabad in order to apply further pressure on the Pakistani government to increase its efforts in combating terrorist groups in FATA (Mazzetti, 2008). Cheney’s trip was bolstered by visits from Defense Secretary Robert Gates and several U.S. military commanders bearing the same message (Rashid, 2008, 384). With the U.S. government’s focus on bolstering partner states’ capabilities to target safe havens, the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad also patched together a plan to increase U.S. assistance for addressing the problems emanating from FATA and meant to “permanently render F.A.T.A. inhospitable to terrorists and extremists” (Coll, 2018, 284). The public

condemnation of Pakistan's conduct led Musharraf to abandon the truce and re-launch counterterrorism offensives. In a September 2007 meeting in Islamabad, Pakistani Interior Minister Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao stressed to Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte that on-going Pakistani military operations had been successful in marginalizing al Qaeda, with over 100,000 troops now stationed within FATA. Much of the on-going terrorism, he also noted, was domestic in nature and conducted by "small independent groups with their own leaders," with violence "starting to spread into the settled districts of the Northwest Frontier Province" (State Department, 2007b).

### ***Pakistan and Domestic Terrorism: The Emergence of the TTP***

As the War on Terror progressed, Pakistan continued its reliance on the military to target terrorist groups within the northwestern periphery under demands and pressure from U.S. officials pushing American interests within Pakistan. In line with the expectations of the terrorism trap theory, the military activity in the periphery led to escalating levels of domestic terrorism with the attacks largely focused on the Pakistani military and other symbols of the Pakistani government spearheading operations in the periphery. The various Taliban groups emerging from FATA's tribal landscape possessed clear motivations that connect the increase in domestic terrorist attacks with the conduct of the Pakistan army in relying on indiscriminate violence resulting in civilian casualties within the targeted communities, especially with the formation of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan in 2007.

Within Pakistan's northwestern periphery, there has not been a single and unified Taliban movement but a disparate grouping of varying aligned and opposed groups. These groups include the Ansar al-Aser led by Adnan Rasheed; the Ansarul Mujahideen under Mufti Shafique; and the Muqami Tehrik Taliban led by Hafiz Gul Bahadur in North Waziristan and Bahawal Khan in South Waziristan. Other groups include the Amr Bil Maruf Wa Nahi Anil Munkar, Lashkar Islam, Tehrik Taliban Islami Pakistan, Ittehad Mujahideen Khurasan, and Ansar ul Islam. These groups predominately emerged at the tribal level, with the leadership of the Afghan Taliban, the Quetta Shura, not involved in the formation or operations of the Taliban groups in Pakistan's border region (Schricker, 2017; Sheikh, 2016). A report by the Danish Institute for International Studies observed, "The various militant factions in North and South Waziristan are also divided along the lines of tribal identities, and there exist deep tribal cleavages and local difference over how to relate to foreign fighters. Nearly every tribe has its own Taliban faction operating (relatively) independent of the other; militants of one tribe do not generally operate in the territory of another tribe, and even to cross another tribe's territories to reach areas of combat, permission is required" (Siddique, 2010, 32). Much of the violence against the Pakistani state has been committed by these local groups, with foreign and al Qaeda fighters, in line with the policy of al Qaeda core's leadership, attempting to avoid confrontation with Pakistan's military forces.

In December 2007, the most prominent and deadly Taliban group would emerge—the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (The Movement of the Pakistan Taliban)—whose formation was quickened by the Pakistan military's invasion and heavy-handed

approach uniting the tribes into opposition against it, just as British generals had warned a century before. This was a movement of 27 local Taliban groups that joined together under the leadership of Baitullah Mehsud, a member of the Shabi Khel Mehsud and a semi-literate mullah within his tribal village in South Waziristan Agency. The Mehsud, particularly the Shabi Khel, were long considered one of the toughest of the Pashtun tribes within Waziristan, a region that had pride of place in the annals of British frontier history as its tribes proved to be the most resistant to government control. A British general in the 19<sup>th</sup> century remarked of the “most inveterate and most incorrigible” Mehsud, “It was their boast that while kings and dynasties had passed away, they alone of all the Afghan tribes had remained free and that the armies of kings have never penetrated their strongholds” (Government of India, 1901, 21). A 1901 frontier report by the British Indian government conceded, “We exercise control over the Mahsud country and the tribe only from the outside and do not enter the country to carry out police duties there” (Ibid., 29). Sir Olaf Caroe (1958, 393), the former British governor of the North-West Frontier Province, used the imagery of the panther and the wolf to capture the character of the two tribes that inhabited Waziristan—the Wazir (divided between the Ahmadzai Wazir in South Waziristan and Utmanzai Wazir in North Waziristan with ethnic kin across the border in Afghanistan) and the Mehsud (only of South Waziristan): “The nearest I can get to it is to liken the Mahsud to a wolf, the Wazir to a panther. Both are splendid creatures; the panther is slier, sleeker and has more grace, the wolf-pack is more purposeful, more united and more dangerous.” Caroe further observed that the

Mehsud would fiercely defend their lands from any outside invasion and would never even consider submitting to an external power.

This assessment of the Mehsud and the Wazir has been repeated by contemporary Pakistani scholars (Abbas, 2014; Ahmed, 2013). A Pashtun soldier serving with the Pakistani army observed in the late 2000s, “The Waziristan tribes, the Mehsuds and the Wazirs, were the fiercest under the British and they still are the fiercest now. These people are different from the others. They even speak a Pashtu very different from the rest of the Frontier” (Schofield, 2011, 137). General Abdullah Dogar referred to the Mehsud as “the fiercest fighters and a free-spirited people which caused the most problems,” particularly pointing out the difficulties emanating from the Shabi Khel Mehsud.<sup>58</sup> In 2009, it was estimated that over 70% of suicide bombings in Pakistan were committed by individuals from the Mehsud tribe (Tajik, 2010).

Baitullah Mehsud and his militia originally emerged to fill the leadership vacuum left by Nek Mohammad Wazir’s death in the first U.S. drone strike in 2004. He subsequently signed a peace agreement with the Pakistani government in February 2005 stating that he would refrain from attacking government forces in exchange for amnesty for him and 120 of his men and the withdrawal of regular army checkpoints from Mehsud territory. At the signing ceremony of the agreement, he remained defiant and proclaimed, “My head can be chopped off but it will not bow to anybody. My head only bows to God five times a day” (Hussain, 2010, 78). However, he continued to target tribal maliks that supported the government, including the former federal minister and senator Faridullah

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with General Abdullah Dogar, former brigade commander in Waziristan, Washington, DC, April 23, 2012.

Khan, leading Musharraf in the following year to announce that Mehsud was considered a terrorist and the government would kill him if presented with the opportunity. In the summer of 2007, Mehsud officially withdrew from the agreement after the Pakistani military re-established military garrisons within Mehsud tribal territory (State Department, 2008c). He quickly directed attacks against the military presence in FATA, especially in the wake of the Lal Masjid raid.

The July 2007 siege of Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) in Islamabad by Pakistani military forces led to the acceleration of domestic terrorist attacks in Pakistan and the subsequent formation of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). While located in the heart of Pakistan's capital city a stone's throw from the president's house and around the corner from ISI headquarters, the mosque and its attached madrassas maintained strong links with the Pashtun tribes of FATA and the neighboring North-West Frontier Province as 70% of the madrassa students were Pashtun. The leadership of Lal Masjid also played an influential role in stirring up anti-government sentiments and protests in response to the military operations in FATA. In the preceding years, there were increasing clashes between madrassa students and local police in Islamabad. In 2005, for example, burqa-clad and stick wielding female students, known as the "Burqa Brigade" from Lal Masjid's girls' school, Jamia Hafsa, hit the streets in protest after British Prime Minister Tony Blair pushed Pakistan to crack down on its madrassas following the 7/7 bombing in London.

Two years later, the female students again would draw the ire of authorities when they occupied a neighboring children's library to protest the destruction of illegally



constructed mosques on state land. This came at a time when the Lal Masjid clerics announced its own charter for the implementation of a new political and legal system within Pakistan based on Sharia. Shortly after this announcement, the mosque formed their own Sharia courts, which would eventually leverage public opinion against the tourism minister, Nilofer Bakhtiar, after it was reported she hugged a male parachuting instructor in France, forcing her to resign. Lal Masjid's madrassa students subsequently moved to detaining individuals they deemed to be "un-Islamic." Following clashes with Pakistani security forces, teachers and students barricaded themselves inside the mosque complex, with the mosque's imam warning an attack by the government would lead to an "appropriate response" by the Taliban (Ahmed, 2013, 71-72; Hussain, 2010, 113-116). In the midst of the tensions between the government and Lal Masjid leadership, Haji Omar, a Taliban commander in Waziristan, declared, "If the government tried to attack Lal Masjid, they would take revenge" (Shahzad, 2007).

Musharraf, however, was under mounting international pressure to deal strongly with the situation, especially with the lingering concern for madrassas preaching and spreading radical and fundamentalist ideas. In a July 1 meeting with senior advisors, he stated, "There is no way we can tolerate these kinds of activities" (Hussain, 2010, 116). Shortly after, he issued an ultimatum, "We have been patient. I want to say to the ones who have been left inside: they should come out and surrender, and if they don't, I am saying this here and now: they will be killed" (*BBC News*, 2007). On July 10, Pakistani commandos launched Operation Silence and stormed the compound with mortar fire and a helicopter gunship flying overhead, an action that was captured on live television. Over

the next 35 hours, they engaged in intensive room-to-room fighting. According to the Lal Masjid Commission, 103 individuals were killed, including 92 civilians and 11 members of the security forces (*Pakistan Today*, 2013).

The response was immediate. On July 12<sup>th</sup>, 20,000 tribesmen in Bajaur Agency protested the government action, chanting “Death to Musharraf” (Hussain, 2010, 119-120). The Taliban leader Maulana Faqir Mohammed of the Mamund tribe in Bajaur, who would join the TTP, stated, “We beg Allah to destroy Musharraf, and we will seek revenge for the atrocities perpetrated on the Lal Masjid” (Schmidle, 2007). On July 14<sup>th</sup>, there was an attack against a military convoy in North Waziristan, killing 26 soldiers and wounding 54. The following day, a suicide bomber attacked a convoy in Swat, killing 16 soldiers and wounding 47, with a second attack on a police station in Dera Ismail Khan killing 28 policemen and wounding 35. On July 17<sup>th</sup>, there was another suicide bombing at a courthouse in Islamabad, killing 13 and wounding another 50 people. Later that month, a group of tribesmen in Mohmand Agency besieged a mosque and renamed it Lal Masjid. To disconnect himself from accusations of being al Qaeda, the group’s leader Omar Khalid who would become the local TTP commander stated, “We are local. There is no single non-local in our ranks. Our struggle is to carry on the Ghazi Abdur Rashid [Lal Masjid’s imam] mission” (Ahmed, 2013, 72).

On July 19, 2007, the Pakistani military officially relaunched military operations against the Taliban in FATA, leading to increased retaliatory attacks against military and government targets inside and outside of the region. In early September 2007, a suicide bombing struck a military bus near Army General Headquarters in Rawalpindi, killing 26

soldiers, including a number of officers, and wounding another 66. Just a few days later, Baitullah Mehsud attacked a military convoy in South Waziristan and captured 247 soldiers, a humiliating blow for Pakistan. This attack was preceded by fellow Mehsud tribesmen kidnapping 213 Pakistani soldiers and demanding an end to military operations in South Waziristan and the removal of all troops and checkpoints. The military responded with airstrikes and ground forces that resulted in 257 deaths—175 militants, 47 soldiers, and 35 civilians (Shahzad, 2011, 49). That same month, an 18-year-old suicide bomber targeted the Tarbela Ghazi mess south of Islamabad, killing 22 commandos of the Special Services Group's Kararr Company that had been responsible for the Lal Masjid raid (Schofield, 2011, 179). It was later revealed that the suicide bomber's sister had been one of the students of Jamia Hafsa killed by the American-trained counterterrorism unit, with his bombing an act of revenge for the raid (Mir, 2011). In Orakzai Agency, former Lal Masjid madrassa students would go on to form the "Ghazi Force", which would become allied with the TTP, in order to "avenge" the Lal Masjid raid and was involved in a number of suicide bombings (*Dawn*, 2011b). Hakimullah Mehsud (2012), the leader of the TTP following Baitullah Mehsud's death in a 2009 drone strike, later declared that he "would never forgive the government for committing excesses against students at Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa," following this declaration with the recitation of a poem by Pashtun poet Khushal Khah Khattack—"Warriors had no other wish in life but to sacrifice their lives or emerge victorious."

In the wake of the Lal Masjid raid, Maulana Fazlullah, the "Radio Mullah," also emerged as the head of a militant group in the former princely state of Swat, a

mountainous region of the NWFP populated by the Pashtun Yusufzai tribe and described by Queen Elizabeth II as the “Switzerland of the East” after a visit in the 1960s. Since the early 2000s, Fazlullah, who would become the TTP commander in 2013, had been preaching for a fundamentalist version of Sharia in place of the prevailing political and economic system dominated by a handful of large landowners. He explained the reason behind him and his followers beginning to target Pakistani security forces in July 2007: “I just told my followers to be prepared for *jihad*. Whatever has started in Swat is not related to my announcement, but it is related to the government operation in Lal Masjid and Jamia Hafsa...It is the responsibility of every Pakistani to rise up in arms against those who are bombing their own people” (Siddique, 2010, 40). In October and November 2007, Pakistani troops entered Swat Valley to battle Maulana Fazlullah’s Taliban forces. Over 1,000 civilians were killed in the fighting and approximately 2 million people displaced. Fazlullah instructed his followers:

We always tell the *fidayeen* to target two types of people: the Pakistan Army and their supporters. And the leaders and members of the Awami National Party [a Pashtun nationalist party]. You people should also act on this principle. Try to target them with minimum damage to the masses, but if there is any collateral damage, then we will not be held responsible for it in the court of Allah (Sheikh, 2016, 145).

He stated in a speech to suicide bombers, “The Pakistani Army also did cruelties and now people like the suicide bombers are targeting them” (Fazlullah, 2010).

During 2007, there was a dramatic increase in suicide bombings emanating from FATA against domestic targets. In the year after the attack on Lal Masjid, there were 88 bombings responsible for the deaths of 1,188 people and 3,209 wounded (Hussain, 2010, 120). In September 2007, the UN reported that Baitullah Mehsud and his forces were

responsible for 80% of the suicide bombings inside Pakistan (Akbar, 2011b). The suicide bombers often were young boys who were ill, “mentally challenged,” or were motivated by revenge, especially individuals whose family members had been killed in military operations (Coll, 2018, 262). Pakistani journalist Zahid Hussain (2010, 132) noted after visiting the bombed-out remnants of a suicide training center in South Waziristan, “Many of the boys in the camp had close relatives who had been killed in the Pakistani military’s operations against the militants, and the tribal code of honor required them to avenge the death of their dear ones. The number of such volunteers swelled with the escalation in fighting.” In a meeting with Admiral Mike Mullen during his February 2008 visit to Islamabad, General Tariq Majid, the Chairman of Pakistan’s Joint Chiefs of Staff, also explained that the military operations launched over the previous year were “squeezing” the militants and led to increasingly desperate measures such as suicide bombings (State Department, 2008h).

Spurred by the Lal Masjid raid and the government response to the increase in violence, the formation of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was announced on December 14, 2007 to attempt to assert political control over the border region and further the fight against the Pakistani military. It was a movement uniting all the disparate Taliban groups, including traditional tribal rivals, throughout the seven FATA agencies and into the neighboring NWFP with Baitullah Mehsud as its “emir” and a 40-member shura council. Their mission statement was grounded in local frontier politics and included the following points: “1) enforce Islamic law; 2) Unite against NATO forces in Afghanistan and wage a defensive Jihad against Pakistani forces; 3) Abolish checkpoints

in FATA and end military operations in Swat and North Waziristan; 4) No more negotiations with the government on any future peace deals; 5) Release Lal Masjid cleric Abdul Aziz” (Abbas, 2014, 152).

In line with their first goal, the TTP espoused an extremely harsh and fundamentalist Islamic ideology, reflective of the Afghan Taliban, as justification for their campaigns of violence and as the basis for a new governance system in FATA to replace the prevailing maliki system (Sheikh, 2016). The group distributed leaflets around the villages of South Waziristan “advising all locals to strictly abide by the new law system” (Mehsud, 2009). These leaflets outlined the system as a series of local committees meant to replace the authority of the maliks and the council of elders as a mechanism of dispute resolution:

Matters of little significance should be settled in their respective halqa as a first stage. If a settlement cannot be reached, the matter can be taken to the second stage: the subcommittee. If the subcommittee fails to arrive at a decision, the matter can be brought to the central committee where the verdict is final. Should the concerned parties object they have the right to further proceedings. On the basis of performance members of the committee can be dismissed from duty at any time. Decision made by the committee head can be debated among members of the committee which has representation from all areas. The services of Amir Baitullah Mehsud, Naib Amir Maulana Noor Saeed, Maulana Mufti Noor Wali Khan, Maulana Wali-ur Rehman are reserved only for organizational affairs (Ibid.).

A Pakistani non-commissioned officer, who had fought in FATA, observed that,

The foreigners have been driven out of South Waziristan. So the Taliban there is only local. This strengthens them and it pleases them. People are very scared of the Taliban. They will kill anybody, and you’ll never know who did it. But they have done one good thing. There is now no crime in South Waziristan. They enforce justice. Murderers are shot; they get the family of the victim to do it. If anyone is kidnapped the Taliban can find him within two days (Schofield, 2011, 72).

The TTP also banned any activities they deemed un-Islamic, including men shaving off their beards, playing music, Internet cafes, and holiday celebrations.

Despite their religious rhetoric and commitment to a Sharia-based system of governance, Major General Shafqat Ashgar, who commanded a brigade in South Waziristan in 2009, later recounted that he saw little evidence of “religiosity” among the TTP fighters he faced, as they adhered more to tribal custom than Islamic orthodoxy (Abbas, 2014, 160). The TTP’s embrace of an Islamic system of governance was bound with the local tribal politics of FATA, especially the kashar’s opposition to the dominance of the maliks and governing maliki system. Shuja Nawaz (2009, 22) described the kashar leadership of the TTP as “tribal entrepreneurs” as they were challenging and replacing the maliki system based in the FCR which disadvantaged them. The removal of the maliks’ authority also severed the link between the FATA tribes and the Pakistani government, allowing them the space and opportunity to fill the vacuum of power.

With this goal in mind, the TTP targeted the maliks themselves in increasingly brazen terrorist attacks, including targeting entire jirgas with suicide bombings. Maliks often were presented with the choice of either publicly submitting to the authority of the TTP or risk being killed, with many choosing to instead flee their tribal agency.<sup>59</sup> By 2017, at least 1,100 of them had been killed (Farooq, 2017). The attacks against the maliks were described as a “virtual decapitation of the tribe,” creating a local power vacuum which the TTP could fill (Ahmed, 2013, 77). Khalid Aziz, the former PA of North Waziristan Agency, stated, “The elders knew how to interact with the state. They

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with General Abdullah Dogar, former brigade commander in Waziristan, Washington, DC, April 23, 2012.

knew the rules. They intellectually knew what statecraft is.” Their deaths, according to Aziz, “removed traditional management. And when it is removed it is very difficult for the chief administrator, locally known as political agent, to control the areas” (Khattak, 2014, 211). Ghulam Qadir Khan Daur (2014, 261), the former PA of Orakzai Agency and from North Waziristan, further wrote, “The old system of Pashtunwali is [being] destroyed systematically. It was weakened long before 9/11 by being pitched against religion but after that it has been scrapped. Our sleeping government doesn’t have a new system to replace the old one. There is no tribal way of life, the ways of the fathers, and there is no new system of government to replace it.”

In regard to its attacks against the Pakistani military and government, the TTP rationalized them as part of a “defensive jihad.” The group drew on the tenets of Pashtunwali for increasingly desperate and deadly acts of revenge, left unchecked by the now devastated traditional tribal structures. The group argued, “The US and its allies want the bloodshed to continue on our soil. But we have made it clear that, if a war is imposed on us, we will take this war out of tribal areas and NWFP to the rest of the country and will attack security forces and important government functionaries in Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi and other big cities” (Yusufzai, 2008).

The TTP used civilian casualties from military operations in their recruitment efforts and in justification for their domestic terrorist attacks. In 2008, a resident of Wana, South Waziristan, Hussein Khan, observed of Baitullah Mehsud and the TTP:

Mehsud is gaining the advantage of indiscriminate bombing and killing of common tribesmen. Sympathies are increasing for him with every passing day. I am not a literate person, or a security expert, but I know that no military operation will succeed against him. Those who are not supporters of Osama [bin Laden] or



Baitullah, even they have been forced by the indiscriminate military operation to harbor sympathies for them (Latif, 2008).

A TTP (2009) recruitment video titled “Bloodshed and revenge” opens with the Urdu phrase *Napak fauj kai mezaalim* (The atrocity of the unpure army). It subsequently shows footage of destroyed madrassas, mosques, and other buildings and the bodies of civilians, including women and children, killed during Pakistani military operations and airstrikes in Bajaur, Mohmand, Swat, North and South Waziristan, and Orakzai. A TTP commander in Swat, Hafizullah, stated, “Wherever [the army] have gone, they have committed atrocities, killing children and the elderly, who have nothing to do with the Taliban. And they have looted their homes, stealing anything that is remotely valuable” (Siddique, 2010, 63). A 2011 TTP announcement explained the group’s motivations, “The Murtad [apostate] and Napak [impure] army of Pakistan is bombarding its own Muslims without any reasons. Locals: They acted very cruelly towards us, like an enemy army, brutally attacking and looting our houses. This is the madrassa of Sherakai [in KP’s Frontier Region Kohat] which was attacked in Ramadan by the Murtad and Napak army, killing and injuring scores of innocent people” (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, 2011). Muhammad Khurasani (2016), a TTP spokesman, further stated, “Our war is not against Pakistan or people of Pakistan but against its government and army who has forsaken us from our religious right that is Islamic law. They are killing us massively and destroying our properties in return for this demand. We are not terrorists but we are fighting our religious war.” In March 2008, the leader of the Pashtun nationalist Awami National Party, Asfundyar Wali Khan, told a visiting Congressional delegation that he had once told Musharraf that when military operations resulted in civilian deaths, especially

women and children, it undermined any efforts by the government, through negotiations, political reform, or economic development, “to win the hearts of the tribal people” (State Department, 2008f). While the government nominally pursued a “carrot and stick” strategy, Khan argued, FATA “hasn’t yet seen the carrot, just the stick” (Ibid.).

During 2008, the government tried signing a series of ceasefire agreements with various groups in FATA, all of which quickly fell apart. In leaflets dropped from helicopters, the Pakistan Army (2009) blamed militants operating in North Waziristan for violating the peace agreement as they “started a new wave of attacks against the army in North Waziristan.” The army asked for cooperation from the local community in halting the attacks and pledged that “should an area experience an attack against the army, the government will use force against the perpetrators and their accomplices in the local population.” Militants, however, continued to oppose the army’s mere presence in FATA as a provocation and violation of any peace agreement. The Shura Ittehad-ul-Mujahideen (2009), the primary council of the TTP, argued,

Despite peace agreements dictating that the Pakistani government remove its army, it has strengthened its presence in Waziristan. More than 50 drone attacks have been carried out with the mediation of the army, and there is proof on CDs that they have been paid for it, plus 30 strikes in Mehsud areas and Wana. The Pakistani government also violates the agreement that they should allot specific days for army drills so that locals are not put unnecessarily at risk; instead activities have amplified to the extent of imposing curfews and children, women or old people are fired at. This may lead to new violence in Waziristan.

The group pressed for the Army to “leave all unnecessary areas and handover responsibility to the locals, all army posts between Wana and Angoor Adda should be eliminated.”

The position of the United States was to applaud the aggressive military operations taken in Swat against Maulana Fazlullah but to press Musharraf to “follow up success in Swat with bold operations against Al Qaeda and the Taliban in North and South Waziristan” (State Department, 2008b). While the United States voiced support for economic development projects within FATA to combat extremism in the long term, it understood that “successful implementation of the development programs for the Tribal Areas hinges on the security element. To this end, we plan to robustly support the Frontier Corps and in the meantime are encouraging Pakistan’s military to take aggressive and sustained efforts against the extremists, as it recently did in the Swat valley” (State Department, 2008e).

By 2008, President Bush recalled that he was growing “tired of reading intelligence reports about extremist sanctuaries in Pakistan” (Bush, 2010, 217). While Bush relied on drones to “reach into the tribal areas,” his administration also increased its support of Pakistan “to go after the extremists” by providing “money, training, and equipment, and proposed joint counterterrorism operations—all aimed at helping increase Pakistani capabilities” (Ibid., 217-218). With the emergence of the TTP in 2007 and the increasing levels of domestic terrorism, General Stanley McChrystal (2014, 358), then serving as JSOC commander, thought that this could help push Pakistan to strengthen its cooperation with U.S. counterterrorism priorities, especially as it related to on-going operations in Afghanistan. In February 2008, Musharraf assured Admiral Michael Mullen that the Pakistani public was more tolerant of the government’s counterterrorism efforts due to the upsurge in deadly suicide bombings. He then blamed Baitullah Mehsud for the

attacks and stressed the importance of killing Mehsud, stating “we must get this man” (State Department, 2008j).

With the rising level of domestic terrorist attacks within Pakistan, the government focused its efforts on countering the immediate threat of the TTP. At the time, the Pakistani government was increasing its military operations in the border region with the military conducting an undeclared troop surge within Waziristan to target the TTP, re-deploying tens of thousands of infantry troops from the Indian border and other parts of Pakistan. General Kayani, now serving as the Army Chief of Staff, explained, “We’re carrying out operations against our own people. It has to be done subtly” (Coll, 2018, 324). Though he assured his corps commanders, “This is our fight, our war. This is not a U.S. war” (Ibid.). In July 2008, Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani likewise emphasized to reporters in Lahore, “Pakistan is not fighting the war of any other country. The war on terror is in our own interests” (Bergen, 2011, 264). The following month, the Pakistani military launched an “extensive bombing campaign” into Bajaur Agency against the TTP with helicopter gunships and F-16s that destroyed entire villages, displacing over 250,000 people and reportedly killing 900 militants (Rashid, 2008, 407). The military, however, provided no figures for civilian casualties, which local reports identified as considerable (Ibid.). Pakistani military officials understood the September 20<sup>th</sup> suicide bombing of the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, which killed 53 people, as revenge for the military operations in Bajaur (Khan and Gall, 2008; Rashid, 2008, 409).

On the other hand, U.S. officials were pressing for the Pakistani government to expand their military operations to target groups active within Afghanistan. In particular,

the U.S. was concerned with the Haqqani network, which derived its name from the legendary mujahedeen commander Jalaluddin Haqqani from the 1980s and was based in the Mehsud's rival the Wazir whose tribal territory straddled the Durand Line. The U.S. intelligence community was continuing to monitor the presence of foreign fighters, such as Arabs, Punjabis, Kashmiris, Uzbeks, and Afghans, in training camps in North Waziristan's Miranshah area operated by the Haqqani network (Defense Intelligence Agency, 2008, 253). This group was using Pakistan as a safe haven to conduct operations in Afghanistan against NATO forces but not targeting Pakistan. The U.S. government also was concerned with the Haqqani network's ability to raise funds within Pakistan, such as large amounts of funding coming from Taliban leaders based in Quetta and the Hadika Ta Uloom Madrassa in Dera Ismail Khan facilitating fundraising activities from businessmen within the oil industry in Karachi and Lahore (Defense Intelligence Agency, 2009a, 2009b).

Pakistani officials, however, were reluctant to target the Haqqani network, wishing to reserve their limited resources for the difficult counterinsurgency campaigns against the government's primary threat—the TTP. Pakistani officials perceived the Haqqanis through their own interests: “If we don't hit them, then they won't hit us” (Tankel, 2018, 149). Lieutenant General Asif Yasin Malik who previously served as the XI Corps Commander overseeing military operations in FATA explained in 2010, “Everyone who is challenging the writ of the government of Pakistan, he is a problem for me.” He, however, recognized the limitations of his forces: “I can't open three to four fronts. I don't have the resources” (Brulliard and Khan, 2010). The DIA further

determined that Haqqani training camps, in addition to the broader Haqqani operations, were being monitored and supported by the ISI (Defense Intelligence Agency, 2010). Under the expectation of a future U.S. exit from Afghanistan, it was thought that some ISI officials were hesitant to sever ties with the Afghan Taliban given the importance of maintaining influence and strategic depth against Indian machinations, especially as they saw India's growing influence within the U.S.-backed Afghan government.

As attacks by the Haqqani network in Afghanistan mounted, U.S. officials in the waning days of the Bush administration were growing increasingly frustrated by their South Asian ally, pressing Musharraf and the Pakistani military to "do more against the growing militancy in FATA or to allow the United States to do more" (Hayden, 2016, 346). A review of the situation in Afghanistan by Lieutenant General Douglas Lute at the end of the Bush administration found that the Taliban safe havens in Pakistan had to be eliminated if the United States wanted to make any headway towards prevailing in Afghanistan (Woodward, 2010, 44). There were largely two positions being advocated for among senior U.S. security officials at the time: (1) essentially understand Pakistan as a lost cause and step up U.S. unilateral actions such as drone strikes or cross-border raids from Afghanistan or (2) increase engagement and pressure on the Pakistani political and military leadership (Coll, 2018, 313-314). The path that the U.S. government would soon pursue was to rely on both.

### *Fixing the Folly of Iraq: Obama's War in FATA*

During the 2008 presidential campaign, President Obama (2008) ran on a security platform that painted the Iraq invasion as a deadly mistake, a military invasion in which the U.S. “lost thousands of American lives, spent nearly a trillion dollars, alienated allies and neglected emerging threats—all in the cause of fighting a war for well over five years in a country that had absolutely nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks.” He instead argued for the need to pull out of Iraq and re-direct U.S. attention to “taking the fight to al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan.” Obama further emphasized the role FATA played as a Taliban safe haven in disrupting the U.S. mission in Afghanistan and promised a hard line:

The greatest threat to that security lies in the tribal regions of Pakistan, where terrorists train and insurgents strike into Afghanistan. We cannot tolerate a terrorist sanctuary, and as President, I won't. We need a stronger and sustained partnership between Afghanistan, Pakistan and NATO to secure the border, to take out terrorist camps, and to crack down on cross-border insurgents. We need more troops, more helicopters, more satellites, more Predator drones in the Afghan border region. And we must make it clear that if Pakistan cannot or will not act, we will take out high-level terrorist targets like bin Laden if we have them in our sights (Ibid.).

In one of Obama's first security briefings days after his November 2008 electoral victory, Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell vindicated Obama's rhetoric and informed the President-elect that the top security priority and most immediate threat for the United States had to be the tribal regions of Pakistan where al Qaeda and various Taliban groups continued to operate (Woodward, 2010, 3).

As Obama and his national security team were preparing the details of the new Afghan strategy, they understood the importance of Pakistan and that any goal within

Afghanistan had to be tempered with the Pakistani army's ability to target the Taliban and al Qaeda forces operating out of FATA. In the first year of Obama's presidency, Vice President Joe Biden argued in one of the President's Daily Intelligence Briefings, "The premise of the counterinsurgency is flawed. There's a balloon effect. We squeeze it, and it pops out somewhere else. Are we prepared to go to countries where al Qaeda can pop up?" For the Vice President, this, in particular, meant focusing on Pakistan's FATA. "If you don't get Pakistan right," he said in the briefing, "you can't win" (Woodward, 2010, 166-167).

At the outset of the Obama Presidency, the White House enlisted the help of Bruce Riedel, a former CIA officer and National Security Council advisor on South Asia and the Middle East serving as a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC, to conduct a strategic review of the situation in Afghanistan to assist the administration in crafting its new "Af-Pak" strategy. One of the core goals outlined in his strategic review was "refocusing on al Qaeda as the goal: disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda and its safe havens in Pakistan and Afghanistan and prevent its return to either country" (State Department, 2009m). To achieve this, the review recommended "assisting Pakistan's capability to fight extremists: It is vital to strengthen our efforts to both develop and operationally enable Pakistani security forces so they are capable of succeeding in sustained counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations." It stressed the importance of "engaging and focusing Islamabad on the common threat: Successfully shutting down the Pakistani safe haven for extremists will also require consistent and



intensive strategic engagement with Pakistani leadership in both the civilian and military spheres” (Ibid.).

Riedel further recommended to the Obama administration that it “give the Pakistani military what it needs to fight a counterinsurgency war against the terrorist groups” (Woodward, 2010, 100). He warned President Obama of al Qaeda, “These guys are serious. They are clever, and they are relentless. Until we kill them, they’re going to keep trying to kill us” (Ibid., 106). He also communicated that drones, despite the attractiveness of them, were not the answer, likening the drone campaign in FATA to trying to take out a bee hive one bee at a time. What was needed were Pakistani boots on the ground. The Pakistan Counterinsurgency Capability Fund, established by Congress in 2009 after Obama took office, was meant to address “Pakistan’s immediate counterinsurgency and counterterrorism requirements.” The Foreign Military Financing program, as the other principal military assistance funding stream, was aimed at fostering long-term military ties between the two countries (State Department, 2009).

On March 27, 2009, President Obama (2009b) announced a “comprehensive, new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan.” He continued:

Many people in the United States—and many in partner countries that have sacrificed so much—have a simple question: What is our purpose in Afghanistan? After so many years, they ask, why do our men and women still fight and die there? And they deserve a straightforward answer. So let me be clear: Al Qaeda and its allies—the terrorists who planned and supported the 9/11 attacks—are in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Multiple intelligence estimates have warned that al Qaeda is actively planning attacks on the United States homeland from its safe haven in Pakistan. And if the Afghan government falls to the Taliban—or allows al Qaeda to go unchallenged—that country will again be a base for terrorists who want to kill as many of our people as they possibly can. The future of Afghanistan is inextricably linked to the future of its neighbor, Pakistan (Ibid.)

To target al Qaeda in Pakistan's "vast," "rugged" and "ungoverned" Tribal Areas, Obama (2009b) announced his administration would "focus our military assistance on the tools, training and support that Pakistan needs to root out the terrorists." He added, "Pakistan's government must be a stronger partner in destroying these safe havens, and we must isolate al Qaeda from the Pakistani people."

Success in Afghanistan would be inextricably linked with Pakistan. In a heated exchange between Vice President Joe Biden and Afghan President Hamid Karzai in January 2009, Karzai pressed, "Mr. Vice President, we should do more about Pakistan, the sanctuaries." Biden responded, "Mr. President, Pakistan is *fifty* times more important than Afghanistan for the United States" (Coll, 2018, 352). On that same trip, Biden pressured Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, Benazir Bhutto's husband who had by now been elected to replace Musharraf following the former president's resignation in August 2008, on the issue of safe havens in FATA. He stated, "Afghanistan is going to be [Obama's] war. We can't fix Afghanistan without Pakistan's help" (Woodward, 2010, 63). Briefings by Peter Lavoy, then Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analysis, during the fall of 2009 further demonstrated to White House senior leadership that "there was no way to defeat the Taliban militarily, to eradicate them or force their surrender, unless the United States was prepared to invade Pakistan, an unstable nuclear weapons state," which President Obama quickly ruled out, or "Pakistan's army had to finally take on the Taliban, to wipe them out" (Coll, 2018, 402). In 2011, Chris Wood, then CIA chief of station in Kabul and later director of the CIA's Counterterrorism Center, repeatedly expressed to visitors concerning FATA, "We either address the

sanctuary and we win the war, or we don't and we lose the war. It's that simple" (Coll, 2018, 536).

President Obama agreed—"Changing the Pakistan calculus is key to achieving our core goals." Petraeus responded to this declaration that this change was indeed occurring and recounted a recent meeting with General Kayani in which he walked Petraeus through new plans for additional ground operations against "extremist terrorist groups" in Swat and South Waziristan, an "encouraging sign" (Woodward, 2010, 187-188). To achieve these goals, the White House drastically increased U.S. military assistance to Pakistan to bolster the fight against its own Taliban insurgency, hoping this would help to assert control over the border region and provide leverage for pressuring the Pakistani military to target the Haqqani network. This emphasis on military action by Pakistan was a consistent theme in interactions between Pakistani officials and senior members of the Obama administration. While the administration paired this with increased economic and development assistance reflective of the "whole of government" approach to terrorism, any international funds related to counterterrorism were directed toward security forces and remained firmly under their control (Abbas, 2014, 4).

In February 2009, however, the government signed a ceasefire agreement with the Swat Taliban leader, Maulana Fazlullah, following two years of heavy and costly fighting in the Swat Valley. As part of the agreement, the government agreed to allow Sharia courts within the Malakand Region. This agreement lasted only months, with U.S. officials heavily criticizing it (Mohammed, 2009b). Under mounting international pressure and with increasing clashes between Taliban forces and the military beginning to

threaten Islamabad, the Pakistani ordered over a million residents to evacuate Swat Valley and launched further military operations against the Taliban ensconced there. On May 7, 2009 in a meeting with President Zardari in the White House, President Obama again stressed the need to follow up these operations with expanded military action in FATA (Woodward, 2010, 116). Richard Holbrooke, serving as the U.S. Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, told the journalist Ahmed Rashid (2012, 149), “This progress is much appreciated, but there is a need now to do more, and the Pakistanis have proved they can do more.” In November 2009, John Brennan and National Security Advisor James Jones traveled to Islamabad to hand deliver a letter to Zardari from Obama proposing a paired escalation of military operations and counterterrorism cooperation in FATA targeting “al Qaeda, TTP, [Lashkar-e-Taiba], the Haqqani network, the Afghan Taliban” (Woodward, 2010, 285). Later that year and in part motivated by his desire to shore up his political support within Pakistan, Zardari would push for new military offensives against the TTP in Waziristan, which the Pentagon was supporting with helicopters, aircraft, and other key counterinsurgency equipment paid for with Congressional approval (Ibid., 200-201).

U.S. intelligence estimates later questioned the whole-heartedness and effectiveness of these operations (Ibid., 215). U.S. officials also became concerned that Pakistan was focusing its fight on the TTP and continuing to allow al Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban to use the northwestern border region as a safe haven. At this time President Obama was seeking to replicate the Iraqi Surge in Afghanistan, with an increase in troop strength in key southeastern provinces to conduct counterinsurgency

operations. He would announce on December 1, 2009 in a speech at the U.S. Military Academy that he would be sending an additional 30,000 troops to Afghanistan but would begin to bring the troops home in 18 months, turning over counterinsurgency operations to Afghan forces. In relation to Pakistan's own efforts in FATA, the White House thought their troop increase in Afghanistan would demonstrate U.S. resolve and, according to Admiral Mullen, "will encourage the Pakistanis to continue their counterinsurgency effort on their side of the border" (Woodward, 2010, 269).

Before the official announcement of Obama's new Afghan strategy, former ISAF commander and U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry criticized this costly proposal given the unreliability of Afghan security forces to inherit counterinsurgency efforts, the weakness of Afghanistan's political leadership, and the fact that Taliban was still able to use FATA as a safe haven for its operations. Eikenberry (2009a, 4) wrote in a cable to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, which would be leaked to the press the following year,

More troops won't end the insurgency as long as Pakistan sanctuaries remain. Pakistan will remain the single greatest source of Afghan instability so long as the border sanctuaries remain, and Pakistan views its strategic interests as best served by a weak neighbor. There is reason to be encouraged by Pakistan's current military offensive in Waziristan, but the lasting result of this effort is still unclear. Nor does the Pakistan military action address the role of the Quetta Shura, which has the most influence over the insurgency in southern Taliban strongholds, or the Haqqani network, the most lethal killer of allied troops and Afghan civilians. Until this sanctuary problem is fully addressed, the gains from sending additional forces may be fleeting.

In a subsequent cable, he pushed for a re-evaluation of Obama's Afghan strategy and a more thorough examination of "the prospects for the Pakistani security services putting

meaningful pressure against the Afghan Taliban, the insurgent sanctuaries and leadership, and al Qaeda” (Eikenberry, 2009b, 3).

In conversations with Pakistani leadership, U.S. officials continually alluded to the fact that if the Pakistani government failed to act against the safe havens in FATA the U.S. government would act in its place. Leon Panetta told Kayani in 2010, “We can’t do this without some boots on the ground. They could be Pakistani boots or they can be our boots, but we got to have some boots on the ground” (Woodward, 2010, 367). In the wake of the attempted bombing in Times Square, President Obama acknowledged to journalist Bob Woodward (2010, 369), “[Pakistan] also ramped up their CT cooperation in a way that over the last 18 months has hunkered down al Qaeda in a way that is significant,” despite also recognizing that this was “still not enough.” Cameron Munter, appointed U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan in October 2010, was told by Obama in encounters at the White House, “We have to stay tough with these guys” (Coll, 2018, 523).

### ***Hell from Above: The U.S. Drone War in FATA***

The deployment of the CIA’s fleet of armed Predator drones was a means for the United States to pursue direct action against the Taliban forces in FATA, especially when it was feared Pakistan couldn’t or wouldn’t act, without putting American soldiers’ lives at risk. The expansion of the drone program in 2008 was in part a response to a classified CIA paper dated May 1, 2007, which argued that al Qaeda was the most dangerous that it had been since 2001 due to the safe havens in FATA. There were growing concerns and

worries, especially by the new Defense Secretary Robert Gates, that Pakistan wouldn't aggressively target militant camps which officials feared al Qaeda was using as bases of operation (Mazzetti, 2013, 265-267). While the drone program began under President Bush with secret authorization from Musharraf and saw an uptick in the final year of Bush's presidency, the Obama administration rapidly increased their use, seeing it as a means of being able to act assertively and quickly against terrorists without putting boots on the ground, a politically risky move given his campaign rhetoric. Obama would authorize the same number of drone strikes in the first 10 months of his presidency as Bush had in his entire eight years in office.

The U.S. employed two types of strikes: targeted strikes and signature strikes. Targeted strikes were directed against key individuals who: 1) "pose a continuing, imminent threat to U.S. persons" and the U.S. can determine their location but "capture is infeasible"; 2) there is "near certainty that an identified HVT [high-value target] is present"; and 3) "near certainty that non-combatants will not be injured or killed" (White House, 2013, 3). Signature strikes, on the other hand, were directed against suspicious behavior, such as large meetings or convoys, by "military-aged" males within a defined region. The U.S. often lacked specific intelligence identifying individuals who were killed in these strikes with the understanding that "lower ranking terrorists" and "foot soldiers" were taken out, having the effect of "shrinking the enemy's bench" and limiting al Qaeda and the Taliban's sense of safety (Hayden, 2016, 337-338). However, with the absence of clear intelligence about who was targeted, these strikes were more susceptible to causing civilian casualties, such as the killing of Warren Weinstein, a USAID

contractor kidnapped by the Taliban in 2011, along with the Italian aid worker Giovanni Lo Porto in a 2015 drone strike (Bergner, 2016).

The leadership in Pakistan was ambivalent about the U.S. drone campaign in Waziristan. On one hand, the drones targeted Taliban militants engaged in fighting the Pakistani military. On November 12, 2008, CIA director General Michael Hayden met with President Zardari and Pakistani Ambassador to the U.S. Hussain Haqqani in a New York City hotel. After Hayden provided an overview of U.S. drone strikes in FATA, Zardari told him, “Kill the seniors. Collateral damage worries you Americans. It does not worry me” (Woodward, 2010, 26). Earlier that year, Prime Minister Syed Yusuf Gilani stated, “I don’t care if they do it as long as they get the right people. We’ll protest in the national assembly and then ignore it” (Miller and Woodward, 2013). Further, a number of local maliks and tribes opposed to the Taliban, such as the Shia Turi tribe of Kurram Agency which was often a target of sectarian violence, were also supportive of the drone strikes. However, as the use of drones spiked with increasing reports of civilian deaths, as admitted by President Obama in a May 2013 speech at the National Defense University, the drone strikes became public knowledge, and it was becoming more difficult for Pakistani leadership to tolerate the use of the drone within its borders. There also was a growing group of officials within the Obama administration that saw the use of the drone in FATA as too indiscriminate and too visible, doing further damage to the already strained U.S.-Pakistan relationship.

Within academia and policy circles, there has been an ongoing debate about the effectiveness of the drones in stemming the tide of terrorism. The drone’s detractors



pointed to the illegality of the strikes, the number of civilians killed, and the long-term negative impact (Abbas, 2014; Ahmed, 2013; Banks, 2015; Cavallaro, et. al., 2012; O’Connell, 2015; Smith and Walsh, 2013; Woods, 2015). A number of scholars, on the other hand, argued that the drone is effective in degrading the short-term capabilities of terrorist groups (Byman, 2013; Johnston and Sarbahi, 2016; Mir, 2018; Terrill, 2013). By taking out the experienced leadership and limiting the groups’ movements and ability to meet, organize, and recruit, it is argued that drones prevent groups in the short term from launching attacks, forcing them instead to spend their time, energy, and resources avoiding the drones overhead. Shah (2018) further argues against the potential for blowback from drone strikes in terms of pushing recruitment for local Taliban groups. He instead points to the intersection of other mitigating factors such as political grievances, state repression, weak governance, and coercive recruitment by terrorist groups. Some studies even showed local support within Pakistan and the Tribal Areas for the use of the drone to target the Taliban (Fair, Kaltenthaler, and Miller, 2014; Shah, 2016). Ambassador Cameron Munter recounted to me one FATA resident telling him, “We prefer drone attacks because at least the drone attacks get bad guys whereas when the Punjabis [the Pakistan army] come through they just wipe out the entire village.”<sup>60</sup>

Despite any potential short-term benefits derived from drone strikes, there was an awareness within the government that long-term gains against al Qaeda and the Taliban required troops on the ground, a point emphasized by Bruce Riedel in his strategic review of Afghanistan. As Michael Hayden was preparing to leave his position at the CIA, he

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with Ambassador Cameron Munter, former U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, 2010-2012, Washington, DC, January 23, 2019.

told the new White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel that drones in FATA taking out high value targets gained, at best, short-term, tactical successes. He stated, “Unless you’re prepared to do this forever, you have to change the facts on the ground. That requires successful counterinsurgency. You’ve got to change the facts on the ground” (Woodward, 2010, 93-94). General Stanley McChrystal reiterated this point to me, stating, “Done in isolation, I think drone strikes are counterproductive. They will very near term have some effect in killing or stopping people. But long term, as we look in Pakistan, they can very rarely be decisive against an enemy because you can’t just shoot enough drones. You don’t have enough intelligence to do that.”<sup>61</sup> The journalist David Rohde (2015, 11), who was held captive by the Haqqani network in North and South Waziristan from November 2008 to June 2009, observed from the ground: “Overall, the drone strikes seemed to create a stalemate. They limited operations and killed some senior militants. However, they certainly did not stop these groups from being active in the tribal areas. I was left with the impression that drone strikes are not a long-term solution. The only answer is to get the Pakistani military on the ground in North Waziristan and in key areas of South Waziristan. Drones alone will not solve the problem.” In the “inhospitable land” of FATA, according to a former Pakistani army officer, “technology can’t help,” and there is “no substitute” for “boots on the ground.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Interview with General Stanley McChrystal, former JSOC and ISAF Commander, Washington, DC, January 8, 2019.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Dr. Shahid Ahmed Afridi, former Pakistani army officer and counterinsurgency expert, Islamabad, Pakistan, December 17, 2018.

### *Pakistan Falls Deeper into the Terrorism Trap*

As pressure from the Obama administration mounted on the Pakistani government to confront the growing terrorism threat within FATA, the Pakistani government continued to respond to domestic terrorist attacks with new and expanded military operations, trapping the military and local Taliban groups in an escalating cycle of violence within Pakistan. As the Pakistani military saw the need to challenge terrorist groups with greater levels of strength, they fell back on the use of air strikes and artillery to pound Taliban positions, leading to higher levels of civilian casualties and population displacement. The TTP responded with increased attacks against the Pakistani military and other symbolic targets of the state, citing revenge for the military operations and civilian casualties as motivation.

Beginning in October 2009, the Pakistan army launched Operation Rah-e-Nijat, a three-pronged military invasion of South Waziristan involving 28,000 troops and described as the “mother of all battles.” A number of towns were devastated in the fighting, particularly as the region was heavily bombed by Pakistani jets and attack helicopters. A senior Pakistani official informed U.S. diplomats that the military intended essentially to empty the population from the region and separate “good Mehsuds” from “bad Mehsuds” by thoroughly screening “South Waziri family attempting to flee the operations” (State Department, 2009n). These military operations displaced over 250,000 residents from Bajaur, North Waziristan, and South Waziristan Agencies, adding to those already displaced by previous operations. In June 2009, the National Database and

Registration Authority reported a total of 1.73 million internally displaced individuals within Pakistan (State Department, 2009k).

A large number of displaced individuals were residing in refugee camps on the outskirts of Peshawar. A report by Pakistani intelligence agencies warned that these camps were becoming recruiting grounds for various Taliban groups operating in Pakistan as young men sought to “avenge” the deaths of relatives in on-going Pakistani military operations (Latif, 2009). According to one resident of the camps who fled his home in Bajaur Agency following shelling by the Pakistan army, hundreds of angry young men joined the Taliban, including his 19-year-old nephew whose brother was killed in operations by the army. “Our youths have become bitterly angry,” he argued. “The courageous among them have joined Taliban, no matter whether they agree with their philosophy or not.” Rather than any ideology, he saw revenge as the clear motivation for his nephew’s actions: “As far as I know him, he was a cool and calm boy who did not agree with Taliban philosophy. But he had no other force which could help him avenge the death of his brother” (Ibid.). A Pakistani intelligence official further stated, “Taliban militants have been exploiting the deaths of women and children in both U.S. drone attacks and bombings by Pakistani forces to coax angry young men to join hands with them for revenge” (Ibid.).

The attempted, but failed, Times Square bombing in 2010 by Faisal Shahzad, a Pakistani-American who spent six weeks in Waziristan with the TTP, helped to put further pressure on the Pakistani government to deal with the Taliban insurgency. As the tempo of military operations in FATA and the northwestern border region increased,

paired with an increase in U.S. drone strikes, the domestic terrorist attacks against the Pakistani state by the TTP increased in kind. Pakistan military's senior leadership was aware that its military operations in FATA would lead to an increase in retaliatory attacks by the TTP against civilian populations, particularly given the group's diminished ability to confront the army's strength in direct confrontations. In a November 2009 speech to police forces in Peshawar following the beginning of a new military offensive in FATA, General Kayani warned, "We knew the militants will resort to suicide attacks and bombings in Peshawar to target innocent civilians" (Khattak, 2014, 206). In 2009, there were 87 suicide attacks in Pakistan, killing 1,300 people.

Much of the groups' rhetoric continued to highlight revenge for military operations in FATA that produced civilian casualties as motivation for its domestic terrorist attacks. Amir Muawiya (2009), a spokesman for the Abdullah Azam Shaheed Brigade and Taliban commander, claimed that the June 9, 2009 bombing of the Pearl Continental Hotel in Peshawar was "to avenge the killing of innocent people" in counterterrorism operations by the military. The TTP's March 2009 attack against the police academy in Lahore, coming only a day after an attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team, was done, according to an announcement by Baitullah Mehsud, "as a retaliation for U.S. missile strikes off drones inside the Pakistan territory" (Gul, 2009, xv). During the TTP's December 2009 attack on Rawalpindi's Parade Lane Mosque, in which 36 people including 17 children were killed, the assailants were heard shouting, "Now know how it feels when other people are killed in the bombings!" (Hussain, 2010, 179). The selection of this target for revenge against military action was further stressed by the fact that the

mosque was only five minutes away from Army Headquarters in a Cantonment area and frequented by senior military officials and their families, with two serving generals and four army officers killed in the attack (Walsh, 2009). In a January 2012 video released to the media, the TTP executed 15 Pakistani soldiers, explaining, “Twelve of our comrades were besieged and mercilessly martyred in the Khyber Agency. Our pious women were also targeted. To avenge those comrades, we will kill these men. We warn the government of Pakistan that if the killing of our friends is not halted, this will be the fate of you all” (Mehsud, 2012). Later that year, the TTP released a gruesome video of the severed heads of a dozen Pakistani soldiers executed in Bajaur Agency and announced they had been killed in “revenge” for recent Pakistan army operations (Ahmed, 2013, 74). In December 2012, the TTP, using ten suicide bombers, also attacked the international airport in Peshawar which serves as a base for helicopter gunships used for counterterrorism operations in FATA. In an Independence Day speech in August 2013, General Kayani stated, “The internal threat to Pakistan is now greater than any external one” (*Daily Times*, 2013).

In June 2014, the TTP attacked the Jinnah International Airport in Karachi, which killed 36 people, in revenge for the on-going Pakistani air strikes in FATA and the drone strike that killed its leader Hakimullah Mehsud (Sheikh, 2016, 41). In response, the Pakistan military launched Operation Zarb-e-Azb in North Waziristan the following week, which intended to be a “comprehensive operation...to eliminate these terrorists regardless of hue and color, along with their sanctuaries” (Sherazi, 2014). The operations involved 25,000-30,000 troops supported by heavy air strikes, which resulted in the

deaths of hundreds and the displacement of tens of thousands of people. In December 2014, the TTP conducted the highly publicized and widely condemned attack on an army school in Peshawar that killed over 130 children, largely from military families. A TTP spokesman, Mohammed Umar Khurasani, announced that the attack was specifically conducted in revenge for Operation Zarb-e-Azb. He explained, “We selected the army’s school for the attack because the government is targeting our families and females. We want them to feel the pain” (Boone and MacAskill, 2014). In response to the Peshawar school attack, the Pakistani military launched air strikes into Khyber Agency and increased the intensity of military action under Operation Zarb-e-Azb. By June 2015, the military was ready to declare victory. In the process, however, the military essentially emptied the region, resulting in nearly 1 million people displaced as a result of the operation (Kakakhel and Farooq, 2015).

### ***The “Af-Pak” Region: A Bevy of Troubled Relationships***

The Afghanistan-Pakistan border region increasingly became the focal point for the many overlapping and difficult interstate relationships within the South Asian region. Security issues connected with the Taliban insurgency in Pakistan’s northwest border region loomed large in the domestic and foreign policy of the various states involved in this political arena as they pursued their own and often competing strategic interests. As U.S. forces battled a resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan and pressured Pakistan to do the same within its own borders, a series of events helped to drive a wedge between the U.S. and Pakistani governments: from the June 2008 NATO strike on the international border that

mistakenly killed 11 Pakistani soldiers and the September 2008 U.S. special forces raid in South Waziristan which Pakistani officials claimed resulted in a number of civilian deaths to the 2011 arrest of undercover CIA agent Raymond Davis for murdering two ISI agents in Lahore and the May 2011 Abbottabad raid by U.S. Navy SEALs against Osama bin Laden's compound. These events served as a catalyst to bring to the forefront and in greater relief underlying tensions in the bilateral relationship between the two countries.<sup>63</sup>

Americans saw Pakistani officials playing a “double game” by offering cooperation with the U.S. in return for aid while maintaining links with the Taliban and other Pashtun militant groups to protect their influence in Afghanistan to promote “strategic depth” against India. Richard Armitage stated, “We knew if Musharraf was talking to us it was about 60% accurate and about 40% lies.”<sup>64</sup> Armitage further recounted to me an incident in which he pressured Musharraf to dismantle a militant training camp in Kashmir, which served as an irritant to India. Musharraf did dismantle the camp, only to reconstitute it a few kilometers away. He stated, “You are dealing with literal truth tellers, no wiggle room, you couldn't give them any wiggle room, or they would take it.” There was continued frustration felt within both the Bush and Obama administrations that Pakistan was not doing enough to target Taliban forces using FATA as a base for attacks within Afghanistan. This distrust of the Pakistanis ran deep enough that U.S. officials chose not to pre-warn them of the raid in Abbottabad, fearing that the target could be tipped off and, in the words of then CIA director Leon Panetta,

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<sup>63</sup> Interview with Ambassador Cameron Munter, former U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, 2010-2012, Washington, DC, January 23, 2019.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Richard Armitage, former Deputy Secretary of State, Arlington, VA, November 27, 2018.



“jeopardize the mission” (Rashid, 2012, 8). Yet, as U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham noted in 2011 of the U.S. relationship with Pakistan in the wake of the bin Laden raid, “You can’t trust them, and you can’t abandon them” (Raju and Sherman, 2011). Michael Hayden (2016, 348) referred to Pakistan as the “ally from hell.”

This came to a head when U.S. President Donald Trump tweeted on January 1, 2018, “The United States has foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years, and they have given us nothing but lies & deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools. They give safe havens to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan, with little help. No more!” (*BBC News*, 2018). Trump (2017) had earlier stated in an August 2017 speech at Fort Myers, “Pakistan has also sheltered the same organizations that try every single day to kill our people. We have been paying Pakistan billions and billions of dollars at the same time they are housing the very terrorists that we are fighting. But that will have to change, and that will change immediately. No partnership can survive a country’s harboring of militants and terrorists who target U.S. servicemembers and officials.” Following his 2018 New Year’s Day tweet, his administration froze over \$1 billion in military assistance for Pakistan (Landler and Harris, 2018).

General Stanley McChrystal, the former JSOC and ISAF commander, however, argued that there has been a “sense of naivete” among senior U.S. officials in Washington concerning the Pakistani government’s ability to control the Tribal Areas and the violent backlash to military operations in the region. He stated, “I never thought that the Pakistanis wouldn’t have been happy to have al Qaeda go away but the costs in terms of loss of stability and control, the threat of that was something I don’t think Americans

appreciated for a long, long time, and many still don't....Until you spend time there, it's hard to appreciate completely...I think we were slow to it, and I think people who hadn't been there or spent time there, had a difficult time accepting that."<sup>65</sup> Ambassador Cameron Munter further recognized that U.S. priorities for Pakistan were "mainly military and intelligence driven," narrowing the scope of the bilateral relationship to counterterrorism despite his and others "failed" efforts to broaden it. "And their priority," he further explained,

was, they wanted to kill the bad guys, understandably, and they wanted our troops not to be hit by people in the sanctuaries in Pakistan...And it was pretty well understood by the American intelligence and by the military guys, at least at the embassy, that there was a huge price to pay because of the tactics and the problems sending in the Pakistan military to clean out Pashtun territories but the Americans didn't care...So Pakistan in this sense was collateral damage to the American policy on Afghanistan.<sup>66</sup>

Ambassador Richard Boucher, who served as Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs from 2006-2009, further observed that during his visits to Rawalpindi, senior Pakistani military leadership stressed that in counterterrorism efforts in FATA, "if we only use military force, they will band together against us." He continued,

And frankly in the end that's what happened. We pressured them so hard to go after these that, starting in Khyber and them moving onto other areas, they would do their piece by piece military operations and that's how you got the TTP, the Pakistani Taliban, which did not exist before. It was something that was created because U.S. military pressure and U.S. military tactics, which the Pakistanis told us wouldn't work, didn't work.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with General Stanley McChrystal, former JSOC and ISAF Commander, Washington, DC, January 8, 2019.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Ambassador Cameron Munter, former U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, 2010-2012, Washington, DC, January 23, 2019.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Ambassador Richard Boucher, former Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, Washington, DC, February 25, 2019.

Pakistani officials, on the other hand, consider the turmoil in their country since 2001 as a direct result of U.S. action across the border in Afghanistan, bringing the death and destruction of the War on Terror to their doorstep despite having nothing to do with the events of 9/11. General Ashfaq Kayani, who was serving as the Director General of Military Operations for the Army in 2001, stated, “We suggest to the US that they should not drive fighters towards our borders. We hoped that the coalition would encircle the al Qaeda forces... We first learnt about Tora Bora [December 2001] from the television.” Describing a lack of cooperation with Pakistan by the American forces, he continued, “We watched the American forces driving towards us. But no one was manning our borders” (Schofield, 2011, 133). General Orakzai, who was serving as the corps commander in Peshawar in 2001 and commanded the first military operations into FATA, likewise complained that “Pakistan was not taken into confidence about the Tora Bora operation” (Abbas, 2014, 79). A former North-West Frontier Province government official complained to me, “The United States brought al Qaeda to my province.”<sup>68</sup> A former senior-level official in Pakistan’s Foreign Ministry similarly referred to the War on Terror as an “imposed war” due to U.S. military actions pushing al Qaeda “into the tribal areas...and that’s when it became our problem.”<sup>69</sup>

A Pakistani diplomat told me that Pakistani government officials are offended by the constant criticism from U.S. officials that Pakistan “has not done enough,” citing the fact that 80,000 Pakistanis have been killed since 2001 including a number of soldiers

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with former North-West Frontier Province government official, Islamabad, Pakistan, December 2018.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with former Pakistani Foreign Ministry official, Islamabad, Pakistan, December 2018.

“embracing martyrdom” in the Tribal Areas as part of “America’s war.”<sup>70</sup> By 2010, 2,300 Pakistani soldiers had been killed in FATA, nearly all of these deaths occurring after 2006 (Coll, 2018, 440). A former senior ISI official stated, “The pressure on partner states to take up the American fight is exactly the problem,” recognizing that U.S. policy creates a “reaction.” Recognizing Pakistan’s culpability in partnering with the United States on counterterrorism, he added, “We took a decision. We have sacrificed for this decision...It is not the U.S. that is suffering. We are suffering.”<sup>71</sup> A former Pakistani Foreign Ministry official added that while Pakistan’s “priority was how to cope with the implications of U.S. actions in Afghanistan,” U.S. officials remained focus on “al Qaeda and their decimation,” pressuring their Pakistani counterparts to “keep pursuing relentlessly” this objective.<sup>72</sup> Many Pakistani officials accuse the United States of being a “fair weather friend” exploiting them for their own gains and remained insensitive to the strategic interests of Pakistan, especially with the United States’ perceived tilt towards India over the previous two decades. Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry further argued,

Pakistan felt that the U.S. acknowledges our role but is not understanding or factoring in Pakistan’s own security interests. Clearly when India was given a larger role in Afghanistan, then Pakistanis felt that our security interests were not being looked after and India would naturally want to use this opportunity for a double squeeze on Pakistan, to destabilize Pakistan...And on top of it, when the U.S. tells us we have not done enough or you need to do more, then people didn’t really like that because they think you really don’t care for the sacrifices that we have made.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Interview with Pakistani diplomat, Washington, DC, November 2018.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with former senior ISI official, Islamabad, Pakistan, December 2018.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with former Pakistani Foreign Ministry official, Islamabad, Pakistan, December 2018.

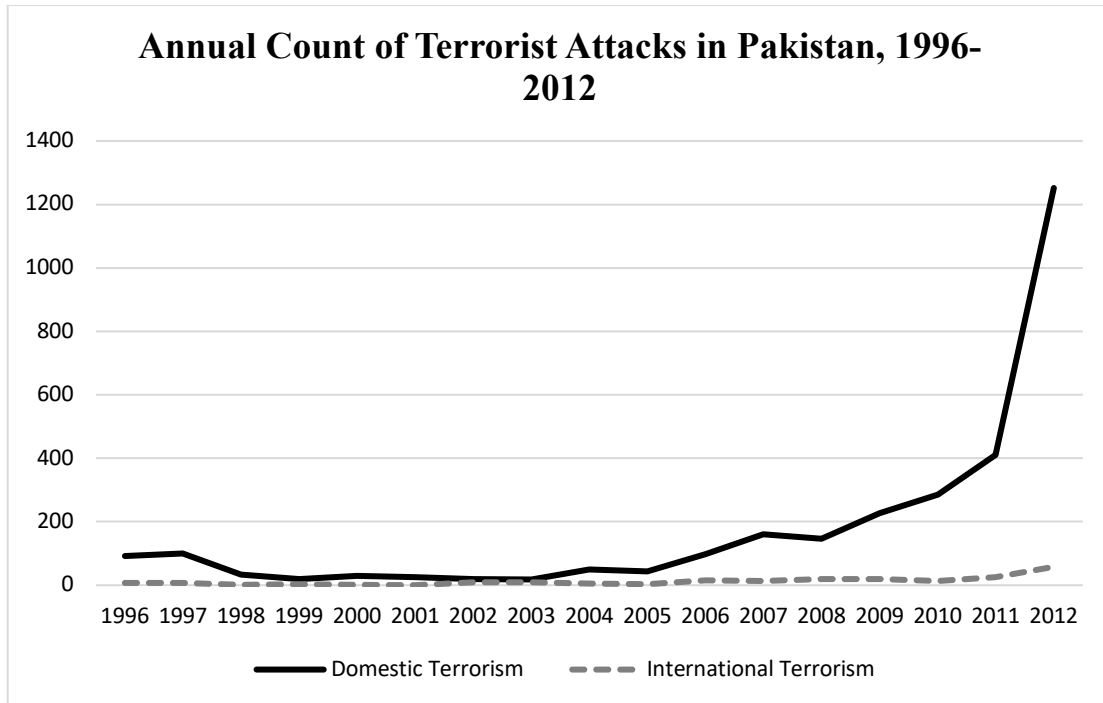
<sup>73</sup> Interview with Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry, former Pakistani Foreign Secretary and Pakistani Ambassador to the U.S., Islamabad, Pakistan, December 18, 2018.

Pakistani diplomats and other government officials I spoke with highlighted that Afghan and U.S. officials are constantly pressing about sanctuaries in FATA, but the problem, they argue, is on the Afghan side where as much as 70% of its territory is not controlled by the government with cross border movement an issue. They bristle at the U.S. counterterrorism mantra of “do more” by pointing to the need for U.S. and Afghan forces needing to do more in Afghanistan (Syed, 2013). In March 2006, Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz blamed the NATO forces’ and Afghan government’s “inability to control its border” for “destabilizing the FATA” (State Department, 2006l). Pakistan, he continued, “has done its part” in clearing the tribal areas and today is trying to control the border through construction of a border fence and stricter visa controls along the border. Pakistani military officials, further, argued that they must first confront the greater threat to Pakistan, emanating from groups like the TTP, before being able to move against the Haqqani network which is not directly threatening the Pakistani state (Khattak, 2014). Of course, the Afghans blame the Pakistanis for allowing their territory to be used as a safe haven for the Afghan Taliban, contributing to the chaos of their country. In a July 2008 lunch in Kabul with then presidential candidate Barack Obama, President Karzai blamed “Pakistan as the source of increasing instability in Afghanistan,” especially the ISI and Pakistani military, and even urged “U.S. military operations in Pakistan” to address this problem (State Department, 2008d). This was a point he would continue to press to American officials in the coming years.

## *Conclusion*

The increase in domestic terrorist attacks in Pakistan increased in step with the Pakistan's counterterrorism operations and efforts to gain control over FATA's "ungoverned spaces" being used as a safe haven for terrorist groups, under pressure from the U.S. government pursuing their own security interests in the region. By 2012, there had been 57 separate counterterrorism operations by the military within FATA and neighboring areas of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province (Staniland, Mir, and Lalwani, 2018). These operations led to a backlash against the Pakistani state from FATA and a drastic increase in the number of domestic terrorist attacks occurring within Pakistan since the large-scale deployment of Pakistani military forces to its border region in 2004. Increased U.S. pressure to "do more" and the subsequent Pakistani military operations to challenge the rising levels terrorism only led to increased domestic terrorist attacks as the expanded use of military force provoked more revenge attacks against the Pakistani state, sinking the country deeper into a terrorism trap. As demonstrated, states that use military force for counterterrorism as a part of the United States' War on Terror are more likely to experience higher levels of domestic terrorism, given the prevailing conditions of the periphery which were targeted by the operations. The use of process tracing in this in-depth case study provides contextual evidence to support the expectations of the terrorism trap theory and helps to illustrate the causal mechanisms that drive the statistical findings. Figure 5.1 below shows the annual count of terrorist attacks in Pakistan from 1996-2012, demonstrating this trend.

While analysts often point to the Pakistan Taliban's Islamic rhetoric and embrace



**Figure 5.1 Annual Count of Terrorist Attacks in Pakistan, 1996-2012 (Enders, et. al., 2011; Gaibulloev, et. al., 2017)**

of a Sharia-based system of governance within FATA or its varying links with al Qaeda core as explanations for the outbreak of terrorism, the groups' actual behavior shows little evidence that these are the main driving factors for committing acts of terrorist violence. The pattern of domestic terrorist attacks by the Pakistan Taliban demonstrate that revenge for counterterrorism operations by the military is the clear motivation. Public statements by the TTP and other groups announcing the purposes of the domestic terrorist attacks are replete with references to blood revenge for the Pakistani military's actions, in particular actions that lead to civilian casualties. In addition to direct attacks against military and government targets, the Taliban groups argue that attacks against the families of members of the Pakistani military, such as the Peshawar army school attack and the Rawalpindi mosque attack, are revenge for civilian deaths in FATA, in a warped application of

Pashtunwali. A Baloch scholar explained to me that people within the peripheral areas of Pakistan view their interests and the actions of the government through their “tribal norms.” The Pakistani government, as well as its international backers, have not fully appreciated this fact and, therefore, the application of force has been “counter-productive.”<sup>74</sup>

Moreover, the domestic focus of these attacks, with domestic terrorism comprising the lion’s share of terrorist activity within Pakistan, shows a fundamental divide between the TTP and al Qaeda core. The TTP’s formation and campaign of violence were bound with the local political dynamics of the northwestern border region and the changing conflict environment as a result of U.S. counterterrorism policy and Pakistani military operations. As discussed in Chapter 2, al Qaeda core with its transnational “jihadist” ideology continually pressed its affiliate organizations to concentrate their fight on targeting the United States and other Western targets and avoid confrontation with the local government. Only after driving the United States out of the Muslim world did al Qaeda core then wish to pursue action against local governments, seeing conflict with local military forces as premature and a waste of vital resources. Al Qaeda leadership even chastised the TTP for its targeting of fellow Muslims and poor understanding of Islam in justifying its terrorist attacks. This provides further evidence that, rather than international politics or al Qaeda’s transnational ideology, the increase in domestic terrorism within Pakistan was a product of the deployment of the military for

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<sup>74</sup> Interview with Dr. Abdul Basit Mujahid, chairman, Balochistan Intellectual Forum, Islamabad, Pakistan, December 14, 2018.



counterterrorism operations in FATA and the northwestern border region under pressure from United States.

There has been a fundamental failure among a wide range of senior level policymakers to appreciate the local context of the violence in Pakistan and how best to approach the problem. With the tempo of domestic terrorist attacks increasing, both within Pakistan and across the border in Afghanistan, domestic and international pressure mounted on the Pakistan government to take decisive military action against terrorist groups within its border. This only helped to serve as a further catalyst for domestic terrorism as the targeted groups committed increasingly high-level attacks in retaliation for Pakistani military operations, often resulting in civilian casualties, and as a means of asserting their continued capabilities and power in the face of the government's counterterrorism efforts. In the following chapter, I quantitatively test the terrorism trap theory before turning to shorter case studies that demonstrate variation on partner states' approach to counterterrorism under the rubric of America's War on Terror prior to the deployment of military forces to the periphery and how this connects with the levels of domestic terrorism.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **STATISTICAL ANALYSIS**

In the previous chapter, I presented an illustrative case study of the terrorism trap theory's causal mechanism explaining the increase in domestic terrorism under the auspices of the War on Terror. I argue that key partner states increasingly relied on military forces to conduct domestic counterterrorism operations, especially to offensively target safe havens within their borders. These counterterrorism operations led to a backlash from the targeted groups and communities, increasing the levels of domestic terrorism within partner states. While the purpose of U.S. and partner states' counterterrorism efforts were meant to stymie and defeat international terrorism as "a threat to our way of life," they ended up serving as a catalyst for increased acts of domestic terrorism. In order to test the connection between the use of the military for counterterrorism and domestic terrorism, this chapter provides statistical analysis based on a global dataset. This analysis will be paired with qualitative case studies of Yemen, Mali, and Egypt in subsequent chapters as additional evidence of the theory's casual mechanism through systematic process tracing and further test the theory (George and Bennett, 2005; Ragin, 1987; Hall, 2003).

### **Research Design**

For the large-N quantitative analysis, I use cross-sectional, time series models covering the years 1996-2012 for 173 states with state-year as the unit of analysis. My dependent variables are annual counts of international and domestic terrorist attacks. These variables are based on the Enders, Sandler, and Gaibullov (2011) and Gaibullov, Piazza, and

Sandler (2017) datasets, which divide the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) between international and domestic terrorism for the years 1970-2012. In building their dataset, Enders, et. al. (2011), with Gaibulloev, et. al. (2017) relying on the same coding protocol to update the data to 2012, first exclude terrorist attacks that do not meet all three inclusion criteria outlined in GTD, a stricter level than GTD itself which only requires meeting two of the three criteria for inclusion. These three criteria are: “1) the attack is perpetrated for a political, socioeconomic, or religious motive; 2) the attack is intended to coerce, intimidate, or send a message to a wider audience than the immediate victim(s); and 3) the attack is beyond the boundaries set by international humanitarian law” (START, 2018). They also exclude any terrorist attack identified with the classification as “Doubt Terrorism Proper,” which includes incidents involving guerilla warfare or criminal acts. They then code terrorist attacks as either international or domestic by examining the nationality of the victim and the target. If the nationality of the victim is different than the state within which the attack occurred, it is coded as an international terrorist attack. Similarly, if the target is a diplomatic target, a multi-national NGO, a foreign business, or other institution representative of a state outside the attack venue, it is coded an international terrorist attack. The remainder of the attacks are coded as domestic terrorism as “the venue country matches the nationality of the identified victims, and that there are no diplomatic or multilateral entities involved. Finally, these domestic terrorist incidents do not concern hostage events that included the interests from two or more countries” (Enders, Sandler, and Gaibulloev, 2011, 323).

Because the dependent variables are event counts with excess zeros, I use a zero-inflated negative binomial (ZINB) regression. Poisson and negative binomial regressions are also used to estimate models with event counts as the dependent variable. A Poisson regression, however, assumes that the variance is equal to the mean and is not appropriate for data with over-dispersion, which is often the case with data on terrorism as some states experience very high levels of terrorist attacks while others only experience a handful of attacks or even none at all. A negative binomial regression is appropriate for data with wide variance but not for data with excess zeros. There are a number of states that have never experienced an incident of either domestic or international terrorism with many states only experiencing them intermittently. This leads to an excessive level of zeros in the data. Further, many of these states have a very low likelihood of ever experiencing terrorism given particular conditions within the state, such as a very small population, geographic isolation, a strongly homogenous society, or lack of a strategic position in international politics. This creates a sub-category within the data of states with zero terrorist attacks that are “certain zeros” and, regardless of variation in the independent variables, are not likely to experience a terrorist attack. A ZINB regression accounts for this sub-category by relying on a two-step regression process using both a logistic regression to independently model the likelihood of a state being part of the “certain zero” sub-category and a negative binomial regression to estimate the relationship between the independent variables and the size of the event count. Because the dependent variables used in my models display both over-dispersion and excess zeros, I use a ZINB regression. The results of a Vuong test also statistically demonstrated

that a ZINB regression is a more appropriate choice for the data than a standard negative binomial regression. To account for issues of heteroscedasticity, I use robust standard errors clustered on state. I also include a dependent variable lagged by one year in all the models estimated to account for potential autocorrelation.

The key explanatory variable is a binary measure for the presence of domestic counterterrorism operations by the military in a given year. To code this variable, I relied on information within the State Department's annual *Patterns of Global Terrorism* reports from 1996-2003 and *Country Reports on Terrorism* from 2004-2012.<sup>75</sup> The State Department is required by law, under Title 22, Section 2656f of the U.S. Code, to submit to Congress an annual report providing "detailed assessments with respect to each foreign country in which acts of international terrorism occurred which were, in the opinion of the Secretary [of State], of major significance" (State Department, 2004). These reports provide:

with respect to each foreign country from which the United States Government has sought cooperation during the previous five years in the investigation or prosecution of an act of international terrorism against United States citizens or interests, information on: (A) the extent to which the government of the foreign country is cooperating with the United States Government in apprehending, convicting, and punishing the individual or individuals responsible for the act; and (B) the extent to which the government of the foreign country is cooperating in preventing further acts of terrorism against United States citizens in the foreign country (Ibid.).

These reports, therefore, provide an overview of the range of counterterrorism activities undertaken by partner states deemed to be of significance to the United States in the fight

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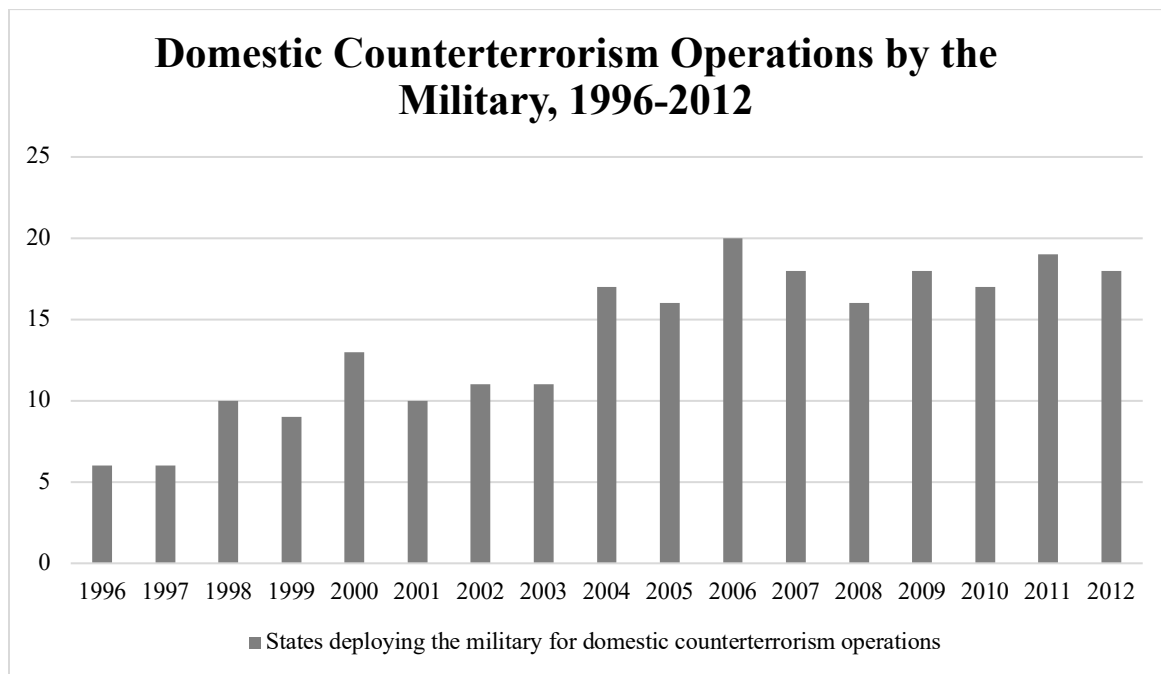
<sup>75</sup> The name of the annual State Department report on terrorism was changed in 2004 when the State Department began incorporating data on global terrorism from the newly established National Counterterrorism Center in order to distinguish the more comprehensive subsequent reports from previous ones.

against terrorism and with whom the United States has sought cooperation in counterterrorism measures. These activities include the passage of new anti-terrorism laws, terrorism arrests, targeting terrorist financing, political or economic reforms related to terrorism, relevant police activity, intelligence sharing arrangements, cooperation in the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, and domestic military operations.

In regard to constructing a variable for domestic counterterrorism operations by the military, the use of these reports has two empirical advantages. First, the reports only include domestic military operations that are considered to be part of the country's counterterrorism efforts and are targeting terrorist groups of interest to the U.S. government. This distinguishes counterterrorism operations from other domestic military operations that are against traditional insurgencies or rebellions and which the U.S. government does not consider to be part of the War on Terror. This helps to isolate partner states' military activities considered to be counterterrorism. Second, the reports discuss operations that the State Department deems to be evidence of a government "cooperating with the United States Government" to target existing terrorist groups and "cooperating in preventing further acts of terrorism." Therefore, the domestic military operations included in the coding of this variable are those that are in line with U.S. counterterrorism priorities and evidence of their cooperation with the United States. The explanatory variables will be lagged by one year to capture the temporal causal mechanism. As a robustness check, I run the models without Iraq and Afghanistan given the U.S. military presence in both countries increasing the levels of international terrorism within both states and potentially inflating the levels of domestic terrorism as

the local population possesses increased grievances against the U.S.-backed governments installed after the toppling of the Taliban and Baathist regimes.

Figure 6.1 shows the annual count of states that relied upon their military for domestic counterterrorism operations from 1996-2012, according to information within the State Department's *Patterns of Global Terrorism* reports and *Country Reports on Terrorism*. The data shows an increase in states relying on the military for counterterrorism beginning in 2004, reflective of the changing priorities in U.S. counterterrorism efforts away from direct U.S. military action. After 2004, the U.S. government increased its focus on increasing its reliance on partner states to target terrorist groups within its borders, especially as there was concern that al Qaeda was shifting its operations outside of Afghanistan into other safe havens in various parts of the Muslim world.

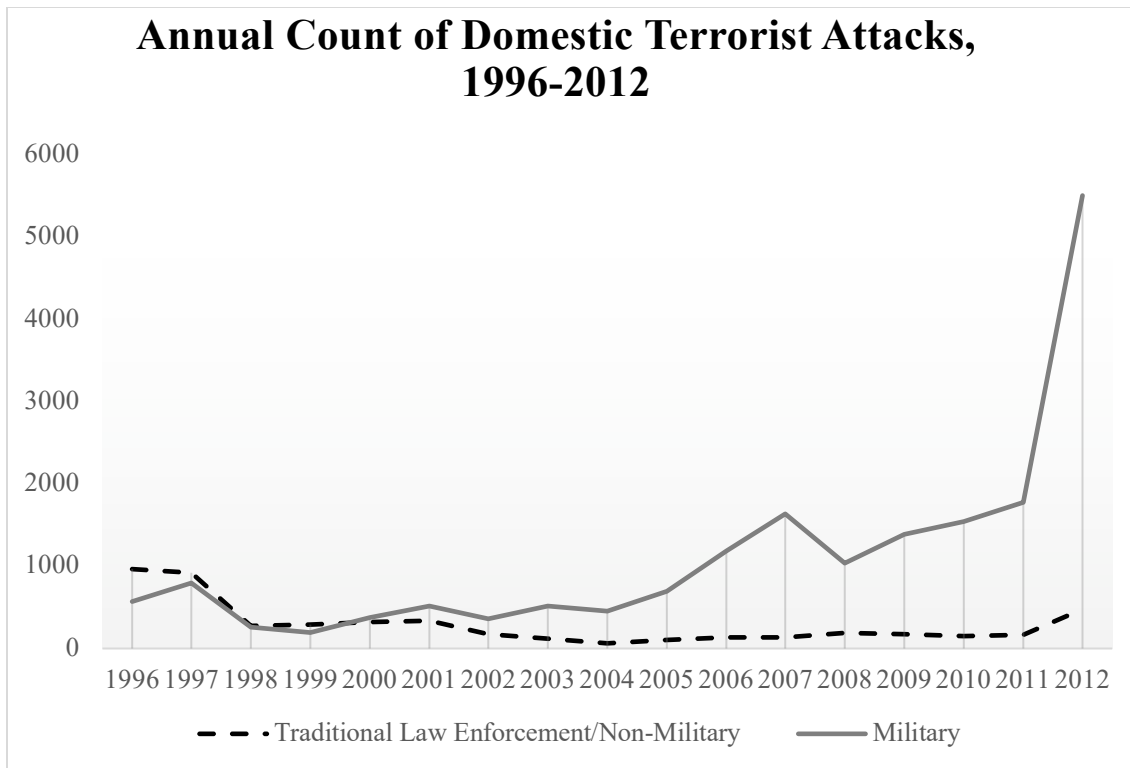


**Figure 6.1 Domestic Counterterrorism Operations by the Military, 1996-2012 (State Department, 1996-2012)**

Figure 6.2 below demonstrates the pattern of domestic terrorist attacks within states that relied on traditional law enforcement methods for counterterrorism overlaid by the pattern for states that relied on military from 1996-2012. Prior to 2001, states relying on both approaches resulted in similar levels of domestic terrorism. After the beginning of the War on Terror, there is a decrease in the level of domestic terrorism within states relying on traditional law enforcement, as states began to take counterterrorism more seriously under pressure from the U.S. government and undertake greater measures to challenge it. However, for states that relied upon the military in offensive counterterrorism efforts, the levels of domestic terrorism increased, especially in 2005 when the U.S. government officially shifted its counterterrorism policy towards supporting the military capacity of partner states to offensively target terrorist groups within their borders. Further, the below figure demonstrates that the increase in domestic terrorism discussed at the beginning of chapter 1 is concentrated within states relying on military force for counterterrorism.

In the models estimated, I include a number of control variables that account for alternative explanations for the outbreak of domestic terrorism. I control for politically excluded ethnic groups as a proportion of the total state population, derived from the Ethnic Power Relations dataset, as scholars have shown that this can contribute to the outbreak of domestic terrorism (Wimmer, Cederman, and Min, 2009; Choi and Piazza, 2016b). I also estimated models using an alternative variable for minority discrimination from the Minorities at Risk dataset, which did not substantively change the models' outputs (Minorities at Risk Project, 2009). To control for regime type, I include a state's





**Figure 6.2 Annual Count of Domestic Terrorist Attacks, 1996-2012 (Enders, Sandler, and Gaibullov, 2011; Gaibullov, Piazza, and Sandler, 2017; State Department, 1996-2012)**

Polity IV score (Marshall and Jaggers, 2010). The Polity IV score is a ranking from -10 (hereditary monarchy) to +10 (full democracy). Regime type controls for a state's propensity to suppress political and human rights against its civilian population, which can stimulate terrorism through increased grievances (Abrahms, 2007; Aksoy, Carter, and Wright, 2012; Azam and Thelen, 2010; Choi, 2010; Eyerman, 1998; Findley and Young, 2011; Walsh and Piazza, 2010). The Polity score also controls for levels of democracy which scholars argue can increase the opportunities to commit terrorist attacks (Ash, 2014; Chenoweth, 2010, 2013; Eubank and Weinberg, 1994, 1998, 2001; Li, 2005; Pape, 2005; Young and Dugan, 2011). Using data from the World Bank, I include logged control variables for a state's GDP using constant 2014 dollars, total state population, and

total land area (World Bank, 2017). I include a logged variable controlling for the level of military expenditures by the government (SIPRI, 2017). I also include a dummy variable for a War on Terror year, beginning in 2002, and a logged and lagged variable for total U.S. military aid, which increases a state's military capacity and was often used as a point of leverage in gaining cooperation with partner states. With military assistance playing a key role in gaining cooperation of states of key strategic interest under the War on Terror, this helps to serve as a proxy for the importance a partner state holds for the U.S. government in the fight against terrorism and the likelihood of experiencing pressure from the U.S. government to undertake offensive counterterrorism operations. For U.S. military assistance, I use data from the USAID (2015) Green Book, which catalogues all U.S. aid programs since 1945. To account for regional influences, I estimate models with regional controls for parts of the world more directly impacted by the War on Terror: Middle East & North Africa, Africa, Central Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.

## **Findings**

Table 6.1 below displays the results of the primary models estimated with the annual count of domestic terrorist attacks as the dependent variables, testing hypotheses 7, 8, 10, 11, and 12. Domestic counterterrorism operations by the military has a positive and statistically significant relationship (at the 99.9% confidence level) with the annual count of domestic terrorist attacks in all three models within the table. This provides support for the theory that the domestic use of military force to target terrorist groups, controlling for other relevant factors, will lead to an increase in the levels of domestic terrorism. The

logged measure of a state's military expenditures is also positive and statistically significant (at the 99% confidence level) in models 2 and 3. As a state's military expenditures increase, consistent with the deployment of the military in counterterrorism operations, domestic terrorism likewise will increase. The War on Terror dummy variable is also statistically significant (at the 99% confidence level in model 2 and the 99.9% confidence level in model 3) but has a negative relationship with the dependent variable. During the War on Terror, controlling for other relevant factors, there has actually been on average an overall decrease in global levels of domestic terrorism. This finding is evident with international terrorism as well, demonstrated in Table 2 in which the War on Terror variable has a negative and statistically significant relationship at the 99% confidence level with the annual count of international terrorism.

Table 6.2 below provides the output of the models estimated with the annual count of international terrorist attacks as the dependent variable. As demonstrated in models 5 and 6, the relationship between domestic counterterrorism operations and international terrorism is less robust than with domestic terrorism. Moreover, U.S. military assistance has a positive and statistically significant relationship with the annual count of international terrorist attacks, connecting international terrorism with policies and actions of the U.S. government. The higher levels of U.S. military aid could increase anger towards the United States, especially when this aid is used to bolster a repressive government and increase the likelihood of U.S. or other Western targets being attacked (Bell, Clay, and Martinez Machain, 2017; Shor, et. al., 2014; Dube and Naidu, 2015). This could also be connected with high levels of U.S. military assistance leading to a

**Table 6.1 Annual Count of Domestic Terrorist Attacks**

Variable Name	(1)	(2)	(3)
Dependent Variable <sub>t-1</sub>	.021*** (.006)	.016** (.005)	.015** (.004)
Counterterrorism Operations <sub>t-1</sub>	1.542*** (.217)	1.388*** (.196)	1.368*** (.188)
U.S. Military Assistance <sub>t-1</sub>		.002 (.012)	.003 (.013)
War on Terror Dummy		-.463** (.137)	-.525*** (.135)
Polity IV Score		-.002 (.005)	-.003 (.005)
Logged GDP		-.303 (.155)	-.177 (.186)
Logged Total Population		.377** (.128)	.068 (.219)
Logged Military Expenditures		.368** (.121)	.397** (.131)
Excluded Population <sub>t-1</sub>		.494 (.502)	.85 (.548)
Logged Area		-.192** (.066)	-.098 (.084)
MENA			-.129 (.301)
Africa			.349 (.374)
Central Asia			.047 (.792)
South Asia			.904 (.477)
Southeast Asia			.636 (.329)
Constant	1.234*** (.145)	2.348 (2.575)	2.817 (2.638)
Wald Chi-Squared	249.50***	320.34***	384.76***
N	2,496	1,852	1,852

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001; Robust standard errors clustered on country in parentheses

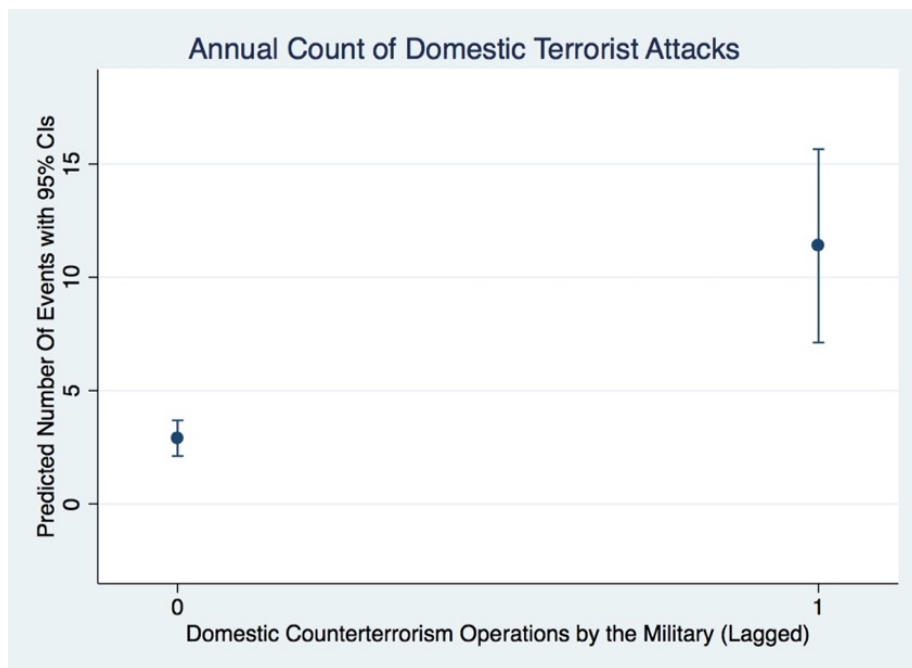
**Table 6.2 Annual Count of International Terrorist Attacks**

Variable Name	(4)	(5)	(6)
Dependent Variable <sub>t-1</sub>	.095*** (.02)	.068*** (.016)	.071*** (.017)
Counterterrorism Operations <sub>t-1</sub>	.717*** (.154)	.402 (.206)	.50* (.198)
U.S. Military Assistance <sub>t-1</sub>		.03** (.01)	.03** (.01)
War on Terror Dummy		-.487** (.158)	-.495** (.148)
Polity IV Score		-.011** (.004)	-.011** (.004)
Logged GDP		-.179 (.106)	-.209 (.179)
Logged Total Population		.259* (.123)	.176 (.257)
Logged Military Expenditures		.253* (.102)	.363** (.129)
Excluded Population <sub>t-1</sub>		-.202 (.304)	-.253 (.372)
Logged Area		-.109 (.059)	-.095 (.092)
MENA			-.10 (.302)
Africa			.435 (.437)
Central Asia			.685 (.794)
South Asia			.069 (.483)
Southeast Asia			.157 (.40)
Constant	.223 (.154)	-.125 (1.988)	.909 (2.453)
Wald Chi-Squared	67.98***	347.81***	391.53***
N	2,496	1,852	1,852

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001; Robust standard errors clustered on country in parentheses

greater in-country presence of American officials or American troops, making it easier to commit international terrorist attacks (Choi, 2011; Rogers, 2013).

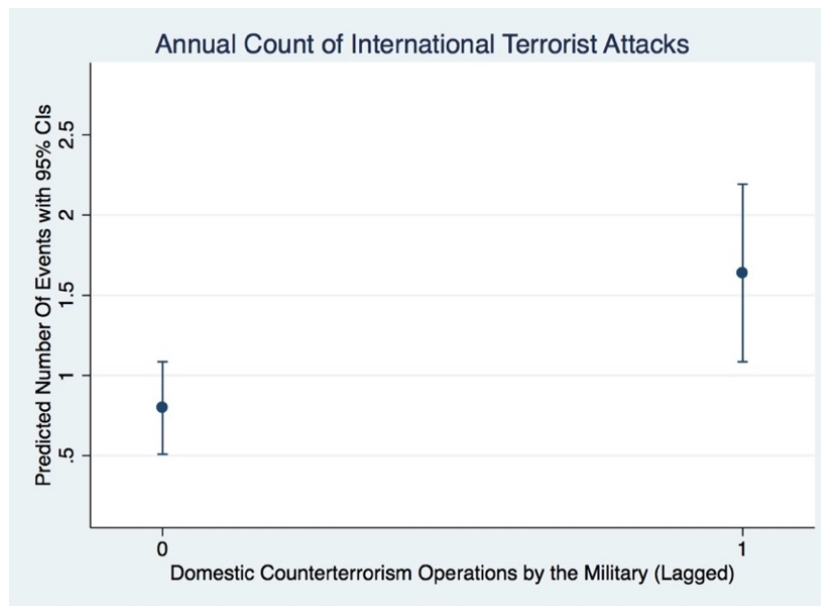
To understand the substantive impact of these relationships, Figures 6.3 and 6.4 show the marginal effects of domestic and international terrorist attacks. In Figure 6.3 below, states that rely on domestic counterterrorism operations by the military are expected to experience 11.4 domestic terrorist attacks (at the 99.9% confidence level), while holding other independent variables at their mean. States that did not use their militaries for counterterrorism are expected to experience 2.9 domestic terrorist attacks (at the 99.9% confidence level). This provides strong empirical support for hypothesis 7—controlling for alternative explanations, domestic counterterrorism operations by the military will result in an increase in domestic terrorism as they lead to a backlash from the targeted communities.



**Figure 6.3 Marginal Effects on Domestic Terrorism**

In Figure 6.4, states deploying their militaries for counterterrorism are expected to experience 1.6 international terrorist attacks while states that do not use military force are expected to experience 0.8 international terrorist attacks. However, the 95% confidence intervals overlap, further demonstrating that domestic counterterrorism operations by the military have a substantively significant relationship with domestic terrorism, as militant groups respond to the offensive actions of local governments, but not international terrorism.

In order to demonstrate the factors that contribute to a state deploying its military in counterterrorism operations, I estimate logistic regression models with the binary variable for domestic counterterrorism operations by the military as the dependent variable. I include as the key explanatory variable a dummy variable for a state possessing a safe haven identified by the 9/11 Commission Report. These regions were identified by the 9/11 Commission in 2004 as potential safe havens and, with the



**Figure 6.4 Marginal Effects on International Terrorism**

exception of southeastern Afghanistan and the southern Philippines, did not have on-going counterterrorism operations or existing terrorist activity at the time. This coding excludes European cities. I interact this variable with the War on Terror dummy variable, as a proxy for U.S. pressure to pursue counterterrorism operations within these regions. I also include a lagged dependent variable and replace the U.S. military assistance variable with a lagged dummy variable controlling for whether a state receives any level of U.S. military assistance, independent of the actual amount, which can serve as a signal to the partner state to use military force in its counterterrorism efforts regardless of the actual amount provided.

Table 6.3 consists of models estimated with the binary variable for domestic counterterrorism operations by the military as the dependent variable. The interaction term between the variables for states with safe havens identified by the 9/11 Commission Report and the War on Terror dummy variable has a positive and statistically significant relationship (at the 99% confidence level) with the use of the military for counterterrorism operations. Neither variable alone is statistically significant. The odds ratio shows that a state with a safe haven during the War on Terror is 3.668 times more likely to have deployed its military domestically for counterterrorism operations. Neither the presence of a safe haven or a War on Terror year was statistically significant on its own, evidence against hypotheses 3 and 4. This provides support for hypothesis 2 which argues that states that possess a safe haven, conditional to U.S. pressure during the War on Terror, will be more likely to deploy their military for domestic counterterrorism operations. The dummy variable for U.S. military assistance is also positive and



**Table 6.3 Domestic Counterterrorism Operations by the Military**

Variable Name	<i>Odds Ratios</i>			
	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Dependent Variable <sub>t-1</sub>	4.904*** (.39)	4.087*** (.409)	4.027*** (.411)	56.117*** (23.08)
Total Terrorist Attacks <sub>t-1</sub>	.022** (.004)	.017** (.003)	.018*** (.004)	1.018*** (.004)
Safe Haven*War on Terror	1.916*** (.419)	1.317** (.38)	1.30** (.435)	3.668** (1.597)
Safe Haven	.223 (.904)	.511 (.84)	.354 (.925)	1.425 (1.318)
War on Terror Dummy	-.128 (.25)	-.076 (.275)	-.046 (.291)	.955 (.278)
U.S. Military Assistance <sub>t-1</sub>		1.02* (.401)	.904* (.41)	2.469* (1.012)
Polity IV Score		.001 (.006)	.006 (.008)	1.006 (.008)
Logged GDP		-.568** (.172)	-.679** (.224)	.507** (.114)
Logged Total Population		.591*** (.167)	.893** (.265)	2.442** (.648)
Logged Military Expenditure		.522** (.162)	.418 (.193)	1.52* (.293)
Excluded Population <sub>t-1</sub>		1.068 (.727)	.726 (.822)	2.067 (1.698)
Logged Area		-.211 (.143)	-.285 (.172)	.752 (.13)
MENA			.597 (.51)	1.817 (.926)
Africa			-.631 (.636)	.532 (.338)
Central Asia			.524 (.614)	1.689 (1.037)
South Asia			-.728 (.792)	.483 (.383)
Southeast Asia			-.092 (.609)	.912 (.556)
Constant	-4.448*** (.297)	-1.673 (3.176)	-2.178 (3.607)	.113 (.409)
Wald Chi-Squared	266.64***	269.92***	353.88***	353.88***
N	2,798	1,885	1,868	1,868

\*<p.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001; Robust standard errors clustered on country in parentheses

statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. States that received any level of U.S. military assistance are 2.469 times more likely to have deployed the military for counterterrorism operations, providing empirical support for hypothesis 1. These findings provide support for the argument that a state's decision to deploy its military for domestic counterterrorism policies are influenced by U.S. counterterrorism policy. As will be qualitatively demonstrated in subsequent chapters, many government officials within the United States' partner states were reluctant to use concerted military force for counterterrorism operations, aware of the backlash it would provoke. It was only under incessant U.S. pressure that they eventually deployed the military in line with U.S. policy.

In regard to domestic factors influencing a state's decision for counterterrorism operations, experiencing terrorist attacks in the previous year has a positive and statistically significant relationship with the subsequent deployment of the military. However, as will be demonstrated qualitatively in subsequent chapters, it often took external pressure from the United States for partner states to marshal a military response to these terrorist activity, especially in the initial introduction of military force for counterterrorism operations. The logged measure of GDP is negative and statistically significant, implying that higher capacity states are less likely to rely on military force domestically given the lower likelihood of possessing an ungoverned space on the periphery and their ability to rely on other state institutions to deal with law and order throughout their sovereign territory. The presence of an excluded minority group does not

have a statistically significant relationship with the use of the military for counterterrorism operations, evidence against hypothesis 6.

I also estimated models, found in Tables 5.4 and 5.5 below, with Peter Henne's (2016) Counterterrorism Cooperation Scale (CTCS) for 47 Muslim-majority states from 1996-2009. This controls for alternative counterterrorism approaches used alongside the military which can also have an impact on the levels of both domestic and international terrorism. The CTCS is a quantitative measure running from -10 (completely uncooperative) and 10 (completely cooperative). To construct this measure, Henne similarly relies on the State Department's *Patterns of Global Terrorism and Country Reports on Terrorism* to count every action of cooperation or non-cooperation with the United States. The partner state actions he codes encompass the entire range of counterterrorism behavior, without distinguishing between offensive or defensive behavior, military or police operations, or political and economic or kinetic approaches to counterterrorism. He writes, "Examples of cooperative behaviors include restricting terrorist financing, arresting terrorist targets, and participating in US international military actions. And uncooperative examples include failures to undertake cooperative behaviors or active steps to frustrate US efforts, such as refusing to extradite terrorist suspects" (Henne, 2016, 69). He, then, calculated the percentage of cooperative and uncooperative counterterrorism behavior for each state and took the difference between the two percentages to establish an annual measure of counterterrorism cooperation with the U.S. government. I run models with the CTCS variable as separate from the primary models because of the data loss stemming from the inclusion of this variable. The CTCS

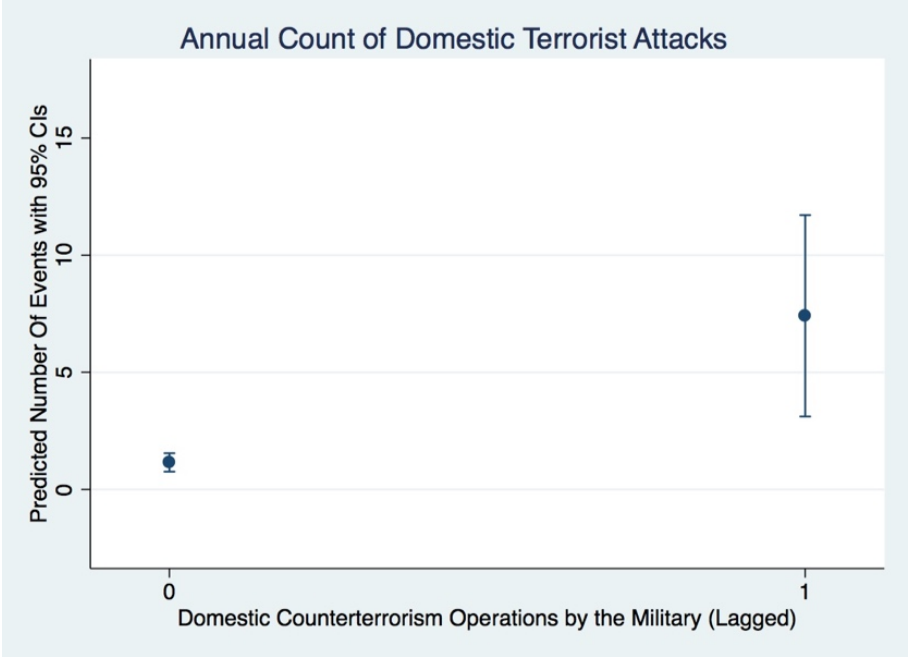
is limited in both years and states included in its coding. This measure only includes Muslim-majority states and therefore key partner states in the War on Terror that do not possess a Muslim-majority but face a Muslim periphery and have cooperated with the United States on counterterrorism operations, such as the Philippines and Ethiopia, are not included. Because Henne's measure only uses data from Muslim-majority states and does not suffer from excess zeros as a result, I use negative binomial regressions to estimate these models.

Table 6.4 below includes the results of the models estimated with Henne's CTCS. Controlling for a state's level of cooperation with the United States on counterterrorism, the variable for domestic counterterrorism operations by the military is still positive and statistically significant at the 99.9% confidence level. As shown in Figure 6.5 below, the predicted number of domestic terrorist attacks (at the 99% confidence level) for states that rely on military force for counterterrorism, holding other independent variables at their mean and controlling for total counterterrorism cooperation, is 7.4 attacks. The predicted number of attacks for states that do not use military force is 1.2, without overlap of the 95% confidence intervals. The Counterterrorism Cooperation Scale, on the other hand, has a negative relationship with domestic terrorism but only statistically significant at the 90% confidence level. However, the marginal effects of counterterrorism cooperation on domestic terrorism in Figure 5.6 below shows that as states increase their cooperation on counterterrorism with United States, cooperation that encompasses the whole range of counterterrorism activities, the expected number of domestic terrorist attacks declines, holding other independent variables at their means and

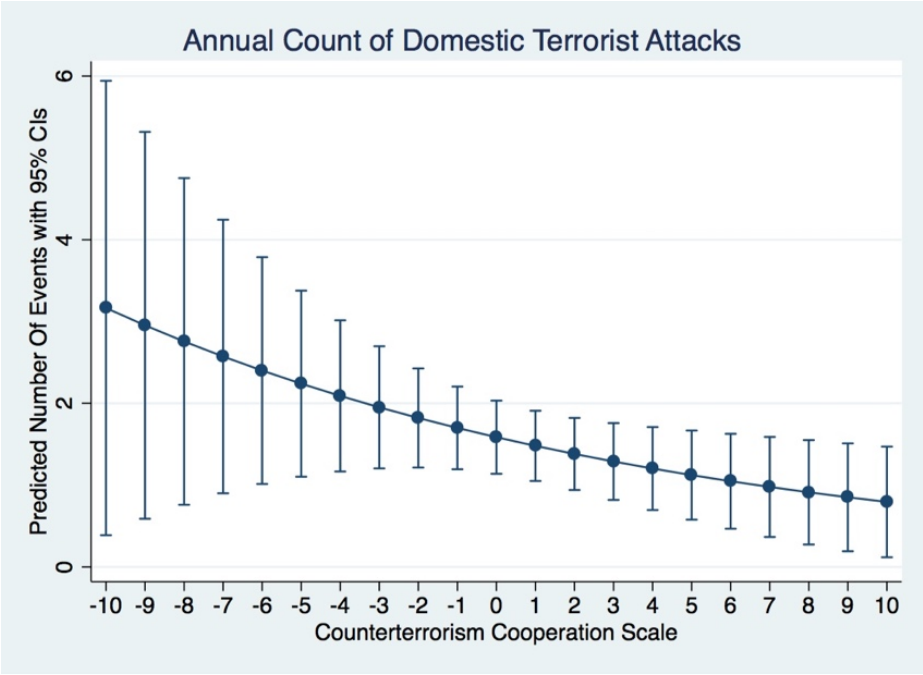
**Table 6.4 Annual Count of Domestic Terrorist Attacks**

Variable Name	(11)	(12)	(13)
Dependent Variable <sub>t-1</sub>	.038*	.02	.018
	(.016)	(.011)	(.011)
Counterterrorism Cooperation Scale	-.061*	-.031	-.069
	(.03)	(.037)	(.042)
Counterterrorism Operations <sub>t-1</sub>	1.932***	1.755***	1.861***
	(.312)	(.338)	(.374)
U.S. Military Assistance <sub>t-1</sub>		-.005	-.017
		(.022)	(.021)
War on Terror Dummy		-.819**	-.572*
		(.294)	(.25)
Polity IV Score		-.012	-.014*
		(.007)	(.006)
Logged GDP		-.517*	-.617
		(.20)	(.319)
Logged Total Population		1.038***	1.43***
		(.207)	(.278)
Logged Military Expenditures		.335*	-.037
		(.131)	(.77)
Excluded Population <sub>t-1</sub>		.47	-.037
		(.131)	(.77)
Logged Area		-.269*	-.259
		(.117)	(.137)
MENA			-1.364
			(.919)
Africa			-2.014**
			(.698)
Central Asia			-1.583**
			(.606)
South Asia			-2.235*
			(.972)
Southeast Asia			-3.241***
			(.922)
Constant	.202	-2.78	-5.009
	(.258)	(2.998)	(4.483)
Wald Chi-Squared	107.87***	378.67***	545.60***
N	572	440	440

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001; Robust standard errors clustered on country in parentheses



**Figure 6.5 Marginal Effects on Domestic Terrorism**



**Figure 6.6 Marginal Effects on Domestic Terrorism**

controlling for domestic counterterrorism operations by the military. Table 6.5 below displays the results of the models estimated with international terrorist attacks as the dependent variable and including the Counterterrorism Cooperation Scale as an independent variable. The variable for military counterterrorism operations is positive and statistically significant at the 95% confidence level in models 15 and 16. As in previous models estimated, the relationship between the use of the military for counterterrorism and international terrorism is a less robust relationship than the relationship with domestic terrorism. In controlling for counterterrorism cooperation, U.S. military assistance is no longer statistically significant.

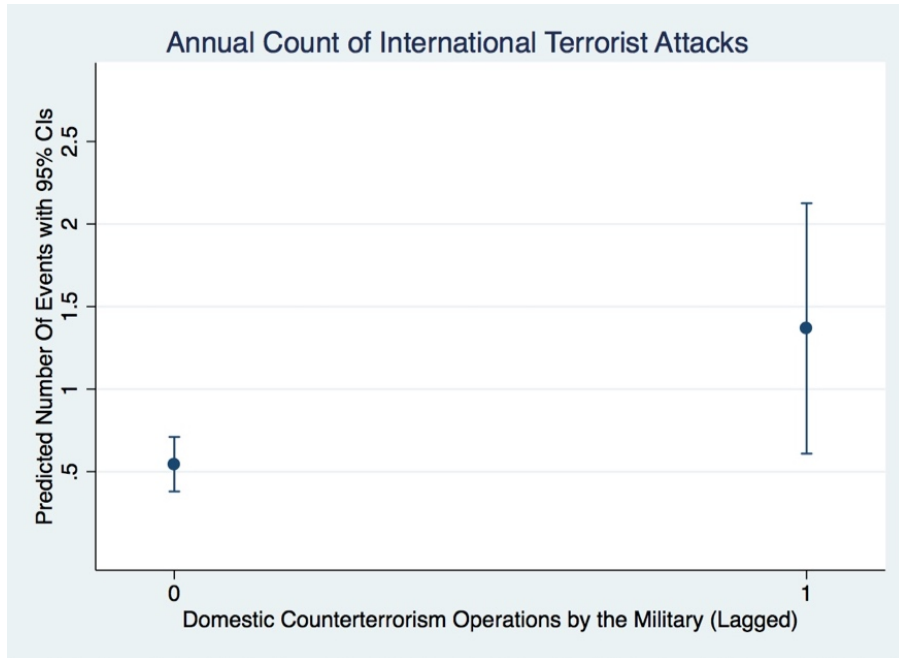
As shown in Figure 6.7 below, the predicted number of international terrorist attacks for states using the military for counterterrorism operations, controlling for broad counterterrorism cooperation, is 1.4 attacks whereas states that do not use the military are expected to experience .5 attacks. However, the 95% confidence intervals overlap, further demonstrating the substantively insignificant relationship between military operations and international terrorism. In models 15 and 16 in Table 6.5, Henne's (2016) Counterterrorism Cooperation Scale has a negative and statistically significant (at the 95% confidence level) relationship with international terrorism. In order to see the substantive relationship between the two variables, Figure 5.8 below shows the marginal effects of the Counterterrorism Cooperation Scale, holding other independent variables at their mean and controlling for the deployment of the military for counterterrorism operations.

**Table 6.5 Annual Count of International Terrorist Attacks**

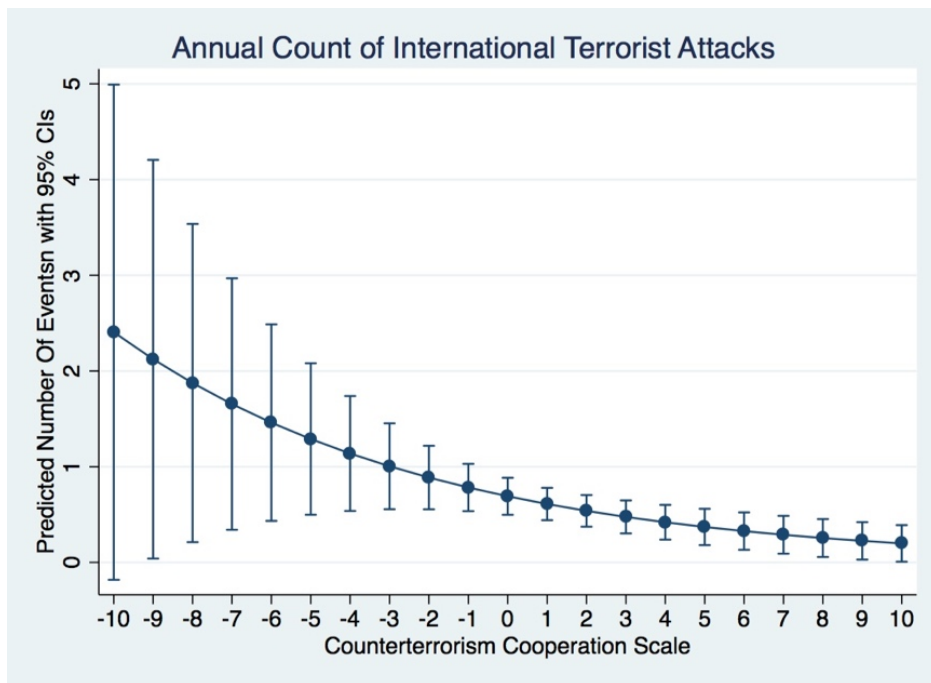
Variable Name	(14)	(15)	(16)
Dependent Variable <sub>t-1</sub>	.135*	.093*	.095*
	(.058)	(.042)	(.048)
Counterterrorism Cooperation Scale	-.039	-.133*	-.125*
	(.046)	(.051)	(.05)
Counterterrorism Operations <sub>t-1</sub>	1.132***	.686*	.92**
	(.253)	(.323)	(.316)
U.S. Military Assistance <sub>t-1</sub>		.021	.021
		(.017)	(.018)
War on Terror Dummy		-.219	-.291
		(.261)	(.21)
Polity IV Score		-.01	-.012
		(.008)	(.009)
Logged GDP		-.533*	-.816***
		(.226)	(.211)
Logged Total Population		.588**	.859***
		(.20)	(.209)
Logged Military Expenditures		.492**	.731***
		(.157)	(.193)
Excluded Population <sub>t-1</sub>		.40	.113
		(.606)	(.724)
Logged Area		-.059	-.131
		(.122)	(.114)
MENA			.871
			(.981)
Africa			-.386
			(.90)
Central Asia			-.651
			(.968)
South Asia			-1.804
			(1.061)
Southeast Asia			-1.259
			(.996)
Constant	-.486	-.081	2.428
	(.262)	(3.672)	(3.581)
Wald Chi-Squared	52.78***	228.17***	275.35***
N	572	440	440

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001; Robust standard errors clustered on country in parentheses





**Figure 6.7 Marginal Effects on International Terrorism**



**Figure 6.8 Marginal Effects on International Terrorism**

As shown in the results of the models in Table 6.5 and the predicted number of events in Figure 6.7, broad counterterrorism cooperation with the United States, while controlling for the use of military force, has a much stronger impact in reducing acts of international terrorism in partner states.

These results bring up further questions about whether any domestic deployment of the military and killing of civilians, not just for counterterrorism operations under pressure from the United States, will lead to an increase in domestic terrorism. Previous theories have already demonstrated that government repression and indiscriminate killings of civilians serve as a catalyst domestic terrorism (Asal, et. al., 2018; Avdan and Uzonyi, 2017; Choi and Piazza, 2016a; Piazza, 2017; Polo and Gleditsch, 2016; Walsh and Piazza, 2010). Scholars also have recognized that civil wars increase the likelihood for the emergence of terrorism (Boulden, 2009; Crenshaw, 2017; Fazal, 2018; Findley and Young, 2012; Fortna, 2015; Ghatak, 2018; Kalyvas, 2004; Merari, 1993; Sambanis, 2008; Stanton, 2013; Thomas, 2014). On-going conflict environments provide greater opportunities for individuals to commit violent acts. Rebel groups also use terrorism as a tactic for a variety of reasons, such as facing a democratic government more sensitive to attacks against civilians (Stanton, 2013), lacking a strong base of support (Ghatak, 2018), and the increased likelihood of being given the opportunity to participate in negotiations with the government (Thomas, 2014). Though, rebel groups that use terrorism have been shown to have a lower likelihood of achieving larger political objectives in civil wars that typically last longer (Fortna, 2015; Findley and Young, 2015). The logic of my theory, therefore, is also applicable for any domestic military deployment, with the targeted

groups and communities increasing their attacks against the government in response to military force whether or not these actions are taken as part of the War on Terror.

To demonstrate this, I re-ran the models including a binary variable for the presence of civil conflict that resulted in at least 25 battle-related deaths within the year, using the UCDP/PRIO measure (Gleditsch, et. al., 2002).<sup>76</sup> I lag this variable by one year to capture the causal direction of a backlash to domestic military operations by the government. I also estimate models with an explanatory variable for government mass killing. This is the binary variable used by Avdan and Uzonyi (2017), based on data from Ulfelder and Valentino (2008). Ulfelder and Valentino (2008, 3) describe a mass killing as “any event in which the actions of state agents result in the intentional death of at least 1,000 noncombatants from a discrete group in a period of sustained violence.” This does need to have an “intent to destroy,” as in the case of genocide, to be counted as a mass killing and therefore includes military operations relying on indiscriminate violence that leads to high levels of civilian casualties. Avdan and Uzonyi’s (2017) variable is a binary measure with a mass killing event considered to have begun if at least 100 noncombatants are killed in a given year. This variable is lagged by one year to capture the causal direction. Table 6.6 below contains the results for these models.

The presence of civil conflict has a positive and statistically significant relationship (at the 99.9% confidence interval) with the annual count of domestic terrorist attacks. Similarly, a government mass killing has a positive and statistically significant

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<sup>76</sup> There is the potential that there is troublesome correlation between domestic counterterrorism operations and the presence of civil conflict as the broader measure could also be capturing counterterrorism activities related to the War on Terror. However, the correlation between the two variables is 0.54.

**Table 6.6 Annual Count of Domestic Terrorist Attacks**

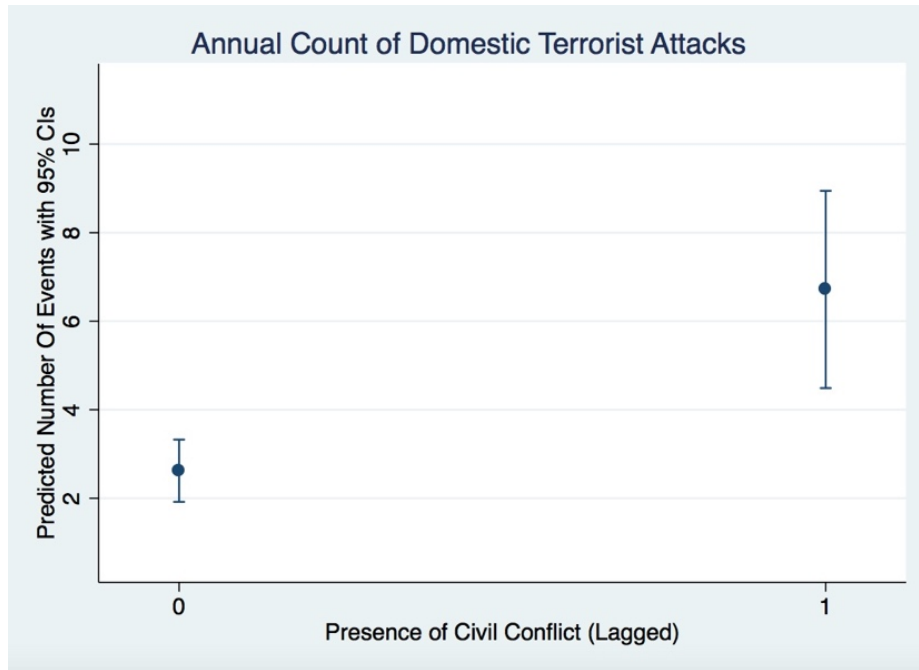
Variable Name	(17)	(18)	(19)	(20)	(21)	(22)	(23)
Dependent Variable <sub>t-1</sub>	.018** (.005)	.014** (.004)	.013*** (.003)	.02*** (.005)	.017*** (.005)	.015*** (.004)	.013*** (.003)
Counterterrorism Operations <sub>t-1</sub>	1.167*** (.182)	.948*** (.162)	.975*** (.156)	1.45*** (.21)	1.17*** (.185)	1.131*** (.158)	.929*** (.147)
Civil Conflict <sub>t-1</sub>	.718*** (.194)	.948*** (.18)	.941*** (.168)				.718*** (.165)
Mass Killing <sub>t-1</sub>				.456** (.147)	.647** (.208)	.763*** (.184)	.468** (.173)
U.S. Military Assistance <sub>t-1</sub>		-.002 (.012)	.003 (.013)		.008 (.012)	.011 (.013)	.003 (.013)
War on Terror Dummy		-.36** (.137)	-.407** (.135)		-.415** (.138)	-.478*** (.136)	-.391** (.134)
Polity IV Score		-.001 (.005)	-.003 (.005)		-.003 (.006)	-.004 (.005)	-.004 (.005)
Logged GDP		-.182 (.159)	-.108 (.174)		-.245 (.151)	-.098 (.165)	-.069 (.159)
Logged Total Population		.238 (.122)	-.008 (.196)		.286* (.125)	-.084 (.185)	-.081 (.179)
Logged Military Expenditures		.343** (.112)	.378** (.579)		.378** (.117)	.412** (.119)	.386** (.115)
Excluded Population <sub>t-1</sub>		-.094 (.552)	.328 (.579)		.049 (.551)	.499 (.553)	.232 (.571)
Logged Area		-.199** (.066)	-.112 (.077)		-.238*** (.057)	-.131 (.073)	-.135 (.073)
MENA			-.252 (.279)			-.198 (.258)	-.273 (.26)
Africa			.092 (.328)			.307 (.279)	.132 (.287)
Central Asia			-.231 (.667)			-.028 (.687)	-.209 (.642)
South Asia			.766 (.48)			1.089** (.403)	.901* (.434)
Southeast Asia			.445 (.308)			.683* (.334)	.481 (.308)
Constant	1.072*** (.164)	1.776 (2.635)	2.632 (2.527)	1.16*** (.159)	2.803 (2.515)	3.502 (2.398)	3.005 (2.363)
Wald Chi-Squared	245.24***	345.48***	522.28***	209.65***	340.21***	438.43**	497.94***
N	2,496	1,852	1,852	2,408	1,813	1,813	1,813

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001; Robust standard errors clustered on country in parentheses

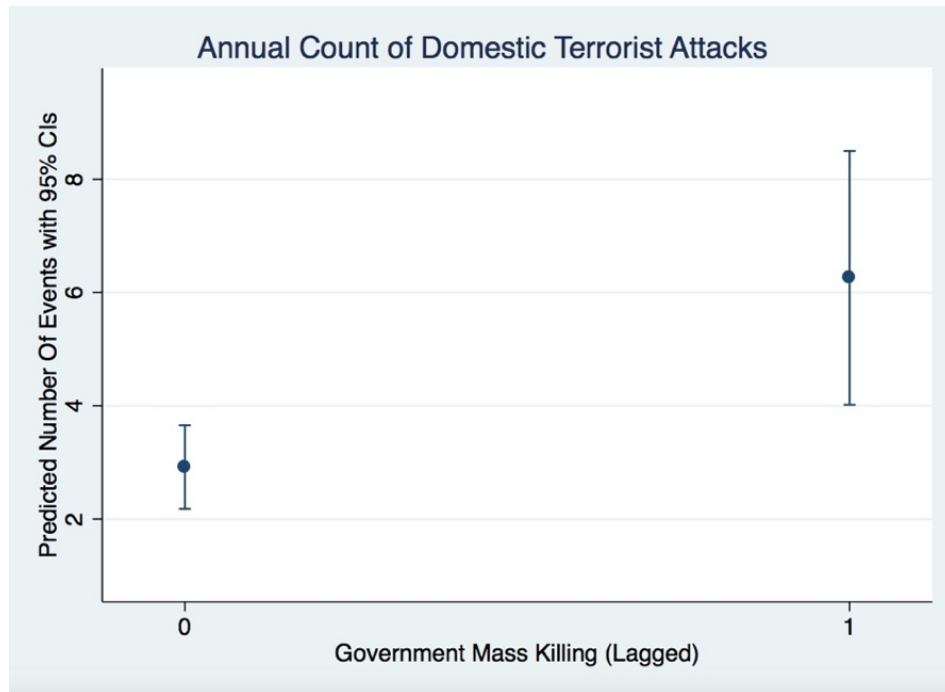
relationship with the levels of domestic terrorism at either the 99% or 99.9% confidence interval. Moreover, when controlling for the presence of any civil conflict or government mass killing within a country, domestic counterterrorism operations by the military remains positive and statistically significant at the 99.9% confidence interval.

To see the substantive impact of both civil conflict and government mass killings, Figures 6.9 and 6.10 below show the marginal effects of both variables, respectively, holding other independent variables at their means. The predicted number of domestic terrorist attacks following the outbreak of civil conflict is 6.7 attacks. Whereas the absence of civil conflict predicts 2.6 domestic terrorist attacks. The predicted number of domestic terrorist attacks in response to a government mass killing is 6.3 attacks. Figure 6.11 below shows the predicted number of domestic terrorist attacks for domestic counterterrorism operations by the military, when controlling for any civil conflict and government mass killing and keeping other independent variables at their means, is 7.1 attacks.

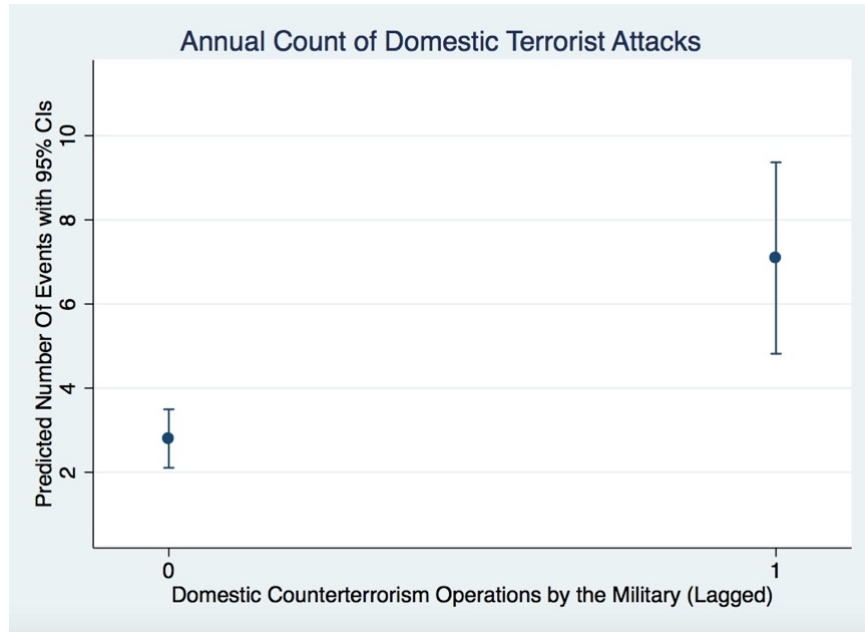
These models provide evidence that the increase in domestic terrorism can result from any civil conflict or government mass killing, in line with previous theories (Asal, et. al., 2018; Avdan and Uzonyi, 2017; Choi and Piazza, 2016a; Piazza, 2017; Polo and Gleditsch, 2016; Walsh and Piazza, 2010). The results also provide further evidence that domestic counterterrorism operations by the military under the War on Terror lead to increased levels of domestic terrorism.



**Figure 6.9 Marginal Effects on Domestic Terrorism**



**Figure 6.10 Marginal Effects on Domestic Terrorism**



**Figure 6.11 Marginal Effects on Domestic Terrorism**

### *Robustness Checks*

To check the robustness of the results, I dropped Iraq and Afghanistan from the data and re-estimated the primary models. Iraq and Afghanistan are both outliers within the data as the U.S. military invasions in the early years of the War on Terror, continued U.S. military presence, and high levels of U.S. military assistance to both countries helped to increase the levels of international terrorism. Even with operations that are organized and conducted by the security forces of the Iraqi and Afghan governments, with the lion's share of recent counterterrorism and counterinsurgency shouldered by the local governments<sup>77</sup>, the anti-Americanism generated by U.S. military operations combined

<sup>77</sup> In January 2019, for example, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani announced at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland that 45,000 members of the Afghan security forces had been killed in operations against the Taliban and other militant groups since 2014, compared to less than 72 international casualties during the same period (*BBC News*, 2019).

with the strong U.S. support of the two governments installed after the invasions could help to generate an increased backlash to the actions of the local governments and lead to higher levels of domestic terrorism.

Table 6.7 below shows the output of models estimated without Iraq and Afghanistan. These models produced results that are consistent with the earlier results in Table 6.1, providing further evidence in support of the theory that the use of the military for domestic counterterrorism operations increases the levels of domestic terrorism within the state. To see the substantive results, Figure 6.12 below shows the marginal effects on domestic terrorism, holding other independent variables at their means and controlling for alternative explanations. States that use military force for counterterrorism operations are predicted to experience 8.8 domestic terrorist attacks (at the 99.9% confidence level) while states that do not use the military are predicted to experience 2.8 domestic terrorist attacks (at the 99.9% confidence level).

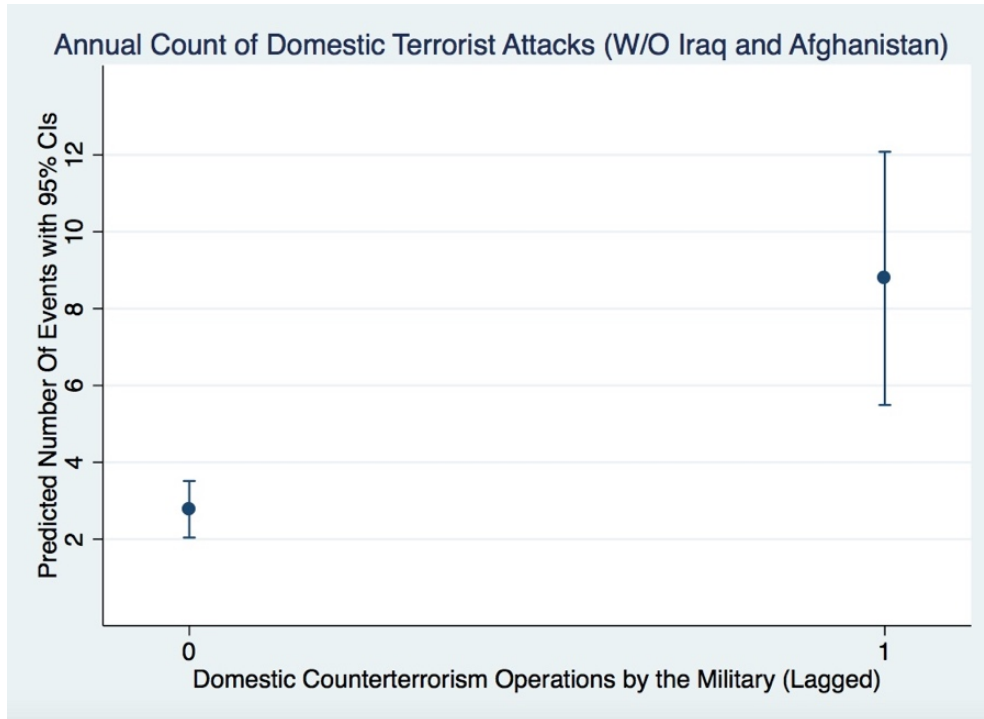
Table 6.8 below shows the results of the models estimated with the annual count of international terrorist attacks as the dependent variable without Iraq and Afghanistan. These models also display similar results as Table 2, with domestic military operations having a statistically significant but less robust impact on the levels of international terrorism. The marginal effects of military operations on international terrorism, holding other independent variables at their mean, are found in Figure 6.10 below. The predicted number of international terrorist attacks within states using their military for counterterrorism is 1.5 attacks while states not using their military for counterterrorism is .7 attacks, both at the 99.9% confidence level.



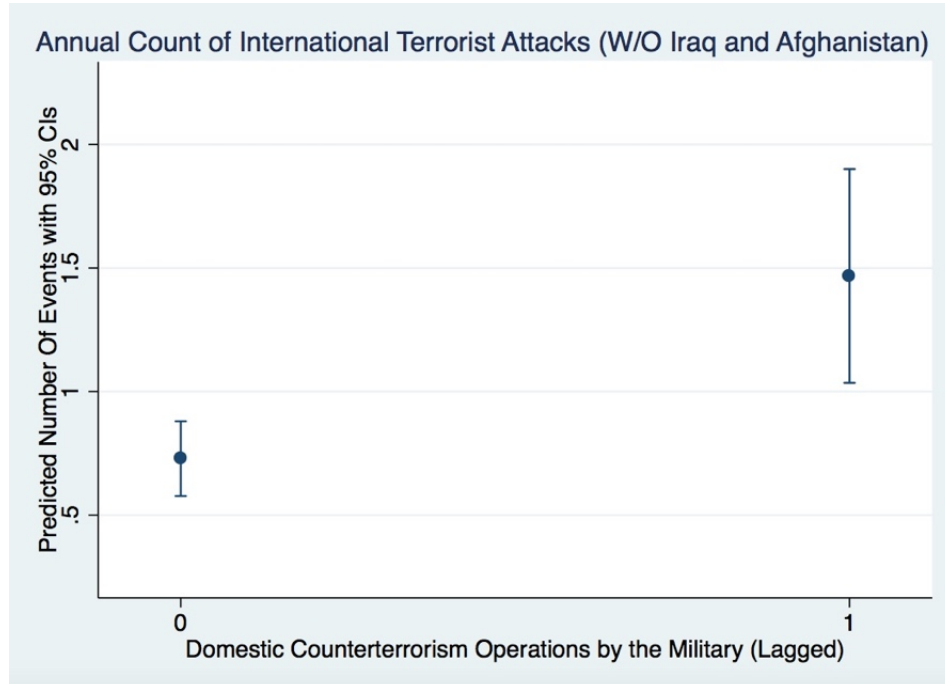
**Table 6.7 Annual Count of Domestic Terrorist Attacks (W/O Iraq and Afghanistan)**

Variable Name	(24)	(25)	(26)
Dependent Variable <sub>t-1</sub>	.029*** (.007)	.022** (.007)	.021** (.007)
Counterterrorism Operations <sub>t-1</sub>	1.354*** (.178)	1.183*** (.159)	1.152*** (.162)
U.S. Military Assistance <sub>t-1</sub>		.000 (.011)	.003 (.012)
War on Terror Dummy		-.443** (.13)	-.50*** (.125)
Polity IV Score		.006 (.003)	.005 (.004)
Logged GDP		-.325* (.145)	-.235 (.179)
Logged Total Population		.373** (.129)	.107 (.213)
Logged Military Expenditures		.379** (.115)	.427** (.131)
Excluded Population <sub>t-1</sub>		.638 (.496)	.822 (.534)
Logged Area		-.206** (.067)	-.128 (.087)
MENA			-.085 (.291)
Africa			.424 (.358)
Central Asia			.078 (.792)
South Asia			.73 (.493)
Southeast Asia			.658* (.312)
Constant	1.14*** (.151)	2.969 (2.343)	3.675 (2.49)
Wald Chi-Squared	185.59***	325.82***	333.70***
N	2,464	1,836	1,836

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001; Robust standard errors clustered on country in parentheses



**Figure 6.12 Marginal Effects on Domestic Terrorism**



**Figure 6.13 Marginal Effects on International Terrorism**

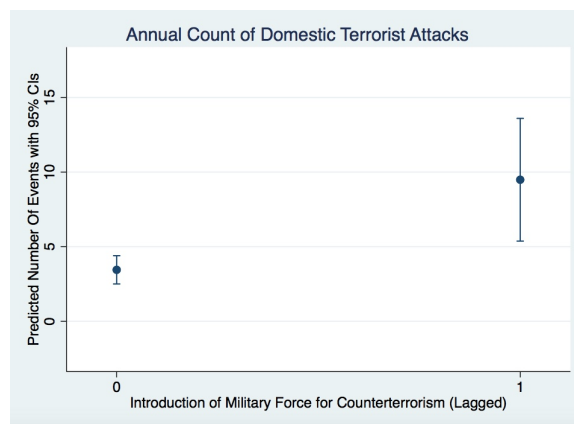
**Table 6.8 Annual Count of International Terrorist Attacks (W/O Iraq and Afghanistan)**

Variable Name	(27)	(28)	(29)
Dependent Variable <sub>t-1</sub>	.133*** (.024)	.099*** (.026)	.101*** (.028)
Counterterrorism Operations <sub>t-1</sub>	.695*** (.136)	.405* (.197)	.471** (.173)
U.S. Military Assistance <sub>t-1</sub>		.028** (.009)	.028** (.009)
War on Terror Dummy		-.385* (.16)	-.401** (.15)
Polity IV Score		-.012** (.004)	-.012* (.005)
Logged GDP		-.182 (.103)	-.199 (.186)
Logged Total Population		.23 (.123)	.126 (.266)
Logged Military Expenditures		.248* (.10)	.355** (.13)
Excluded Population <sub>t-1</sub>		-.204 (.305)	-.267 (.383)
Logged Area		-.10 (.059)	-.085 (.094)
MENA			-.041 (.315)
Africa			.499 (.439)
Central Asia			.689 (.772)
South Asia			.161 (.555)
Southeast Asia			.268 (.414)
Constant	.043 (.149)	.186 (1.92)	1.217 (2.301)
Wald Chi-Squared	71.23***	222.82***	235.37***
N	2,464	1,836	1,836

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001; Robust standard errors clustered on country in parentheses

There are also empirical concerns for causal implications related to the simultaneity of on-going domestic counterterrorism operations by the military and the levels of domestic terrorism. To address this issue, I re-coded the variable for domestic counterterrorism operations to only include the introduction of military force for counterterrorism. The year in which military force is introduced is coded a 1 while all subsequent years of the operation are coded 0. When there are temporal breaks between counterterrorism operations, I code the re-introduction of military force as 1 and the remaining years of the subsequent operation as a 0. Table 6.9 below displays the results of the models estimated with this re-coded explanatory variable.

As shown in Table 6.9, the introduction of military for counterterrorism is positive and statistically significant at the 99.9% confidence level in all models estimated. To see the substantive effect, Figure 6.14 below shows the marginal effects. The introduction of military force for counterterrorism operations, holding other independent variables at their means, is expected to lead to 9.5 domestic terrorist attacks whereas the absence of this effect is expected to produce only 3.4 attacks, without overlap of the 95% confidence levels.



**Figure 6.14 Marginal Effects on Domestic Terrorism**

**Table 6.9 Annual Count of Domestic Terrorist Attacks**

Variable Name	(30)	(31)	(32)
Dependent Variable <sub>t-1</sub>	.037*** (.008)	.025*** (.007)	.023*** (.006)
Introduction of Military Force for CT <sub>t-1</sub>	1.265*** (.213)	1.059*** (.199)	1.012*** (.192)
U.S. Military Assistance <sub>t-1</sub>		.021 (.013)	.024 (.014)
War on Terror Dummy		-.273* (.134)	-.345* (.14)
Polity IV Score		-.001 (.006)	-.001 (.006)
Logged GDP		-.416* (.167)	-.254 (.199)
Logged Total Population		.49** (.147)	.093 (.229)
Logged Military Expenditures		.463** (.136)	.487*** (.14)
Excluded Population <sub>t-1</sub>		.545 (.501)	.87 (.59)
Logged Area		-.196* (.082)	-.076 (.101)
MENA			.147 (.345)
Africa			.495 (.432)
Central Asia			.22 (.919)
South Asia			1.067* (.501)
Southeast Asia			1.13** (.385)
Constant	1.307*** (.189)	2.441 (2.708)	3.053 (2.839)
Wald Chi-Squared	61.68***	211.50***	310.47***
N	2,496	1,852	1,852

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001; Robust standard errors clustered on country in parentheses

### *Analysis*

The results of the models estimated provide strong empirical support for the argument that the use of the military for domestic counterterrorism operations in line with U.S. counterterrorism policy will result in an increase in domestic terrorism within partner states. With the explanatory variable used in the models isolating military operations from other types of counterterrorism efforts more associated with traditional law enforcement, the results specifically connect this increase in domestic terrorist activity with the use of military force. Military operations have operational guidelines permitting the use of deadly force that can lead to collateral damage, with militaries trained for killing enemy combatants. The use of air power in counterterrorism operations within these peripheral regions makes it even more difficult to distinguish legitimate combatants from local civilians in military strikes, especially as the targets of these operations are often embedded among the local civilian population. This is distinct from traditional law enforcement with stricter limitations on the use of deadly force. Local police forces, a more familiar presence in the community, instead focus on apprehension and arrest. Even abuses of excessive police force, such as mass arrests, can be rectified easier without violence than the aftermath of air strikes and artillery fire that destroy homes or entire villages. The deployment of the military, especially when it is perceived as an unwelcome intrusion by “outside” forces by the periphery, can create problems for the local community, problems that are exacerbated by high civilian casualties, and lead to a violent backlash in the form of domestic terrorism.

Further, the results challenge the robustness of previous theories connecting the outbreak of domestic terrorism with the political and economic marginalization of minority groups (Choi and Piazza, 2016; Ghatak, 2016; Ghatak and Gold, 2017; Ghatak, Gold, and Prins, 2017; Piazza, 2011, 2012, 2017). In all models estimated, the lagged measure for politically excluded ethnic groups has a statistically insignificant relationship with domestic terrorism when controlling for governments' counterterrorism behavior and their relationship with the United States. The alternative Minorities at Risk variable is also statistically insignificant in all models estimated. While the measures of minority discrimination may be a necessary underlying condition for domestic terrorism, the discriminatory policies in of themselves are not sufficient to explain the outbreak of domestic terrorism.

When the models are run without the variable for counterterrorism operations by the military, both measures of minority discrimination are positive and statistically significant at the 99% confidence level. It is possible that these variables, which are standard measures employed in the scholarly literature on domestic terrorism, are capturing the counterterrorism actions of the government as part of their cooperation with the United States or other military actions of the government that lead to a violent backlash. Many minority communities have been targeted as part of the War on Terror, as governments use its narrative of terrorism opportunistically to target minorities or as a diversion from domestic problems (Ahmed, 2013; Kanat, 2012; Tir and Jasinski, 2008). In line with my theory, this demonstrates the need to understand the specific behavior of governments, particularly as domestic terrorism after 2005 has largely been concentrated

in states that rely upon the military for counterterrorism operations, as shown in Figure 1 above. The results of the models estimated with variables for civil conflict and government mass killings also provide further evidence that domestic terrorism is a retaliation to specific actions of the government, such as any use of the military domestically and the incidents involving mass killing of noncombatants. This finding has serious policy implications for both the United States and partner states counterterrorism efforts and the inadvisability of using offensive military action. Military force is shown to be a counterproductive approach to counterterrorism (see Chapter 8).

As the results of the Counterterrorism Cooperation Scale further demonstrate, cooperation within the U.S. government does not in of itself lead to negative outcomes, as would be expected when arguing for a general backlash within the Muslim world to cooperation with the U.S. government and its counterterrorism policies. These efforts have produced some positive results in reducing terrorism, empirically demonstrated in the models above. In the models estimated, the Counterterrorism Cooperation Scale has a negative and statistically significant relationship at the 90% confidence level with the levels of domestic terrorism, when controlling for the use of military force. It has a stronger negative relationship, significant at 95% confidence level, with international terrorism, when controlling for the use of military force for counterterrorism. This demonstrates that cooperation with the United States can be successful in lowering the levels of international terrorism.

This counterterrorism success, however, is conditional to the use of traditional law enforcement methods rather than military force. While military operations have led



to an increase in domestic terrorism, the use of the military force by partner states has a substantively insignificant relationship with the levels of international terrorism. Even though these operations are meant to target international terrorism, they are shown empirically to be unsuccessful in preventing international terrorist attacks, instead having no significant impact on the levels of international terrorism and simply shifting the target of terrorist violence to domestic targets. Despite political rhetoric from U.S. and other governments' officials, this provides further evidence that the use of military force is counterproductive to lowering the levels of terrorism and ineffective in preventing future terrorist attacks.

These results also challenge the argument that states using military force in counterterrorism operations are simply harder cases and their use of the military is emblematic of the fact that they inherently experience higher levels of terrorism because of conditions faced within their borders. This is particularly challenged in the data presented in Figure 1 with the level of domestic terrorism increasing only after the deployment of military forces under the umbrella of the War on Terror in line with the U.S. government's shift in counterterrorism policy to focus on terrorist safe havens in partner states. The models in Table 3 show that states with a U.S.-identified safe haven for terrorist groups, conditional to War on Terror years, or receive U.S. military assistance are more likely to use their military forces for counterterrorism. This demonstrates the influence of U.S. counterterrorism policy in influencing partner states' counterterrorism actions.

As the results show, there also are domestic characteristics that drive the adoption of a military-focused approach for counterterrorism. In Table 3, the logged measure for GDP is both negative and statistically significant at the 99% confidence level. States with a lower GDP and, therefore, a lower state capacity will be more likely to use the military in counterterrorism operations due to the lack of effective administrative control over the entirety of their sovereign territory. This finding is consistent with the conditions of states which have safe havens for terrorist groups to exploit. Given that a state's Polity score has an insignificant relationship with the domestic deployment of military forces for counterterrorism, this finding is more in line with issues of capacity rather than a general disregard for civil and human rights by the government over its population.

Moreover, it has been argued that governments have an incentive for reporting higher numbers of terrorist attacks during the War on Terror to gain or maintain U.S. foreign assistance or that an increased focus on the problem of terrorism given the heightened security awareness would result in the government reporting higher numbers of terrorism or interpreting more acts of violence as terrorism (Bapat, 2011). This does not explain why there is not an increase in terrorist activity in the initial years of the War on Terror, when incentives for reporting would exist, but only beginning following a distinct policy shift within the Bush administration for increasing cooperation with partner states in pursuing counterterrorism operations within their borders. Further, the War on Terror dummy variable has a statistically significant negative relationship with the annual count of both international and domestic terrorist attacks, empirically challenging this argument. The results of the models show that the increase in domestic

terrorism is correlated with the counterterrorism actions of the government as opposed to simply being a reporting issue, in line with the terrorism trap theory.

### ***Conclusion***

With the tendency to conflate international and domestic terrorism and types of counterterrorism actions into single categories in both academic studies and policy discussions, the unique domestic impact of U.S. counterterrorism policy and partner states' use of military force have been hiding in plain sight. While statistical analysis has helped provide strong empirical support for this theory, the subsequent chapter pairs this quantitative approach with systematic process tracing of relevant case studies as additional evidence. As scholars have recognized, this mixed method approach relying on both quantitative and qualitative analysis strengthens the evidence for a causal mechanism (George and Bennett, 2005; Kohli, et al., 1995; Lieberman, 2005; Lijphart, 1971; Munck, 2001). The qualitative analysis helps demonstrate the influence of U.S. government policy on the decision-making process of key officials and subsequent actions of the government in partner states over time, interactions which often take place out of the public eye, and connect this process with the increase in domestic terrorism.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **TESTING THE TERRORISM TRAP**

This chapter contains case studies of three other states that have been swept up into the Global War on Terror—Yemen, Mali, and Egypt—as additional evidence. All three states possess “ungoverned spaces” on the periphery in which government officials feared that al Qaeda or al Qaeda linked groups could take advantage as safe havens. With the growing focus on safe havens, the attention of both the U.S. and partner states’ officials shifted to these peripheral regions as a current or potential threat that needed to be confronted. While the tensions between center and periphery in each case pre-dated the War on Terror, the introduction of military force for counterterrorism operations in these regions as part of the War on Terror served as a catalyst for the rise in anti-state violence among the local population and the use of domestic terrorism to confront the government. Moreover, in all three states, there was not an on-going militarized conflict between the center and periphery at the outset of the War on Terror, helping to demonstrate more clearly the influence of U.S. counterterrorism policy on the outbreak of domestic terrorism in partner states.

While all three cases demonstrate this backlash to domestic military operations, the cases each have variation, both within case temporally and between cases, in how the governments initially approached counterterrorism prior to the use of concerted military force: Yemen’s duplicity with its “revolving door” policy in order to placate the Americans; Egypt’s reliance on traditional law enforcement given the legal restrictions on the deployment of military forces in Sinai; and the Malian government simply not acting against terrorist groups in the north given the low capacity of the state within the

periphery. The rise in domestic terrorism in all three cases only occurred after these states shifted to a military approach, highlighting the causal connection between domestic counterterrorism operations by the military and domestic terrorism. While local populations in the periphery did not necessarily support either the extreme ideology or activities of terrorist groups within their midst, the hard-handed approach of the military increased groups' local recruiting efforts to join the fight against the government. These cases, with each government pursuing a different approach to counterterrorism prior to the use of military force, further show that in the absence of domestic counterterrorism operations by the military levels of domestic terrorism remained low, even with conditions in place which scholars have argued lead to the outbreak of domestic terrorism such as political and economic marginalization of minority groups, high levels of poverty, or a repressive government.

In order to connect U.S. counterterrorism policy with the outbreak of domestic terrorism, each case study is structured in three parts demonstrating the casual chain linking the two phenomena, mirroring the structure of the Pakistan case study. After an introductory summary of the case study and how it relates to the terrorism trap theory, I first provide an overview of the historical relationship between the central government and the tribal communities of the periphery and the conditions underlying the periphery's classification as an "ungoverned space," conditions that are exploitable by terrorist groups and would garner the attention of the United States. This "scene setter" establishes the environment into which governments pursue counterterrorism actions and introduces the points of contention between center and periphery that underlay the violent backlash

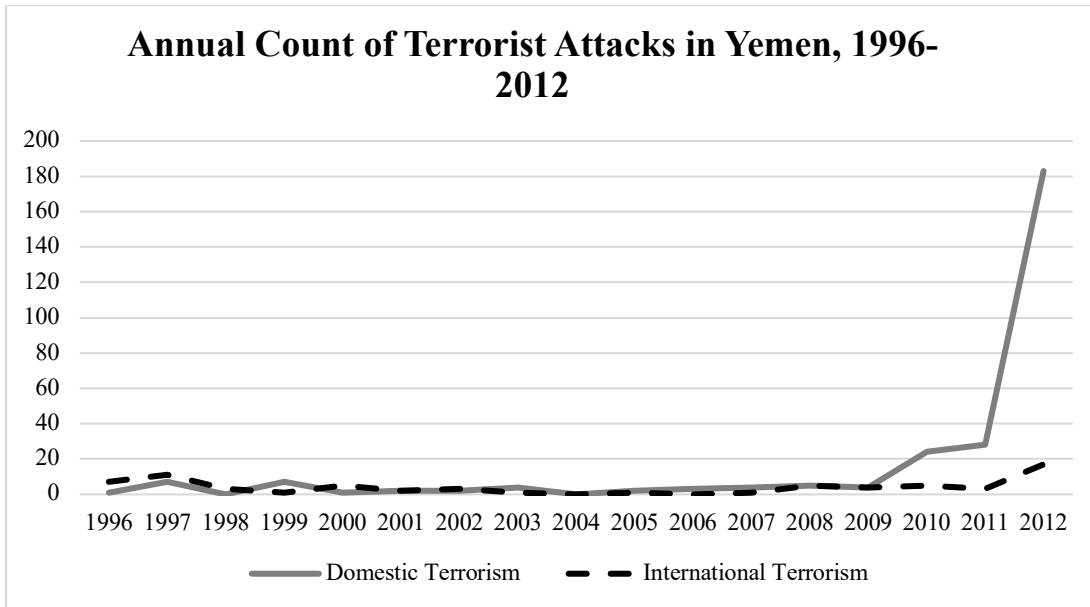
to the governments' use of military force in the periphery. Secondly, I focus on each state's counterterrorism cooperation with the United States, showing how both the U.S. and partner states' attention increasingly shifted towards the periphery as a safe haven for international terrorist groups with U.S. officials pressing the partner states to confront these groups with offensive military force, a key aspect of the theory connecting U.S. policy with the rise in domestic terrorism. Finally, the case studies demonstrate how partner states' eventual deployment of military forces to confront terrorist groups within the periphery led to a subsequent increase in domestic terrorist attacks, showing that revenge for these operations and the resulting civilian casualties was a key motivation for the rising levels of domestic terrorism.

### **Yemen: “Dancing on the Heads of Snakes”**

With its historical connections with al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, himself an ethnic Yemeni, Yemen has been one of the key frontline states in America's fight against terrorism since the early months of the War on Terror, with U.S. officials initially pushing to gain the Yemeni government's cooperation in arresting and handing over al Qaeda suspects within its borders. Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh's initial approach to counterterrorism, however, was one of duplicity, instituting a “revolving door” policy in which he would arrest al Qaeda suspects but quietly release them later. He wished to do enough to keep U.S. money flowing into Yemeni coffers but not enough to upset the political status quo given the precarity of the government's position over the powerful tribal confederations within the country. U.S. officials were keen to keep

pressing Saleh to do more against terrorists operating within Yemen's empty deserts and difficult mountains, especially with the formation of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in the country's southern periphery.

In the wake of the attempted Christmas Day bombing of a U.S. airliner in December 2009, which was connected back to AQAP, the Yemeni government was under mounting U.S. pressure to act strongly against the growing threat of terrorism and subsequently increased its domestic military operations to target AQAP and its perceived supporting tribal groups within the southern periphery. Saleh further saw an increasingly volatile political situation in the south as a pro-independence movement emerged with anti-regime protests erupting. As demonstrated in Figure 1 below, the number of domestic terrorist attacks drastically rose in response to the increase in Yemeni military operations and the government's excessive use of indiscriminate force against AQAP forces and the southern tribes. Demonstrating AQAP's motivation, the vast majority of the group's attacks were directed against the Yemeni military and government, with explicit references to revenge against the government's counterterrorism operations and the resulting civilian casualties. The domestic terrorist attacks by AQAP, however, garnered increased attention from U.S. officials who saw in their rhetoric and behavior a threat to the United States and its interests. The U.S. government increased its support for the Yemeni government's counterterrorism efforts, supplemented with U.S. cruise missiles and drones strikes to target suspected terrorists in situations where it was feared Yemen couldn't or wouldn't act. These heightened efforts sunk Yemen further and further into the terrorism trap. The trend in terrorism in Yemen is shown in Figure 7.1.



**Figure 7.1 Annual Count of Terrorist Attacks in Yemen, 1996-2012 (Enders, et. al., 2011; Gaibulloev, et. al., 2017)**

### *North and South Yemen*

The Yemeni government’s counterterrorism efforts would focus largely on the southern periphery. Yemen today is essentially two separate countries—North Yemen and South Yemen—joined together in 1990. North Yemen had been the seat of the Zaidi Imamate originally formed in the late 9<sup>th</sup> century CE and nominally ruling over a tribal confederation to varying extents, with brief intervals of Ottoman invasions, until 1962, enduring over a millennium. The government of the final Zaidi king, Muhammad al-Badr, was overthrown by Arab nationalists inspired by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and transformed into the Yemen Arab Republic with its capital in Sana’a, which soon fell into a deadly civil war that was waged for 8 years between the Republican forces backed by Egypt and the Royalist forces backed by the Zaidi tribes and Saudi Arabia.



South Yemen, on the other hand, was the former British colony of Aden from 1839-1967, with British colonial authorities withdrawing after a four-year, anti-colonial insurgency by Marxist forces. In 1967, the Marxists, in opposition to the traditional tribal chieftains who had been allied with the British colonial government, formed the Soviet-backed communist government of the People's Republic of Southern Yemen, with many leading tribesmen fleeing the country to live in exile. The communist government attempted to impose a uniform Communist ideology over the people as a means of stamping out tribalism. However, this proved unsuccessful. A Russian anthropologist who studied the region in the 1980s concluded that tribesmen were less concerned with promoting a particular political ideology and more focused on the "reinforcement of the overall position of the tribe" (Clark, 2010, 118).

Following a rapid period of decline for South Yemen's government in the 1980s precipitated by liberalization and ultimately the loss of its Soviet backing, the two governments were united into a single Yemeni state in 1990, after the dissolution of the communist government in the south. The political structure of North Yemen was maintained in the now unified Yemen with Ali Abdullah Saleh, selected as president by North Yemen's parliament in 1978, remaining the head of state and Sana'a continuing as the nation's capital. Many southerners saw the unification as a northern victory, especially with the supply shortages plaguing the south and massive land seizures by northern government officials. A civil war would break out in 1994, with the Yemeni government finding allies from the southern tribal leaders who had opposed the communist government now returning from exile, a number of whom found their way to

Afghanistan during the 1980s (Dresch, 2001). Following the civil war, there was a growing apprehension across the country that Saleh's government was not forthcoming with resources as many regions, especially those with difficult relationship with the government, lagging behind in all measures of development. There was a saying that "Yemen is the Republic of the Sinhan [the president's tribe]" (Caton, 2005, 279).

The unified Yemeni government, however, never fully established effective control over the entirety of the country, who lived according to their tribal traditions and code of honor (Jones, 2011). Colonel Robert Lang, the former U.S. defense attaché in Yemen, stated of the government's weak position in regard to the country's vast tribal network,

There's a precarious balance all the time between the authority of the government and the authority of these massive tribal groups. The government normally only controls the land its forces sit on, or where it's providing some service that the tribal leaders and population wants, like medical service, or education. So you end up with a lot of defended towns, with a lot of checkpoints around them, and little punitive expeditions going on, all the time, by the government around the country, to punish people with whom they are quarreling over some issue (Scahill, 2013, 61).

Edmund Hull, who served as U.S. Ambassador to Yemen from 2001-2004, argued that the tense relationship between the central government and tribal periphery led to a perpetual cycle of bad governance and violence between the two. He observed of Yemen's rural areas where government presence among the tribes were limited, "You had bad governance which led to an alienated population, which led to continuing violence, which led to discouraging any kind of investment, which meant unemployment, which meant more violence and fed into the government ignoring the area and back to

bad governance” (Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, 2005, 199). Saleh described governing Yemen’s tribes as “dancing on the heads of snakes” (Worth, 2017).

As a result of this political reality on the ground, previous governments had been forced to rule through alliances with tribal leadership throughout the country in order to assert their influence. One British political officer in the 1930s, Harold Ingrams (1964, 80), stated that during negotiations for a three-year truce between two feuding tribes in Yemen’s southeastern Hadraumat region, “this could only be done by direct approach to the tribes.” The final agreement was signed by between 1,300 to 1,400 tribal leaders, with Ingrams noting, “Sultans were generally disregarded not only by the tribes but even by other local rulers and peace could not have been secured in any other way than personal intervention and the help of men of influence. There were in fact not two governments to deal with but nearly 2,000.” Many colonial officials were aware that they ignored the influence of the tribes to their own peril, particularly in regard to the use of force.

Stephen Day, a British political officer who served in the Aden Protectorate in the 1960s, stated,

Knowing and living within the tribal system we political officers developed top-quality intelligence and went to extreme lengths to avoid human casualties, dropping leaflets calling for the miscreants to come down and submit to authority and only attacking physical targets as a last resort and after due warning. We worked within the tribal system and knew full well a feud that would develop if we killed tribal people—and we would personally be the targets.<sup>78</sup>

Other foreign governments entangled in the internal politics of Yemen also noted the importance of the tribal structure and the futility of military force in preserving law

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<sup>78</sup> Correspondence with Stephen Day, a former British political officer of the Aden Protectorate (1961-1967), May 8, 2013.

and order. An Ottoman official remarked of his government's failed military expeditions into Yemen in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, "Yemen has now become the graveyard of Muslims and money" (Clark, 2010, 43). After departing from Sana'a, the last Ottoman pasha of Yemen explained, "In my opinion, this is what happened, from the day we conquered it to the time we left it we neither knew Yemen nor did we understand it nor learn [anything] about it, nor were we, for that matter, able to administer it" (Ibid., 44). The Egyptian Field Marshal Abdel Hakim Amer, similarly stated of Egypt's mistakes in its military campaign in North Yemen in the 1960s, known as Egypt's Vietnam, "We did not bother to study the local, Arab and international implications or the political or military questions involved. After years of experience we realized that it was a war between the tribes and that we entered it without knowing the nature of their land, their traditions and their ideas" (Dresch, 2001, 262). In an October 2001 meeting with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak advised the U.S. government against "too much bombing" in Afghanistan, citing the ineffectiveness of Egypt's own military campaign in Yemen during the 1960s. "Don't be in a hurry, take it easy," he stressed. "Put your money into buying allies on the ground in Afghanistan" (Rumsfeld, 2001i, 4).

### ***Yemen's South and the War on Terror***

Even before 9/11 and the War on Terror, U.S. officials were concerned with Yemen as a hub of terrorist activity. It was the site of the 2000 USS Cole bombing by al Qaeda and the earlier 1992 hotel bombing in Aden targeting U.S. soldiers awaiting deployment to

Somalia. U.S. officials also were aware that Yemenis played a key role in the al Qaeda organization, comprising 95% of its ranks and serving as its primary “foot soldiers” (Ahmed, 2013, 107; Hull, 2003, 6). In fact, 18 of the 19 al Qaeda hijackers on 9/11, all but the Egyptian Mohammad Atta, had Yemeni tribal backgrounds, whether from Yemen proper, ethnic Yemenis from Saudi Arabia, especially the Yemeni-populated southeastern periphery of Asir, or other regions of the Middle East (Ahmed, 2013, 106-122).

With President Saleh’s method of governance (non-interference and cultivating a patronage network with tribes operating autonomously within Yemen), al Qaeda had lots of room to operate in Yemen during the 1990s. Former mujahedeen fighters were welcomed by Saleh who took advantage of their presence as pro-government fighters within the civil war raging after unification in 1990 and to target his political opponents. Saleh stated in an interview with the *New York Times* (2008),

They were all sent to Afghanistan to face the former Soviet invasion and occupation. And the USA forced friendly countries at that time, including Yemen, the Gulf States, Sudan, and Syria, to support the mujahedeen—they call them freedom fighters—to go fight in Afghanistan. The USA used to strongly support the Islamist movement to fight against the Soviets. Then, following collapse of Soviets in Afghanistan, the USA suddenly adopted a completely different and extreme attitude towards these Islamic movements and stated to put pressure on the countries to have confrontations with these Islamic movements that were in the Arab and Islamic territories.

Following the USS Cole attack in 2000, Saleh even bragged on *Al Jazeera* that he had stymied the resulting FBI investigation, stating “We denied them access to Yemen with forces, planes, and ships. We put them under direct monitoring by our security forces. They respected our position and surrendered to what we did” (Pincus, 2001).

While international terrorism was a problem within Yemen in the years immediately preceding 9/11, domestic terrorism remained low, with domestic terrorist attacks never exceeding single digits. This was a result of Saleh both maintaining an ambiguous attitude towards terrorist groups and, given his approach to ruling and low state capacity, negotiating with and working through the many tribes composing the Yemeni political landscape rather than directly confronting them. Despite growing U.S. concerns with international terrorist activity within its border, Yemen ultimately remained peripheral to broader U.S. interests in the Middle East prior to 2001. The former U.S. ambassador to Yemen Barbara Bodine (2003, 5), appointed in 1997, described the pre-9/11 U.S. relationship with Yemen as “benign neglect.”

With the declaration of the War on Terror, the partnership between U.S. and Yemen was dialed up to ten, like so many other states within the region, and would predominately focus on counterterrorism and other security issues. After the invasion of Afghanistan, Saleh feared Yemen could be the next target of the United States military (Tankel, 2018, 205-206; Scahill, 2013, 132). In the early days of the War on Terror, some U.S. government officials wanted to take a similar approach to Yemen as had been taken in Afghanistan, an idea that went as far as U.S. Central Command beginning operational planning for a military front in Yemen (Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, 2005, 202-203). In order to stymie a U.S. invasion that would inevitably take him out of power, the Yemeni president arrived in Washington, DC in November 2001 to discuss Yemeni counterterrorism cooperation with the United States. CIA director George Tenet bluntly told Saleh that Yemen could be a target or a partner in the War on Terror. In a

meeting with President Bush in the White House, in which the U.S. president reinforced this message, Saleh stressed his “condemnation of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the U.S. and Yemen’s denunciation of all forms of terrorism.” He also strategically added that Yemen would be “a principal partner in the coalition against terrorism” (Scahill, 2013, 64).

Soon after 9/11, Saleh was handed a list of al Qaeda suspects operating in Yemen by U.S. Ambassador Edmund Hull who asked him “for assistance in either capturing or killing these specific individuals.” Ambassador Hull stated, “We agreed that we would establish a special channel to pursue this objective, and we were therefore launched as quickly as possible” (Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, 2005, 195). This message was reiterated in Saleh’s November 2001 meeting with President Bush in the White House. Prior to the meeting Ambassador Hull briefed President Bush to be “very direct, very clear about what we wanted” from Yemen in regard to counterterrorism, summed up by Ambassador Hull as targeting “Al Qaeda’s leadership Abu Ali and Abu Assem, and to reach a partnership with President Saleh that together we would eliminate Al Qaeda’s basic operation in Yemen” (Ibid., 201). President Saleh responded positively to this message, promising President Bush that “we will butcher them” (Ibid.).

The following month, Saleh ordered raids by Yemeni special forces in the Marib and al Jawf Governorates against suspected hideouts of al Qaeda operatives. These were a disaster that ended up angering local tribes as an imposition by the government, with tribesmen attacking and killing Yemeni soldiers and taking several of them hostage. These operations were followed by the arrests of a number of suspected al Qaeda

operatives in Yemen's south, meant to demonstrate compliance with U.S. demands rather than actually weakening al Qaeda's operations (Johnsen, 2013, 90, 111; Tankel, 2018, 213). Despite the ultimate failure of these early operations, senior U.S. officials in Washington, DC were encouraged by the fact that, according to Ambassador Hull, "Yemenis had spilled their own blood in pursuit of these terrorist targets" and this "was a stronger argument for a potential partnership than any words that we could have had" (Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, 2005, 203). The failure of these operations also stressed the need to provide U.S. training for Yemen's military forces for more effective counterterrorism operations.

In the following years, the Yemeni government continued sporadic and limited operations against terrorist groups with suspected links to al Qaeda as demonstrations of its compliance with the United States. A June 25, 2003 operation by Yemen's U.S.-trained Central Security Forces (CSF) in the southern Abyan Province targeted the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army, a group which the Yemeni government argued had links to al Qaeda and was attempting to re-establish al Qaeda in Yemen (State Department, 2003c). U.S. military trainers were allowed to "view film footage of combat operations by CSF during the Abyan operation." A State Department cable observed, "Somewhat unusually, the ROYG kept the embassy continually informed on developments and invited the media to cover the operation" (Ibid.). The cable further recognized, "[T]he effective performance of the U.S.-trained CSF adds a strong argument for solely-needed further funding to continue and expand CT training." At this time, however, much of the U.S.



attention remain fixed on military operations in Iraq which consumed the government's resources for counterterrorism efforts.

Adroit at playing a given political situation to his own advantage and balancing between competing interests, Saleh saw counterterrorism cooperation with the United States as a means of gaining increased levels of U.S. financial assistance and bolster his own situation. He wanted to do enough against suspected terrorists within Yemen to keep U.S. officials satisfied and demonstrate cooperation with their demands, focusing on short-term tactical successes rather than long-term goals, but not enough to endanger his own domestic political standing.<sup>79</sup> Saleh initially had apprehensions about using military force, understanding the high costs and the backlash it would provoke. A close advisor to Saleh stated in 2004, "Paying the tribal leaders to co-operate was cheaper than any other way, like doing it in a forceful way. It has been faster, cheaper and easier and has worked very well" (*Yemen Times*, 2004). In relying on traditional approaches to law and order, Saleh was assuming that the people the U.S. government was referring to as terrorists were a known commodity. He expected these men, many of whom he knew to be Afghan war veterans who he had relied on for domestic political support in the past, to behave like traditional tribesmen, and thus had a "revolving door" policy of arrest and release. He attempted a delicate balancing act, arresting them, but then "rehabilitating" them or making arrangements with their families and tribal leaders to keep them out of trouble. This policy, as well as Yemen's reticence in intelligence sharing, frustrated U.S. officials,

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<sup>79</sup> Interview with Yemeni diplomat, Washington, DC, October 2018.

who constantly urged Saleh to take stronger action and increase his counterterrorism and military cooperation with the United States (State Department, 2005b, 2005c).

During this period, there was growing discontentment among the southern tribes stemming from counterterrorism actions taken by the Yemeni government and the on-going corruption of Saleh (State Department, 2005d, 2005e). In late 2005 and early 2006, tribes in Marib and Shabwa Governorates began kidnapping foreigners, a traditional method of the tribes to pressure the government and bring attention to their grievances. This helps them to more quickly register their complaints with the government while bypassing the weak and ineffective legal system. The tribes particularly were concerned with the arrests and imprisonment of their fellow tribesmen without trial in arrest sweeps by the Political Security Organization (PSO) against suspected terrorists and individuals thought to be attempting to travel to Iraq to fight against U.S. forces (State Department, 2006n). The military-led PSO was one of the primary organizations for domestic counterterrorism and intelligence, reporting directly to the president outside normal bureaucratic and judicial control. The 150,000-member organization also ran its own detention centers for holding suspected terrorists where it has been accused of heavy-handedness and human rights violations. Given international pressure to deal with the kidnappings of foreign nationals, the Yemeni government agreed to take a harder line with the kidnappers and refuse to negotiate with them. After the kidnapping of five Italians in late December 2005, the Yemeni Prime Minister Abdel Kader Bajammal stated, “Army and security forces are now completely besieging the captors of the of the Italian tourists in order to force them to free the hostages” (*BBC News*, 2006).

During 2007 and into 2008, there were increasing clashes with local tribes, civil unrest, and anti-government attacks in the south, including by groups which the U.S. government argued “were associated with al-Qaida” (State Department, 2008l). This was serious enough for the U.S. government to suspend development activities in certain southern provinces (State Department, 2007c). The tension in the south was made worse by a number of incidents of violence by Yemeni security forces. These included the Yemeni security forces opening fire “indiscriminately at protestors,” killing four people and injuring 15 in October 2007 during preparations for a demonstration celebrating the 44<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the anti-British insurgency in Lahj. The following month, a military helicopter opened fire on a crowd trying to enter Aden ahead of demonstrations celebrating South Yemen’s independence from Britain (State Department, 2007d, 2007e). In April of the following year, the Yemeni government deployed military force backed by tanks, armored vehicles, and aircraft to suppress demonstrations which were increasingly calling for southern secession. A southern opposition leader warned, “If the regime continues to try and solve problems with force, there will, of course, be a reaction” (State Department, 2008k). During an October 2007 meeting with Frances Townsend, a key aide to President Bush on homeland security, Saleh expressed concern about growing unrest in the south and external support for their “secessionist” movement. Saleh accused the southerners of having links with “jihadists, salafis, and al-Qaeda.” He stated that “it is important that Yemen not reach a state of instability. We need your support.” Townsend replied, “You do not even have to think about it. Of course we support Yemen” (State

Department, 2007a). With American backing, Saleh promised to deal with southern unrest “once and for all” (State Department, 2007d).

### ***Yemen and Domestic Terrorism: The Emergence of AQAP***

The emergence of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) re-focused U.S. attention on Yemen. The formation of AQAP initially was triggered by the escape of 23 individuals detained as suspected terrorists from a PSO prison in 2006, with suspicions that their escape was aided by Yemeni intelligence officials sympathetic to their cause (*Washington Post*, 2009). The escaped prisoners including the future leader of AQAP Nasir al-Wuhayshi from Yemen’s al-Bayda Governorate. Al-Wuhayshi had traveled to Afghanistan in the 1990s and served with al Qaeda, including as a personal secretary to bin Laden. He left Afghanistan in 2001 but was arrested by Iranian authorities and later handed over to the Yemeni government who imprisoned him without charge.

In the midst of growing unrest in the south, AQAP was formed as a union of the local al Qaeda in Yemen and Yemeni tribesmen from Asir fighting under the banner of al Qaeda who fled Saudi Arabia for the safety of their tribal kin in Yemen. AQAP began ramping up its attacks during this period, including a September 17, 2008 attack against the U.S. Embassy compound in Sana’a. Over the following months, the U.S. government sought to increase its counterterrorism cooperation with Yemen in order to bolster Yemeni efforts against terrorists within its borders. Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice argued that a resurgence of al Qaeda in Yemen over the past year “has been fed by the national government’s inability to exert its authority in remote areas characterized by

rugged, inaccessible terrain” and, at Saleh’s request, pushed to have up to 150-200 M113 armored personnel carriers transferred to Yemen for “[counterterrorism] purposes” (State Department, 2008m).

During a May 28, 2009 meeting with President Saleh in Taiz, the CIA Deputy Director Stephen Kappes praised cooperation between U.S. and Yemeni intelligence agencies and told Saleh that “the [United States government] remains as determined as ever to destroy [al Qaeda] worldwide.” Saleh replied, “I hope this campaign continues and succeeds. We’re doing the same here. Our position is unshakable” and characterized AQAP “as the most severe threat” with “an international terrorist conspiracy fueling AQAP’s growth” (State Department, 2009a). In reference to the southern unrest, however, Saleh added, “We are not that worried. This is not new. These are the same people who tried to break away in 1994. Then, even with an army and an air force, they failed. They will fail again without external assistance” (Ibid.). The State Department cable on the meeting noted that Saleh’s characterization of AQAP

as the most serious threat facing Yemen was almost certainly taken with his USG interlocutors in mind, as was, one suspects, his dismissal of the risk posed to his regime by the increasingly militant southern-independence movement. Nor was it coincidental that Saleh was quick to blame foreign powers for the nation’s woes...the implication is that Yemen is beset by forces that it will be hard-pressed to repel without substantial external support (Ibid.).

In July 2009, General David Petraeus visited Yemen to officially confirm an increase in military assistance to Yemen in order to escalate operations against AQAP in the south. Saleh promised cooperation in counterterrorism operations “without restrictions or conditions.” He referred to AQAP as “a dangerous poison” and an “epidemic” and “committed to hunting down terrorists in Jawf, Sa’ada, Marib, Abyan,

and Hadramout governorates” (State Department, 2009b). Petraeus and Saleh “agreed to increase the tempo of cooperation and training, with the goal of enabling [Yemen] forces to independently conduct CT operations and secure Yemen’s borders” (Ibid.). Saleh further argued that “the Southern Movement is cooperating with AQAP” and subsequently began to use the term “al-Qaeda/Southern Movement” to conflate the two (State Department, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b).

To demonstrate Yemen’s cooperation, Saleh sent his nephew Ammar Muhammad Abdullah Saleh, a senior commander in the National Security Bureau, into Marib Province to target an AQAP compound. In the ensuing operation subsequently known as “the Battle of Marib”, the Yemeni forces shelled the wrong compound, resulting in a running gun battle with AQAP and local tribesmen from the struck compound. The Yemeni forces lost five tanks, a supply truck, several soldiers killed and wounded, and seven soldiers captured (Johnsen, 2010). Anwar al-Awlaki referred to these clashes as the “beginning of the greatest Jihad...to free the Arabian Peninsula from tyrants,” with subsequent AQAP announcements urging fellow Yemenis to organize and join the fight against the “traitor, oppressive, corrupt rulers of the Arabian Peninsula” (Gallagher, 2011).

The resulting military operations faced a number of difficulties. The deployment of Yemen’s military into tribal territory in of itself angered the southern tribes, who were accustomed to the government working through tribal structures rather than using brute force to extend the writ of the state or handle matters of law and order. This often led to clashes between tribal groups and the military. This also presented a challenging

operational environment for the military who often lacked effective human intelligence about AQAP and who was and wasn't involved in or supporting its activities. The military relied on indiscriminate violence with high civilian casualties, leading to ever higher levels of domestic terrorist attacks against Yemeni targets in revenge for these operations.

Drone and cruise missile strikes began again in December 2009 and largely were concentrated in the two southern governorates of Abyan and Shabwah (Ahmed, 2013, 261). The drone campaign began by targeting a suspected AQAP camp in Abyan. The Yemeni air force took credit for the strike claiming 34 al Qaeda fighters had been killed. However, local video the following day showed a number of civilians, including children, were the actual victims of the strike. Shortly after, a U.S. cruise missile strike hit an Aulaq tribal village in al Majalah Governorate, suspecting it of being an al Qaeda training camp and weapons store from which terrorists were planning imminent attacks against the United States. The cruise missile strike, called a "success" by a State Department cable, was similarly reported at the time as a Yemeni air strike, with Saleh soon receiving congratulatory calls from foreign leaders (State Department, 2009f). Yemeni officials claimed that 34 terrorists were killed with 51 arrested in a coordinated series of attacks and raids (Ibid.). The Deputy Prime Minister for Security and Defense Rashad al-Alimi told the U.S. Ambassador in a December 19, 2009 meeting, "Saleh wants these operations against AQAP to continue non-stop until we eradicate this disease" (State Department, 2009g). Al-Alimi further explained away any civilian deaths as nomadic Bedouin families living in tents near the AQAP training camp and were suspected of

even “assisting AQAP with logistical support... acting in collusion with the terrorists and benefitting financially from AQAP’s presence in the area” (Ibid.).

Sheikh Saleh bin Fareed, the head of the Aulaq tribe and a former member of parliament, visited the village the following day and described what he saw:

When we went there, we could not believe our eyes. I mean, if somebody had a weak heart, I think he would collapse. You see goats and sheep all over, you see the heads of those who were killed here and there. You see their bodies, you see children. I mean some of them, they were not hit immediately, but by the fire, they were burned... They were all children, old women, all kinds of sheep and goats and cows. Unbelievable. Why did they do this? Why in the hell are they doing this? There are no [weapons] stores, there is no field for training. There is nobody except a very poor tribe, one of the poorest tribes in the south (Scahill, 2013, 305).

A survivor of the attack stated, “Most of the dead were women, children and the elderly. Five pregnant women were killed. I ran to the area. I found scattered bodies and injured women and children” (Ibid., 305-306). Eyewitnesses reported over 40 people killed in the strike, including 14 women and 21 children. Another survivor stated, “If they kill innocent children and call them al Qaeda, then we are all al Qaeda. If children are terrorists, then we are all terrorists” (Ibid., 306). Bin Fareed organized a gathering of 50,000-70,000 tribesmen, including key tribal leaders, in al Majalah to show them that the strike was against innocent civilians and “there was not al Qaeda whatsoever” (Scahill, 2013, 309). He wanted to further demonstrate that the Americans were also involved in the attack, proved by bomb fragments. At the rally, much the chagrin of its organizers, members of AQAP showed up and told the crowd at the edge of the gathering they planned to avenge the victims of the strike, stating “Our issue is with the Americans and their lackeys” (Ibid., 311).



On December 23, the Yemeni government publicly acknowledged U.S. intelligence assistance in the strike and further stated that the civilian casualties were simply AQAP family members and outlined the threat AQAP continued to pose to Yemen. On the same day, the Yemeni Foreign Minister Abu Bakr al-Qirbi told the Charge d’Affaires of the U.S. Embassy, “the U.S. should continue to refer inquiries to the Yemeni government, highlight the ROYG’s indigenous CT capabilities, and stress that al-Qaeda represents a threat not only to the West, but also Yemeni’s security” (State Department, 2009h). He further added that the Southern Movement was “speaking in defense of al-Qaeda” in claiming innocent civilians were killed in the strike (Ibid.).

AQAP exploited these civilian casualties and collateral damage, actions which already provoked revenge attacks from the impacted tribes, in its messaging and recruitment as evidence of the brutality and illegitimacy of the Yemeni government under Saleh and their American allies. On February 20, 2009, AQAP leader Nasir al-Wuhayshi (2009, 2-4) released a recording calling on the Yemeni tribes to fight against the Yemeni government in response to previous military actions and the imminent military campaigns in Yemen’s southern provinces. He stated,

This military campaign amassing in Ma’rib, Al-Jawf, Shabwah, Abyan, Sanaa, and Hadramawt, which they kept it away from the media, is just a step towards striking on the tribes and their sons with flimsy and false pretexts that are really aimed at breaking the dignity of the tribes, disarming them, controlling their land, and killing their sons in order to make it easy for mean agents and the Crusade to humiliate them... Their compass went astray and they moved their armies, tanks, and aircraft to the tribes of Al-Ashraf, Abidah, Nihim, Jaham, Daham, Murad, Al-Awaliq, Ilah, Al-Awazil, Khawlan, Wa’ilah, Al-Mayasir, Bilharith, and other tribes... This is your day, so fight against them before they control you tomorrow. Fight against them as one man, fight for your religion and your good qualities... Get prepared with anti-tank mines, explosive charges, explosive belts, snipers, well-planned ambushes, and daring assaults.

He also chastised the Yemeni soldiers involved in the counterterrorism campaigns: “As for you, O oppressive soldiers, who attack your own kinfolks, tribes, and own people, where have your sense of reason and conscience gone? You kill your own people for the sake of the Jews and Christians” (al-Wuhayshi, 2009, 4). In spring 2009, following an AQAP bombing at the Sana’a airport, a statement released by the group explained, “The government of Al-Aswad al-‘Ansi [an epithet comparing President Saleh with a false Yemeni prophet of the 7<sup>th</sup> century] has already spilled the blood of many Muslims with air raids and the military advance with tanks in Sana’a, Amran, Marib, Jawf, Dhal’a, Abyan, and Shabwah” (Koehler-Derrick, 2011, 47). An AQAP operative, Basir, stressed in a letter that attacks against the military were “in self-defense” (Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, 2016, 2).

A December 27, 2009 AQAP statement further read, “Five American fighter jets carried out a savage raid against the innocent Muslims of Bal Kazim tribes in the al-Muajila village of the al-Mahfad region in the state of Abyan after dawn prayer on Thursday. Following this savage bombing on the village of Bal Kazim almost 50 women, children, and men were killed. [This] occurred simultaneously with a military campaign against the tribes of Arhab, under the pretext of counterterrorism and elimination of the mujahid vanguard from the sons of the proud tribes of Yemen” (Koehler-Derrick, 2011, 124). An AQAP spokesman further stated of the group’s attacks, “The mujahideen target criminals from America, Crusaders, and henchmen from security forces and intelligence officials responsible for shedding blood of women and children in Aden, Mu’ajalla [Abyan], al-Dal’a, Lahj, Lawdar, Marib, Ta’izz, and Shabwah” (Ibid., 43-44). In a

statement to local tribes in Marib in June 2010, AQAP stated, “Who, by God, is it that destroys your mosques and kills your women and children? Is it the mujahideen or Ali Abdullah Salih? And who violates the sanctity of your homes and bombs your farms...Is it the mujahideen or Ali Abdullah Salih?” (Koehler-Derrick, 2011, 109). Later that month, the AQAP announced that an attack on a prison run by the Political Security Organization in Aden was a “response to the brutal aggression imposed on our people in Marib in order to humiliate the tribes under the pretext of fighting terrorism” (Ibid., 110).

The southern tribes held varying views of AQAP and its offshoot Ansar al Sharia. While many Yemeni tribesmen rejected the religious fundamentalism of AQAP, the military actions of the government angered the tribes and turned them against the regime and their counterterrorism priorities. As a result, the traditional tribal leaders were unwilling to cooperate with Saleh’s government to challenge AQAP. The vast tribal network had been a necessary means for the Yemeni government to maintain internal stability, with a weak central government reliant on the tribes to operate in many rural parts of the country. Ali Abdullah Abdulsalam, a leading southern tribal leader in Shabwah Governorate backed by 30,000 fighters, explained his reticence to cooperate with the government, “Why should we fight them? Why? If my government built schools, hospitals and roads and met basic needs, I would be loyal to my government and protect it. So far, we don’t have basic services such as electricity, water pumps. Why should we fight al Qaeda?” (Scahill, 2013, 465). He added that at least AQAP helped to “provide security and prevent looting. If your car is stolen, they will get it back for you.” Under the Saleh regime, “there is looting and robbery. You can see the difference” (Ibid.,

466). Southerners claimed that the government was using the excuse of counterterrorism to target political opponents in the south, warning of an increased backlash from the southern tribes especially with civilians continuing to be killed in military operations (State Department, 2010b).

Many tribesmen further saw in AQAP a vehicle for opposing the Yemeni government. The Deputy Speaker of Parliament Mohammed Ali al-Shadadi stated, “Culturally, the south is not a good environment for AQAP. However, geographically, it is well-suited, and with the increasing desperation among southerners, it is becoming easier for them to recruit” (State Department, 2009i). Another southern politician similarly warned, “Al-Qaeda isn’t just in Abyan. They’re all over the south, in Aden, too. The youth are desperate, which makes it a very, very dangerous situation” (Ibid.). The continued military operations increasingly pushed southern tribal leaders to declare openly their support of AQAP and Ansar al-Sharia, such as the former presidential advisor Tariq al-Fadhli, the son of the last British-backed Sultan of the Fadhli Sultanate (Ahmed, 2013, 260-263; Ahmed and Akins, 2013; Worth, 2010). Following a military strike against his home and the increasing civilian casualties by military forces, he stated in 2012, “As for my sons, they are youth and were present with me in Abyan when my house was attacked for several times. When my sons saw what happened to me and their country and the creation of Ansar Al-Sharia, they joined Ansar Al-Sharia and fought with them, and I’m proud of that...And if I had one thousand sons I wouldn’t chose [sic] for them any other but this path” (Siraaj, 2012). The Yemeni government quickly put al-Fadhli under house arrest in Aden after labeling him a “terrorist.” In 2014, he escaped

from house arrest and fled into the Maraqsha mountains in the Abyan Governorate to officially join AQAP and its fight against the government (Adaki, 2014).

### ***Yemen Falls Deeper into the Terrorism Trap***

In 2010, the Yemeni government took a more concerted military effort, backed by the U.S. government, to address the growing threat from AQAP in the south. The attempted bombing of a U.S. airliner on Christmas Day 2009 by the Nigerian Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, which was connected back to AQAP, led to a dramatic escalation of Yemeni military operations. The State Department's 2010 *Country Reports on Terrorism* (2010) recognized, "The Yemeni government's response to the terrorist threat included large-scale kinetic operations against suspected AQAP members in the south. In turn, AQAP attacks against foreign interests, Yemeni government targets, and the Shia Houthi movement in the north increased dramatically in 2010."

On January 19, 2010, the U.S. government officially declared AQAP a Foreign Terrorist Organization. In that same month, General Petraeus met with Saleh and offered congratulations for "recent successful operations against AQAP" and told him U.S. security assistance would be increased the following year to \$150 million, with a sizable portion of the funds specifically allocated to increase counterterrorism capabilities of the Yemeni air force to target AQAP. While Saleh recognized that "mistakes were made" in the killing of civilians in recent military strikes in Abyan Governorate, this did not impede his commitment to use military force against AQAP. Saleh further requested 12 attack helicopters for counterterrorism operations, promising to use them "only against

al-Qaeda” (State Department, 2010). Petraeus also informed Saleh that President Obama approved “providing U.S. intelligence in support of ROYG ground operations against AQAP targets” (Ibid.). Deputy Prime Minister al-Alimi stated at a news conference, “The operations that have been taken...are 100 percent Yemeni forces. The Yemeni security apparatus has taken support, information and technology that are not available here, and that’s mostly from the U.S. and Saudi Arabia and other friendly countries” (Edwards, 2010). The “unprecedented” increase in the presence of security forces aimed at targeting AQAP also put the local tribes, even those nominally friendly with the government, on the “defensive,” according to the regional commander of the Yemeni Armed Forces Middle District Major General Mohammed al-Maqdashi (State Department, 2009o).

The increase in Yemeni domestic military operations was met with an increase in domestic terrorist attacks, without a paired increase in international targets. In 2009, AQAP was responsible for only three terrorist attacks. By 2010, its number of terrorist attacks increased to 48. In 2011, AQAP attacks rose to 75 and, by the following year, spiked to 199 attacks, attacks that largely were directed towards Yemeni targets as revenge for on-going military operations (Global Terrorism Database, 2018). On June 19, 2010, AQAP attacked the headquarters of the Yemeni Political Security Organization in Aden, killing 10 officers. The attackers were dressed in military uniforms and attacked during a morning flag raising ceremony. Following the attack, AQAP called on local tribes to “light up the ground with fire under the tyrants of infidelity in the regime” in revenge for government air strikes (*BBC News*, 2010). During Ramadan in the summer of 2010, AQAP targeted senior Yemeni military and intelligence officials directly involved

in counterterrorism operations, killing 60 by September 2010. At this time, as one analyst noted, “In addition to systematically targeting senior and field-level security officials, AQAP militants repeatedly assaulted security officers, soldiers, and policemen with small arms fire and hand grenades throughout southern and central Yemen. There were no reported attacks executed against traditionally preferred targets such as western embassies or the country’s oil infrastructure within Yemen” (Gallagher, 2011).

In response to the killing of senior officials and under continued pressure from U.S. government officials, Yemen launched a major military offensive against AQAP in the Lawdar District of Abyan Governorate in August 2010. The offensive lasted several days leading to the deaths of a dozen soldiers, 19 people identified as al Qaeda members, and at least three civilians. Many civilians were forced to flee their homes from the fighting. Yemen’s deputy interior minister, General Saleh al-Zaweri stated, “Security forces have taught the terrorists of Al-Qaeda a hard lesson and inflicted painful hits on them, forcing those terrorist elements that tried to hide, to flee after dozens were killed and wounded” (al Haidari, 2010). U.S. officials however viewed these Yemeni counterterrorism operations as largely ineffective, particularly given the “dearth of solid intelligence” (Shane, Mazzetti, and Worth, 2010). The following month Saleh launched another major military offensive against AQAP, using military forces armed and trained by the U.S. counterterrorism programs, in the city of Hawta in Shabwah Governorate. Yemeni troops besieged the city, relying on artillery shelling and strafing runs by attack helicopters. The operation coincided with a visit to Sana’a by John Brennan to discuss

U.S.-Yemeni counterterrorism efforts giving Saleh concrete evidence of Yemen's cooperation with U.S. counterterrorism priorities (The White House, 2010).

Even if the U.S. took unilateral action through cruise missile or drone strikes, Saleh stated, "We'll continue saying the bombs are ours, not yours" (State Department, 2010). However, this often created difficulties for the Yemeni government. A May 24, 2010 U.S. missile strike hit a convoy under the belief it was heading to a meeting of al Qaeda operatives. Jabir al-Shabwani, the deputy governor of Marib Governorate, was killed in the strike, along with other members of a Yemeni mediation team. Al-Shabwani's uncle also was killed in the attack. When the Yemeni government took responsibility for the air strike, the Shabwani tribe responded the following day by blowing up an oil pipeline running from Marib to the Ras Isa terminal on the Red Sea coast. The tribe also attacked the presidential palace in Marib, attempting to occupy it but were repelled by Yemeni soldiers and tanks stationed around the palace's perimeter (*Al Jazeera*, 2010).

On May 27, 2011, amidst the Arab Spring protests which saw the resignation of Saleh, the AQAP's spin-off Ansar al Sharia militants targeted Zinjibar and took the city within two days. AQAP's top cleric stated, "The name Ansar al Sharia is what we use to introduce ourselves in areas where we work to tell people about our work and goals, and that we are on the path of Allah" (Scahill, 2013, 460). The group followed the Taliban model of taking over territory and establishing political legitimacy among the population through social services and providing security and stability, complete with the same brutal view of law and order according to a fundamentalist interpretation of Sharia. Their



support of a Sharia-based system was seen to be an antithesis to the Saleh regime. In May 2008, for example, an AQAP spokesman pushed back against the corrupt political status quo in Yemen, stating,

People have become fed-up with socialism and democracy...The Mujahideen are capable of being the only alternative, and in their hands is the solution for all these transgressions. If the [Yemeni] people stand with them, they will arrive [at the desired Yemeni state] by the shortest path (Koehler-Derrick, 2011, 42).

With the shift to controlling territory, Abdul Ghani al-Iryani, a Sana'a based political analyst, stated, "As these group of militants took over the city, then AQAP came in and also tribes from areas that have been attacked in the past by the Yemeni government and by the U.S. government. They came because they have a feud against the regime and against the U.S. There is a nucleus of AQAP, but the vast majority are people who are aggrieved by attacks on their homes that forced them to go out and fight" (Scahill, 2013, 464).

The back and forth violence between militants and government forces continued unabated with the appointment of the new government under Saleh's successor President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, who had served as Saleh's vice president since 1994. In May 2012, AQAP targeted a military parade in Sana'a. The bombing killed 90 people, mostly soldiers. After the attack, an AQAP spokesman made an announcement directed at Yemeni military leadership, "We will take revenge, God willing, and the flames of war will reach you everywhere, and what happened is but the start of a jihad project in defense of honor and sanctities" (Almujahed and Raghavan, 2012). The following month in Aden, an AQAP suicide bomber killed the senior Yemeni commander for southern operations, Major General Salim Ali Qatn, in Aden, who had initiated a stepped-up

crackdown on AQAP militants by Yemeni military forces following his appointment by President Hadi (Kasinof, 2012). In August 2012, AQAP fighters launched another attack against the government's intelligence headquarters in Aden, killing twenty intelligence officers and wounding another thirteen.

### **Mali: The Struggle for Azawad**

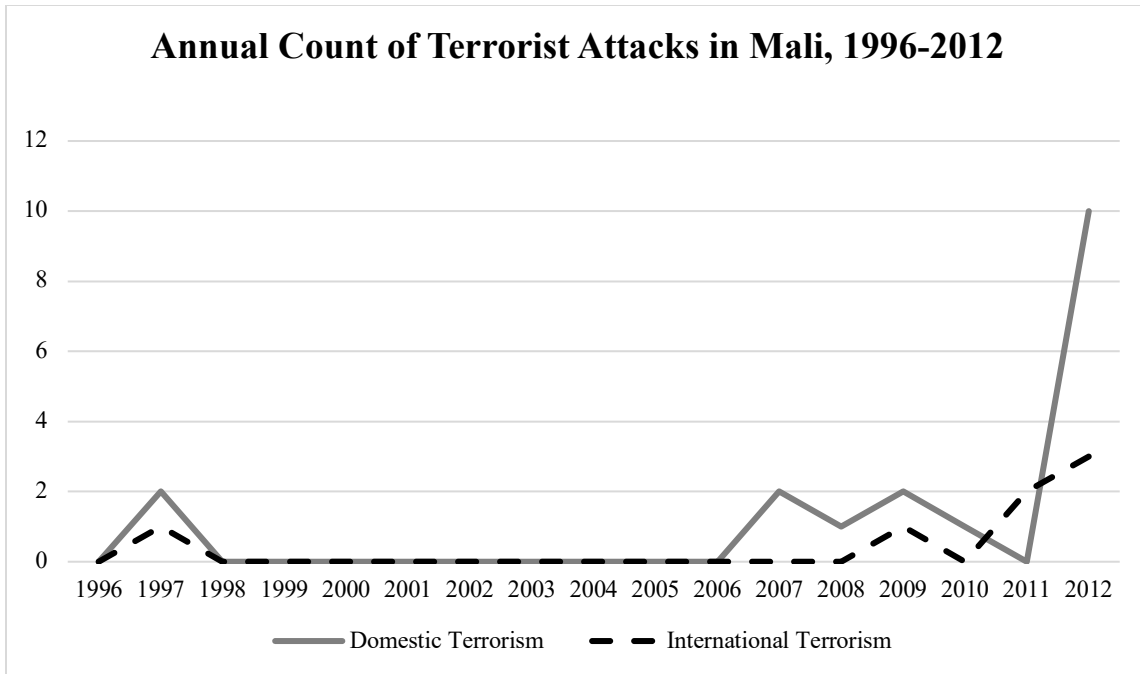
At the outset of the War on Terror, the vast Sahel region of western Africa was a concern for U.S. officials because of the potential of its exploitation by al Qaeda, with Mali part of a broader conversation about al Qaeda's movement outside of Afghanistan.

Ultimately, however, this region was a secondary concern to more immediately troublesome areas such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Yemen, which dominated the United States' focus in the War on Terror's early years. Attention was pulled to Mali's northern deserts with the increased activity of Algeria's Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), which would re-name itself al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in 2007. Using Mali's northern periphery as a safe haven, the group was heavily involved with the kidnapping of Westerners for ransom, and there was a growing fear that it had global ambitions beyond West Africa. U.S. officials, therefore, increasingly pushed the Malian government to confront GSPC/AQIM within its borders.

Mali initially did nothing against the group due to limited state capacity in its northern periphery and concerns for stirring up further trouble among the northern Tuareg tribes, which had a history of rebellion, including a breakaway Tuareg group rebelling in 2007. As GSPC/AQIM's kidnapping's increased, so too did U.S. pressure, with Mali

finally moving its military into the north to confront GSPC/AQIM in the fall of 2011, including a plan to establish control over the periphery through a stronger military presence to prevent the deserts from becoming a future safe haven. The introduction of the Malian military helped lead to the formation of a number of local Tuareg groups in opposition to the government, most notably the religious group Ansar Dine who the U.S. argued had connections with al Qaeda. As the Mali government, backed by the United States and other international partners, increased its military efforts in the northern Tuareg region against GSPC/AQIM, domestic terrorism by local Tuareg groups increased as a direct result.

The presence of the military was seen by the Tuareg as an unwanted intrusion, a position made worse by the civilian casualties among the Tuareg that resulted from the increasing counterterrorism operations. The escalating violence in northern Mali eventually spurred an international intervention to confront the terrorist threat, leading to an increase in violence against the international military presence. However, the initial increase in domestic terrorism after 2011 can be traced to the introduction of a military approach to counterterrorism by the Malian government, in line with the demands of U.S. officials. This negatively impacted the government's troubled relationship with its Tuareg periphery. Figure 7.2 below shows the overall trend of terrorism within Mali from 1996-2012.



**Figure 7.2 Annual Count of Terrorist Attacks in Mali, 1996-2012 (Enders, et. al., 2011; Gaibulloev, et. al., 2017)**

### *The Tuareg's Struggle for Azawad*

Mali's northern Tuareg population had long resisted government encroachments into their remote desert territory dating back to the days of French colonialism and France's brutal and failed attempts to extend definitely its rule over the region. Due to their remote desert environment and traditional nomadic lifestyle, the Berber Tuareg had lived outside of government control according to their tribal customs, with a reputation for banditry, fierce independence, and extraordinary survival skills in the harshest of desert climates. The Arabs gave them the name "Tuareg," which translates as "abandoned by God," while the tribesmen refer to themselves as Imohag, meaning "free men." As French West Africa began its transition towards post-colonial independence, many Tuareg hoped to be

able to form their own state, free from the continued political domination of far-away capitals. In 1959, Tuareg leaders, with the encouragement of French army officers, had petitioned to form an independent Tuareg state of Azawad, comprising of the Tuareg regions of Mali, Niger, and Algeria, but were unsuccessful (Clarke, 1978, 125). Instead, the Tuareg were split in the 1960s between five different post-colonial states, ruled by governments dominated by rival ethnic groups thousands of kilometers away. In Mali, this was viewed as a loss of their autonomy with the government largely consisting of officials from the Bambara and Malinke groups in the south.

When Mali received their independence in 1960, the new president, Modibo Keita, introduced a policy of industrial and agricultural modernization for the new African nation. The nomadism of the Tuareg was seen as antithetical to this new policy and his vision for a modern Malian state, with the northern region labeled “the useless Mali” (Benjaminsen, 2008, 828). The government attempted to convert the northern nomads into “productive” and “taxed” citizens by encouraging them to settle and become farmers. This settlement policy was accompanied by a ban on the Tuareg language and the introduction of a military administration in the north to assert government control. The tensions over this policy of coerced settlement were made worse by droughts in the 1960s and 1970s, during which it was reported that the government was hoarding food. A 1973 cable from the U.S. Embassy in Bamako stated, “There is evidence piling up that [Government of Mali] is hoarding grain in government warehouses at distribution points...think [Government of Mali] is doing only small amounts of food and hoarding

rest to keep fiercely independent and sometimes hostile desert nomads, i.e. Tuaregs, under government control in towns” (Clarke, 1978, 127).

Tuareg anger over their marginalized status within Mali, combined with the heavy handed approach of Malian military forces, soon led to the first of a series of four major rebellions by the Tuareg against the Malian state. The leader of the first rebellion in the 1960s, Elledi ag Alla of the Kel Adrar tribal confederation whose father was beheaded by French authorities when he was seven years old, explained, “I became a rebel to avenge my father, killed by the French administration, and to personally avenge myself for what the security agents of the Malian security post at Bouressa kept repeating at me—that if I did not stay quiet I would be slain like my father had been” (Lecocq, 2002, 132-133). In the coming years, the presence of Malian troops in the north was a key point of concern. Following the separatist Tuareg rebellion in the early 1990s, the peace agreement ending the fighting promised the demilitarization of the north with greater opportunities provided for the Tuareg. Tuareg leaders would criticize the government for failing to live up to the conditions of the agreement, and they continued clamoring for greater political autonomy and increased development for the north, with unrest beginning to again erupt in the region in 2006. In order to resolve the situation, the political leadership of the Tuareg Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC) and the Mali government signed an Algerian-mediated peace agreement, the Algiers Accords. The key components of the agreement were an increase in development for the north and the establishment of a northern security force consisting of local Tuareg. The following year, a small group of Tuareg under Ibrahim ag Bhangha of the Kidal region rebelled against the government,

conducting raids against military positions. They largely were angered at the continued presence of regular military forces in the north which they saw as a violation of previous peace treaties, especially the Algiers Accords from the previous year.

Many leading Tuareg from competing tribes, however, opposed this new rebellion such as the leader of the ADC Iyad ag Ghaly, a prominent Tuareg leader that led the rebellion in the 1990s and subsequently became an intermediary and advisor for the government in its relations with the north. Though Tuareg political leaders rejected the use of violence, they still embraced the objectives ag Bhangha was pursuing, including greater political representation for northern Mali, increased funds for development, the removal of the southern-dominated Malian army from the north, and recruitment of local Tuareg for a local security force. A Tuareg National Assembly Deputy Alghabass Intallah, whose father was the traditional leader of the Kidal Tuaregs, explained, “We see the military as an occupying army” (State Department, 2008p). Throughout the conflict, President Toure pushed for a negotiated settlement to resolve the conflict. Government efforts were marked by restraint in the use of military force, aware of the backlash large troop deployments could provoke. The government’s traditional approach to Tuareg rebellions, given the limited capacity of the Mali’s military forces, was to “fight the Tuaregs to the negotiating table” (Tankel, 2018, 248). The government ultimately relied on local Tuareg and Arab militias to push Bhangha’s forces out of Mali and into Algeria in February 2009.

### *Northern Mali and the War on Terror*

During the early years of the War on Terror, the U.S. government, seeking to identify potential safe havens for al Qaeda, was increasingly concerned over the empty deserts of the Sahel region in West Africa. In particular, Mali's vast "ungovernable North," according to the Malian President Amadou Toumani Toure, was recognized as a potential problem for both the Malian and U.S. authorities (State Department, 2003e). Officials in the Bush Administration were concerned that terrorist groups, especially the GSPC/AQIM, would exploit the region as a base of operations. GSPC/AQIM formed as a GIA breakaway faction during the Algerian civil war in the 1990s (Ahmed, 2013, 187-189). The group, however, had connections with Tuareg tribes in northern Mali through its leader Mokhtar Belmokhtar, who trained with al Qaeda in Afghanistan in the early 1990s and married the daughters of prominent Tuareg families. He had previously used these tribal connections for smuggling operations in the region.

To build local government capacity, the United States included Mali in the Pan-Sahel Initiative in 2002, though money was not allocated to the program until 2004 (Tankel, 2018, 246). The program was meant to "assist Mali, Niger, Chad, and Mauritania in detecting and responding to suspicious movement of people and goods across and within their borders through training, equipment and cooperation. Its goals support two U.S. national security interests in Africa: waging the war on terrorism and enhancing regional peace and security" (State Department, 2002d). This was superseded by the more comprehensive Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership in 2005, aimed at military capacity building among the participating states to conduct counterterrorism



operations within their borders. Two years later, the White House announced the creation of the U.S. military's Africa Command (AFRICOM) in order to strengthen military cooperation with strategic African states in counterterrorism efforts on the continent. While the U.S. government addressed problems of terrorism in the Sahel as a region through these programs, the bilateral relationship with Mali ultimately remained on the back burner in the early years of the War on Terror, with U.S. officials aware of the potential problems but lacking the resources and the policy focus to adequately address them.

For the weak Malian government, the north remained its primary security challenge because of its history of rebellion by the region's Tuareg tribes, seeing the War on Terror as an opportunity to gain U.S. support. During a June 2003 meeting in Bamako between the Mali President, the Deputy Commander of U.S. European Command General Charles Wald, and U.S. Ambassador Vicki Huddleston, President Toure "expressed his desire to deepen Mali's military relationship with the U.S. in order to better control the northern desert regions, which cover 60 percent of the country and are ripe for contraband and terrorist activity...Mali's geographic location lends it to infiltration." He further added that, "Mali does not have the means to continue its counter-terrorist activities without U.S. assistance," and his country "is grateful for the training provided by the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI), which has allowed Mali to participate in regional peacekeeping operations, and welcomes the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI)" (State Department, 2003e). General Wald highlighted the importance of continuing and strengthening military cooperation between the U.S. and Mali for

counterterrorism purposes “since terrorist activity in the region will likely increase unless we work together to stop it...at a time when potential terrorists from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Middle East are moving through Africa searching for safe places to hide and train their followers” (Ibid.). It was feared that al Qaeda and other al Qaeda-linked groups would exploit the historical conflict between the northern Tuareg periphery and Mali’s central government, dominated by the country’s southern ethnic groups. An American diplomat in Bamako stated, “The north is huge and impoverished, with lots of unemployed and angry young men. The potential for the exploitation of disenfranchised youth definitely exists” (Hammer, 2016, 68).

With GSPC/AQIM increasing its presence and connections among the Tuareg in the north amidst the growing domestic unrest, President Toure initially was reluctant to engage the Malian military forces in counterterrorism operations against the group. He didn’t want to divert the military’s limited resources away from dealing with Tuareg rebels and wanted to avoid pushing his government into direct conflict with GSPC/AQIM, which was not targeting Mali at the time. In their push for increased counterterrorism cooperation, however, U.S. officials maintained the focus on working through the local government. A November 2006 cable from the U.S. Embassy in Bamako stated,

As for the U.S. role, we need to balance our goal of denying space to or eliminating the GSPC from northern Mali with our larger long-term objectives of supporting a stable and democratic Mali and enhancing the country’s capacity to address multiple security threats in the north. While we should explore how to expand our training calendar with Malian security forces, we must tread carefully to keep the U.S. footprint as light as possible. Mali’s civilian and military leadership is unanimous in seeking expanded engagement with U.S. forces, but President Toure is manifestly reluctant to consider a sustained U.S. presence in

northern Mali, particularly if this could throw his military into a conflict with the GSPC (State Department, 2006o).

GSPC/AQIM was initially opposed by many of the local Tuareg tribes, with Iyad ag Ghaly arguing in a meeting with the U.S. Ambassador that the Tuareg rejected its extremist ideology (State Department, 2007g). Any support from locals within the region was motivated by economic gains, with a broader and implicit understanding that the group would leave local Tuareg alone if they did nothing against them. In 2006, Tuareg leaders, however, had asked GSPC/AQIM to leave their territory, where they were holding Westerners hostage for ransom. The group refused, leading to firefights between the GSPC/AQIM forces and local tribes, including ag Ghaly's own group the ADC. While ag Ghaly saw that the group "had little to no support amongst the native population of northern Mali," he also understood that it would be difficult to defeat given the terrain within which it operated (Ibid.). In November 2007 meetings with Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte, President Toure and Foreign Minister Moctar Ouane also rejected the claim that Tuareg rebels were connected with GSPC/AQIM, but President Toure did acknowledge that "Bahanga is strengthening banditry, insecurity, the fundamentalists and Algerian Salafists" (State Department, 2007h). The following year, the National Assembly Deputy Deity ag Simadou, a Tuareg rebel leader, told U.S. diplomats that the local Tuareg population was tired of the "Arab" GSPC/AQIM using its territory as a safe haven. He stated, "If you give us the means, we will go get the hostages right now. We are ready. We will put an end to the entire hostage trade in northern Mali. If you want AQIM's geo-coordinates so you can kill them, let us know" (State Department, 2008o).

U.S. officials' worry over GSPC/AQIM's activities increased when they declared allegiance to al Qaeda core in 2007 and changed their name to al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), putting increased pressure on the Malian government to move against the group. In May 2008, the U.S. Embassy in Bamako reported "some progress in convincing President Toure of the need to zero in on AQIM by focusing on the changing nature of AQIM and the fact that Mali, like neighboring Mauritania, is not immune to AQIM attacks on its soil...though President Toure still sees action against AQIM as counter to fundamental national interests due to the inherent risks of further stirring up trouble in the north" (State Department, 2008q). According to a trafficker in northern Mali's Kidal region with contacts with GSPC/AQIM, the group had a long-standing policy that if Mali took military action against their positions in northern Mali, they would respond with suicide attacks against Malian targets (State Department, 2009p). U.S. officials further recognized that Mali's failure to take offensive action against GSPC/AQIM also was driven by the limited capacity of its military forces operating in the north, rather than duplicity or collusion with the terrorists (State Department, 2009r).

As the rebellion died down at the beginning of 2009 with the disarmament of the Tuareg rebels in Kidal, GSPC/AQIM increased their kidnapping of westerners in Mali, with government fears that any negotiations with the group would lead to increased hostage taking. With NGOs such as the International Committee of the Red Cross telling Mali they were no longer able to work in the region due to GSPC/AQIM activity, the international community pushed the need to prioritize security above all (State Department, 2009q). There was also a growing fear that GSPC/AQIM was attempting to

infiltrate Europe for further operations against Western targets (Committee on Foreign Relations, 2009). Following the January 2009 murder of a British hostage and the June 2009 murder of Malian army colonel in Timbuktu by GSPC/AQIM forces, U.S.

Ambassador to Mali Gillian Milovanovic pressed President Toure to “do something” as the unanswered attacks were “rapidly tarnishing” the reputation of the country (Hammer, 2016, 111). The Malian President agreed with the need to use military force to target GSPC/AQIM, telling Vicki Huddleston, now serving as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Africa, “The biggest mistake of the 1992 peace accords was demilitarization of the north; we abandoned our territory to the Salafists” (State Department, 2009u).

The Malian military soon launched Operation Djihui in the north to confront GSPC/AQIM, leading to limited engagements with the group in June and July (*Country Reports on Terrorism*, 2009). Military reinforcements moved into the region to bolster the existing military presence. This operation, however, proved to be a failure, given the low capacity of Malian military forces, particularly in operating in the north. During this time, the Malian government pushed to gain support from local Tuareg militias, including former rebel groups, with ag Ghaly’s ADC pledging to join the fight against GSPC/AQIM (State Department, 2009v). With the potential increased military activity in the north for counterterrorism operations, Tuareg leaders understood that the continued presence of GSPC/AQIM in their territory posed a threat to their relative autonomy and their cooperation was meant to dissuade regular military forces from “occupying” the north.

With the Malian military's failed operation, President Toure asked Ambassador Milovanovic for greater U.S. military support given the supply difficulties the Malian troops faced and the southern soldiers' limited knowledge of the region (State Department, 2009s). A June 25, 2009 cable from the U.S. Embassy in Bamako stated, "If Mali is to secure its northern regions, its military support infrastructure will have to be expanded, and training will have to be improved. Since Mali's recent offensive against AQIM is a positive step forward responsive to long-standing international community expectations and consistent with American interests, Mali's efforts should be supported both morally and materially" (State Department, 2009t). In a November 2009 meeting with U.S. Africa Command General William Ward, President Toure reiterated the point that Mali needed to take decisive military action against AQIM in the north, with General Ward telling the Malian president that "we are paying close attention to how we can increase the capacity of the Malian Army to eliminate the threat posed" (State Department, 2009z). As reported by a State Department cable summarizing the meeting, President Toure and General Ward "agreed that, with or without regional cooperation, Mali has no choice but to move forward in confronting terrorist and criminal elements in the North" (Ibid.). Huddleston saw U.S. military training and support for the Malian forces as necessary for the "termination of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb" (Hammer, 2016, 107).

The following year, the Malian government began preparing its Special Program for Peace, Security, and Development (PSPSDN) as a means of establishing control over the security situation in the north with backing from international partners. The 50-

million-euro initiative, officially launched in August 2011, involved establishing Secure Development and Governance Centers at eleven strategic locations. Each location would be manned by Malian military forces providing security for development projects within the surrounding regions. The project was criticized by Tuareg leaders because of the high proportion of the budget dedicated to security and the fact that the government did not consult with Tuareg leadership. As construction began, the project faced opposition from the local population due to the introduction of a strong “southern” military presence which they did not trust. During Fall 2011, there were a series of attacks against construction sites for military barracks associated with the project, with Malian government officials claimed GSPC/AQIM committed the attacks. However, the International Crisis Group (2012, 7) reported that local Tuareg were responsible.

***Mali and Domestic Terrorism: Northern Backlash to the Malian Military Operations***

As the military increased its presence in the north as part of PSPSDN, the National Movement for Azawad, founded in November 2010, joined with other Tuareg groups and formed the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) in October 2011 in order to advocate for an independent Tuareg state. Their movement gained momentum with the arrest of their leadership after the founding meeting in Timbuktu and violent repression of their demonstrations. The movement would be bolstered by the return of Tuareg serving in Gaddafi’s mercenary army disbanded after Gaddafi’s fall from power in 2011, along with a flood of weapons into the region. The group was comprised predominately of younger tribesmen demanding equal economic and political

representation of the Tuareg in the army and universities, greater economic opportunities, and infrastructure development, as well as a greater share of resource wealth from their territory. Initially they declared their intention to find a political, legal and peaceful route to Azawad independence, advocating a secular and nationalist approach in their struggle. There were serious concerns from the U.S. and Malian governments, however, that these young Tuareg and their fight for independence could be exploited by GSPC/AQIM.

Violence broke out in January 2012 as the MNLA mobilized its forces and began targeting Mali's military forces in the region, with emotions stemming from the previous rebellions never far from the surface. The Malian army, for example, killed the father of the military leader of MNLA, Mohamed Ag Najm, during the first Tuareg uprising in 1963. As the fighting intensified, the MNLA occupied a number of major towns across northern Mali, including Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu, and drove the Malian military out of the region. The group then set up an administrative structure in order to contest the legitimacy of the government's sovereignty in the north. On April 5, 2012, the group declared independence in the north. Between 2011 and 2012, there also was an increase in GSPC/AQIM attacks as it increased its presence in Mali (Arieff and Johnson, 2012).

This soon led to the collapse of the government as the military staged a coup in March 2012 given the lack of success in fighting the northern rebels, after which the U.S. government suspended its assistance to Mali. The junta justified its actions by referencing "the government's failure to provide adequate equipment to the defense and security forces fulfilling their mission to defend the country's territorial integrity" (International Crisis Group, 2012, 18). Following a negotiated settlement, power passed to the hands of



the National Assembly of Mali Speaker Dioncounda Traore, who promised to “wage a total and relentless war” against the Tuareg groups (*BBC News*, 2012). His efforts would be supported by the international community, with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stating in September 2012 at the United Nations, “the chaos and violence in Mali [threatens] to undermine the stability of the entire region” (Hammer, 2016, 187).

In fighting for an independent state of Azawad, the MNLA leadership was opposed to working with Tuareg leadership that had previously worked with the Malian government, most notably Iyad ag Ghaly as they were wary of his links with President Toure. Amidst the eruption of anti-government violence, the increasingly religious ag Ghaly, who had returned from a diplomatic posting in Saudi Arabia in November 2008 and relegated to minor duties, switched his loyalties and founded the religious group Ansar Dine to fight the Malian government. Unlike MNLA’s secular nationalism, Ansar Dine’s goal was to replace Malian secular law in the north with *Sharia*, which he saw as an antidote to corruption and the exploitation of the northern region. Many of his supporters were Tuareg from his Ifogha tribal group and also saw Ansar Dine as a means of protecting Ifogha interests in the conflict (International Crisis Group, 2012, 26). It soon entered the conflict with the group’s first attack taking place in March 2012. Malian military officials quickly pointed to a connection between Ansar Dine and GSPC/AQIM (*Al Jazeera English*, 2012). The following year, the State Department designated Ansar Dine a Foreign Terrorist Organization. State Department officials understood Ansar Dine to be an issue of al Qaeda-linked terrorism and therefore distinct from the local political problems related to the Tuareg rebellion (Committee on Foreign Affairs, 2012).

As the two Tuareg groups competed with one another for resources and territory, the MNLA and Ansar Dine faced off in the Battle of Gao and Timbuktu in June 2012, resulting in a victory by Ansar Dine, replacing MNLA as the leading Tuareg group in the north. Oumar Ould Hamaha, Ansar Dine's chief of security in Gao, stated after the battle, "Our fighters control the perimeter. We control Timbuktu completely. We control Gao completely. It's Ansar Dine that commands the north of Mali. Now we have every opportunity to apply Shariah... Shariah does not require a majority vote. It's not democracy. It's the divine law that was set out by God to be followed by his slaves. One hundred percent of the north of Mali is Muslim, and even if they don't want this, they need to go along with it" (*Associated Press*, 2012). Other religious groups soon became involved in the civil war in addition to Ansar Dine, including the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa in March 2012, a GSPC/AQIM splinter group defining itself explicitly with a regional focus, and the Islamic Movement of the Azawad in January 2013.

The GSPC/AQIM leadership based in Algeria's Kabylia region, however, was opposed to the actions of Ansar Dine. They singled out and condemned Ansar Dine's battles with the MNLA and move to establish a system of governance based on *Sharia*, calling it "a major mistake." In a 2012 letter to Ansar Dine's ag Ghaly and other militant groups, the head of GSPC/AQIM Abdelmalek Droukdel wrote that the goal of the militant groups should be to outlast the Western-backed military intervention of northern Mali which allows them to "gain a region under control and a people fighting for us and a refuge for our members that allows us to move forward with our program." Moreover, he

considered the declaration of an “Islamic State of Azawad” premature because “establishing a just Islamic regime ruling people by the Shari’a of the People’s Lord is [a] very big duty that exceeds the capabilities of any organization or movement [now operating in Azawad].” He warned that the “extreme speed with which you applied Shari’a Law...in an environment ignorant of religion” was “wrong” as “our previous experience proved that applying Shari’a this way, without taking into account the environment into consideration will lead to people rejecting religion and engender hatred toward the mujahiden.” The letter also chastised Ansar Dine’s use of violence against civilians as a means of asserting political control and “the destruction of shines” which could bring “negative repercussions” and stressed “I hope you will not repeat” these mistakes. Above all, he pushed for the groups to show restraint and “not to monopolize the political and military stage” (Callimachi, 2013; Doyle, 2013; Siegel, 2013). In a September 2012 letter back to AQIM leadership, Belmokhtar bristled at the credibility of GSPC/AQIM to direct the local fight within Mali and responded, “Your board gives orders whereas there is no single leader in it who knows this area [the Sahel] or lived here” (Guidere, 2014, 8). In response to the tense relationship with Belmokhtar, GSPC/AQIM leadership stated that he had “too much independence, having no link other than in name with the organization’s command, showing no interest, no consideration, no respect to the guidance and to the orders issued by the Emirate [AQIM]” (Ibid., 11). After this dispute with the GSPC/AQIM leadership, Mokhtar Belmokhtar formed the Signed-in-Blood Battalion and began to conduct attacks within Mali and neighboring Algeria. He warned the Malian government of the consequences of military action in the north, “We

will respond forcefully [to all attackers]; we promise we will follow you to your homes and you will feel pain and we will attack your interests” (*BBC News*, 2015).

The GSPC/AQIM order not to provoke a retaliatory response was ignored by Ansar Dine who continued domestic terrorist attacks against government targets. In January 2013, the group launched attacks into southern Mali. After taking the town of Konna, they announced to local residents in a mosque, “Your town was long terrorized by the Malian government, and now we have taken it. There is no mayor, no police, and no army. There is only us” (Hammer, 2016, 191). At this time, there were also an increasing number of reports of the Malian army committing extrajudicial killings and human rights abuses against Tuareg civilians as reprisals such as indiscriminate shelling of nomadic Tuareg camps (Hirsch, 2013). In one incident in Diabaly in late 2012, for example, the military executed sixteen Muslim religious figures after suspecting them of being militants. Shortly after, Ansar Dine fighters attacked the military positioned in Diabaly and occupied the town in revenge for the incident (Raghavan and Cody, 2013). Mali’s Minister of Justice, Malick Coulibaly, attempted to explain away the incidents by the army, stating, “No army in the world is perfect. The US army is one of the most professional in the world, yet they have been found to have committed acts of torture and unlawful killings. That exists in all armies” (Hirsch, 2013). These abuses, he was quick to add, were matched by the militant groups’ own atrocities against civilians. Ansar Dine continued its march south and attacked the town of Mopti only 460 kilometers from Bamako, then the last town held by Malian forces before entering the north.

### *The International Community Intervenes*

With the rise in violence and nearing threat to the capital city, the international community saw the need to increase support for the Mali government's counterterrorism efforts. The commanding general of U.S. AFRICOM, General Carter Ham, stated in December 2012, "As each day goes by, Al Qaeda and other organizations are strengthening their hold in northern Mali" (Schmitt, 2012). That same month, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon supported a plan for the deployment of regional troops to assist in taking back control of the north. He wrote, "Northern Mali is at risk of becoming a permanent haven for terrorists and organized criminal networks where people are subjected to a very strict interpretation of Shariah law and human rights are abused on a systematic basis" (Ibid). GSPC/AQIM responded, "We warn all the countries that are planning aggression against us, [we will mete out] merciless punishment" (Hammer, 2016, 188).

Following the January 2013 attacks, the French, unhappy with the limited effectiveness of their former colony's military forces, launched Operation Serval, a military intervention into northern Mali involving 2,500 troops and extensive air support at the invitation of the Malian transitional government under President Traore (*Al Jazeera English*, 2013). The military operation was supported by Malian and ECOWAS troops as part of the African-led International Support Mission to Mali, and, beginning in April 2013, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. The military operations also received U.S. logistical and intelligence assistance. The French motivation for intervening was primarily tied to their economic interests in the region,

especially the two uranium mines run by the French nuclear energy company Areva across the border in Niger from which France derives 18% of the total fuel for its 58 nuclear reactors. There were concerns within the French government that unrest in Mali would spill across the border and negatively impact the uranium mining operations. Simultaneous to the deployment of French troops into Niger, France deployed special forces to guard these two mines (*France 24*, 2013).

As this mission pushed back the militants and reclaimed territory through the north, local militant attacks increased against French, UN and other international targets, including the November 2013 kidnapping and killing of two French journalists by GSPC/AQIM and the December 2013 attack against a UN camp in Kidal. The Malian military also continued its own operations in the north, which stoked additional attacks by local Tuareg groups. In April 2014, a number of protests were launched against the presence of the foreign troops as both a provocation for attacks and their ineffectiveness in countering terrorist groups. As France decreased their focus on Mali itself and embraced a regional approach to counterterrorism in West Africa, the protestors asked why “despite their large numbers, these [UN and Serval forces] fail to provide the necessary support for the Malian army in its fierce fight against terrorists” (Cisse, 2014).

With the increase in terrorist attacks in the north, the Malian government moved to broker peace negotiations with the secular MNLA forces. President Traore, however, stated his refusal to negotiate with Ansar Dine, arguing that they are “disqualified” from the talks due to their brutality against civilians and domestic terrorist attacks against the government (*Agence-France Press*, 2013). A peace agreement between a coalition of

various Tuareg rebel factions and the government was signed in June 2015, giving greater political autonomy to the northern region with promises that local Tuareg would be included in security forces in the north. With the peace agreement in place, the government hoped this would allow military forces in the north, now receiving limited U.S. assistance again beginning in 2014, to focus more attention on the threat from GSPC/AQIM and Ansar Dine. These two groups, which were left out of peace negotiations, continued their attacks on local targets as well as the UN peacekeepers that remained in the north. By 2016, the UN mission in northern Mali had become the deadliest on-going mission by UN peacekeepers in the world (Sieff, 2017).

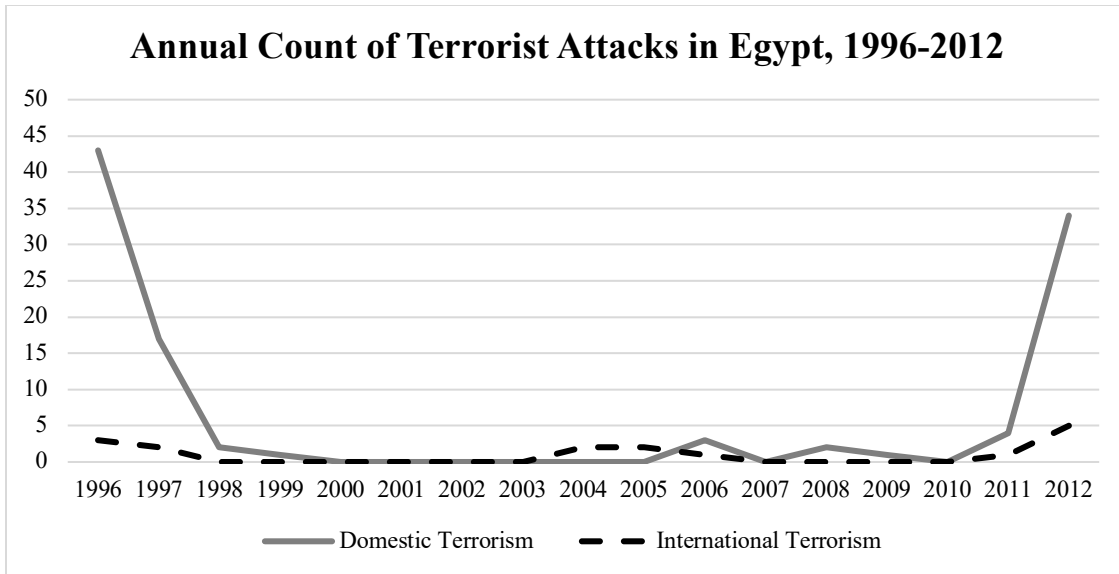
### **Egypt: The Middle East’s “Bulwark Against Terrorism”**

Egypt has had a strong military relationship with the United States since the 1978 Camp David Accords which helped to establish peaceful relations between long-time rivals Egypt and Israel. As a result of this agreement, the Egyptian government, alongside Israel, has consistently been one of the largest recipients of U.S. military assistance in the world. For the Egyptian government, the War on Terror was an opportunity to strengthen its ties with the United States and continue its military-to-military relationship. Terrorism had already been a concern for Egypt. Prior to 9/11, Egypt maintained a “zero-tolerance” domestic security position against terrorist groups given past security threats and terrorist activity from domestic religious groups such as Egyptian Islamic Jihad and al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya (*Patterns of Global Terrorism*, 2002, 55). These groups opposed the peace treaty with Israel, having assassinated President Anwar Sadat in 1981, and sought to

replace Egypt's secular, military government under Sadat's successor Hosni Mubarak with an Islamic state throughout the 1980s and 1990s. During this time periods, they were active in committing a number of attacks in the country's urban areas.

The periphery of the Sinai Peninsula was also a security concern, especially with the growing concern among U.S. officials that al Qaeda could take advantage of the cross-border movement of Palestinians (State Department, 2006q). International terrorism arrived in Sinai in 2004 as a spillover to the neighboring Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, the Egyptian government was limited to using traditional law enforcement in the region for counterterrorism efforts due to the conditions of the Camp David Accords, which treated Sinai essentially as a demilitarized zone. In the government's response to these attacks, the Egyptian police in Sinai were criticized for its mass arrests of the marginalized Bedouin. However, domestic terrorism remained low, with many Bedouin instead protesting to express their anger at the actions of the police. Following Israel's shift in policy regarding the deployment of Egyptian military forces in Sinai in August 2011, Egypt was able to use its U.S.-backed military in counterterrorism operations, often resulting in civilian casualties among the local Bedouin due to the scorched earth tactics used. This served as a catalyst for an increase in domestic terrorism as local Bedouin groups, especially Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM), committed revenge attacks against the Egyptian military and security agencies both within and outside of the Sinai Peninsula. Figure 7.3 below shows the trend in both international and domestic terrorist attacks in Egypt from 1996-2012.





**Figure 7.3 Annual Count of Terrorist Attacks in Egypt, 1996-2012 (Enders, et. al., 2011; Gaibullov, et. al., 2017)**

### *The Sinai Peninsula*

Historically, governments’ interactions with the Bedouin of Sinai were confined to three aspects: protection services for trade caravans and Hajj pilgrimages passing through Sinai, attempting to exact taxation from the tribes, and depending on the local tribes for the security of administrative centers and outposts (Bailey, 2009, 9-10). Prior to being brought into the fold of the British administration in Egypt in 1882, Sinai was loosely administered by a regional governor at al-Arish on the Mediterranean coast. His only responsibility was to ensure the safe passage of through traffic passing to Egypt or Palestine and the Hijaz, largely leaving the Bedouin to govern their own affairs so long as any issues remained internal to the tribe (Murray, 1935, 200). In 1884, the British closed the Hajj pilgrimage route through Sinai, which were constantly harassed by Bedouin raiding parties, and required all pilgrims to pass through the Suez Canal and the Red Sea

to Mecca by steamship, diminishing the need for a government presence in the region. The first British agent in Sinai, W.E. Jennings-Bramley who was appointed in 1904, noted in 1910 seeing only one manned government garrison which housed the regional governor and ten soldiers. The caravan trade and pilgrimages through Sinai were diminished further when the British built a railroad line in World War I from Qantara in the northwest corner of Sinai across the coast to Rafah in the present-day Gaza Strip (Bailey, 1991, 344).

The period following World War II was a period of drastic change in the life of the Sinai Bedouin tribesmen. The encroachment of the Egyptian government began to alter the economic and cultural life of the Bedouin on the whole, as distinct from previous engagement under British authorities who were largely content to neglect the region and work through tribal structures when necessary. The Bedouin started to be conscripted as unskilled laborers in government projects such as mining and road-building. The Egyptian government during this period also began the process of settling the tribes into villages to increase control over the region and the government's ability to tax Sinai's inhabitants (Rabinowitz, 1985). Between 1953, when Egyptian gained independence, and 1967, Sinai fell under a military administration until it was lost to Israel in the Six Day War, during which control of the peninsula became a key political symbol for both countries.

As part of the 1978 Camp David Accords, Israel agreed to a staged withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula in order to return political control of the region over to Egypt. As part of the agreement, both nations agreed to limited military deployments on either

side of the border along with the stationing of UN troops to monitor compliance with the peace treaty. In 1982, Israel withdrew the remainder of its troops from Sinai. After 1982, security in Sinai relied on police forces working with the local Bedouin tribes. Under the 1978 Camp David Accords and the 1979 Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel, the Sinai Peninsula was returned to Egypt as an essentially demilitarized zone, with the Egyptian Government only permitted to deploy civilian police in Sinai along with small numbers of military forces to enhance border security. The border force supported the police in apprehending, using minimal force, Palestinians who illegally crossed the border and return them to Gaza. In order for Egypt to increase the number of these forces, the Israeli government had to agree to the deployment, agreement that was never forthcoming given Israeli concerns that Egypt would attempt to alter the political status quo of the region.

In 2005, for example, Egypt was pushing Israel to consent to the deployment of additional Egyptian border guards in Sinai due to constant Israeli criticisms over lax border security on the Egyptian side. The Egyptian Defense Minister Mohamed Hussein Tantawi and the Director of Military Intelligence Mourad Mowafi pressed U.S. officials for their support in convincing Israel to agree to the deployment of an additional battalion at the border with Gaza (State Department, 2006p, 2006r). The deployment of such a large force was a measure to which the Israeli government would not agree. Israeli officials were concerned with Egypt's military posturing, with the Deputy Director of Israel's Ministry of Defense General Amos Gilad telling the U.S. Ambassador that he feared Egypt was attempting to undermine the security provisions of the Egyptian-Israeli

peace treaty, something he argued became obvious during negotiations for the 2005 border agreement (State Department, 2005h). However, the two countries eventually signed an agreement allowing a 750-member Border Guard Force to supplement the lightly armed police force, in anticipation of Israel's withdrawal from Gaza the following year.

Given the period of Israeli rule in Sinai and the tribal connections between the Sinai and Negev Bedouin in southern Israel, the Egyptian government distrusted the Bedouin and saw them as potential fifth columnists and allies to Israel, even denying some Bedouin Egyptian citizenship (Bradley, 2008; *Daily News Egypt*, 2007). The Sinai Bedouin as a whole were politically marginalized, even if they held Egyptian citizenship. They were denied the right to own land for the fear that they would sell it to Israelis, excluded from serving in the Egyptian military and police force, and blocked from holding key positions in Sinai's two governorates—North Sinai and South Sinai (Yossef, 2011). In the 1980s, a Bedouin tribesman complained to a journalist about the marginalization of the Bedouin (*ahl al-dega'a*—People of the Land) by the government (*shuglin al-siyasa*—People of Politics), “But what can we do? We are *ahl al-dage'a*. They are *shuglin al-siyasa*. So what can we do?” (Lavie, 1990, 89).

Beginning in the 1990s, the Tourism Development Authority of the Egyptian government opened up Sinai for land developers to build hotels, resorts, and other tourist amenities on Sinai's coasts, resulting in tourist centers such as Sharm el-Sheikh. The tourist industry quickly expanded throughout the following decade with the number of tourist establishments rising from 17 in 1994 to 274 in 2003. 70% of the growth occurred

in four and five-star establishments aimed at foreign tourists (SEAM Programme, 2004, 2). By the early 2000s, hotel rooms in south Sinai comprised nearly one-quarter of all hotel rooms in the country (Rady, 2002, 15). Egyptian workers from the Nile Valley migrated into Sinai to fill the newly created tourism jobs in the region, with little benefit to the local Bedouin communities. Bedouin were only hired for seasonal odd jobs or outdoor guards, with many choosing instead to rely on illegal smuggling practices. This expansion of tourism also re-allocated the scant resources of the desert, primarily water, for tourism projects, leading Bedouin communities to suffer from constant water shortages. The growth of the tourist industry was paired with efforts to “settle the Bedouins into developed areas” to “help end the smuggling of goods, such as food and petrol, through tunnels to Gaza and the smuggling of migrants across the border,” according to the Governor of North Sinai Murad Muwafi (Bradley, 2010). Local government officials in Sinai, largely consisting of Egyptians from the Nile Valley, complained of a cultural divide between the Egyptians and the Sinai Bedouin, arguing that “social engineering” would be needed to fix the government’s problems with the Bedouin population (State Department, 2009y).

### ***The Sinai Peninsula and the War on Terror***

On September 11, 2001, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was quick to condemn the al Qaeda attack, calling a press conference the same day to express his sorrow and sadness over the day’s events. Later that day, he convened a cabinet meeting in which he directed all present to provide any kind of assistance needed to the U.S. government (State

Department, 2001m). Within days, the Egyptian government increased its domestic security and began arresting terrorist suspects within the Cairo area. The Egyptian foreign minister proclaimed, “There is war between bin Laden and the whole world” (*The Economist*, 2001). The CIA subsequently worked closely with the Egyptian Intelligence Services and shared intelligence such as biometric data on terrorist suspects.

Within the next few years, Egypt’s counterterrorism focus would shift to the Sinai Peninsula when there was a series of international terrorist attacks between 2004 and 2006 targeting the tourist industry as well as the Multinational Force and Observers present in Sinai as part of the Camp David Accords. These initial attacks were a result of regional and international concerns over Palestinian issues, with Israeli tourists being targeted. The first incident of international terrorism occurred on October 7, 2004 with the bombing of the Hilton Hotel in Taba, Egypt near the Israeli border on the Gulf of Aqaba. A car bomb detonated in front of the hotel killing 34 and injuring 105, many of whom were Israeli (*BBC News*, 2004). There were additional bombings at two campsites in Ras Shitan, 35 miles south of Taba, both a destination point and a thoroughfare for Israeli tourists coming into south Sinai. The Egyptian Ministry of Interior soon after produced nine suspects, many of them local Bedouin, and identified the main perpetrator as Iyad Salah, a minibus driver of Palestinian origin from al-Arish in northern Sinai who died in the explosion. It was reported that he had ties to an un-identified Palestinian group in Gaza and, according to the government statement, “the bombings were a reaction to the deterioration of the situation in the occupied territories, and targeted Israelis staying in the hotel and at the camping ground” (Human Rights Watch, 2005, 10). Both U.S. and

Israeli officials, however, pointed to al Qaeda as being involved in the bombing. A U.S. counterterrorism official stated, “American officials suspected Osama bin Laden’s network played a role because the bombings showed a level of sophistication fitting al-Qaeda’s usual operational style” (Nabil, 2004).

Despite having named nine suspects, the Egyptian police quickly began mass arrests throughout north Sinai, including Bedouin working in quarries with regular access to explosives. Egyptian human rights organizations reported nearly 3,000 people in north Sinai had been arrested and held without charge. The security forces were also arresting women and children “as pawns to force men to turn themselves in” (Human Rights Watch, 2005, 13). One local resident near al-Arish stated that the police “were confused at first. They’d arrest whole villages and release them the same day, day after day, village after village. The shaikhs said, ‘You can’t do this: tell us who you want, and we will bring them to you. Don’t violate our homes and our women.’” (Ibid., 10). Soon, the police began to target specific types of individuals, including men named Mustafa, those who drove red pick-ups, or individuals who had “beards” and therefore were “presumed adherents of Islamist congregations” (Ibid.).

In January 2005, Egyptian security services instituted a formal agreement, a “Pledge Document,” with Bedouin leaders to work closely with local Bedouin tribes to deal with local security issues (State Department, 2005f). The Bedouin leaders, in turn, agreed to notify government authorities of criminal activity within their territory, instead of simply dealing with matters internally as the tribes had done in the past. Some Bedouin disapproved of this new arrangement as a violation of the traditional tribal system of

justice. They were especially concerned with the government seeking to play a larger role in the selection of tribal leaders, traditionally picked by consensus within the tribe, to ensure the tribes' loyalty to the government. In early February 2005, tribal militias, working with local policemen, were involved in the cornering and killing of three suspects involved with the October bombing. The following month, the Egyptian government brought to trial three additional suspected arrested for their connections with the bombing, with three other suspects released for lack of evidence.

The following year on July 23, at the height of tourist season, another bombing occurred in the resort city of Sharm el-Sheikh in Sinai's southern tip. The attack was a series of three bombs set off in the early morning: the first was a car bomb in the Old Market bazaar, the second detonated outside the Movenpick Hotel, and the third was a truck bomb driven into the lobby of the Ghazala Garden Hotel. 88 people were killed and more than 200 injured, with the victims consisting of both Egyptians and foreign tourists (*BBC News*, 2005). Following the Sharm el-Sheikh bombing, police took the lead in sweeping the region of al Arish in North Sinai for suspects responsible for the incident and continued to conduct regular police patrols in the region over the coming months, with increased security at tourist facilities. There were some incidents involving "Bedouin outcasts" setting landmines targeting the police raids, which killed two senior police officials and wounding nine others in late August 2005 (State Department, 2005i). Despite the Lebanese group Abdallah Azzam Brigades, with suspected links to al Qaeda, taking responsibility for the bombing, Egyptian government officials maintained that the



bombings were perpetrated by local Bedouin rather than linked with any international terrorist groups (*Country Reports on Terrorism*, 2005).

The U.S. Embassy in Cairo pushed back against this theory, arguing in a September 2005 cable, “Nonetheless, the Egyptian assertion that the Sinai terrorists are purely homegrown and devoid of outside influence seems to be wearing thin” (State Department, 2005i). The head of Israeli Military Intelligence General Zeevi Farkash went so far as announcing al Qaeda had “assumed control of some parts of the Sinai,” something which Egyptian officials denied (State Department, 2005j). The U.S. Embassy in Cairo questioned Farkash’s assertion, stating, “While we do not share the [Government of Egypt’s] absolute confidence that the Jebel Halal militants, and perpetrators of the Taba and Sharm attacks, had no connections to Al-Qaida or other affiliated terror networks, neither are we in possession of any evidence to the contrary. Clearly, references to Al-Qaida’s establishment of a base of operations in Sinai are overblown” (Ibid.). Later that year, the military advisor to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Major General Gadi Shamni, told the U.S. Ambassador to Israel that “Egypt and Israel are both worried about the growing presence of global jihadist terrorists in the Sinai,” many of whom are attempting to infiltrate Israel (State Department, 2005k).

In late April 2006, there were two more international terrorist attacks in Sinai—one in the resort city of Dahab targeting tourists in a market, killing 24 and injuring 100, including 4 American citizens; and a suicide attack against Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) soldiers (two Egyptians, one Norwegian, and one New Zealander) traveling in an SUV in northeastern Sinai near an MFO camp with the targeted soldiers

only sustaining minor injuries. Egyptian police argued that Al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad, an “indigenous group comprised mostly of radicalized Bedouin extremists” that “espouses a pro al-Qaida, Salafist ideology,” was responsible for the bombings. Soon after, the government announced that they had arrested or killed the group’s leadership in police raids in Sinai (*Country Reports on Terrorism*, 2006).

A few days after the bombings, the Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs John Hillen stated to both the Egyptian Foreign Minister and Defense Minister, “It will be important not to allow the Treaty of Peace to impair Egypt’s counterterrorism program...the U.S. would support discussions with Egypt, Israel, and the MFO to ensure that Egypt’s counterterrorism efforts can continue” (State Department, 2006s). U.S. government officials understood the need to maintain positive relations between Egypt and Israel and, therefore, were sensitive to the provisions of the peace agreements. In December 2008, for example, the U.S. Embassy in Cairo supported the sale of 24 Apache helicopters to the Egyptian military, using Foreign Military Financing funds, to bolster its reconnaissance and border security operations and assist “protecting U.S. and partner interests.” These helicopters, the Embassy argued in a cable, made a note that they would not affect the regional balance of power with Israel and stressed that “all missions will be in compliance with the standards and regulations outlined within current international and regional agreements” (State Department, 2008r).

Throughout this period, tensions remained high between the Egyptian government and the Sinai Bedouin, with 2,000 local tribesmen holding a multi-day sit-in at the Israeli border in late April 2007. The protestors claimed that the government’s security and

development policies in the region discriminated against the Bedouin and pushed for greater development and economic opportunities. They also expressed concern over the cultural insensitivities and brutality of the police and sought the release of fellow Bedouin imprisoned during security sweeps by police following the recent international terrorist attacks. In 2009, Bedouin political leaders again expressed concerns with the Egyptian government's move to increase "heavy-handed" security in north Sinai to "control" the local population, seeing them as "spies." They saw a "hand of steel" approach would only increase resentment among the Bedouin and lead to attempts to "embarrass" the government in order to end "random" arrests and force the government to address the political and economic marginalization of the Bedouin. The only means of providing security and stability within Sinai, according the Bedouin leaders, was to increase development and economic opportunities. However, the protestors argued, the government's focus was "how to get rid of the Bedouin problem," with the North Sinai governor, a former "military man," focused more on security than development (State Department, 2009w, 2009x).

In 2009 and 2010, Bedouin protests continued to erupt in the region in order to force the government's hand on these issues. In early 2010, there were concerns within the government about growing lawlessness in the peninsula, particularly in the mountainous central Sinai, with officials questioning the ability of the local police forces within the Department of the Interior to deal effectively with criminal elements among the Bedouin. A local council meeting in North Sinai, attended by the five North Sinai MPs, argued that the Egyptian Army should be used for operations in the region to

address the security situation if the police are unable “to maintain control.” The council argued that the police are “ineffective due to the harsh nature of central Sinai Bedouin and the challenges of pursuing suspected criminals in central Sinai” (State Department, 2010d).

### ***Egypt’s Operation Eagle***

The events of the Arab Spring in Spring 2011, which led to the resignation of President Mubarak, resulted in a security vacuum in Sinai with criminals, smugglers, and militants using the political environment as an opportunity to organize and operate. After the fall of Mubarak’s rule, natural gas pipelines running through north Sinai, which serviced both Israel and Jordan, quickly became a target for attacks as a symbol of the government’s exploitation of the region. Between February and August 2011, the pipelines were attacked four times (Cook, 2011). There also was an attack against two police stations in al Arish in late July 2011. In this environment, the militant group Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (Supporters of Jerusalem) was formed in July 2011 in north Sinai and suspected of collaborating with Palestinian groups in cross-border attacks against Israel. ABM’s leadership and ranks emerged from local Bedouin tribes and appealed to local grievances and tribal connections for recruitment (Zeiger, 2012). However, there were concerns among government officials that the group was “linked” with or “inspired by” al Qaeda (*Al Jazeera*, 2014; Kaphle, 2014). In August 2011, a general in Egyptian intelligence stated, “Al Qaeda is present in Sinai mainly in the area of Sakaska close to Rafah. They have been training there for [a] month, but we have not identified their nationalities yet”

(Fahmy, 2011). Analysts, however, later noted that the group's "appropriation of the themes of global jihad should be understood in primarily strategic terms" as "ABM is an entirely Egyptian phenomenon" (Goodman, 2014).

With the emergence of the group and suspicions of its al Qaeda connections, Egyptian officials repeated its long-time concerns with Israel's unwillingness to permit the deployment of the Egyptian military forces to Sinai. They argued this was an impediment in dealing decisively with any unrest among the Bedouin population in this marginalized periphery and the opportunity this presented to ABM for recruitment purposes. Egyptian Major General Safwat al-Zayyat, a former official within Egypt's General Intelligence, stated of militancy in Sinai,

There are also sympathisers among the Bedouin tribes, because no one has paid attention to them. We must realise that the farther away you get from the centre towards the periphery the more tenuous are ties based on national loyalty and patriotism. This is happening in Sinai, which was marginalized before and after liberation. Unfortunately, the peace agreement limits our control over our own territories, at a time when we are dealing with the border as a security issue, forgetting that Camp David restricts our ability to exercise sovereignty while it places no restraints on Israel (Eleiba, 2011).

The perception of Israeli officials concerning the security situation in Sinai changed in August 2011. On August 8, a bus in southern Israel was attacked, killing eight Israelis. The Israeli government argued that Palestinian militants who had crossed into Sinai from Gaza and then re-entered Israel were responsible for the attack. Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak stated, "The incident underscores the weak Egyptian hold on Sinai and the broadening of the activities of terrorists" (Sherwood, 2011). Barak added, "The real source of terror is in Gaza and we will act against them with full force," with the Israeli military launching air strikes into the Gaza strip. In the days following the

attack, the Israeli government also shifted its position in regard to the deployment of Egyptian military near the border and granted Egypt permission to deploy thousands of troops into Sinai, including the use of helicopter gunships and armored vehicles. As one Israeli intelligence officer explained, “Following recent violence at the border, Israel has become more understanding of the security situation we are dealing with in Sinai” (Lubell, 2011).

After the border attack in Israel and fearing future attacks, the Egyptian military deployed 2,000 troops into North Sinai as part of Operation Eagle in order to “deter these armed groups” (Fahmy, 2011a). The “open-ended” operation was supported with Apache gunships and M-60 tanks. A statement by the Defense Ministry stated, “The armed forces will continue Operation Eagle to pursue the terrorists and will...start to redeploy its forces to complete its pursuit of the fugitive terrorists and finish off all terrorist cells in the Sinai” (Fahmy, 2011b). Many Bedouin rejected the imposition of military forces, with one village brandishing their weapons and chasing troops out of the area in the midst of a raid that “ravaged Bedouin houses” and was seen “as a violation on the conservative customs and traditions of their community” (Sabry, 2013).

Following the election of a Muslim Brotherhood government, President Mohamed Morsi tried to take a development focus on unrest in the Sinai Peninsula aimed at the underlying drivers of conflict and negotiate with militants once in power, withdrawing a portion of the military forces in the process (Eleiba, 2012). Morsi’s critics, especially within the military, saw these moves as giving militants a free hand to operate within Egypt, a contributing factor to the July 2013 military coup led by General Abdul Fattah

al-Sisi (*Associated Press*, 2013). After Morsi's removal, the military government re-deployed troops to the Sinai Peninsula quickly leading to attacks against military positions, such as the August 2013 attack against two military buses transporting military units into the region which killed 25 soldiers.

### ***Egypt and Domestic Terrorism: The Terrorism Trap in Sinai***

In 2013, domestic terrorist attacks within Sinai saw a dramatic increase, where the Egyptian military was “continuing an aggressive military campaign in northern Sinai in an effort to disrupt the smuggling of arms and explosives between Gaza and Egypt, as well as to kill suspected militants and deny extremist groups a place from which to plan attacks” (*Country Reports on Terrorism*, 2013). The military operations implemented an indiscriminate “scorched-earth policy” in North Sinai, including torching entire villages due to suspected terrorist activity (Tankel, 2018, 282). ABM exploited the resulting civilian casualties for recruitment purposes and as motivation for its domestic terrorist attacks. As described by the State Department's *Country Reports on Terrorism* (2013), “The majority of attacks were concentrated in northern Sinai...This violence was primarily directed against Egyptian government security forces and rarely targeted Egyptian civilians, foreigners, or foreign economic interests, although there were several bombings or attempted bombings of public buses in Cairo in late December. The Sinai-based terrorist organization Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM) claimed responsibility for the majority of the more complex attacks on the security services.” In April 2014, the State Department designated ABM a Foreign Terrorist Organization, stating in its

announcement that the group “shares some aspects of AQ ideology, but is not a formal AQ affiliate and generally maintains a local focus” (State Department, 2014).

In early September 2013, two days after an attempted assassination by ABM of the Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim, the Egyptian military launched retaliatory operations against a group of villages in North Sinai said “to be the biggest of its kind in recent years in Sinai” (*BBC News*, 2013). An Egyptian security official stated that the operations intended to “clean all the villages in Rafah and Sheikh Zuweid area from dangerous terrorists” (*Ma’an News Agency*, 2013). Eyewitnesses reported seeing ten military helicopters above as “clouds of smoke could be seen rising from the villages” (*Ibid.*). Following the operation, ABM released a statement and photos demonstrating that innocent people were killed and stating the targeted homes “belonged to families that have no religious leaning and belong to no organization” and destroyed wells used for “drinking water and agricultural irrigation.” The statement further accused the army of knowing the villages were empty of militants, instead launching a “terror campaign for the families of the area in general” (Barnett, 2013c). The group stated they launched three attacks as a “fast, painful response” for these “crimes” (*Ibid.*). ABM also stated it would continue attacking economic targets in retaliation for ongoing military operations in Sinai (Barnett, 2014).

During these counterterrorism operations, the director of North Sinai security, Major General Sameh Bashady, argued that the military forces “only assault very specific targets and that is why it is very difficult, because everything is very close to one another. We only assault specific targets without harming any innocent, and it is based on very



accurate information” (Youssef and Ismail, 2013). Two journalists reporting from the area, however, observed that in the “tit-for-tat” violence, “The military not only attacks suspected insurgents, but it’s also taking out its wrath on everyone related to an alleged insurgent. Here in this Bedouin community that means everyone, as kin is never more than a house away. The tribesmen promise more attacks and warn that every army response earns more support for radical groups with links to al Qaida” (Ibid.). Other residents within Sinai argued that the indiscriminate actions of the military against anyone suspected of being a militant, such as Salafists “who happen to look devout,” breeds further anger against the government and forces them to bear arms for self-defense. An Islamic judge in North Sinai stated, “Those who renounced violence and made ideological recantations will once again carry arms to defend themselves against the unjust and humiliating security measures” (Sabry, 2013).

After another raid against ABM in which the group argued seven civilians including four children were killed, the Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem, a Gaza-based group that was also active in the Sinai Peninsula, urged “the mujahideen to hit without fail so as to thwart those criminals from among the Egyptian army” (Barnett, 2013a). ABM further argued that “it is obligatory to repulse them [the Egyptian army] and fight until the command of Allah is fulfilled... We in Ansar Jerusalem and all the mujahideen in Sinai in Egypt as a whole stress that the blood of innocent Muslims will not go in vain” (Ibid.). As a result of their operations targeting “innocent Muslims,” ABM declared members of the Egyptian military and police “apostates” that could be killed (Awad and Tadros, 2015, 3).

By Fall 2013, ABM increasingly began to expand their attacks beyond Sinai with an assassination attempt of the Interior Minister and the bombing of a military intelligence building in the city of Ismailia on the west bank of the Suez Canal. The group claimed the bombing in Ismailia was a response to the “repressive practices carried out by the Egyptian army against our people” (Barnett, 2013b). This bombing came in the wake of a string of attacks against Egyptian military forces in Sinai, including an October 7, 2013 suicide bombing of the South Sinai Security Directorate. The group’s statement also warned, “[W]e reiterate our advice to our people in Egypt to stay away from all military and police headquarters, for they are legitimate targets for the mujahideen” (Ibid.).

The Obama administration put a hold on a portion of U.S. military assistance to Egypt in October 2013 due to the Egyptian army’s role in crackdown on protestors in Cairo which resulted in the deaths of 800 civilians. This stopped the transfer of large-scale military equipment such as Apache helicopters, F-16 fighter jets, Harpoon missiles, and M1A1 tanks. In a State Department (2013) press release, however, the U.S. government pledged, “We will continue assistance to help secure Egypt’s borders, counter terrorism and proliferation, and ensure security in the Sinai. We will continue to provide parts for U.S.-origin military equipment as well as military training and education.” Following an October 2014 suicide bombing by ABM in central Sinai that killed 30 soldiers, the Egyptian government declared a three-month state of emergency and increased its efforts to target terrorism in the region. The State Department announced, “The United States continues to support the Egyptian government’s efforts to

counter the threat of terrorism in Egypt as part of our commitments to the strategic partnership between our two countries” (*Agence France-Presse*, 2014a). The U.S. government responded to this state of emergency by lifting part of the freeze on military assistance, delivering 10 Apache helicopters to the Egyptian military in December 2014 for specific use in counterterrorism efforts in Sinai (*Agence France-Presse*, 2014b). The remainder of the military hardware was released by late March 2015. In meetings with senior U.S. officials, who continued to express “steadfast support for Egypt in its fight against terrorism in the Sinai,” President Sisi presented himself and the Egyptian military as a “bulwark against terrorism” in the region (El-Ghobashy, 2015; U.S. Embassy in Egypt, 2015)

## **Conclusion**

Similar to the case study of Pakistan and in line with the expectations of the terrorism trap theory, these three case studies demonstrate how the use of military force for counterterrorism operations within the periphery led to a domestic backlash, helping to explain the increase in domestic terrorism. In Yemen, Mali, and Egypt, the War on Terror helped to bring focus on the “ungoverned” periphery of each state as a safe haven for terrorist groups from which they could plan and launch attacks against the United States and its interests. With the United States’ unwillingness to pursue unilateral military action in these states, particularly after 2005 and the shift towards a policy of “disaggregation,” U.S. officials supported the partner states’ militaries to pursue counterterrorism operations within their periphery both to target terrorist groups and

assert state control over the region to prevent the region from being a safe haven in the future.

These military actions, which resulted in high civilian casualties, led to a violent backlash from the targeted communities, with the various local groups' rhetoric stressing revenge against the military as a key motivation. Despite suspicions of international links with al Qaeda, the rhetoric and patterns of attacks by the groups emerging from these peripheries remained local, in opposition to al Qaeda's goals focused on the United States and other Western targets. This helps to demonstrate the importance of understanding the local political dynamics and actions of the partner states' governments in influencing these groups to commit acts of terrorism. As the Yemeni, Malian, and Egyptian governments pursued expanded military action against the rising levels of domestic terrorism, with Mali's efforts being backed by an international intervention, each country fell deeper into a terrorism trap, with the heightened military efforts leading to increased revenge attacks against domestic targets from the targeted groups and communities. The counterterrorism efforts by the military in the periphery of each state did nothing to address the underlying problems with the periphery that provoked acts of violence. As demonstrated in the above analysis, the use of military force as part of the War on Terror only exacerbated these problems, preventing any progress on long-term political goals to address violence in the periphery and leading to increased levels of domestic terrorism.

This center vs. periphery dynamic is evident in other states as well where governments have confronted terrorist threats from their peripheries and have predominately relied on military force, including the Philippines' struggles with Abu

Sayyaf, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, and the Moro National Liberation Front in the south; the Kurdish PKK in southeastern Turkey; Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria; the northeastern Somali periphery in Kenya; and Russia's war in the Caucasus. Many of these peripheral regions, however, were experiencing on-going conflicts in 2001, conflicts which were co-opted by the United States and included in the narrative and scope of the War on Terror. The underlying problems involved in these conflicts were potentially exacerbated, given the increased military capacity or political cover provided by the U.S. hunt for al Qaeda and its affiliates. However, in the case studies of Yemen, Mali, and Egypt analyzed above, despite having historical conflicts with their peripheries, the periphery did not have active conflicts at the outset of the War on Terror. Therefore, the selection of these cases, along with the variation in counterterrorism approaches prior to the deployment of military forces, helps to demonstrate the connection between the use of military force for counterterrorism operations and the outbreak and frequency of domestic terrorist attacks. While the War on Terror did not create the tensions between center and periphery, the actions of the United States' partner states in line with U.S. counterterrorism policy helped to serve as a catalyst for the escalation of domestic terrorism.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In December 2018, the co-chairs of the 9/11 Commission, Lee Hamilton and Tom Kean (2018), looked back at the conduct of the United States' counterterrorism efforts fifteen years after they released the Commission's recommendations and observed,

Our nation has devoted trillions of dollars to protecting the homeland and confronting insurgencies since 9/11, yet the threat of violent extremism to the U.S. is greater than ever before. Violence has increased, and new generations of terrorists have emerged in fragile states across the Middle East, the Horn of Africa and the Sahel. In these fragile states—many of which lack adequate governance, effective and responsible security forces, and other basic services—extremist groups are easily able to recruit fighters, hide out and, worse still, capture and hold territory.

President Donald Trump's Director of National Intelligence Daniel Coats (2019, 12) likewise continued to see a lingering threat from al Qaeda, writing in the 2019 *Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community*, "Al Qa'ida senior leaders are strengthening the network's global command structure and continuing to encourage attacks against the West, including the United States, although most al-Qa'ida affiliates' attacks to date have been small scale and limited to their regional areas. We expected that al-Qa'ida's global network will remain a CT challenge for the United States and its allies during the next year."

In lined with the expectations of the terrorism trap theory, this study has demonstrated that the increase in domestic terrorism, the perceived threat from "al-Qa'ida's global network," was a consequence of the counterterrorism efforts by the United States and its partner states. Using quantitative analysis and case studies of Pakistan, Yemen, Mali, and Egypt, I demonstrated the causal process underlying the

connection between U.S. counterterrorism policy and domestic terrorism in the United States' partner states. Beginning in 2005, as it was increasingly recognized that al Qaeda operatives were fleeing U.S. military operations in Afghanistan, the United States government shifted its counterterrorism policy away from unilateral military action to "disaggregation," in which it relied upon and supported partnered military operations to confront international terrorists using the "ungoverned spaces" on the periphery of partner states as safe havens and prevent these regions from continuing to be used as safe havens by extending the writ of the state. Understanding the limitations and difficulties of U.S. actions in these peripheral regions, senior U.S. officials thought that partner states' own military forces would be more effective in targeting terrorist groups operating within their borders, without fully considering the limitations of the government's reach into these areas, the historical conflict between the center and periphery, and the resulting impact of the introduction of the military for counterterrorism operations.

Given the historical lack of government presence in these "ungoverned" areas and the prevailing tensions between the center and periphery, the introduction of the military for offensive counterterrorism operations was seen by the periphery to be an unwelcome invasion of their territory, resulting in a violent backlash from the targeted communities. These operations created further problems given their reliance on indiscriminate force, often as a result of the military possessing limited knowledge about the conflict environment and the difficult terrain within which they were operating. The high levels of civilian casualties were exploited by existing terrorist groups in their recruitment efforts and further pushed local groups into attacking the government. Much of the rhetoric and

motivations of these terrorist groups focused on revenge for the government's military operations and civilian casualties in the targeted areas, motivations which were reflected in the pattern of attacks directed against military and other state targets. These local groups' campaigns of domestic terrorism, despite being identified as al Qaeda affiliates, were in direct contradiction with al Qaeda core's transnational ideology and focus on targeting the United States. The outbreak of domestic terrorist attacks, on the other hand, was inextricably linked with the local political dynamics and the shifting conditions of the periphery following the offensive military approach by partner states' governments, in line with U.S. counterterrorism priorities. As former Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Richard Boucher argued, "If you look around the world, you see many places where the United States starts out chasing al Qaeda and then it becomes a domestic problem for the locals. And the locals want to decide their own strategy and that's different than our whack-a-mole strategy because they've got to live there."<sup>80</sup>

As the levels of domestic terrorism and political instability spiked, the United States and other international actors put increased pressure on government officials within the partner states to increase their counterterrorism efforts in targeting the areas from which the terrorist groups originated and establish control over the periphery. U.S. officials saw the increased domestic violence through their own strategic interests and expressed concern that al Qaeda or al Qaeda-linked groups would exploit the violence in the periphery to continue planning and executing attacks against the United States and its interests abroad. While Daniel Coats (2019, 12) observed that al Qaeda-affiliated attacks

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with Ambassador Richard Boucher, former Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, Washington, DC, February 25, 2019.



are largely “small scale and limited to their regional areas,” he warned that the al Qaeda network still poses a “CT challenge for the United States” in encouraging “attacks against the West.” International pressure, along with pressure from domestic audiences, led to expanded domestic counterterrorism operations by partner states’ military forces in the periphery, exacerbating the underlying conditions that led to the initial outbreak of domestic terrorism. These increased counterterrorism actions in the periphery sunk the partner states further into a “terrorism trap,” as the military and local militant groups fell into an escalating cycle of violence resulting in ever higher levels of domestic terrorism. The ongoing terrorism threats that Lee Hamilton, Tom Kean, and Daniel Coats identified at the outset of this chapter, therefore, has its roots in America’s own counterterrorism policies.

Writing in 2016, David Kilcullen (2016, 12, 208-209), one of the architects of the strategy of disaggregation in President Bush’s second term, recognized the failure of this approach with the emergence of new terrorist groups, like the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and increased levels of terrorist violence. He argued that President Obama’s policy of “strategic divestment” from Iraq to increase the United States’ focus on al Qaeda contributed to this failure. In improving U.S. counterterrorism, Kilcullen recommends an increase in better funded military operations, though he stresses that these should be paired with a broader approach aimed at protecting local communities and should not only focus on killing terrorists. In these efforts, mirroring the same logic that led to the original policy shift, Kilcullen states that U.S. government should establish a counterterrorism policy “always—*always*—preferring operations by, with and through

local partners, conducted in their own way and in accord with their own priorities” (Ibid., 211).

As demonstrated here, the strategy failed less because of the diminishing commitment of the U.S. government in Iraq but more broadly by the nature of the strategy itself and the conditions within which it was pursued. While Kilcullen’s critique points specifically to the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria with its growing network of affiliates, he does not grapple with the increasing levels of terrorism elsewhere. Terrorist groups’ subsequent campaigns of violence, often domestically focused, were in response to the military actions of the partner states with their behavior shaped by the local conflict environment, often in conflict with al Qaeda core. The increase in domestic terrorism only served to bring greater attention and pressure for continued military action to counter the escalating violence, exacerbating the very conditions that served as a catalyst for the increase in domestic terrorist attacks. In order to prevent a potentially catastrophic act of international terrorism against the United States, the U.S. government ended up setting smaller fires across the Muslim world, many of which continue to burn today, and helped to push its partner states into a terrorism trap.

This theory further demonstrates that to understand the dramatic rise in domestic terrorism it is necessary to understand how government counterterrorism efforts changed the local conflict environment and thereby changed the motivations and actions of individuals and groups who pursue terrorist violence against the state. While a number of previous theories explaining domestic terrorism examined more static features of the state

such as economic conditions, political systems, and discrimination of minority groups, this study demonstrates the importance of considering the actions of the government in serving as a catalyst for an increase in domestic terrorist attacks. Within policy discussions and popular media, there also has been an overreliance on the narrative of al Qaeda and the global threat that the group continues to pose to the United States. This narrative was paired with a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature and behavior of the al Qaeda network and its “affiliate” groups. The promotion of this narrative by politicians and media alike has overshadowed the need to understand the influences of the local political context for many of the affiliate groups. By favoring the al Qaeda narrative as an explanation for the continued violence without disaggregating the trends in terrorism, there has been a failure to appreciate the impact of U.S. counterterrorism policy in serving as a catalyst for the increase in violence, leaving its causes to be hiding in plain sight.

This concluding chapter first discusses the broad implications of these main findings, in particular focusing on military force as a counterproductive approach to fighting terrorism and the mis-conceptions of the al Qaeda network. It then turns to the relevancy of this theory for understanding the rise of the Islamic State as a rival global terrorist brand to al Qaeda and how governments are repeating the same mistakes from the past in how they approach the new group and its emerging affiliates. Next, the chapter provides concrete recommendations for establishing more effective counterterrorism policies that both avoid the terrorism trap that only leads to increased levels of violence

and are able to connect short and medium-term success in counterterrorism actions with long-term political and economic goals to prevent future acts of terrorism.

### ***Understand the Causes and the Context***

As practically every single study of terrorism will rightly conclude, it is imperative to recognize and understand the underlying causes of terrorism in order to construct more effective counterterrorism policies which actually address these issues, something with which many policymakers motivated by political considerations have struggled. Theories of terrorism have connected the outbreak of violence with societal explanations such as minority discrimination, political repression, social marginalization, or poor economic conditions. Scholars have argued that to combat terrorism in the long run governments need to promote greater political and economic equality, increase development, and strengthen democratic institutions and respect for human and civil rights (Ahmed, 2013; Abrahms, 2007; Aksoy, Carter, and Wright, 2012; Azam and Thelen, 2010; Choi, 2010; Eyerman, 1998; Findley and Young, 2011; Walsh and Piazza, 2010).

These ideas have been mirrored in policy discussions within the U.S. and other governments, as officials have attempted to push for a “whole of government” approach to the problem of terrorism. A January 2010 Senate Foreign Relations Committee (2010, 17) report argued that “a viable counter-terrorism strategy must take into account the fact that terrorism is not created in a vacuum, and its causes must be addressed. The U.S. government must engage foreign partners on issues such as literacy, high birth rates, economic development, and human rights. All countries concerned must understand the

dangers of attempting to solve the complex problem of terrorism through a one-dimensional military approach.” If governments solely focus on “killing terrorists,” this is at best a short-term measure that leaves the root political and economic causes in place that feed future terrorist attacks. Therefore, to proactively and preemptively address the problem of terrorism in the long run, governments have implemented policies under the umbrella of “countering violent extremism” to address “the conditions and reduce the factors that most likely contribute to recruitment and radicalization by violent extremists” (Department of Homeland Security, 2019). This long-term approach, however, is often pursued parallel with the use of military force to challenge terrorism in the short-term.

The real challenge for policymakers and academics alike is to understand how the impact of short-term counterterrorism efforts by the military undermines the potential success of long-term oriented policies. These two approaches do not exist independently and must be understood as intertwined with one another. As this study has demonstrated, the use of military force to challenge terrorism in the short term not only does little to actually address the problem but actively contributes to the outbreak of domestic terrorism within partner states, making headway on long-term political and economic objectives impossible to make. Military force is particularly troublesome when it results in civilian casualties, as it so often has in both the United States’ and partner states’ counterterrorism operations. In March 2010, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen (2010) stated, “Each time an errant bomb or a bomb accurately aimed but against the wrong target kills or hurts civilians, we risk setting our strategy back months, if not years. Despite the fact that the Taliban kill and maim far more than

we do, civilian casualty incidents such as those we've recently seen in Afghanistan will hurt us more in the long run than any tactical success we may achieve against the enemy."

Civilian casualties were a constant concern for General Stanley McChrystal during his various operational commands as part of the War on Terror. During a briefing with his headquarters and regional command staff shortly after taking command of ISAF in 2009, he stated bluntly, "What is it that we don't understand? We're going to lose this fucking war if we don't stop killing civilians" (McChrystal, 2014, 310). General McChrystal reiterated to me that, while there are valid moral and humanitarian arguments to be made for avoiding civilian casualties during military operations, his focus on this problem was strategic in nature. He explained that while he was in Afghanistan U.S. military leadership brought in a London School of Economics research team to conduct a study on the connection between violence and civilian casualties. The team found that if civilian casualties in a region increased, regardless of whether the militants or security forces were responsible, anti-government and anti-U.S. violence likewise increased. He explained, "So it kind of didn't matter who killed the civilians, we became the loser. And so the only thing that really helped you was to get the level of civilian casualties down." He observed that this same challenge exists for partner states' militaries conducting domestic operations, where civilian casualties lead the military forces to "lose their own credibility. They lose their own legitimacy with the people." This was exacerbated when counterterrorism operations were conducted in the periphery where the military was viewed by the local population as an outside force. While operating in the periphery,

General McChrystal explained, “There’s just a spring-loaded resentment and so that’s where discipline of security forces is so damn important where focus [and] where an understanding of what they’re trying to do in the long term is critical because you can focus on these short-term things, winning the firefight, but you lose the war.”<sup>81</sup>

The worsening security situation created by domestic counterterrorism operations by the military makes long-term political and economic focused counterterrorism efforts difficult, if not impossible, to implement successfully. A study by Seth Jones and Martin Libicki (2008) found that military force rarely leads to “victory” over terrorist groups, accounting for the end of only 7% of terrorist groups between 1968 and 2006. Their analysis shows the two primary reasons for terrorist groups giving up their violent struggle are deciding to enter the political process (43%) and traditional law enforcement arresting or killing key group members (40%). Among religious-oriented groups, local policing proved to be even more successful, with 73% of them ending as a result of traditional police action.

Despite the lack of long-term success and the worsening violence over the past two decades, the view that the military is a vital part of any counterterrorism strategy has persisted (Cohen, 2016). Many policymakers and analysts argue that it is necessary to use military force to fight terrorists “over there” so that we don’t have to fight them at home. They further argue that the low level of terrorist incidents and fatalities within the United States is evidence that U.S. counterterrorism policies at home and overseas have been successful in pushing the fighting to the “frontline wars of the War on Terror” (Bergen,

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<sup>81</sup> Interview with General Stanley McChrystal, former JSOC and ISAF Commander, Washington, DC, January 8, 2019.

2016; Lehrke and Schomaker, 2016, 761; Miller, 2009). This argument assumes that the terrorist threat against the United States has remained static since 9/11 and al Qaeda's affiliate organizations prioritize the same goal of targeting the United States as al Qaeda core. In a point by point analysis within a 2018 study, John Mueller and Mark Stewart (2018) find these arguments posited about the effectiveness of U.S. counterterrorism policy "wanting" and conclude that "terrorism is rare outside war zones because, to a substantial degree, terrorists don't exist there" (Ibid., 3). They calculate that the annual fatality risk in the United States from an act of terrorism is only 1 in 39,000,000. In 2013, one journalist argued, "Terrorism is such a minor threat to American life and limb that it's simply bizarre—just stupefyingly irrational and intellectually unserious—to suppose that it could even *begin* to justify the abolition of privacy rights as they have been traditionally understood in favour of the installation of panoptic surveillance state" (Houston, 2013). What these arguments do not often consider is the local impact of our partner states' actions in line with U.S. counterterrorism policy and how they create the conditions for locally-oriented violence. The increase in terrorism within partner states, therefore, should in no way be viewed as a sign of success but a clear indication of failure while other states suffer the violent consequences of these short-sighted policies.

As this study demonstrates, military force is a counterproductive means of challenging terrorism, especially in confronting terrorist groups in the conditions prevalent in the peripheries of partner states where military force inevitably leads to a violent backlash. Akbar Ahmed argued that in his experience administering large swathes of Pakistan's frontier region, "Force can only take you so far and beyond that it's not



effective.” He in particular stressed “how counter-productive military action can be” and is “no way to solve a local problem.” He understood, “When you use a crude military strategy resulting in civilian deaths, you will not be successful.”<sup>82</sup> Ahmed (2013, 249) earlier explained the problem with the domestic use of military force in the periphery, “The imposition of military rule should be avoided at all costs: it sends the message that the periphery is not part of the nation but rather a fringe of troublemakers and outsiders that the government needs to ‘defeat’ or ‘punish.’” These problems have not been sufficiently recognized at the policymaking level with an over reliance on the military as a first step solution to terrorism, often with a disconnect between senior officials in Washington, DC and diplomats and other government officials in the affected countries observing developments on the ground. As Lawrence Wilkerson observed, the number of individuals who would be aware of the connections between partner states’ military actions and the resulting backlash are few and far between. The U.S. government, instead, is “straining at a gnat to swallow a camel.” Despite a small segment of diplomatic elites tracking developments in partner states, “most of the time we’d be straining at the gnat.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Interview with Akbar Ahmed, the Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies, American University, Washington, DC, December 7, 2018.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Lawrence Wilkerson, former Chief of Staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell, Falls Church, VA, September 21, 2018.

### *Assigning Blame to the Wrong Causes*

Policymakers' failure to understand the causes and the context of terrorism often results in them attributing blame to irrelevant or secondary causes, leading to ill-informed policies. Political scientist Stephen Walt (2011) argued,

One of the things that gets in the way of conducting good national security policy is a reluctance to call things by their right names and state plainly what is really happening. If you keep describing difficult situations in misleading or inaccurate ways, plenty of people will draw the wrong conclusions about them and will continue to support policies that don't make a lot of sense.

U.S. officials have been too quick to blame the long arm of al Qaeda and a transnational jihadist ideology for being behind much of the terrorist violence over the previous two decades, often blinding them to the local drivers of conflict.

As earlier demonstrated, shallow arguments pointing to the Islamic religion and punditry based in "ancient hatreds" or other crude stereotypes of Muslim societies cannot explain variation in states that experience high levels of terrorism against those that do not. The reality is far more complex. Scholars, in particular, have pointed towards circumstantial factors that result in Muslim-majority states experiencing higher levels and incidents of intra-state violence than other religions in the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries (Ahmed, 2013; Gleditsch and Rudolfson, 2016; Toft, 2007). Likewise, neither the "jihadist" ideology of al Qaeda and the Islamic State nor any fundamentalist interpretation of Islam can be held accountable for the outbreak of violence as they cannot explain variation in individuals and groups who pursue acts of terrorism and those who don't, especially with such a miniscule minority actually committing terrorist

attacks. In referencing the influence of Anwar al-Awlaki, Joshua Foust, a former Yemen analyst for the DIA, stated,

I don't see any evidence whatsoever that [Awlaki] poses some kind of ideological threat against the United States. I would say that 99.99 percent of all the people who either listen to, or believe in Awlaki's ideology, never act on it. So if you're going to argue that ideology is what caused someone to do something, you need to actually—to me at least—to be intellectually honest and analytically rigorous. You need to explain why that ideology compelled that person to act, but it didn't compel everyone who didn't act to not act. And to me, I don't think it's possible to really explain that. I haven't ever seen an argument that actually does that. So from the start, I think a lot of the focus on Awlaki doesn't make sense, because we assign him a kind of importance and influence that he doesn't really have (Scahill, 2013, 241).

There needs to be a clearer distinction between radicalization, that is the embrace of fundamentalist ideas or extremist ideology, and recruitment, i.e. actually joining a terrorist group and committing an act of violence. As demonstrated in earlier chapters, the two do not always overlap. Simply being “radicalized” does not mean an individual will pursue terrorist attacks or ever commit an act of violence. Many of the recruits to terrorist groups, on the other hand, are not radicalized into an ideological mindset but are motivated by concrete grievances against the government, revenge, or economic reasons such as being paid by the group to participate. Understanding the distinction between radicalization and recruitment undermines the War on Terror's “battle of ideas” between fundamentalist and modernist interpretations of Islam. This ideological approach, however, has continually been given emphasis by past administrations as one of the main pillars of counterterrorism alongside kinetic military action as a result of officials fundamentally assuming that terrorism is “ideologically-motivated” (Department of Homeland Security, 2016).

In their authoritative book *Friction: How Conflict Radicalizes Them and Us*, terrorism scholars Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko (2017) identify thirteen distinct mechanisms that can radicalize individuals to commit acts of violence. Ideology as a mechanism of radicalization is not found among them. McCauley and Moskalenko (2017, 280) argue,

As explanation of action, ideology is too general and too indefinite; it cannot prescribe action under changing circumstances. Ideology requires interpretation in order to connect with current action. But every major ideology, from Christianity to Marxism, offers some textual foundation for use of violence. When we move to violence, we seek out the interpretations of our ideology that can support use of violence. There is always such an interpretation available, always someone who can claim authenticity for the interpretation.

The popular strategy of promoting a “moderate” or “mainstream” form of Islam as a solution to terrorism, as so many pundits and commentators argue, will have little effect if the underlying sources of violence are derived from factors other than a religious ideology, such as individuals seeking revenge or local issues of governance and oppression which can motivate mobilization under a religious banner.

A “jihadist” ideology or fundamentalist interpretation of Islam should not be thought of as a cause of terrorism but as a consequence of other underlying factors that lead to the outbreak of terrorism. Research suggests that increased religiosity is an effect of state violence and insecurity as a coping mechanism for dealing with associating traumas, such as witnessing friends and loved ones injured or killed (Carreras and Verghese, 2018; Henrich, et. al., 2019). As a number of scholars have also argued, religious ideology is used as a strategic tool by groups or elites to commit violence or further their political agenda, especially in overcoming the collective action problem that

plagues non-state actors (Basedau, Pfeiffer, and Vullers, 2016; Capoccia, Saez, and Rooij, 2012; De Juan, 2008; Jaffrelot, 2014; Ratelle and Souleimanov, 2017; Satana, Inman, and Birnir, 2013; Toft, 2013; Ullah, 2013). For many of these societies, Islam and a Sharia-based system of governance, with its appeals to social justice and egalitarianism, resonated among the disadvantaged individuals of the periphery as potential recruits and became a counter-narrative to corruption within administrative and political structures. In corruption-plagued Pakistan, for example, public support for Sharia is connected with its associations with good governance free from corruption (Fair, Malhotra, and Shapiro, 2010). As shown throughout this study, these groups' interpretations of Islamic ideology, along with their motivations and behavior, are inextricably bound with their local conflict environment and the impulse for revenge against the government's military efforts.

The adherence of these groups to a fundamentalist form of Islam has often been taken at face value as a motivating incentive for violence. In order to understand these groups better, scholars have parsed the underlying Islamic ideas found in their messages and ideology and the centuries-old doctrinal history of Islamic theology in reference to concepts such as jihad or Salafism (Allen, 2006; Hellmich, 2008; James, 2009; Maher, 2016; Porter, 2011; Ryan, 2013; Sheikh, 2016; Turner, 2010). Many of these analyses use "jihad" as a universal concept with assumed relevance for groups' behavior, connecting it to al Qaeda's transnational ideology without adequately addressing the local political context and local motivations of these "jihadist" groups. "Jihadism," therefore, is often treated as an external ideology to the regions within which these militant groups operate, a "cancer" that can be simply cut out of society.

In many ways, the underlying framework for the War on Terror and the U.S. officials' conceptualization of the problem of al Qaeda and Islamic terrorism was inherited from a Cold War template (Katz, 2013). During the Cold War, counterterrorism and counterinsurgency were viewed directly or indirectly through the prism of communist ideology and the Soviet Union (Anderson, 2003b, 2; Oakley, 2003, 1). Shafer (1988) argues that during this period of time official U.S. doctrine reduced its analysis of insurgencies to a product of communist meddling and a communist tactic. U.S. interests in any particular militant group or conflict was tied to its potential for communist co-optation. A 1972 RAND study wrote, "A revolutionary conflict becomes unambiguously injurious to U.S. interests...if it lends itself to being exploited by Soviet or Chinese military power" (Heymann and Whitson, 1972, v). Any militant groups embracing a communist ideology garnered the attention of the U.S. government, seeing in their actions a threat to the United States and an extension of the global conflict with the communist bloc of nations.

This perspective often ignored local conditions as having little impact on conflict initiation or outcome, seeing them as no more than an opportunity for "Communist interference" as "the causative factor" (Shafer, 1988, 59). Former U.S. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger stated at the 1986 Department of Defense-sponsored Low Intensity Warfare Conference (1986, 3), "Tonight, one out of four countries around the globe is at war. In virtually every case, there is a mask on the face of war. In virtually every case, behind the mask is the Soviet Union and those who do its bidding."

Undersecretary of Defense Fred Ikle (1986, 97) followed these comments by saying it

was necessary to focus on “the Soviet role in each specific situation and the Soviet role globally towards low-intensity conflict.” Officials at the conference argued that nuclear deterrence’s success in preventing conventional interstate war led the Soviet Union increasingly to rely on low-intensity conflict and insurgency to challenge the balance of power.

This perspective essentially understood the local population to be passive actors being manipulated by external entities such as the Soviet Union. Colonel John McCuen (1966, 55), a Cold War-era U.S. army specialist on counterinsurgency, argued that the “secret behind revolutionary successes in winning the people is to tell them what they want to hear, irrespective of whether or not this happens to vary from long-term rebel objectives.” Douglas Pike (1970, 3), a senior government consultant for counterinsurgency, further argued that an insurgency’s success was dependent on the coercion of “a passive and generally apolitical peasantry.” Further, the U.S. government adopted the view that any political leader, regardless of their authoritarian tendencies or record of human rights abuses, could be an ally against the Soviet Union and the spread of communism. The United States would open their coffers to them as long as they agreed to fight communism within their borders. Using this singular vision of counterinsurgency through the Cold War frame and the inclination to focus only on external factors connected with the Soviet Union, as Shafer (1988) argues, U.S. officials at the time imagined that a single counterinsurgency doctrine was possible which could be used universally.

The Bush administration shifted this template to the War on Terror with al Qaeda and its transnational jihadist ideology replacing the specter of the Soviet Union and communism. Al Qaeda and the forces of jihad were external global actors injecting themselves into various conflict environments around the globe, seeking to create a global Islamic caliphate. By focusing on a single actor, senior officials within the Bush administration were trying to find a single, “one size fits all” approach to the problem of terrorism, often without full consideration or knowledge of local political and conflict dynamics or the potential local impact of their actions.<sup>84</sup> U.S. government officials often spoke of al Qaeda and terrorism as a foreign “cancer” that can simply be cut out of society, a crude metaphor that fails to capture the complexities of the local problems that lead to the outbreak of violence. Whether people like to admit it or not, these groups are part of and connected with local society, “part and parcel of the land,” and must be dealt with accordingly (Ahmed, 2013, 349).

Lawrence Wilkerson sees “discarding the template” from the Cold War as a necessary first step for the United States. In particular, this means challenging the narrative of a global jihad threatening the United States. While many disparate groups buy into and exploit this narrative, it only serves to shadow local causes of conflict and the local nature of the violence that needs to be confronted. “Countries are different,” Wilkerson explained. “Peoples are different. And so your approaches to them have to be different and hopefully adapted to the actual differences in the country.”<sup>85</sup> Bruce

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<sup>84</sup> Interview with Marvin Weinbaum, former analyst for the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research and director for Pakistan Studies at the Middle East Institute; Washington, DC, October 16, 2018.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Lawrence Wilkerson, former Chief of Staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell, Falls Church, VA, November 21, 2018.



Berkowitz (2004, 5), a former CIA official, similarly stated in his interview with the 9/11 commission, “We are applying Cold War-era security paradigms to counterterrorism... Yet it is unclear what kind of security regimes are appropriate for transnational threats.” The answer, I would argue, is that the answer to the transnational threat of terrorism is inherently a locally-based one rather than a global approach. Governments need to adapt their counterterrorism strategies both to the local context and how the conflict dynamics change over time rather than blaming dubious causal factors that result in misguided policies.

### ***The Rise of the Islamic State: A New Global Brand***

In recent years, the perceived threat from al Qaeda has been equaled, if not eclipsed, by the emergence of the Islamic State, variably known as ISIL or ISIS (Staffell and Awan, 2016). In September 2014, President Obama (2014) declared,

ISIL poses a threat to the people of Iraq and Syria, and the broader Middle East—including American citizens, personnel and facilities. If left unchecked, these terrorists could pose a growing threat beyond that region, including to the United States. While we have not yet detected specific plotting against our homeland, ISIL leaders have threatened America and our allies. Our Intelligence Community believes that thousands of foreigners—including Europeans and some Americans—have joined them in Syria and Iraq. Trained and battle-hardened, these fighters could try to return to their home countries and carry out deadly attacks.

He announced the U.S. military had conducted over 150 air strikes in Iraq against the Islamic State and was working on putting together a global coalition to fight the emerging group. He added, “We will degrade, and ultimately destroy, ISIL through a comprehensive and sustained counterterrorism strategy.” This strategy would be similarly

based on the use of direct military strikes and military assistance to partner states in the region, with Obama pledging:

This counterterrorism campaign will be waged through a steady, relentless effort to take out ISIL wherever they exist, using our air power and our support for partner forces on the ground. This strategy of taking out terrorists who threaten us, while supporting partners on the front lines, is one that we have successfully pursued in Yemen and Somalia for years. And it is consistent with the approach I outlined earlier this year: to use force against anyone who threatens America's core interests, but to mobilize partners wherever possible to address broader challenges to international order (Ibid.).

After establishing itself on the world stage in 2014, Islamic State affiliates and Islamic State “inspired” attacks began to appear across the Muslim world, the United States, and in Europe, with one *CNN* headline warning that “ISIS goes global” (Lister, et al., 2018). The Islamic State was effectively challenging al Qaeda as a global brand for terrorism with many arguing that it constituted a mounting global threat to the United States and its interests abroad. The Director of National Intelligence's 2019 *Worldwide Threat Assessment* stated,

ISIS still commands thousands of fighters in Iraq and Syria, and it maintains eight branches, more than a dozen networks, and thousands of dispersed supporters around the world, despite significant leadership and territorial losses. The group will exploit any reduction in CT pressure to strengthen its clandestine presence and accelerate rebuilding key capabilities, such as media production and external operations. ISIS very likely will continue to pursue external attacks from Iraq and Syria against regional and Western adversaries, including the United States (Coats, 2019, 11).

Experts argued that the group's approach was similarly based in the model of a “leaderless resistance movement” (Kilcullen, 2016, 123-124). It relied upon the tools of globalization (internet, social media, television) to broadcast a broad and ambiguous message of resistance, encouraging self-starters using what means and resources were at

hand and with no coordination or operational control from Islamic State core to commit attacks against Western targets. In May 2017, for example, Islamic State leaders called on its supporters around the world to wage “all-out war” against the West, even providing instructions for stabbing attacks and driving cars into crowds (Dearden, 2017). By May 2018, the State Department (2018c) had designated seven Islamic State affiliates as Foreign Terrorist Organizations: ISIS-Sinai, ISIL-Khorasan, ISIL-Libya, ISIS-Bangladesh, ISIS-Philippines, ISIS-West Africa, and ISIS-Greater Sahara.

Similar to the previous embrace of the al Qaeda brand, many groups adopting the Islamic State mantle were motivated by the political context within which they were operating and continued to focus their efforts locally. For example, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis which emerged in 2011 and began its domestic terrorist campaign in the wake of the Egyptian military’s operations in Sinai, changed its name to ISIS-Sinai in 2014 after pledging loyalty to the group. The now branded Islamic State affiliate, however, continued to target the military and security forces as the Egyptian government expanded its counterterrorism operations in Sinai. ISIS-Somalia emerged as a faction within al Shabaab, switching organizational allegiance to challenge the group’s existing leadership in Somalia and recruit former al Shabaab fighters (Maruf and Joseph, 2018, 256-264). Al Shabaab leaders subsequently ordered their supporters to “attack and eliminate” the splinter group, leading to intensified violence between the two warring groups within Somalia (Hassan, 2018). Like ISIS-Somalia, the Maute Group was formed by Omar Maute and his brother Abdullah as a splinter group from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The MILF, with the bulk of its membership drawn from the Maguindanao

people, had been fighting for greater political autonomy for the various Moro groups on the island of Mindanao. The newly minted Islamic State affiliate in the southern Philippines was formed by former of MILF who opposed the group's 2014 peace agreement with the government. The Maute group continued a campaign of violence against the Philippine army operating in the southern periphery (Fonbuena, 2017). In regard to the emergence of the Islamic State affiliate in Afghanistan, journalist Anand Gopal explained,

It's important to look at what we mean when we say ISIS, because these were groups that were disgruntled and they essentially rebranded themselves as a way of reinvigorating their group or faction, and attracting funding. There's been increased dissatisfaction among certain elements of the Taliban, and with the media talking about ISIS all the time and the Afghan government playing up the idea of ISIS as a way of keeping the United States interested, all of that sort of set the ground for the groups to rebrand themselves (Boghani, 2015).

Even the Islamic State "inspired" attacks in Europe were largely conducted by European nationals pushed by problems facing the marginalized Muslim communities within European societies (Ahmed, 2018, 460-472).

This is not to say that these groups do not pose a very serious and deadly threat that must be strongly confronted. Many governments, however, have fallen back on the same military approaches used in the past. In September 2015, Egypt launched Operation "Right of the Martyr" into Sinai. In May 2017, Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte declared martial law in Mindanao, promising that he would be "harsh" in dealing with the Islamic State affiliate (*Al Jazeera*, 2017). Following this announcement, the Philippine military launched a counterterrorism operation targeting the areas where the Maute group was active, a conflict dubbed the "Battle of Marawi." In fighting that lasted for months,

the military relied on extensive and indiscriminate bombing and committed other abuses against civilians, alongside those committed by the militants (*Amnesty International*, 2017). Three months after Duterte implemented martial law, President Donald Trump, surrounding himself with a revolving door of hawkish senior officials in his administration, stated that his favored approach to the problem of terrorism was “killing terrorists.” He announced, “We will fight to win. From now on, victory will have a clear definition: Attacking our enemies, obliterating ISIS, crushing al Qaeda, preventing the Taliban from taking over Afghanistan, and stopping mass terror attacks against America before they emerge” (Trump, 2017). He had earlier vowed during his presidential campaign to hit the Islamic State “like they’ve never been hit before” and argued that it was important also “to take out their families” (Levitz, 2015). The United States and other governments appear to be settling into familiar counterterrorism patterns that have been shown to be counterproductive. With a growing sense of urgency about how to deal with the Islamic State affiliates, one matched by past fears of an al Qaeda presence, the real question is how to confront them without falling into the same terrorism trap that has bred increased violence in the past.

## **Recommendations**

One thing is clear after nearly two decades of the War on Terror—the U.S. counterterrorism strategy is not working. By understanding the trends in terrorism since 2001 and the underlying reasons why the U.S. approach to counterterrorism has been unsuccessful in combating terrorism, I am able to offer concrete recommendations for not

only how we conceptualize and understand the problem of terrorism but also how to create more effective counterterrorism policies, both in terms of U.S. relations with partner states and on the ground approaches that avoid the problems that have driven many states into a terrorism trap.

### ***Clarify and Limit U.S. Objectives***

The U.S. government needs to clarify and limit its counterterrorism objectives. The broad scope of the War on Terror made “victory” an impossible concept to define (Cronin, 2014). As even Donald Rumsfeld (2003b) asked in an October 2003 memo to senior DoD officials: “Are we winning or losing the Global War on Terror?” He continued,

Today, we lack metrics to know if we are winning or losing the global war on terror. Are we capturing, killing or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the madrassas and the radical clerics are recruiting, training and deploying against us? Does the US need to fashion a broad, integrated plan to stop the next generation of terrorists? The US is putting relatively little effort into a long-range plan, but we are putting a great deal of effort into trying to stop terrorists. The cost-benefit ratio is against us! Our cost is billions against the terrorists’ costs of millions.

While both the Bush and Obama administrations sought to militarily “destroy” al Qaeda to end the War on Terror, its prevailing view of the al Qaeda network made such a task nearly impossible, a metric for victory that can never be attained as the brand can survive even if the group does not (Cronin, 2012; McIntosh, 2015). Militarily defeating al Qaeda and its affiliates, or any international terrorist group like the Islamic State, is fundamentally in conflict with the means meant to achieve it. It’s not that a military solution should be part of an overall strategy, deployed alongside other counterterrorism

measures by the government. It is that a reliance on military force and the broad framework of a war undermine gains made in other areas.

Scholars operating in other disciplines have recognized that broad wars against concepts, despite their rhetorical popularity and policymakers' preference for large-scale planning, simply do not work. In his book *The White Man's Burden*, development economist William Easterly (2006), for example, outlines how the Utopian goals of the West's War on Poverty was built on central planning to change the entire system from the top down. He argues that this is an impossible undertaking that harms the developing world more than it helps. Easterly instead pushes for more moderate, piecemeal objectives premised on knowledgeable "searchers" attempting to find and build local solutions to poverty and development within given contexts and working with local communities from the ground up, rather than forcing on them pre-formed ideas from "planners" without consideration of local conditions. Similarly, with the War on Drugs, Coletta Youngers and Eileen Rosin (2005, 4) write,

Standard drug war terminology makes use of a powerful metaphor. As a guide to policy, however, it is fraught with problems. The presumed 'enemy' is not an organized army that can be identified and defeated but rather a set of social and economic forces that sustain the trade. The drug war mentality ensures that U.S. drug control resources are skewed toward interdiction and law enforcement efforts. But such policies, which fail to take into account the complex social and economic roots of both illicit drug production and consumption, tend to shift the pattern of players in the drug trade without significantly reducing the trade itself.

While understanding that many politicians push the War on Terror and "war against al Qaeda" rhetoric for political gains, the dangers of a global war narrative for counterterrorism should be no different from these other policy areas. This study has highlighted the dangers of relying on "planners" seeking a single approach to terrorism.

By rejecting the conception of al Qaeda and terrorist groups as a monolith, the U.S. government should seek to find more moderate, piecemeal, and attainable objectives tempered to the local conflict dynamics that motivate and influence local terrorist groups' conflict behavior. This should include passing legislation to replace the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force. Congress should move away from a "single, overarching, and decontextualized legal mandate" and connect authorizations to the scope and region of the targeted groups' behavior (Akins, 2018, 18). First and foremost, however, the U.S. government needs to discard the war posturing, not the rhetoric which Obama already moved away from but the policy framework which posits that the U.S. is engaged in a war with a single enemy. Wars are discrete events with ends. Framing the struggle against terrorism as a war to be won leads to a costly status quo of perpetual conflict. While the threat can perhaps never be definitively defeated, much like poverty or drugs, it can be drastically reduced and managed on an appropriate scale.

### *Working with Partner States*

The "one size fits all" approach pursued by the U.S. government too often glossed over the nuances and variations within the domestic politics of our partner states. It has been recognized that officials in the Bush White House did not "take advantage" of regional and country experts within the government as leadership constructed its counterterrorism policy and instead relied upon individuals with the right "ideological pedigree" rather than "a pedigree in a region or particular country."<sup>86</sup> This lack of expert input meant that

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<sup>86</sup> Interview with Richard Armitage, former Deputy Secretary of State, Arlington, VA, November 27, 2018.



decision makers were not only unfamiliar with local dynamics of conflict but also potentially unfamiliar with the characteristics and limitations of our partner states and how best to work with them.

Often times, U.S. officials, especially when working with key partner states in the War on Terror, would fly into capital cities, spend a few hours to “force an agenda” with senior government officials and then quickly depart, pushing a zero-tolerance line without full consideration or sympathy for local political dynamics or partner states’ strategic interests.<sup>87</sup> With anti-state attacks mounting, public opinion swayed against the partner states’ governments and their cooperation with the United States as rising anti-Americanism connected the increase in violence with the War on Terror (Berger, 2014; Blaydes and Linzer, 2012; Kull, 2011). For some regimes, given the unpopularity of U.S. actions after 9/11 and backlash from cooperating with them, political leaders attempted to hide their cooperation as the U.S. relied on “offstage” signals of support in recognition of this fact (McManus and Yahi-Milo, 2017). Yet, with U.S. pressure to act strongly in line with U.S. counterterrorism policy, even this became difficult. Senior-level officials seemed impatient in tailoring their messages, interactions, and counterterrorism priorities to the nuances of each particular partner state and instead forcefully pushed a single message—take out the terrorists.

As terrorism expert Stephen Tankel (2018, 311) argues, it is important to “know your partners, not just your enemies.” In a world of “imperfect partners,” U.S. officials need to understand the limits of their relationships and temper and adjust their

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<sup>87</sup> Interview with Akbar Ahmed, the Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies, American University, Washington, DC, December 7, 2018.

counterterrorism priorities for partner states in accordance with what they are capable of or willing to do, applying pressure when it is constructive to do so but also knowing when it is not. Relentless, and often very public, pressure will do little in the way of gaining cooperation if it is perceived to be against a partner state's interest to act in this way. Marvin Weinbaum argued in the context of U.S.-Pakistani counterterrorism cooperation, "If we ridicule them, if we disparage them, it only makes them defensive."<sup>88</sup>

When pushing for counterterrorism cooperation, it is equally necessary for the U.S. government to be sensitive to their partners' strategic interests and motivations and provide the ammunition with which they can frame subsequent action as being in their own self-interest. Both Presidents Bush and Obama were right to recognize that unilateral U.S. action is not a feasible, long-term strategy to dealing with the threat of terrorism. However, in gaining the cooperation of partner states, any counterterrorism strategy needs to understand the dynamics of each bilateral relationship and moderate expectations accordingly. The goal should be to work with partner states, not through them, in order to find mutually beneficial arrangements, especially with terrorism being a greater immediate threat to the partner states than the United States.

In improving our bilateral relationships with partner states, it is also important to broaden our interactions with them beyond counterterrorism. For many of the key partners in the War on Terror, the U.S. government maintained a narrow focus on security and counterterrorism and stressed cooperation on this front as the only U.S. priority, even in the face of internal dissent within the U.S. government pushing for a

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<sup>88</sup> Interview with Marvin Weinbaum, former analyst for the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research and director for Pakistan Studies at the Middle East Institute; Washington, DC, October 16, 2018.

broadening of the relationships with these states.<sup>89</sup> All other issue areas were drafted into this security narrative and used to bolster, or bully, partner states' counterterrorism cooperation. As U.S. officials throughout succeeding administrations have kept this focus and pressure at a fever pitch level, their counterparts abroad have become fed up by continually being hammered on a single issue, seemingly without regard for the partner states' own strategic interests or sacrifices they have made in the worsening security environment. Many of these officials have expressed a desire to expand their economic and trading relationship with the United States and business-to-business contacts with U.S. industries. By ignoring these issues for the sake of counterterrorism, this helped to convince foreign governments to look elsewhere for investment in their countries.

The Pakistani government, for example, has sought greater investment from its long-time ally China, currently in the process of investing \$46 billion in infrastructure projects in Pakistan as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. As the U.S.-Pakistan relationship has deteriorated over contentious security issues and Pakistani complaints with the perceived U.S. tilt towards India, the relationship with China has been on the ascent, with Pakistanis seeing Chinese support as diminishing the influence and leverage that the United States has in Pakistan. Imtiaz Gul, a leading Pakistani journalist, stated at an October 2018 Pakistan Policy Symposium at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, DC, "Why would Pakistan budge now that the second biggest economy in the world, China, is standing by us? The U.S. has lost its leverage. Only China is investing in Pakistan." Gul further argued that the increasingly difficult security

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<sup>89</sup> Interview with Ambassador Cameron Munter, former U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, 2010-2012, Washington, DC, January 23, 2019.

relationship with the United States “convinced Pakistan that our relationship with the United States will remain transitory, particularly after its tilt toward India. India has been elevated in the view of the establishment here. So, we needed a shoulder, Pakistan needed a shoulder, and that shoulder is China.”<sup>90</sup> Ambassador Cameron Munter argued that in improving relations with Pakistan it has to understand the strengthening Pakistan-China relationship—“In the past, for 60 years or 70 years, we the Americans called the shots in a bilateral relationship. That’s just not the case anymore. So number one is understand what the Chinese are doing because anything the Americans do is not going to be working in a vacuum. It’s going to be working in the context set by the Chinese.”<sup>91</sup>

In keeping key bilateral relationships so narrowly focused on counterterrorism and assuming that the same geo-political conditions of U.S. primacy of the past still hold, the U.S. government risks damaging its ability to leverage these relationships to help protect the United States and its security interests abroad. Government officials within its partner states have simply grown tired of the continuous U.S. pressure to “do more” without seeing great long-term benefit to their country, economy, and society. By broadening these relationships beyond counterterrorism and finding areas of common ground and mutual benefit, the U.S. government can help to ensure that it is able to maintain a productive, working relationship with key partner states, which would have the benefit of increasing the ability to confront more difficult and contentious issues like terrorism.

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<sup>90</sup> Interview with Imtiaz Gul, a Pakistani journalist, Islamabad, Pakistan, December 18, 2018.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Ambassador Cameron Munter, former U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, 2010-2012, Washington, DC, January 23, 2019.

### *Escaping the Terrorism Trap: Building Local Capacity and Legitimacy*

In dealing with many of the terrorist groups today, this analysis demonstrates that an effective counterterrorism approach must be reconceptualized as inherently addressing problems of local governance. Many of the terrorist groups caught in the War on Terror emerged to challenge local sovereignty and establish an alternative system of governance, often one based in Sharia. The establishment of “good governance” and increasing the capacity of the local administration is a key aspect of any long term strategy meant to address the underlying causes associated with the emergence of these groups and the outbreak of terrorism.

There is, however, not a consensus on a definition of what constitutes “good governance,” often meaning different things on various levels of government (Gisselquist, 2012). In addressing this issue governance, it is important to distinguish between national capacity and local capacity. In understanding the importance of the state as a domestic actor, “state capacity” at the national level is traditionally measured by the government’s ability to effectively control its territory through administrative, legal, extractive, and coercive organizations (Skocpol, 1985). Within many developing states in which “ungoverned spaces” persist, state capacity is not uniform across the entire territory. It is, therefore, necessary to shift focus on variations in local capacity in order to assess needs for establishing good governance. At the local level, the United Nations Development Programme (2008, 6) identifies good governance as including: 1) decentralization through local capacity building; 2) participation through inclusiveness and empowerment of citizens; 3) the principle of non-discrimination; 4) representation of

citizens; 5) civil engagement; and 6) public transparency. The primary goal in developing these attributes is the timely and impartial delivery of government services which create a stable security environment for a local economy to grow and provide opportunity without prejudice.

In building good local governance as a strategy of conflict resolution, as earlier demonstrated in the discussion of conflicts between center and periphery, the most effective approach is not simply extending the writ of the central government into the periphery, which can be viewed as illegitimate, but working with local communities to build local administrative structures, with many center/periphery conflicts being resolved through successfully negotiating political autonomy agreements for the periphery (Ahmed, 2013, 335-337). In a comprehensive study of 151 civil wars over a 54 year period, Michael Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis (2006, 5) argue that improving local governance is a key aspect of preventing and resolving conflict through the “provision of temporary security, the building of new institutions capable of resolving future conflicts peaceably, and an economy capable of offering civilian employment to former soldiers and material progress to future citizens.”

While political and economic focused counterterrorism policies which are locally tailored can help to address these issues in the long term, it is important to construct a counterterrorism approach in the short and medium term that help to build toward these ultimate outcomes. In the halls of power in Washington, DC and in the military hierarchy, the mantra “clear- hold-build,” a phrase coined by historian and State Department counselor Philip Zelikow for counterinsurgency operations in Iraq, has been

held up as an effective strategy for connecting the short-term need to confront terrorist groups with the long-term goal of building good governance. This strategy involves security forces seeking “to clear enemy-held areas by military force, hold them, and build popular consent through reconstruction and better governance” (Coll, 2018, 334). While this counterinsurgency doctrine has been endorsed by the highest levels of political and military leadership, its short-comings have been recognized, especially in oversimplifying complex local security problems and exposing fallacies in its essentially military approach (Gawthorpe, 2017; Ollivant, 2008; Smith and Jones, 2015; Ucko, 2013).

In regard to connecting short-term tactical successes with long-term political goals, the use of military force cannot accomplish this and, in fact, can actively undermine it. Being hard on terrorism is not necessarily the right path to take, despite how political and tactically expedient it may seem in the short term. Effective counterterrorism policies must avoid using military force to “kill terrorists” and prevent civilian casualties at all costs. Indiscriminate military force often shifts the costs of conflict from militants and non-combatants, thereby diminishes incentives to remain as non-participants in the violence (Kocher, Pepinsky, and Kalyvas, 2011). A more effective approach focuses on protection of civilians to separate local militant groups from bases of support, rather than killing the enemy with military force, an approach that only serves as a catalyst for increased violence. Instead of attempting to increase the costs of terrorism through punishment by direct kinetic action, the goal of effective counterterrorism should be to lower the cost and increase the benefit of non-participation in violence, which

research has shown to be more effective at reducing acts of terrorism (Dugan and Chenoweth, 2012; Enders and Sandler, 1993; Kenney, 2003; Lafree, Dugan, and Korte, 2009). This has the added benefit of enabling discriminate action against known terrorist groups. As Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Vann, a U.S. army officer serving as an adviser in South Vietnam, once stated, “This is a political war and it calls for discrimination in killing. The best weapon for killing would be a knife, but I’m afraid we can’t do it that way. The worst is an airplane. The next worst is artillery. Barring a knife, the best is a rifle—you know who you’re killing” (Halberstam, 2008, 95). David Kilcullen (2010, 30) similarly observes, “You have more combat power than you can or should use in most situations. Injudicious use of firepower creates blood feuds, homeless people, and societal disruption that fuels and perpetuates the insurgency...The most beneficial actions are often local politics, civic action, and beat-cop behaviors. For your side to win, the people do not have to like you, but they must respect you, accept that your actions benefit them, and trust your integrity and ability to deliver on promises, particularly regarding their security.”

The most effective means of pursuing this goal, without blowback from military force, is the use of local police forces for counterterrorism efforts. Ladwig (2014) does recognize that the police force can be as culpable as the military in engaging in oppressive behavior and human rights abuses, especially when they are reconstituted as essentially paramilitary forces and used as a blunt instrument of social control. With the increased militarization of police forces as a means of addressing a “security gap,” the distinction between these two institutions has become blurred (Hill, Beger, and Zanetti,



2007). This, however, has had the result of making the police more like a domestic military force, with the inherent problems with its use of force, rather than changing the fundamentals of a traditional law enforcement approach (Carriere and Encinosa, 2017; Delehanty, et. al., 2017).

The use of local police within the framework of traditional law enforcement and within the rule of law can resolve many of the inherent difficulties with the domestic deployment of the military for counterterrorism. From an operational perspective, a police force comprised of local individuals has a greater level of knowledge about the community within which they operate, local knowledge that military units often don't have. This makes police more effective in distinguishing between militants and civilians and provides them contextual knowledge for the best approaches in using the minimum necessary force to apprehend, or even kill, targets. Kalev Sepp (2005, 9), a counterinsurgency expert at the Naval Postgraduate School and the former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations Capabilities, recognized, "Intelligence operations that help detect terrorist insurgents for arrest and prosecution are the single most important practice to protect a population from threats to its security. Honest, trained, robust police forces responsible for security can gather intelligence at the community level."

Moreover, a locally raised police force is a consistent part of the community and, therefore, is expected to show more restraint and less apt to commit violence against neighbors with whom they have to live from day to day. Police forces are trained to deal

with civilians on a daily basis, training which the military usually does not possess.<sup>92</sup> This expectation of police behavior, combined with their local character, also gives them a greater perceived local legitimacy and a lower likelihood of alienating the local community in conducting counterterrorism operations, even when requiring the use of force. A well-trained and legitimate police force, therefore, can strengthen the connection between the government and the local population and increase the ability to work with the community to identify and apprehend terrorist suspects. Patrick Skinner, a former CIA counterterrorism officer deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq and now a police officer in Savannah, Georgia, believes that the use of military force ultimately will be unable to end terrorism. The military operating in an environment as outsiders with “six-month” goals, Skinner argued in an interview with the *New Yorker*, won’t produce positive counterterrorism results, in the same way “firefighters can’t end fire and cops can’t end crime.” In order to build a more “resilient society” against terrorism, governments need to rely on local police. “It has to be ‘I live here. This is my job forever’” (Taub, 2018). Bayley and Perito (2010, 51) sum up three main principles which governments need to adhere to in containing violence, which the use of local police can address:

1. Capturing, killing, or imprisoning people who commit violent acts does not mitigate insecurity in the long term unless the identification of perpetrators or targets is guided by precise intelligence.
2. The great effectiveness multiplier in the use of state power against violence is the allegiance and support of the public.
3. In order for governments to gain public support, the responsibility for security should be entrusted as much as possible to police deployed among the population who minimize the use of force and who act in accordance with human rights standards.

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<sup>92</sup> Interview with Dr. Shahid Ahmed Afridi, former Pakistani army officer and counterinsurgency expert, Islamabad, Pakistan, December 17, 2018.

This creates a more durable and sustainable local security framework in the short and medium term that can provide the basis for building toward long-term goals of “good governance,” providing a more integrated local approach to counterterrorism.

Unfortunately, with U.S. assistance focusing on bolstering partner states’ military capacity to address terrorism, local police forces often were a forgotten afterthought for partner states’ counterterrorism efforts (Ladwig, 2007).<sup>93</sup> Hassan Abbas, a professor at National Defense University in Washington, DC and former law enforcement official in northwestern Pakistan, conducted a review of Pakistan’s police forces in order to find recommendations for increasing its effectiveness. He found that, despite the dedication of Pakistani policemen and their “tremendous potential” for counterterrorism, the police force was plagued by problems related to “political interference in police work, totally inadequate resources and poor training facilities.” He highlighted this problem in the context of American policy, in which only “the thinnest slice of US funds” were dedicated to police forces— “The US, which is the major donor in Pakistan’s counterterrorism capacity building, seemed oblivious for quite a while to the fact that a criminal justice system even existed in the country. Pakistan loves F-16s (what air force doesn’t?). But the country needs training and equipment for its police force more than it requires big-ticket military hardware. Poor priority setting unsurprisingly haunts Pakistan” (Abbas, 2009, 8; 2014, 193-194). Dr. Shahid Ahmed Afridi, a former Pakistani army officer involved in military operations in Swat and a former military liaison officer in Kabul with U.S. and Afghan forces, argued that the U.S. was “negligent” to the role of

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<sup>93</sup> Interview with Ambassador Richard Boucher, former Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, Washington, DC, February 25, 2019.

the police, which he saw as “paramount” in effective counterterrorism efforts. He recommended that effective counterterrorism in northwestern Pakistan required “massive support for policing” and “should reflect and empower the local people and society.”<sup>94</sup>

Hassan Abbas similarly pointed to the problem that when the United States prioritizes non-military means to combat terrorism, it skips over supporting the police force and emphasizes long-term economic and development aid instead. This contributes to the continued problems associated with the “rule of law” in Pakistan. Abbas notes, “Extremists are bound to thrive in an environment where the criminal justice system is faltering” (Abbas, 2014, 194). He continues, “Killing terrorists is only a stop-gap arrangement. There is a desperate need for a corresponding and parallel development strategy to bring the tribal areas into mainstream Pakistan... This inclusiveness has long been the missing component in US policy” (Ibid., 202-203). Muhammad Amir Rana similarly argued, “What we have lost during all this 16 or 17 years in CT cooperation with the U.S. are law enforcement agencies, meaning the police has become weaker.” He saw that re-building traditional law enforcement institutions is “one of the major challenges we face.” In more effectively addressing counterterrorism, he recommended, “We have to restore our policing system and other law enforcement agencies... This should be our priority.” He saw the need to return the military to “their normal positions in the barracks” in order to protect the country from external threats.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Interview with Dr. Shahid Ahmed Afridi, former Pakistani army officer and counterinsurgency expert, Islamabad, Pakistan, December 17, 2018.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Muhammad Amir Rana, member of the steering committee for Pakistan’s National Counterterrorism Authority and president of the Pak Institute for Peace Studies, Islamabad, Pakistan, December 13, 2018.

For the United States to support counterterrorism efforts in partner states, it needs to focus its support on building local law enforcement institutions as the frontline of counterterrorism. This support also needs to be adapted to local conditions and work through and with pre-existing institutions, even if the local security framework is non-governmental in nature, in order to promote its legitimacy among the local population. While many government agencies, think tanks, and academics see the importance of an integrated political and economic strategy to counter extremism within developing states in the long term, it is equally vital to employ a short-term strategy that builds towards and connects with these long-term goals, instead of undermining them as a military approach does.

There are, of course, challenges to strengthening the police forces in many developing and fragile states who lack state capacity to exercise control over all of their territory, especially in the periphery where the problem of terrorism often emerges given the absence of an effective government presence. They go beyond simply bolstering the operational capacity of the police but deal with larger issues such as establishing the rule of law, constructing legitimacy within the community, developing professionalization, and connecting police with the broader judicial system (Fidler, 2014; Francis, 2012). These difficulties do not mean that investments should not be made to build up and train local police capabilities that stand at the center of a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy which avoids the problems associated with the use of military force.

## ***Conclusion***

Sir Evelyn Howell, a British colonial officer who served in Waziristan in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, remarked of the colonial government's frontier policy in India: "Let it be reflected how great a diversion of the ship follows from a slight deflection of the rudder" (Caroe, 1958, 412). The early policies and actions taken in the War on Terror helped to push the United States' partner states on a path that trapped them in a deadly cycle of violence with increasingly devastating acts of domestic terrorism that, for many of them, continues to this very day. The United States government has traditionally relied on a broad spectrum of counterterrorism activities, including strengthening U.S. defenses against a potential terrorist attack, intelligence gathering, and targeting terrorist financing. However, at the heart of the U.S. counterterrorism strategy has been a reliance on military force, whether by direct U.S. action or through partnered operations, to proactively target terrorist groups abroad. As this study has demonstrated, the use of the military is counterproductive to diminishing the threat and occurrence of terrorism, doing little to solve the problem and in fact exacerbating it. This analysis exposes the longer term and unintended causal impact of counterterrorism policies implemented by the United States and its partner states. Actions meant to target the problem only served as a catalyst for increasing the levels of violence and shifting the violence onto domestic targets within the United States' partner states. This helps to explain why, despite the trillions of dollars spent and countless government resources dedicated to counterterrorism efforts, terrorism today remains a continuing threat for a number of countries around the world. Future research should expand on these findings to

investigate the causal mechanism outside of the context of the War on Terror and how other causal factors, both international and domestic, can lead to a similar process that sinks states into a terrorism trap. Moreover, additional case studies focusing on states in which there is on-going violent conflict between center and periphery before the War on Terror and states that have not relied on the use of military force can serve as additional evidence in support of the theory.

U.S. government officials also need to recognize the fallacy of continuing to pursue a military approach to a problem that does not have a military solution. The U.S. government and other governments around the world need to change the way they think about and address the problem of terrorism. There are, however, larger questions that loom over the possibility of such a shift occurring—senior government officials finding the political will to do so and the continued ability for the United States to project its influence abroad. The difficulty of being able to pursue significant shifts in U.S. counterterrorism policy due to these intervening factors, however, makes such a reformulation no less urgent or necessary. A well-studied path is laid before them in how to shift counterterrorism towards a more integrated and effective approach.

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## VITA

John Harrison Akins, from Maryville, TN is a PhD candidate in Political Science at the University of Tennessee and a Graduate Research Fellow at the University of Tennessee's Howard H. Baker, Jr. Center for Public Policy. He previously served as an Ibn Khaldun Chair Research Fellow at American University's School of International Service, working with the Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies and former Pakistani High Commissioner to the UK and Ireland, Ambassador Akbar Ahmed. He received an MSc in Political Theory from the London School of Economics, an MA in Liberal Arts from St. John's College in Annapolis, MD, and BA in History from American University. His research interests include intra-state conflict, terrorism, Islamic culture and politics, South Asian politics, and U.S. foreign policy.