ALLAH, AMBIVALENCE, AND DEATH FROM ABOVE: A PERPETUAL CYCLE OF VIOLENCE IN PAKISTAN AND IRAQ

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ABSTRACT 

The War on Terror has become inextricably linked with Islam. The Bush and Obama administrations have fought a mostly military-centric campaign against radical Islamist groups across the world that the U.S. State Department labels as Foreign Terrorist Organizations. However, according to Dr. Mark Juergensmeyer in his award-winning book, Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence, religion alone does not ordinarily lead to violence. When religion becomes fused with political, social, and ideological circumstances, violence can manifest due to social aspirations, personal pride, and movements for political change. Therefore, the War on Terror is highly complex with multiple, intersecting variables contributing to the increased intractability over time. These violent groups are best labeled as politically motivated insurgencies using terrorist tactics. Terrorism is used to elicit a psychological response and destabilize a population, while an insurgency is the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region. The U.S. continues to label these groups as terrorist organizations, leading to an overdependence on the use of airstrikes to confront these violent groups. Remotely operated (drones) and manned (bombers) weapon systems have come to drive policy against religiously motivated terrorist organizations as the U.S. population and the Obama administration become increasingly reticent to deploy combat troops. However,
without the security of combat troops, there is a minimal and ineffective presence of the other organs of the U.S. government to address the political, social, and ideological underpinnings that fuel these violent groups.

The issue of violent extremism is an intractable problem requiring a complex set of solutions. By not understanding and acknowledging that extremist organizations are fundamentally local and thrive in ungoverned spaces, the U.S.’s use of airstrikes will further radicalize the population and raise the salience of radical religious ideology. This thesis will test this hypothesis by conducting an analysis of U.S. efforts to counter the Pakistani Taliban and the Islamic State through mostly military means. Specifically, it will assess how this approach does not address the lack of effective and inclusive governance in Pakistan and Iraq that allows the aforementioned violent groups to function and flourish. As the number and scope of radical, violent extremist organizations continue to grow, it is vital the U.S. create a policy for countering violent extremism that deals with the complexity of the conflict, seeks long-term stability, and utilizes all available means.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My family and friends have been incredibly supportive during this journey. A special debt of gratitude to my brother, who is my role model, and my sister-in-law. They have given me the best reasons to further my education – my nephew and niece. I want to make them proud and serve as an example as they pursue their education in the years to come.

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A special thank you to my classmate, Chris Bosley, for spending several hours reviewing my thesis and adding tremendous value.

Lastly, I dedicate this thesis to my late mother. Although she did not have a formal education, she understood its value and demanded we do well in our educational endeavors. As an immigrant from Afghanistan, I am the first woman in my family to go to college and the first to complete a Master’s. Any success I enjoy in this life is because of my mother’s love, sacrifices, and prayers. I hope I make her proud.
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INTRODUCTION

COMPLEXITY AND THE WAR ON TERROR

The War on Terror and radical Islam have received a great deal of attention during the current presidential campaign. The newest radical Islamist group to grasp the U.S. government’s attention is the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, also known as ISIS, ISIL, or the Islamic State, operating primarily in Iraq and Syria. Republican nominee Donald Trump called for a new War on Terror during his August 15, 2016 speech, comparing radical Islam with Communism. He stated that “just as we won the Cold War, in part, by exposing the evils of communism and the virtues of free markets, so too must we take on the ideology of Radical Islam.”1 However, his strategy, which would “aggressively pursue joint and coalition military operations to crush and destroy ISIS, international cooperation to cutoff their funding, expanded intelligence sharing, and cyberwarfare to disrupt and disable their propaganda and recruiting” does not vary in description from the Obama Administration’s current policies.2 Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton’s approach also mimics the Obama Administration’s, with her three key focus areas to “take out ISIS’s strongholds in Iraq and Syria…work with our allies to dismantle global terror networks…[and] harden our defenses at home.”3


It remains to be seen how the Trump Administration will confront the threat of transnational violence. However, the last fifteen years have and will continue to inform U.S. policy options for fighting the War on Terror.

President Obama and his administration publicly “…reject the lie that America and its allies are at war with Islam.” On February 4, 2016, President Obama addressed over 3,000 people at the annual National Prayer Breakfast held in Washington, D.C. He closed his speech by stating that he prays “…our leaders will always act with humility and generosity…[answering] Scripture’s call to lift up the vulnerable, and to stand up for justice, and ensure that every human being lives in dignity.”

Last year, at the 2015 National Prayer breakfast, Obama discussed the importance of humility once again, explaining that although terrorism today is often seen as an Islamic problem, all religions are guilty of having perverted their messages in order to oppress and inflict violence. He pointed to the Crusades and Jim Crow laws, both justified in the name of Jesus Christ. Obama’s words represent an understanding of the complexity of the War on Terror, not as a simple struggle between the Christian west and Islam. Obama’s humility is partially attributed to his readings of Christian theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. One of Niebuhr’s central themes was humanity’s lack of humility to accept that the entirety of history “is enacted in a frame of meaning too large for human

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comprehension or management,’ and that any far-reaching ambitions to shape a region or
the whole world is rooted in hubris.”

Unfortunately, for all of Obama’s rhetoric that the War on Terror is not a War on
Islam, this is precisely the message often used by extremists to gain support for their
movements. Additionally, there is a great deal of hubris in the U.S. strategy to deal with
organizations labeled as terrorists through mostly military means, namely airstrikes
conducted either through manned bombers against the Islamic State, or through
unmanned platforms (drones) against the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, known as the TTP or
Pakistani Taliban. These military actions, which have consistently caused civilian
casualties, do little to support Obama’s claims that he is concerned about lifting up the
vulnerable, standing up for justice, and ensuring the dignity of every human life.

The increasing reliance on technology is in part due to the administration’s
classification of these groups as religiously motivated terrorist organizations that can be
defeated militarily. In reality, these groups seek political power using terrorist tactics.
Terrorism is used to elicit a psychological response to destabilize a population, but it is
“…used and directed in pursuit of, or in service of, a political aim.” An insurgency is
“the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political
control of a region. Insurgency uses a mixture of subversion, sabotage, political,
economic, psychological actions, and armed conflict to achieve its political aims.”

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7 Daniel Clausen and Max Nurnus, “Obama, Grand Strategy, and Reinhold Niebuhr,” The


9 “Joint Publication 3-24: Counterinsurgency,” U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, November 22, 2013,
Insurgencies are complex conflicts, often rooted in deep societal inequalities, and can become protracted. This paper will explore the connection between U.S. military actions and their effects on making the War on Terror in Pakistan and Iraq increasingly intractable. By not understanding and acknowledging that the extremist organizations in Pakistan and Iraq today are fundamentally local and flourish in ungoverned spaces due to a lack of effective and inclusive governance, the U.S.’s use of airstrikes will further radicalize the local population, raise the salience of radical religious ideology, and potentially lead to the creation of new anti-Western extremist organizations across the globe.

I. Counterinsurgency Versus Counterterrorism

The Taliban, officially known as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, is an example of an insurgency as it sought to replace the Mujahideen Coalition Government in the mid-1990s. It used terrorism and guerilla warfare, but its ultimate goal was to be the government of Afghanistan. The multinational counterinsurgency campaign led by the U.S. in Afghanistan recognized that the Taliban would not be defeated through military might alone, with a former U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff stating, “I consider the threat from lack of governance to be equal to the threat from the Taliban” and that the “legitimacy of the Afghan government at every level…is a real concern.”

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Unfortunately, the perceived failures of large-scale counterinsurgency campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan entailed long-term planning and “comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes” and are no longer considered viable options by the U.S. government who prefers to keep U.S. service members in largely advisory or support roles rather than in direct combat.\(^{11}\) Additionally, current U.S. strategies to counter extremism rely heavily on military airpower, especially in Pakistan and Iraq.

The way in which the presidential administration chooses to classify an organization has a profound effect on the resources the U.S. government brings to bear on the problem. The U.S. State Department lists 61 Foreign Terror Organizations (FTOs) that pose a threat to the U.S. homeland.\(^{12}\) Legally, an organization can only be named a FTO if it is deemed foreign (not based in the U.S.), it engages in terrorist activity or retains the ability to engage in terrorist activity, and the “organization’s terrorist activity or terrorism must threaten the security of U.S. nationals or the national security (national defense, foreign relations, or the economic interests) of the United States.”\(^{13}\) The main benefit of labeling an extremist group as a FTO is financial because it supports international efforts to interrupt terrorism financing.\(^{14}\) This was especially important in the global fight against al Qaida (AQ). Unfortunately, once a group is identified as a


\(^{13}\) Ibid.

\(^{14}\) Ibid.
FTO and not an insurgency, the U.S. government and military begin to look at a military-centric solution focused on decapitating the organization’s leadership structure through airstrikes. As evidenced by the fifteen-year long War on Terror, the U.S. must be prepared to battle these groups indefinitely as counterterrorism efforts using mainly military means are necessary, but insufficient, to confront the political problems that allow insurgencies and terrorists to thrive.

II. Procedure and Literature Review

The foundation of this thesis is based on *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* by Dr. Mark Juergensmeyer. Concepts from this book will be used to argue that the so-called War on Terror is not fundamentally a war of religious ideology. Although there are religious dimensions to these conflicts, the root causes of violent expression are linked to political, social, and ideological circumstances. Dr. Peter Coleman’s book *The Five Percent: Finding Solutions to Seemingly Impossible Conflicts* provides a framework for describing the conflict between the U.S. and religiously-motivated violent extremists. Dr. Coleman’s work illuminates how the human mind chooses to oversimplify complex problems for ease of understanding. This oversimplification can reduce the conflict to a simple “us versus them” construct, leading opposing forces to rely on overarching narratives (U.S. versus Islam) which only increases the intractability.

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After laying this foundation, the first chapter will begin to explore the Pakistani Taliban and its relationship to the Pakistani state. Veena Kukreja’s book *Contemporary Pakistan: Political Processes, Conflicts, and Crises* will be used to describe the systemic and institution marginalization of the Pashtun ethnic group, which constitutes the majority of the Pakistani Taliban, by the Punjabi-dominated government in Islamabad. Imtiaz Gul’s *The Most Dangerous Place: Pakistan’s Lawless Frontier* analyzes how these policies of marginalization have resulted in a lawless border area between Afghanistan and Pakistan, making it an ungoverned safe haven for transnational terrorists. Claudio Franco’s “The Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan,” in *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field* illustrates how the Pakistani Taliban increasingly received support from the Pashtuns in the border area between Afghanistan and Pakistan due to large-scale, indiscriminate attacks by the Pakistani military and U.S. drone strikes as both countries hunted AQ terrorists after 9/11.

The second chapter will then turn to an exploration of the Islamic State in Iraq. William McCants’ *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State* reveals the meteoric rise of the Islamic State over other groups in Iraq due to its commitment to state-building and providing social services to Sunnis and former Baathists who were disenfranchised under the Shia-dominated Maliki regime.

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This book is particularly important as it based almost entirely on primary sources written in Arabic, providing a unique insight into the motivations of the Islamic State and its leadership. Joby Warrick’s *Black Flags: The Rise of ISIS* uses intelligence documents and interviews with numerous U.S. government officials to explain how the U.S. and its military-centric approach in Iraq inevitably fueled the rise of Islamic State in the ashes of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s al Qaeda in Iraq.21

Of note, although the aforementioned books will be used to detail the religious ideology of the TTP and the Islamic State, and *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement* 22 and Charles Allen’s *God’s Terrorists: The Wahhabi Cult and the Hidden Roots of Modern Jihad* 23 will be used to fill in gaps. These books highlight the contributions of Sunni religious scholars to the strains of Islamism used by the TTP and the Islamic State to justify their actions and recruit Muslims to their cause.

The final chapter will explore the merits of the U.S.-led campaigns in Pakistan and Iraq and details the effects thereof. The protracted conflicts in both Pakistan and Iraq prove that the Pakistani Taliban and Islamic State act more as transnational insurgencies filling a political vacuum and are unlikely to be defeated by primarily military means. Official U.S. government documents and Dr. Coleman’s *The Five Percent* will inform important recommendations for how to counter complex, intractable problems.

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III. The Intractable Problem

It is undeniable that the TTP and the Islamic State use terrorism and display a religious dimension to their rhetoric since each group “espouse[s] religious beliefs and…articulates a reasonably consistent and coherent message about the relationship of religion to politics.” However, according to Dr. Mark Juergensmeyer, religion alone “does not ordinarily lead to violence. That happens only with the coalescence of a peculiar set of circumstances – political, social, and ideological – when religion becomes fused with violent expressions of social aspirations, personal pride, and movements for political change.” Therefore, the U.S. should attempt to understand and address the root causes that bolster these groups’ success as insurgencies and create a strategy focused on effective and inclusive governance.

The War on Terror has become a protracted and intractable conflict due to a lack of addressing this peculiar set of circumstances. The war has raged on for over fifteen years and new anti-U.S. and anti-West groups continue to emerge. Intractable conflicts are “highly destructive, never ending,…virtually impossible to solve,…tend to worsen over time and rarely go away,…enrage us, trap us, frustrate us, drain us of energy and other critical resources, and seem to never go away no matter what we do.” In order to understand intractable conflicts, “…we must understand the underlying and


invisible dynamics at work.”27 The War on Terror in Pakistan and Iraq include numerous underlying and invisible dynamics, especially surrounding ethnic and sectarian identities as well as long-standing political cleavages. As the years have progressed, the intractability has increased as “…the many different components of a conflict collapse together into one mass, into one very simple ‘us versus them’ story that effectively resists change.”28 In Chapters One and Two, focused on Pakistan and Iraq respectively, the thesis will explore these underlying and invisible dynamics that have led to internal intractability.

The U.S. has also fed the intractability cycle with its own “us versus them” narrative. As Dr. Peter Coleman, the director of Columbia University’s International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution states, the “two telltale signs” of an intractable conflict are “you find yourself denying or discounting any and all positive information about your opponent and…you feel overwhelming resistance (from yourself and others) to act differently toward your opponent.”29 Since 9/11, the U.S. has increasingly relied on technology to neutralize the threat of terrorism, and there is little indication this will change in the future as drone and air strikes increase. Additionally, the fact that the Obama Administration stated in the 2015 National Security Strategy that the War on Terror is not a War on Islam proves there is a narrative of “us versus them.”30

27 Ibid., 5.
28 Ibid., 9.
29 Ibid., 46.
However, finding solutions to intractable problems requires dynamic actors who “…remain prepared to change strategies, tactics, key indicators, and even members of the intervention team as the system evolves.”\textsuperscript{31} It also requires an understanding of how the 9/11 narrative of the West against Islam has become a rallying cry for increased violence and instability.

IV. The 9/11 Narrative as “Us Versus Them”

As events unfolded on 9/11, President Bush said “sounds like we have a minor war going on here; I heard about the Pentagon. We’re at war…somebody’s going to pay.”\textsuperscript{32} The immediate response was to exact revenge for the attacks on U.S. soil. Afghanistan and Pakistan were immediately drawn in to the narrative as the Afghan Taliban provided sanctuary for Osama bin Laden, the head of AQ at the time. On September 16, 2001, Bush declared “This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while.”\textsuperscript{33} It immediately caused great concern in Europe, conjuring memories of Christian knights attacking Muslims in a battle for Jerusalem. The French foreign minister at the time, Hubert Vedrine, cautioned that “we must avoid a clash of civilizations at all costs…one has to avoid falling into this huge trap, this monstrous trap…conceived by the instigators of the assault.”\textsuperscript{34} Vedrine understood Bin Laden

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\textsuperscript{31} Coleman, \textit{The Five Percent}, 106.
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wanted to “…drag the United States into a war with Islam – ‘a large-scale front which it cannot control.’”\textsuperscript{35} Ultimately, AQ achieved its goal since the War on Terror continues today and has spread to multiple fronts across the globe.

At the State of the Union address in January 2002, President Bush described states that are hostile to the U.S. and their terrorist allies as an “axis of evil” and that “history has called America and our allies to action, and it is both our responsibility and our privilege to fight freedom's fight.”\textsuperscript{36} Extremists were painted as irrational actors who attacked an innocent America on 9/11. Bush believed and perpetuated a narrative that the U.S. had a special mission to fight the War on Terror and the American population agreed. In a January 2002 Gallup Poll, only six percent of Americans surveyed agreed it was a mistake to send military forces to Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{37}

This militaristic narrative continued in future presidential elections and continues to be used by both Republicans and Democrats today. In 2004, Democratic nominee John Kerry ran against Republican George W. Bush and claimed he could wage a more effective war against terrorists. Kerry vowed to “to capture or kill the terrorists, crush their movement and free the world from fear.”\textsuperscript{38} During the 2008 election, Democratic nominee Barack Obama spoke extensively about the War on Terror. Obama did not


reframe the conflict as complex with underlying and invisible factors, further fueled by military action, but instead harshly criticized the Bush administration for focusing too heavily on Iraq when the real threat of terrorism emanated from “al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan and the border region of Pakistan. This is the central front in the war on terrorism.” 39 Once President Obama was elected in 2009, his administration began to drawdown U.S. troop presence from Iraq while simultaneously increasing ground military operations in Afghanistan and drone strikes in Pakistan.

This introduction provided an overview of intractable conflicts and the “us versus them” narratives that drive the War on Terror. The first chapter will focus on the multiple “us versus them” constructs in Pakistan that have allowed a growing insurgency and multiple, violent transnational organizations to grow.

CHAPTER I

PAKISTAN

In March of 2009, President Obama stated that AQ and other extremist organizations have found a home in the “remote areas of the Pakistani frontier…and…for the American people, this border region has become the most dangerous place in the world.”¹ This border area between Afghanistan and Pakistan, known as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), was considered too remote to govern by British India and remains ungoverned by the Pakistani state. It also has a long history of religious extremism. During the anti-Soviet jihad of the 1980s, Pakistan armed and trained Islamic extremists in the border region to fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan. In the 1990s, many groups fought to liberate Kashmir, a disputed territory with India, but refocused on Afghanistan after the U.S. invaded in 2001.

Of the aforementioned list of 61 FTOs, eleven of those groups’ members are known to operate in Pakistan.² Some FTOs have close ties to elements of the Pakistani state, such as Lashkar-e Tayyiba and the Haqqani Network (HQN).³ These groups enjoy Pakistani government support and are used as proxies to influence India, Pakistan’s


existential enemy, and Afghanistan, which Pakistan seeks to manipulate to ensure a friendly neighbor on its western border. This concept of “strategic depth” is a contributing factor in Afghanistan’s instability.⁴

One FTO that considers the Pakistani government its main target is the TTP. Also known as the Pakistani Taliban, the group is headquartered in the FATA and lives alongside groups like the Haqqani Network and Lashkar-e Tayyiba. The Pakistani state often labels the TTP as a radical Islamist organization and the U.S. State Department designated it a FTO in 2010. The TTP began as a local insurgency motivated to protect fellow Pashtuns from U.S. and Pakistani brutality; however, it is now labeled a transnational terror group due to Islamabad’s failure to govern the FATA and combat all radical extremist groups within its borders, even those targeting Afghanistan and India.

Therefore, an understanding of the TTP requires an exploration of historical, political, cultural, and religious circumstances that illuminate the group’s conflict with the Pakistani state. Since the TTP is an insurgency aimed at the overthrow of the Pakistani government, these factors must be understood and addressed because continued drone strikes will do little to stop the root causes of violence in the FATA. TTP leaders believe their conservative Pashtun culture and Islamic faith are under attack. The TTP represents an “…abused, disenfranchised group, deeply identified with the misery….” of fellow Muslim tribesmen living in the FATA.⁵ As “religion is the vehicle through which radical political action is channeled…,” the perceived abuse, whether physical or


⁵ Juergensmeyer, Terror in the Mind of God, 10.
emotional, necessary to motivate religious terrorists such as the TTP most likely occurs at the hands of the government. Furthermore, although drone strikes may be effective at neutralizing the TTP threat in the short term, they have ultimately contributed to a perpetual cycle of violence due to tribal cultural codes, not religious identity. Until the Pakistani state effectively governs the tribes of the FATA and provides basic social services, the U.S. should be prepared to conduct drone strikes in perpetuity.

I. Politics of the FATA

Pakistan is divided into four provinces with a distinct ethnolinguistic group dominating each province. Punjab Province is the heartland and contains the government capital of Islamabad and the cultural capital of Lahore. Punjabis dominate the civilian and military structures and are the largest ethnic group, comprising almost 45 percent of Pakistan’s population of 196 million. Their “unstated guiding dictum is that all Muslims are equal but Punjabi Muslims are more equal than others.” By contrast, the Pashtuns, also known as Pathans or Pakhtuns, are the minority in Pakistan and comprise only 15 percent of Pakistan’s population. The Pashtuns dominate in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, which contains the FATA along Afghanistan’s border. The FATA is divided

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8 Kukreja, Contemporary Pakistan, 118.

into seven agencies. Pakistan’s president appoints a political agent for each agency and these seven political agents report to the governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province.  

Historically, neither the British Indian government nor the Pakistani government has governed the FATA’s agencies in accordance with the national constitution. Today, the nearly seven million residents of the FATA are governed by the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) of 1901, which allows the political agent for each agency to collectively punish the tribes in his territory for crimes committed by its members. Entire tribes have their property confiscated, and members are indefinitely detained or imprisoned. The Parliament plays no role in the affairs of the FATA, Pakistani courts have no jurisdiction, and tribesmen have no right to legal representation or to present evidence. Furthermore, the accused have no right to appeal a conviction. Since 2009, residents of the FATA have petitioned the Pakistan government to grant them full rights as Pakistani citizens, “including hundreds of petitions on behalf of locals detained by the military in its battle against a Taliban insurgency in the region.” In 2011, Pakistani President Zardari ordered legal reforms to the FCR. Unfortunately, the reforms are

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10 Ibid., 1.


12 Ibid.

largely cosmetic, with lawyers and lawmakers in the FATA claiming no change has occurred.\(^{14}\)

Islamabad has little interest in governing the tribal areas because it would be forced to acknowledge the rights of FATA citizens and allocate money and manpower to provide goods, services, and security to the Pashtuns. FATA’s children are still educated in a madrassah, or Islamic seminary school, which fills the void left by state-sponsored schools and serve as recruiting grounds for extremists.\(^{15}\) Moreover, the central government continues to collectively punish the tribes. In June 2015, Pakistani authorities asked tribesmen from the Sipah tribe, who rejected the collective punishment, to pay a collective fine of $120,000 U.S. dollars for the crimes of Mangal Bagh, a fellow tribesman linked to the Pakistani Taliban.\(^{16}\) In May 2016, the Pakistani state arrested 22 members of a tribe in the FATA’s South Waziristan Agency after their tribe was deemed responsible for the kidnapping of eight FATA Development Authority (FDA) workers. Masood Khan, a Pakistani political agent, stated that the arrests were made “‘to put pressure for the release of the eight FDA officials as the kidnapping took place in their area and it is their collective responsibility to help authorities in the recovery.’”\(^{17}\)

II. Pashtun Tribal Culture


\(^{15}\) Allen, \textit{God’s Terrorists}, 3.


The Pashtuns are the world’s largest segmentary tribal society “consisting of several extended families, which is part of a larger section, which, in turn, is part of an even larger clan.”

Although all Pashtuns claim a common ancestor, smaller units often fight amongst themselves over resources but come together to fight against larger tribes and outsiders. This segmentation is best reflected “in the Bedouin saying ‘Me and my brothers against my cousins, me and my cousins against the world.'”

Pashtuns claim their lineage through Qais bin Rashid, who traveled from Afghanistan to Arabia and was reputedly converted to Islam by the Prophet Muhammad. This connection between ethnic and religious identity makes Pashtuns deeply religious Sunni Muslims, and they tend to see “any external threat to the tribe as a parallel threat against Islam, itself. The perception of a dual threat allows tribal leaders to quickly mobilize their tribes against outsiders, particularly those from another religion.”

The Pashtun’s tribal code of Pashtunwali is primarily concerned with maintaining an honorable reputation. Some of the better-known aspects of Pashtunwali are “melmastia, or hospitality, nanawati, the notion that hospitality can never be denied to a fugitive, and badal, the right of revenge.”

The importance of Pashtunwali cannot be

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19 Ibid.

20 Allen, God’s Terrorists, 2.


overstated. This code is what mandated that Mullah Omar, the founder of the Afghan Taliban, continue to protect Osama bin Laden from the U.S. after the attacks of 9/11.\textsuperscript{23} Pashtunwali is also the reason U.S. Navy SEAL Marcus Luttrell became the lone survivor of a helicopter crash in Afghanistan in 2005 after he asked a Pashtun villager for protection from the Taliban.\textsuperscript{24} In both instances, Pashtun men were honor-bound to protect their guests. This code applies today as foreign fighters or Pakistani Taliban seek refuge in the lawless FATA. The tribesman may not share their radical ideology but are honor-bound to provide them sanctuary. As the persistent threat of drones requires militants to move constantly from one location to another, innocent civilians and terrorists alike become the target of indiscriminate strikes. Since Pashtunwali demands revenge if reparations are not made to an individual’s kinship group, covert drone strikes provide no opportunity for justice and are considered dishonorable by the Pashtuns. The Pashtuns are therefore honor-bound to avenge the death of their kin as a result of U.S. drone strikes, creating a large pool of recruits for the TTP.

\textbf{III. Religious Foundation of Conflict}

The majority of TTP fighters were educated in a madrassah located in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border area.\textsuperscript{25} The TTP adhere to the Sunni interpretation of \textit{Deobandism}, named after its main madrassah founded in Deoband, India. This Muslim

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  \item \textsuperscript{25} Allen, \textit{God’s Terrorists}, 3.
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reformist educational movement emerged in the late 1800s, largely as a reaction to the perceived corrupting influence of British colonialism in South Asia. Shortly after the failed Indian uprising against the British in 1857, a group of conservative Sunni scholars founded the Dar ul-Ulum Madrassah at Deoband, India.²⁶

Dar ul-Ulum was originally founded to train religious students in Islamic law and theology “providing young Muslims with a new sense of identity and an alternative to the British model...where boys could be safely initiated into the old religion of their forefathers.”²⁷ Education focused on the study of traditional religious texts, such as the Quran and the Hadiths, the collection of sayings and teachings of the Prophet Mohammad. By 1879, Dar ul-Ulum was renowned as an institution for higher learning in the Islamic world.²⁸ Deobandi graduates opened seminaries throughout Central and South Asia, producing Muslims who were “increasingly conservative and introverted, less tolerant, and far more inclined to look for political leadership in the madrassah.”²⁹

Deobandi beliefs resonated with the conservative Sunni Pashtuns and complemented their tribal code. Deobandi madrassahs grew throughout India’s Northwest frontier along Afghanistan’s border, home to the Pashtuns, and filled an education void left by a lack of Indian state-sponsored schools. During the anti-Soviet jihad timeframe in the 1980s, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia “channeled their financial

²⁶ Ibid. See Chapter 5, “The Early Summer of 1857” and Chapter 6, “The Late Summer of 1857” for more information regarding the failed mutiny.

²⁷ Ibid., 210.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 211.
support to those religious organizations…who shared their vision of jihad” and an
increasing number of madrassahs became recruiting and training camps to fight the
Soviets.\textsuperscript{30}

It was also during this timeframe that \textit{Wahhabism}, the state religion of Saudi
Arabia, began to coalesce with Deobandism in the tribal areas of Pakistan. Wahhabism
was founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in 1744 to purify and renew Islam in
Arabia by returning to the “pure and authentic Islam of the Founder, removing and where
necessary destroying all the later accretions and distortions.”\textsuperscript{31} During this campaign,
Wahhab’s followers were virulently anti-Shia and anti-Sufi, condemning the movement’s
mysticism and tolerance, and slaughtered men, women, and children who did not meet
their strict standards.\textsuperscript{32} Wahhabism is the official, state-enforced doctrine of Saudi
Arabia and the country remains one of the strictest Muslim countries today.

As more Arab fighters came to support the anti-Soviet jihad, their money and
ideology began to spread among their Pashtun hosts. By the end of the 1980s, an
estimated 65 percent of all Pakistani seminary schools were linked to Deobandism, and
by April 2002, “… Pakistan’s Minister of Religious affairs put the total number of
madrassahs at ten thousand…[with] no fewer than seven thousand Deobandi.”\textsuperscript{33} In
addition to an already conservative tribal code of honor and adherence to a strict

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 275

\textsuperscript{31} Bernard Lewis, \textit{The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror} (New York, NY: Random
House, 2004), 120.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 122.

\textsuperscript{33} Allen, \textit{God’s Terrorists}, 275.
Deobandi doctrine, the FATA has been influenced over the last three decades by radical Islamic ideology imported by AQ and its affiliates.

IV. History of the Pakistani Taliban

The Pakistani Taliban has its roots in Afghanistan’s anti-Soviet Jihad during the 1980s. Many of the initial fighters were veteran Mujahidin who had fought the Soviets in Afghanistan and returned home to the FATA once the Soviets left.  

The events of September 11, 2001 had a dramatic effect on Pakistan. On September 20, 2001, President Bush made it clear to the world that “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.” President Bush’s “us versus them” construct shined the spotlight on Pakistan, especially the FATA, as the U.S. demanded Pakistan’s support in apprehending the terrorists responsible for 9/11. In response to the attacks on 9/11, the U.S. invaded Afghanistan. As thousands of defeated Taliban and “al Qaeda fighters…[had] no choice but to retreat into Pakistan’s tribal areas,” the Pashtun tribes welcomed the Taliban and their AQ allies in accordance with Pashtunwali tenets of hospitality and sanctuary, not due to an inherent ideological link.  

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36 Gul, The Most Dangerous Place, 11.
inadvertently spread AQ and Taliban into the FATA and they began espousing Salafi-Jihad ideology, claiming only violent jihad could return Islam to its former glory.37

The Pakistani military began conducting operations along the border “in the autumn of 2001, trying to plug escape routes from the Tora Bora area…to Pakistan…and the Army HQ knew that extreme caution was required” when dealing with the local tribes.38 President Bush’s ultimatum to the world regarding support to terrorists led Pakistan President Musharraf to deploy troops into the FATA for the first time in Pakistan’s modern history. The local tribesmen continued to support their Pashtun Taliban brothers from Afghanistan as well as the foreign fighters but “abstained from fighting the Army, even though they voiced their anger out loud, criticizing a regime which they perceived of as having become the enemy’s ally.”39 By 2004, the tribes had become increasingly agitated by Army activities. On January 8, 2004, the Pakistani Army launched an offensive in South Waziristan to root out foreign militants tied to Tahir Yuldashev, an Uzbek commander who co-founded the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and maintained close ties to AQ and the Afghan Taliban. The first Pakistani Taliban leader, Nek Mohammad Wazir, emerged during this offensive. He was reportedly killed by the first Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) drone strike in June of 2004.40


39 Ibid.

The deployment of “Pakistani military personnel deep inside the Tribal Areas in pursuit of Taliban and AQ operations…ignited the tribal insurgency” that has become the TTP.\textsuperscript{41} Although the Pashtun tribes were already motivated to attack the Pakistani state due to military incursions into tribal Pakistan and the use of drone strikes in the FATA, the catalyst for TTP’s creation and public declaration was a Pakistani Army raid on Islamabad’s Lal Masjid in July 2007. During the eight-day siege, the Pakistani Army killed and injured several hundred people and arrested the leading clerics. The incident resulted in wide-spread condemnation of the Pakistani government as many of Lal Masjid’s students were Pashtuns whose families still lived in the tribal areas and AQ’s Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, then Osama bin Laden’s deputy, “used the occasion to declare jihad against Musharraf, calling for his murder”\textsuperscript{42}

On December 14, 2007, the TTP officially formed under the leadership of Baitullah Mehsud. At the time, at least 27 different groups in the FATA joined under the TTP umbrella. Under this new collective, the TTP announced its goals to enforce Sharia, unite against North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces in Afghanistan, perform defensive jihad against the Pakistan army, demand the release of the lead clerics from Lal Masjid, and refuse future peace deals with the Pakistani government.\textsuperscript{43} Their rhetoric of defensive jihad is relevant when classifying TTP as an insurgent group. TTP claims it

\textsuperscript{41} Franco, “The Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan,” 274.


\textsuperscript{43} Hassan Abbas, “A Profile of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan,” \textit{Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point CTC Sentinel} 1, no. 2 (January 2008): 1, \url{https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/a-profile-of-tehrik-i-taliban-pakistan} (accessed August 4, 2016).
must defend Pashtuns from aggressive actions by the Pakistani state that not only violate their tribal autonomy and honor, but also their religious freedom and the sanctity of Islam due to the Lal Masjid incident.

Since 2002, the Pakistani military has conducted seven major operations against the TTP.44 The State Department confirmed Pakistan’s duplicity in dealing with FTOs as recently as June 2016 since the military “did not take sufficient action to constrain the ability of the Taliban and the Haqqani Network (HQN) to threaten U.S. and Afghan interests in Afghanistan.”45 The TTP remains resilient as fighters move from one tribal agency into another or seek short-term sanctuary in Afghanistan with elements of these aforementioned groups. Since government forces have no plans to remain in the FATA, their short-term gains result in long-term instability. This chronology highlights how Pakistani state authorities, both political and military, helped “create the problems and opportunities to which religious actors…[were] compelled to respond.”46

V. Drones and Badal

Drone strikes in the War on Terror are divided into two camps. One is in support of direct military operations, such as in Iraq and Afghanistan, where the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) uses drones as “…both a weapon and surveillance tool and they proved particularly useful in identifying, locating and eliminating targets conducts strikes.”47


46 Toft, Philpott, and Shah, God’s Century, 26.

The second are CIA “hunter-killer” operations where drones are primarily used “in ‘search and destroy’ missions aimed at terrorism suspects and Taliban leadership in Pakistan.”48 The difference between these two categories is “…that while the military program operates exclusively in recognized combat zones, the CIA program flies drones over civilian areas as well.”49

The Bush Administration “developed the drone program when it belatedly became aware that [President] Pervez Musharraf was not fully engaged in the war against extremism.”50 Pakistan would allow the U.S. to continue drone strikes but “insisted that drones fly only in narrow parts of the tribal areas-ensuring that they would not venture where Islamabad did not want the Americans going: Pakistan’s nuclear facilities, and the mountain camps where Kashmiri militants were trained for attacks in India.”51 Drone strikes could “take place in the border region along the…FATA, none in Baluchistan or the Punjab,” which are considered the settled areas of Pakistan. 52 Additionally, when conducting a signature strike, the CIA “often goes after people whose identity it does not know but who appear to be behaving like militants in insurgent-controlled areas.”53

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Riedel, Deadly Embrace, 125.


52 Riedel, Deadly Embrace, 125.

duplicitous and ambivalent deal resulted in Islamabad’s increasing neglect to effectively govern within its borders. It also further fuels an “us versus them” construct as the U.S. government is viewed as working alongside the Pakistani government, dominated by Punjabis, to terrorize and kill the Pashtuns in the FATA.

In retaliation for Pakistani military operations and U.S. drone strikes, TTP has conducted numerous attacks against Pakistani officials both in the FATA and throughout settled Pakistan. The TTP was responsible for the 2007 assassination of Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and the September 2008 Marriott Hotel bombing in Islamabad.\(^{54}\) In August, 2009, a U.S. drone strike killed TTP leader Baitullah Mehsud.\(^{55}\) His cousin, Hakimullah Mehsud, assumed command of the TTP and in revenge for Baitullah’s death, Hakimullah planned the December 30, 2009 attack on an Afghan base that killed seven CIA officers.\(^{56}\) TTP claimed responsibility for the failed Times Square bombing in May, 2010 by Faisal Shahzad, who stated the bombing was in retaliation for U.S. drone strikes.\(^{57}\) A drone strike killed Hakimullah Mehsud in November 2013 and the group is currently under the leadership of Mullah Fazlullah, a TTP leader from Swat Valley.\(^{58}\)


\(^{58}\) Ibid.
The Pashtunwali tenet of badal continues to permeate TTP rhetoric, proving TTP attacks are “motivated not by the thoughts of Islamic virgins but the idea of tribal revenge.” The most gruesome attack against Pakistan’s military came on December 16, 2014 when the TTP killed nearly 150 people, mostly children, in an attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar as the TTP sought “revenge against the Pakistani military.” On July 9, 2016, a drone strike killed TTP leader Omar Mansoor, the mastermind of the public school attack. U.S. drone strikes coupled with brutal Pakistani incursions and collective punishment have increased the level of intractability as more Pashtuns and other Pakistanis seek revenge against both the U.S. and Pakistan.

This chapter detailed the political and military factors that lead to the creation and expansion of the Pakistani Taliban insurgency. Ambivalent U.S. and Pakistani policies contributed to an ungoverned tribal area that became a safe haven for insurgents and terrorists taking aim at the Pakistani government and the U.S. The next chapter will explore the political and military factors that lead to the creation and expansion of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

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59 Ahmad, *The Thistle and the Drone*, 90.


CHAPTER II
IRAQ

The Islamic State is the latest extremist threat in the Middle East and it may also be the most capable. Attracting recruits from all over the world, it espouses a much broader Islamist ideology than AQ by creating a physical Islamic community dictated by the group’s interpretation of Sharia law. This is perhaps the most important aspect of the Islamic State that makes it a stronger and different opponent than AQ. The fact that the Islamic State holds actual territory, in both Iraq and Syria, and provides social services to its adherents should be the focus of U.S. and Coalition efforts to defeat it. This pseudo-state “collects taxes, regulates prices, operates courts, and administers services ranging from healthcare and education to telecommunications.”\(^1\) This is the classic definition of an insurgency. For Muslims who believe they are treated as second or third class citizens, either in Western countries or even other Muslim-majority countries, the fact that they can physically move themselves and their families to a “utopian” Islamic state is extremely appealing.

Furthermore, the Islamic State’s message appeals to Islamic imagination, a return to a better time when Islam was at its zenith under the Caliphate. There is no denying that its rhetoric is deeply rooted in Quranic passages and it is easy to understand why the West would see the Islamic State as a religiously motivated terrorist organization. In the long term, the Islamic State believes it will win a cosmic battle for supremacy. Its

apocalyptic ideology, detailing a final battle between the infidels and the believers, gives hope to Muslims who welcome judgment day as an end of their supposed suffering and humiliation in the Westphalian order. These messages are powerful tools and are impossible to combat via military means. Additionally, the Islamic State has been able to exploit ethnic, sectarian, and tribal fractures to gain territory. However, some of its followers may have very little in common with the religious ideology of the leaders. The strength of the movement resides in its ability to morph messages to resonate with the masses, explaining the misery and suffering of the Sunni tribes as well as former Baathists (who espoused a secular ideology) at the hands of a corrupt and sinful Shi’a government. Others may join the cause for very personal reasons, such as a feeling of isolation, a need to belong, a lack of economic means, or contradicting views with their family or in-group over religion or politics. Furthermore, due to the multiple sects and tribes in Iraq and Syria, using religion to legitimize its efforts allows the Islamic State to bring together these disparate groups from varying backgrounds and languages into a larger “superculture.” The Islamic State’s messaging brilliantly focuses their followers on a religious struggle, or jihad, against the West in order to rise above often divisive ethnic, tribal, or socio-linguistic identities.

The Islamic State is a renaming of al Qaida in Iraq (AQI), which began as a local movement motivated to protect Sunnis from Iraqi government repression. Over time, it became a transnational group due to Baghdad’s failure to provide effective governance for all its citizens and was labeled a FTO in December 2004. As the Islamic State is fundamentally an insurgency aimed at replacing the Iraqi government and eventually

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2 Gopin, Beyond Eden and Armageddon, 54.
recreating the Islamic Caliphate, an understanding of the group requires an exploration of historical, political, cultural, and religious circumstances that illuminates its conflict with the Iraqi state. These factors must be addressed and understood as continued airstrikes will do little to stop the root causes of violence. Although airstrikes may be effective at producing a psychological blow to the Islamic State in the short term, they have ultimately had little effect on its ability to recruit and maintain territory. The Islamic State continues to exploit Iraq’s tribal and ethnic fracture due to ineffective governance, not solely religious identity. Until the Iraqi government begins to effectively govern and provides basic social services, the anti-Islamic State Coalition should be prepared to conduct airstrikes in perpetuity. Although this thesis will focus primarily focus on U.S. actions in Iraq due to the long history of U.S. involvement in the country’s political upheaval, it is impossible to understand the rapid rise of the Islamic State in Iraq without also addressing sectarian divide and political marginalization in Syria.

I. Politics

Similar to Pakistan, Iraq is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-sect country. Officially, Iraq is divided into eighteen governorates, or provinces, and contains one region, the Kurdistan Regional Government. In reality, Iraq is divided into three sections, each with a distinct ethnic or sectarian majority. The eastern portion of Iraq, sharing borders with Iran and Kuwait, is predominantly Arab and Shi’a. The Shi’a sect is the majority and is estimated to comprise 60-65 percent of Iraq’s population of 37 million people.\(^3\) The western portion of Iraq, sharing borders with Syria, Jordan, and Turkey, is

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predominantly Arab and Sunni. The Sunnis are the minority religious sect and comprise 32-37 percent of the population. The northern portion of Iraq, sharing borders with Turkey and Iran, is predominantly Kurdish. The Kurds are the minority ethnic group, representing roughly 15 percent of the population while Arabs represent roughly 80 percent.4

During Saddam Hussein’s presidency (1979-2003), the secular Arab nationalist Ba’ath party dominated the political and military landscape and actively repressed both the Shi’a and the Kurdish populations. A Sunni Arab himself, Saddam sought to ensure the Iranian revolution of 1979 did not embolden the Iraqi Shi’a majority to topple his regime.5 The Iran-Iraq War began in 1980 and lasted until 1988, followed by the Iraqi Army’s incursion into Kuwait in 1990 as a play for hegemony in the region. A U.S.-led coalition liberated Kuwait in 1991 and demanded oversight of Iraq’s nuclear weapons capability.

In 2003, over 250,000 U.S. troops invaded Iraq to oust Saddam Hussein and eliminate the suspected Weapons of Mass Destruction program.6 The interim government was announced in 2004 and was dominated by factions and political parties historically aligned against Saddam. As a result, the Sunnis largely boycotted the 2005 parliamentary elections and protested the passing of the constitution that same year. With the 2005 Constitution, the Arab Sunnis suffered the most due to the sectarianism that

4 Ibid.


6 Ibid., 2.
followed as the “United States ‘reduce[ed] the Iraqi State to a collection of Shi’as, Sunnis, Kurds, and other minorities…””\(^7\) For all his faults, Saddam was an equal opportunity discriminator and crushed any opponent to his secular nationalism, no matter what their religious sect or ethnicity.

In 2006, Nuri al-Maliki, a Shi’a from the Da’wa Party, become the Prime Minister. The elections did little to resolve the Sunni grievances since they were now on the periphery of the political process and power structures. For example, the U.S.-led De-baathification Commission worked to purposely keep former Baathists from joining the new government.\(^8\) The U.S. construct of “us versus them” pitted Iraq’s non-Baathists against the Baathists, most of them Sunni, and laid the groundwork for the political marginalization of the minority religious sect in Iraq, many of whom saw the insurgency as their only way to influence politics in the country. The U.S. attempted to create a more inclusive government beginning in 2007 but once U.S. forces departed Iraq in 2011, the Maliki government became more repressive and exclusive to the detriment of non-Shi’as. Iraq’s sectarian and ethnic divisions, largely muted during the U.S. military intervention, resurfaced and contributed to Iraq’s instability as Sunnis resentful of the Shi’a dominated Maliki government assisted and contributed to the Islamic State’s capture of almost one-third of the country’s territory in 2014.\(^9\) In August 2014, Maliki


\(^9\) Ibid., 1.
be grudgingly stepped down as prime minister after world leaders called for his resignation. He was succeeded in September, 2014 by a fellow Shi’a and Da’wa Party member, Haider al-Abadi, who continues to struggle forming a more inclusive government with Sunni and Kurdish support.10

II. Iraqi Tribal Culture

Iraq’s tribes are segmented like the Pashtun tribes but appear to be more hierarchical due to their sedentary nature in an urban environment. Unlike the tribes in Pakistan, which are considered outside of the government structure, the tribes of Iraq live in mostly urban areas and have developed a client-patron relationship with the central government. There are approximately 150 tribes in Iraq with over 2,000 smaller clans, or segments, and estimates are that over 75 percent of Iraqis claim tribal membership.11 Many of the tribes pre-date Islam, and tribal identity historically superseded religious identity. For example, several of the Iraqi tribes, such as the Shammar and the Jiburi, have members who identify as Sunni while others identify as Shi’a.12 Additionally, it is this tribal identity that allows insurgencies in the region to cut across Westphalian borders. Many of the major tribes centered in Iraq have branches extending throughout the Middle East in countries such as Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen, Jordan and even Turkey.


12 Ibid., 2.
The tribes were initially relegated to the background during Saddam’s tenure as tribalism contradicted his desire for Arab nationalism. However, Saddam needed the Sunni tribes to fight against Iran during the 1980s and tribal sheikhs (leaders) were granted large swaths of land, complete with roads, water, and electricity, in exchange for mobilizing their tribes for war.\textsuperscript{13} Similarly, the U.S. focused on supporting Sunni tribes who wanted to fight the Sunni AQI as it became increasingly repressive towards fellow Sunnis who did not support their brutal tactics, culminating in the “Sunni Tribal Awakening” in Anbar Province. These tribes were instrumental in defeating AQI with U.S. financial and military support. Sadly, once the U.S. departed, these tribes became the prime target of AQI’s remnants. The tribes were also politically targeted for marginalization by the Maliki government.

Similar to Pashtunwali, the Iraqi tribal code is concerned with the primacy of maintaining family honor and reputation. Some of the better-known aspects include “the tradition of blood feuds (\textit{al-tha’r}), protecting family honor (\textit{\textquotesingle{}ird\textquotesingle{}}), and exhibiting one’s masculinity and valor in fighting (\textit{al-mirowa}).”\textsuperscript{14} Blood feuds are most pronounced among a tribe’s smallest element, the extended family (\textit{kham}). A kham consists of every male child born through the lineage of the same great-grandfather, resulting in a kinship line through five generations. The kham remains the most important level of identification because the tribal code demands that if one member of a kham is killed, the

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 3.

remaining males are obligated to avenge the death of their kham member. Much like the Pashtuns, Iraqis are honor-bound to avenge the death of their kin at the hands of either the repressive government or as a result of U.S. or Coalition airstrikes, creating a large pool of recruits for ISIS. Also, since the tribes cut across modern borders, the death of a kham member in one country can result in the mobilization of kham members from across multiple neighboring countries throughout the Middle East in order to exact their revenge.

III. History of the Islamic State

The Islamic State has its roots in AQI’s struggle against the U.S. invasion of Iraq in March 2003 to depose Saddam Hussain’s Baathist government. The Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the founder of AQI, spent time in Afghanistan and Pakistan during the anti-Soviet jihad, met Osama bin Laden, and adopted his Salafist ideology. After the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, Zarqawi fled to Iraq and created AQI in 2003. Although President Bush declared the combat mission in Iraq was accomplished on May 1, 2003, the CIA reported a rising insurgency by August with Zarqawi emerging as a successful insurgent leader by December. Zarqawi was considered an extremist, even by AQ’s standards, as he viciously and indiscriminately targeted both Sunni and Shi’a tribesmen who he labeled as apostates for supporting either the U.S. or the Iraqi government. Zarqawi was disavowed in 2005 by Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, the current

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head of AQ who was then bin Laden’s deputy, as Zarqawi’s brutal beheadings, “his mass slaughter of Shiites, and his assaults on their mosques were all having a negative effect on Muslim opinion—both of him and, by extension, of al-Qaeda—around the world.”

Zarqawi was killed in Iraq in a U.S. airstrike in June 2006, and his successors renamed the organization The Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). Once the U.S. surged its military forces in 2007, Sunni tribesmen fought against ISI in the previously discussed Tribal Awakening and by 2010, ISI had lost two additional leaders and was all but defeated when the U.S. withdrew in 2011. Under the leadership of an ultraconservative Sunni scholar, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the group strengthened its position from 2010 onwards and was conducting deadly attacks in both Iraq and Syria by 2013.

Similar to the political marginalization faced by the Sunnis under the Shi’a regime in Iraq, the Sunnis in Syria have suffered a similar fate. Syria is also a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-sect country. The population of approximately 17 million is divided into 74 percent Sunni Muslim, 13 percent Alawi, Ismaili, and Shi’a, and 10 percent Christian. The Kurds, Armenians, and others are the minority ethnic groups, representing 9.7 percent of the population while Arabs represent 90.3 percent of the population. Since 2011, Syria has experienced a sectarian civil war between Sunni rebel forces and the government of President Bashar al-Assad from the minority Shi’a

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Alawite sect. ISI was able to gain prominence by supporting Sunni rebel forces and gaining large swathes of territory in northern and eastern Syria.\textsuperscript{21}

In June 2014, the organization once again changed its name to the Islamic State and was officially declared under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Similar to Punjabi-led politics in Pakistan that disenfranchise the Pashtuns, Shi’a-led politics in Iraq disenfranchise both the tribal Sunnis and the secular Baathists. It is not a coincidence that the Islamic State’s military effectiveness is in large part due its ability to woo disenfranchised Sunni tribes and former Baathists, the two groups most marginalized by a Shi’a-dominated central government.\textsuperscript{22} Similar to Pakistan, a U.S.-backed “us versus them” construct of Shi’a versus Baathists (and by extension, many Sunnis who worked for Saddam) contributed to the deteriorating conditions that would allow insurgents and terrorists to thrive.

It is the inclusion of former Baathists that is most intriguing as it calls into question the centrality of religious ideology as the main motivator for the Islamic State and illuminates the secular, political dimension of the Islamic State. The Islamic State’s ranks are filled with former officials from Saddam Hussein’s Ba’ath Party who act as military advisors supporting the Islamic State’s military campaign against the U.S. and its Western allies. Samir Abd Muhammad al-Khifawi, known also as Haji Bakr, was the architect for the Islamic State’s current structure and served as an intelligence colonel in


Saddam Hussein’s Air Defense Force. As a Baathist, he was marginalized once the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003 and spent time in U.S. prisons in Iraq from 2006 to 2008. Upon his release, he began planning his revenge against both the U.S. and the Iraqi Shi’a government. Due to his training and expertise, his blueprint for taking over Iraq focused initially on creating a base of operations in Syria, where the civil war would allow freedom of movement and cross-border support while also gathering intelligence and information throughout Iraq’s villages all the way up through the highest levels of government.23 Haji Bakr used spies, infiltration, kidnapping, blackmail, and assassinations to ensure the “…elimination of every person who might have been a potential leader or opponent” and by 2010, Haji Bakr sought out the increasingly successful al-Baghdadi hoping the educated religious scholar could provide a religious face for the movement.24 There is no denying there are religious dimensions to the ideology and success of the Islamic State. However, the story of Haji Bakr and other Baathists providing the Islamic State with a formal and detailed physical structure makes the organization different from other radical Islamist groups such as AQ, which encouraged a centralized command and control structure for the core leadership but a highly decentralized and global reach across the world. AQ provided the inspiration for global jihadists to conduct attacks and fight, just as the Islamic State does, but it did not promulgate a blueprint for actually governing and providing governance in accordance with Sharia. By contrast, the Islamic State has been able to provide social services,

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24 Ibid.
attracting recruits and their families, because of marginalized former Baathists creating a governance blueprint complete with specific, individual government and military positions. The Islamic State could be described as a brick and mortar version of AQ, able to physically do what AQ sought to achieve – creating an Islamic State governed by Sharia law.

IV. The Islam of the Islamic State

Since the radical group discussed in this chapter calls itself the Islamic State, it is important to understand the multiple religious dimensions involved in fueling the current conflict in Iraq. As previously detailed in the political section, Iraq politics and religion are intertwined as the Sunnis and Baathists were marginalized by the Shiite Maliki government. Syria’s stability is marred by sectarian conflict between the minority Alawite regime and the marginalized Sunni population. Additionally, there are multiple interpretations of Islam discussed and practiced in the region. Therefore, an exploration of the Islamic State’s brand of Islam and how it reinterprets Quranic Scripture will shed light on why its cancerous ideology has been able to metastasize across the region.

Similar to AQ, the Islamic State espouses a radical version of Quranic scripture. The Qur’an is considered by Muslims to be the literal word of God but is only considered scripture when read in Arabic. This leaves the Qur’an open to various interpretations, based more on a word-of-mouth understanding rather than scholarly analysis. Islamic scholars spend years learning classical Arabic and studying historical documents to better understand and interpret the Qur’an’s teaching. In Islam’s early history, differences in

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scriptural interpretation led to the various schools of Islamic jurisprudence in the Sunni and Shi’a sects. Unfortunately, the majority of Muslims today do not speak or read classical Arabic, resorting to rote memorization of the Qur’an under the tutelage of a family member or local clergy. Thus, the student’s understanding of the Qur’an is only as good as his or her tutor. Further adding confusion, the Qur’an is presented from longest to shortest chapter, often contradicting itself, abrogating previous revelations, and devoid of historical context.26 Several violent chapters of the Qur’an were revealed during intense inter-tribal and inter-faith feuds. Islamic extremists such as The Taliban, AQ, and the Islamic State often cite these verses to incite and justify violence against Christians and Jews, usually truncating them to change their meaning and separating them from their historical context. Perhaps the most famous verse is “The Sword” in which Prophet Mohammad was encouraged to engage in armed struggle in defense of his freedom and rights.27

Furthermore, jihad is a term from the Qur’an that is perhaps one of the most misunderstood concepts by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. To the majority of Muslims, jihad simply means to struggle or to strive. In the Qur’an, many of the verses describing jihad commanded Muslims to struggle in the path of Allah and attain knowledge of Allah’s word.28 Some Muslims interpret jihad as the use of force in a holy

26 Ibid., 4-5.
27 Ibid., 130.
war, even though the Qur’an expressly prohibits compulsion in religion, especially through violence.  

The Islamic State’s religious ideology is heavily influenced by the writings and teachings of medieval Syrian Sunni Islamic scholar Taqi al-Din ibn Tammiyah, who lived from 1263 to 1328 during the Mongol invasions of the Muslim world, and is one of the most influential scholars of Salafism. This reformist movement espouses the supremacy of the Prophet Mohammad and the first three generations (Salaf al-Salih) of Muslims as the pinnacle of Islamic society while claiming any innovations after this period, to include Shiism, are heretical and must be purged from Islam.

Ibn Tammiyah’s teaching heavily influenced Mohammad ibn al-Wahhab, the Sunni Islamic scholar mentioned in the previous chapter who gave rise to Saudi Arabia’s Wahhabism, the strain of Salafism imported into Afghanistan and Pakistan during the anti-Soviet jihad. Both ibn Tammiyah and al-Wahhab’s teachings influenced the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood’s most famous and prominent theorists on Islamism, Sayyid Qutb. Qutb worked for the Egyptian Ministry of Public Instruction and in 1948, he was sent to the U.S. to study the American system of education.

Qutb arrived in New York City in November 1948. In the winter of 1949, Qutb traveled to Washington, D.C. and enrolled at the Wilson Teacher’s College, now one of several schools that merged to form the University of the District of Columbia in 1976.

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29 Ibid., 196.


After a term of learning about and critiquing the College, Qutb moved to Greeley, Colorado north of Denver and enrolled at the Colorado State College of Education for six months. Over time, he became highly critical of Americans, stating the people of Greeley “carried within themselves the same more of flaws of materialism and degeneracy” that Qutb had come to condemn during his stays in New York and D.C.  

Qutb’s harsh critiques were also informed by his experience of discrimination. He and a fellow Egyptian student were denied admission into one of Greeley’s theaters when the ticket attendant mistakenly identified them as African-Americans. Once the other students identified them as Arabs, the attendant apologized and allowed them entry. Qutb was unwilling to accept the apology, viewing racism as just one manifestation of exclusivity in American society, and he “departed the scene angry and indignant.”

Qutb returned to Cairo in 1950 with a negative view of the West. His attitude meshed well with that of the Muslim Brotherhood and he officially joined the group in 1952, becoming the editor of the group’s flagship journal titled *Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin* (Muslim Brotherhood). He was imprisoned in 1954 after the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization deeply opposed to Western influence across the Muslim world, was found responsible for the attempted assassination of Egyptian President Nasser, a nationalist leader who curtailed the prominent role of religion in Egypt and sought close ties to the West. Qutb’s most famous book, *Milestones*, was published in 1964 and was intended to

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33 Ibid., 148.

be a “practical handbook for overthrowing the government and establishing an Islamic state and society.”

The book was designed to help the reader distinguish between truly Islamic societies in *Dar al-Islam* (Abode of Islam) and those living in secular ignorance in *Dar al-Harb* (Abode of War), calling for Muslims to wage jihad against the infidel West as well as their own apostate governments. This interpretation has greatly influenced global jihadists movements, chief among them AQ and the Islamic State, and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi himself joined the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1990s.

The violent Salafi ideology of the Islamic State explains its reliance on Quranic Scripture and the sayings and teachings of the Prophet Mohammad, known as *hadiths*. Al-Baghdadi has a PhD in Quranic studies and has supposedly been able to trace his lineage to the Prophet Mohammad himself, providing him a religious legitimacy that even Osama bin Laden could not claim. As Salafism is primarily concerned with a literalist interpretation of the Qur’an and hadiths, both the Qur’an and the multiple volumes of hadiths provide a plethora of passages for al-Baghdadi and other religious scholars from the Islamic State to use to their advantage when justifying the group’s expansion and brutality. It also allows them to create an apocalyptic vision, an epic battle between the non-believers and believers, by using Scripture to defend the need for an Islamic State governed by a Caliph to exist before the *Mahdi*, the rightly-guided savior of Islam, could return and bring justice to the Muslim world.

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35 Toth, *Sayyid Qutb*, 84.
37 Ibid., 146.
38 Ibid., 22.
world who feel oppressed at the hands of the U.S., its Western allies, or even their own
governments, this is a powerful recruiting message rooted in unity and hope.

V. The Arrogance of Airstrikes

The U.S. began conducting airstrikes against the Islamic State in Iraq in August
2014 and President Obama insisted the military actions “did not amount to a full-scale re-
engagement in Iraq.” Since Obama ran on a platform to end the wars in Iraq and
Afghanistan, his authorization to use airstrikes was the minimal use of U.S. military
assets in an attempt to contain the Islamic State. Furthermore, Obama sought to reaffirm
his commitment to the American people during his presidential campaign to disengage
from Iraq. Although the Pentagon deployed 1,600 advisors and other troops to assist
Iraqi government and Kurdish forces combatting the Islamic State, “…air power has been
the crux of the U.S. military involvement in the region” since the U.S. began conducting
airstrikes in Syria in September 2014, directly involving the U.S. military in the Syrian
civil war that began in 2011. By December 2014, the DoD boasted that in addition to
the U.S., Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, the Netherlands and the United
Kingdom had joined the list of countries conducting airstrikes in Iraq while Bahrain,
Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates had joined the list of countries

39 Helene Cooper, Mark Lander, and Alissa J. Rubin, “Obama Allows Limited Airstrikes on ISIS,”

40 Craig Whitlock, “U.S. Begins Airstrikes Against Islamic State in Syria,” The Washington Post,
islamic-state-in-syria/2014/09/22/8b677e26-42b3-11e4-b437-1a7368204804_story.html (accessed August
25, 2016).
conducting airstrikes in Syria. In October 2015, President Obama finally authorized “several dozen” special operations personnel into Syria but made it clear these forces would not play a direct combat role, acting only in an advisory capacity to local military forces combatting the Islamic State. Similar to Iraq, airstrikes would remain the main focus of U.S. military engagement to ensure the Obama presidency was viewed as upholding its claims to keep U.S. troops out of harm’s way.

By June 2015, multiple military commanders were remarking at the effectiveness of the airstrikes, citing that approximately 13,000 enemy combatants had been removed from the battlefield since the airstrikes began in the September and October 2014 timeframe. Yet these strikes are unable to contain the Islamic State. On November 13, 2015, extremists tied to the Islamic State conducted a gruesome attack in Paris on the same day the DoD released a statement tallying the number of Islamic State targets destroyed at 16,075 since the air campaign began on August 8, 2014. There seems to be little correlation between the military victories through bombing and the curbing of terrorism by the Islamic State. Islamic State operatives are responsible for countless

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attacks across the Muslim world and the group’s ideology has inspired numerous attacks against the U.S. and the West. As of May 2016, the Islamic State’s branches in Afghanistan and Pakistan (known as the Islamic State Khorasan Province, an ancient name for the region), Yemen, Saudi Arabia, West Africa, Libya, Egypt, Algeria, and the Caucasus have caused casualties and deaths in their respective areas while actively seeking to attack U.S. interests, resulting in their designation as FTOs by the U.S. State Department.45

The U.S. strategy to counter the Islamic State has met with criticism as the group has not been contained to either Iraq or Syria and continues to successfully plan, execute, and inspire attacks globally. The next chapter will assess the merits of coalition bomber airstrikes against the Islamic State as well as U.S. drone strikes against the Pakistani Taliban by analyzing each tool’s impact on the local population and how military actions have either positively or negatively impacted the viability and strength of the group.

The previous chapters detailed the multiple “us versus them” constructs in Pakistan and Iraq. The internal division in Pakistan is between settled Islamabad and unsettled tribal areas. The internal division in Iraq is between former Baathists, mostly Sunni, and the Shi’a dominated government. Additionally, the U.S.’s increased reliance on technology as a means to counter terrorism has contributed to an “us versus them” construct between the West and Islam. Due to ongoing public debate in the international media over U.S. methods to counter terrorism, this chapter will analyze the effects of the U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan and U.S.-led bombings in Iraq. Although this thesis posits these actions are insufficient since they do not address the root political causes of the conflicts, it is important to analyze the arguments both for and against their use before offering recommendations rooted in current realities.

I. PAKISTAN

Since 9/11, the U.S. has increasingly relied on technology to counter terrorism. Drones have become the weapon of choice in remote, inaccessible areas or when the host government is either unwilling or unable to confront terrorists in their borders. Unfortunately, Pakistan meets both criteria. During the 2000-2008 Bush Administrations, a total of 48 strikes were conducted in Pakistan. President Obama’s tenure has seen a total of 355 strikes.\(^1\) The increase in drone strikes has led both advocates and opponents to characterize them as the centerpiece of U.S. counterterrorism strategy.

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Advocates claim drones eliminate the terrorist threat with little cost to the U.S., both financially and in lives of military personnel.\textsuperscript{2} Although it is impossible to determine the effects of drone strikes with absolute confidence, advocates claim drones are armed with precision-guided weapons able to conduct “…extraordinarily accurate missile attacks…” resulting in the death of almost two thousand Taliban, AQ, and other extremists.\textsuperscript{3} The precision of drone strikes reduces collateral destruction and causes less damage than unpredictable and destabilizing ground campaigns. Furthermore, militants are forced to refrain from congregating in large numbers, thereby negatively impacting their ability to plan attacks against the U.S.\textsuperscript{4}

Yet, if drones are so effective at killing thousands of terrorists, why are Pakistan and Afghanistan still plagued by violence? Why do Pakistani citizens protest the use of drones, and why do Pakistani government officials publicly maintain drone strikes breach their national sovereignty and result in civilian casualties? Why does the international community condemn the U.S. for its reliance on drone strikes? Ultimately, the answer is drone strikes further the “us versus them” construct between the U.S. and Muslims affected by the strikes as well as the construct between Islamabad and the tribal areas. Furthermore, there is a gross lack of accountability and transparency in an illegal policy


of assassinations, often labeled by U.S. officials as “targeted killings.” The U.S. government uses this term because it has no legal basis in international law while the term “assassination” is prohibited in both international and domestic law.\(^5\) Perhaps the most negative effect of drone strikes is how they affect Pakistani perceptions of the U.S. A Gallup Pakistan poll in August 2014 found only 21 percent of Pakistanis supporting U.S. drone strikes as a means to defend Pakistan, 67 percent of responders agreed drone strikes kill too many innocent civilians, and only 14 percent reported a favorable view of the U.S.\(^6\)

A. The Legal Argument

First and foremost, the U.S. has the right to defend its sovereignty and protect its citizens from terrorism. After the attacks on 9/11, the U.S. Congress passed the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) Act allowing the DoD to use military force against suspected terrorists.\(^7\) As the AUMF is equivalent to a declaration of force, the U.S. views itself at “war” with terrorism and can justify its use of drones. Within the internal context, the U.S. cites Article 51 of the U.N. Charter, which stipulates that no country will be denied “…individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs

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against a Member of the United Nations.\textsuperscript{8} Additionally, the U.S. relies heavily on drone strikes since Pakistan has not proven effective at countering extremists within its borders. In 2013, the U.S. State Department acknowledged that the Pakistani military conducted operations against the Pakistani Taliban because the group threatens Pakistan, but that the Pakistani military did not take action against groups focused on causing instability in Afghanistan or India such as the aforementioned Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Afghan Taliban, and Haqqani Network.\textsuperscript{9} The U.S. Special Operations Forces operation to capture Osama bin Laden in May 2011 met with “…outcries from Pakistani officials concerned about violations of the country’s sovereignty” while privately, many Pakistani officials remain supportive of the U.S. drone program and have continued their support despite occasional public protests.”\textsuperscript{10} Since Pakistan does not effectively counter extremism nor provide effective governance, it can be argued the U.S. must conduct drone strikes to neutralize the terrorist threat.

However, critics of the U.S. drone program claim the strikes are illegal since those conducted by the CIA receive limited government oversight, do not comply with international laws, and are perceived as violating sovereign territory. As recently as May 2016, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif openly condemned the first drone strike.


ever outside of the eastern border area between Afghanistan and Pakistan targeting Afghan Taliban commander Mullah Akhtar Mansour in Baluchistan Province.\textsuperscript{11} Article 2(4) of the U.N. Charter states that all members will refrain from the “threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state”\textsuperscript{12} In 2013, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism stated the U.S. drone campaign was a violation of Pakistan’s sovereignty since it is conducted without the consent of elected officials.\textsuperscript{13} Since both the U.S. and Pakistan are members of the U.N., critics argue the U.S. use of drone strikes does not adhere to international law if Pakistani officials such as the prime minister do not provide express public consent.

Although President Gerald Ford outlawed assassinations in 1976, President Reagan’s December 5, 1981 Executive Order 12333 Section 2.11 titled “Prohibition on Assassinations” remains in effect today and has been reaffirmed by every subsequent U.S president.\textsuperscript{14} The term “assassination” is not defined in the executive order and has been reinterpreted by legal advisors to allow for drone strikes. Harold Koh, the State Department Legal Advisor from 2009 to 2013, stated in 2010 that although some critics argue drone strikes are tantamount to assassination, “…precision targeting of specific

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\end{itemize}
high-level belligerent leaders when acting in self-defense or during an armed conflict is not unlawful, and hence does not constitute ‘assassination.’”

Additionally, U.S. drone strikes have met with domestic and international criticism from human rights organizations. In January 2010, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request with the DoD, the Department of Justice (DoJ), the Department of State (DoS), and the CIA asking the “…government to disclose the legal and factual basis for its use of predator drones to conduct ‘targeted killings’ overseas.” The DoD, DoJ, and DoS responded by releasing some records and withholding others while the CIA refused to confirm the existence of the program. The ACLU filed a civil suit against the CIA three months later and has spent the last six years in court.

Reprieve, a U.K.-based human rights charity, and Foundation for Fundamental Rights, a Pakistan-based human rights organization, filed a joint complaint in 2014 with the International Criminal Court (ICC) accusing NATO member countries of war crimes when they share intelligence with the U.S. to facilitate its drone strikes. The complaint also noted that since the “US has immunised itself from legal accountability over drone strikes…,” the ICC should use its power to hold states accountable in an effort to provide justice to the victims of drone strikes.


17 “Complaint filed at International Criminal Court over NATO allies’ complicity in US drone strikes,” Reprieve, February 19, 2014,
B. The Moral Argument

Drone warfare is virtual warfare, akin to playing a video game, because there is physical distance between the drone operator and the combat zone. Therefore, critics argue the drone operator is unable to discriminate between combatants and noncombatants and call for the use of ground troops, even though there is a greater risk of friendly casualties.\(^\text{18}\) CIA signature strikes target high-level militant leaders, but these enemy targets are “rarely alone or only in the company of fellow insurgents. Typically, they are in the company of family and friends and do not present unambiguous military targets.”\(^\text{19}\) The individuals whose identities are unknown may have no connection to terrorism activity whatsoever but are summarily executed due to guilt by association and physical proximity.

Although it is impossible to determine the effects of drone strikes with absolute confidence, drone critics often cite two sources: Washington, D.C.-based independent think tank New America Foundation and London-based Bureau of Investigative Journalism. The New America Foundation claims that the 403 CIA drone strikes in Pakistan resulted in between 2,281 and 3,672 deaths, of which between 255 and 315 were civilians.\(^\text{20}\) The Bureau of Investigative Journalism claims higher numbers in each category, claiming that 424 CIA drone strikes in Pakistan resulted in between 2,499 and

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\(^{19}\) Ibid., 172.

4,001 deaths, of which between 424 and 966 were civilian casualties to include between 172 and 207 children.\textsuperscript{21} The Bureau also estimated in 2014 that “…three-fifths (61\%) of all drone strikes in Pakistan targeted domestic buildings, with at least 132 houses destroyed.”\textsuperscript{22} Although one civilian death is abhorrent, these numbers are appalling. The loss of innocent life and damage to property does little to contribute to overall U.S. victory against terrorism or Pakistan’s stability since strikes contribute to a growing pool of recruits who are honor-bound to avenge the death of family members due to tribal codes. Rather than bringing an end to extremism and terrorism, drone strikes serve as a powerful propaganda tool for extremists who claim the U.S. is at war with Islam.

Another negative consequence of unmanned drones is that they reduce political inhibitions against violence. In a sense, drone strikes may make killing easier and U.S. “…military leaders will bypass nonlethal alternatives, such as apprehending alleged terrorists…” and move straight to illegal assassinations.\textsuperscript{23} Apprehension is an alternative, as Pakistan has a functioning military and police/judicial system.

C. Realities and Recommendations

As NATO continues to decrease its troop numbers and intelligence gathering assets in Afghanistan, the U.S. will likely increase its reliance on drone strikes to combat


the FTOs operating in Pakistan. According to a Pew Research Center poll conducted in May 2015, 58 percent of Americans surveyed approved of U.S. drone strikes to target extremists.\(^{24}\)

Nonetheless, the U.S. cannot expect or demand other countries to comply with international law when it continues to disregard it. Currently, only the U.S., the U.K., Israel, Pakistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Iran, and Turkey have used armed drones in combat.\(^ {25}\) However, the list of countries with drone technology continues to grow and the U.N. expressed concerns in 2014 that drone technology could be abused in the future, especially due to rapid proliferation.\(^ {26}\) It is not a question of whether other countries will use their drones offensively, but questions of when and how.

As the world’s strongest and most advanced military, the U.S. must hold itself accountable to international norms if it hopes to hold other country’s accountable as well. Based on these realities, the first recommendation to the U.S. is to transition the drone program from the CIA to the DoD. As the U.S. claims it is at war with terrorism and is authorized to use military force per the AUMF, the U.S. drone program should be as transparent as any other military program. This will allow for greater accountability and


information sharing. The U.S. drone program should be placed under a unified military command and control structure so strikes adhere to military rules of engagement and the chain of command can be held accountable for any violations. Every time the CIA conducts a strike, the U.S. cedes the strategic communications space to other countries’ governments and militaries, as well as insurgents and global terrorists, who claim unsubstantiated numbers of civilian casualties and damage to infrastructure. It may be impossible to provide transparency to the masses, both in the U.S. and Pakistan, but this is an important first step for the U.S. government. DoD oversight would also allow the U.S. to provide solatia and condolence payments to Pakistani citizens whose family members die as a result of drone strikes or whose property is damaged.

Additionally, a recommendation for Pakistan is to cease its treatment of the tribal areas as “unsettled” Pakistan. The state must provide permanent protection for its tribal residents caught between violent extremists living among them and military forces who occasionally conduct large-scale operations but return to their garrisons. Pakistan’s tribal areas do not need more military presence. They need law enforcement capabilities to make arrests and provide rule of law. The Pakistani government claims the War on Terror has claimed the lives of over 50,000 civilians and security personnel while costing the country more than $78 billion.27 Pakistan’s losses are in vain if the military only clears territory in the short-term but does not hold that territory and build government capabilities to protect its citizens from violent extremists. Although CIA drone strikes kill militants waging a war against the Pakistani state, the ability of these groups to

regenerate rapidly is astounding. For a long-term solution to the terrorist problem plaguing both Pakistan and the U.S., suspected terrorists should be arrested and interrogated to glean information and intelligence about their organization and operations rather than summarily executed. Effective governance, not military action or drone strikes, is the long-term solution to stopping the cycle of violence in the “most dangerous place in the world.”

Finally, the U.S, Afghanistan, and Pakistan are unable to agree on a common threat picture. The border between Afghanistan and Pakistan remains porous. Over the last 15 years, the U.S. has conducted numerous military operations in Afghanistan but insurgents have easily moved into Pakistan beyond the reach of ground forces. When Pakistani Taliban are pressured in the tribal areas, they either move into remote areas of Afghanistan or into settled Pakistan, blending into the population in major cities. A continuation of U.S. drone strikes results in an increased ambivalence towards finding a political solution. Perhaps the greatest danger to peace in the region is that while the U.S. measures success in the number of enemy targets destroyed or enemy combatants killed, there is a little hope for designing a strategy that involves reconciliation and sustainable stability.

II. Iraq

Similar to Pakistan, Iraq poses a complex environment plagued by political ineffectiveness and marginalization. It is critical that the Iraqi government regain control of territory lost to the Islamic State and provide effective governance. If not, the

ungoverned areas of Iraq or areas controlled by the Islamic State could continue to have negative international repercussions as its territory may become “…a base for terrorism, arms supply, or sectarian agitation against neighbors.”

This is precisely the situation in Iraq and Syria, where a porous border between the two countries allows for sanctuary and safe haven of armed militants capitalizing on the disenfranchisement and marginalization of minority groups in the region.

However, the U.S. strategy to counter the Islamic State, labeled Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR), is measured through damage inflicted by bomber airstrikes rather than inclusive government and effective governance. The DoD continues to boast the devastation airstrikes cause in Iraq and Syria on the OIR webpage. As of November 2, 2016, the U.S.-led Coalition has conducted 15,925 total strikes destroying 31,900 targets. Furthermore, the DoD claims the airstrikes have resulted in the Islamic State losing 45 percent of its formerly held territory in Iraq and 20 percent of its formerly held territory in Syria. Yet, if airstrikes are so effective at killing or displacing thousands of Islamic State fighters, why are Iraq and Syria still plagued by violence? Where have multiple attacks against the West been attributed to the Islamic State? Why have several extremist groups on disparate continents pledged their allegiance to al-Baghdadi and asked to join the Islamic State? Ultimately, the answer is that airstrikes cannot contain...


the Islamic State’s ideology, much less address the root causes of ineffective governance and political marginalization. U.S Secretary of State John Kerry accurately stated in June 2014, two months before the airstrikes began in Iraq, that it was irresponsible to launch airstrikes because “…there’s no government, there’s no backup, there’s no military, there’s nothing there that provides the capacity for success.”

Additionally, airstrikes are a boon to the Islamic State’s messaging and recruitment. Nicholas Henin, a journalist held hostage by the Islamic State for ten months, posits that airstrikes fuel the Islamic State’s rhetoric and are providing the group with new recruits. Numerous reports of civilian casualties due to airstrikes provide the Islamic State with the propaganda they need to justify their “us versus them” construct against the West.

A. The Legal Argument

As compared to drone strikes used anywhere in the world, there is significantly less controversy over U.S. airstrikes in Iraq because they are not shrouded in secrecy. The U.S. has a long history of using airstrikes to shock and awe our enemies and the legal justifications for conducting airstrikes are similar to those used to justify drone strikes in Pakistan. The U.S. government cites both the 9/11 AUMF and Article 51 of the U.N. Charter, allowing for member nations to respond in self-defense to an armed attack. The justification stems from Syria’s unwillingness to confront the Islamic State while Iraq


does not have the military capacity to confront the group without support.\(^{34}\) Since Iraqi Security Forces are asking for support through airstrikes, it can be argued the U.S. is acting in collective self-defense and should continue supporting Iraq in its fight against the Islamic State to neutralize the terrorist threat to both countries.

However, critics of the U.S.-led airstrike campaign in Syria claim the strikes do not comply with international law. They cite Article 2(4) of the U.N. Charter prohibiting the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity of a state. Therefore, critics claim airstrikes against Syria would require express consent by the Syrian government or U.N. Security Council approval through a resolution.\(^{35}\) Ironically, U.S. airstrikes in response to Iraqi government requests set a dangerous precedent as Russia used this to its advantage to justify conducting airstrikes in Syria. Russia contends its airstrikes, conducted under the guise of targeting the Islamic State, were requested by the Syrian government.\(^{36}\) In reality, these airstrikes have mostly targeted rebel opposition groups fighting the Assad regime.\(^{37}\)

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\(^{36}\) Nick Robins-Early, “Russia Says Its Airstrikes In Syria Are Perfectly Legal. Are They?,” \textit{Huffington Post}, October 1, 2015, \url{http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/russia-airstrikes-syria-international-law_us_560d6448e4b0dd85030b0c08} (accessed September 15, 2016).

**B. The Moral Argument**

Although it is impossible to determine the effects of airstrikes with absolute confidence due to the difficulty in accessing war-torn areas in both Iraq and Syria, the oft-cited Airwars is a journalist-led transparency organization based out of the U.K that tracks the number of Coalition airstrikes and civilian casualty reports. Airwars claims the 15,228 strikes in Iraq and Syria, slightly higher than the DoD number of 15,134, have caused a minimum of 1,608 civilian deaths.\(^{38}\) The U.S. government has publicly admitted to only 55 deaths due to OIR airstrikes.\(^{39}\) This is almost impossible considering the U.S. government admitted in April 2016 that the Islamic State “cowardly” hides and operates among the civilian population, making them a classic insurgency.\(^{40}\) The loss of innocent life and damage to property does little to contribute to overall U.S. victory against terrorism or Iraq’s stability, especially as Islamic State fighters continue to use urban population centers as camouflage and make it increasingly difficult for the Coalition to conduct its air campaign.

**C. Realities and Recommendations**

Ultimately, there is little hope for defeating the Islamic State if the Syrian War does not reach a peaceful end through negotiations or regime change. The conflicts in Iraq and Syria are interlinked. Similar to the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, U.S.-


led military actions cause extremists in both Iraq and Syria to seek safe haven in neighboring areas. Unfortunately, it is highly unlikely Bashar al-Assad will step down as president in the near future and while peace talks are ongoing, there has been little progress in finding a political solution to the violence in Syria.

Therefore, the U.S. should continue to contain the Islamic State in Iraq where the Iraqi government and military continue to ask for U.S. support. However, the U.S. should not tolerate the actions of the Iraqi government if it continues to inflame ethnic and sectarian tensions. On February 22, 2016, the Iraqi government authorized the incorporation of the Popular Mobilization Front (PMF), an Iranian-supported militia group, as an independent military formation with direct reporting to Shi’a Prime Minister al-Abadi.41 U.S. support to a Shi’a dominated Iraqi government that actively excludes Sunnis and allows Iran to have greater influence within the government will continue to make both the Iraqi government and the U.S. targets for the disenfranchised and marginalized. Furthermore, it inflames sectarian tensions with Iraq’s Sunni neighbors, especially Saudi Arabia, who view Iran as an existential threat. While the U.S. should continue to support the Iraq government, the anti-Islamic State coalition must rethink its military strategy based on airstrikes. Airstrikes alone have proved unsuccessful at defeating or even containing the Islamic State since there are now officially recognized Islamic State branches around the world conducting attacks on multiple continents. A large-scale troop deployment is not a viable option due to U.S. public opinion against the

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wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. While the U.S. should continue deploying small units of U.S. ground forces to serve in a limited role alongside indigenous forces, the U.S. must support Iraqi military forces rather than acting unilaterally. Otherwise, the U.S. would feed the Islamic State’s rhetoric that the U.S. is an occupying force. A mix of U.S. and other nations’ military forces, especially Muslims, should partner with militia units (Kurdish, Sunni, and Shi’a) to conduct guerilla warfare in urban areas where airstrikes would cause massive civilian casualties. Ultimately, the strategy must shift away from military means to achieve political ends.

Although these military actions are necessary, they remain insufficient in containing the Islamic State or battling its ideology. The Islamic State is not a problem for the West to solve alone and requires Iraq’s neighbors to commit to a long-term strategy. The Islamic State has a strong religious and sectarian dimension to its rhetoric and both Saudi Arabia and Iran are fighting a proxy war of ideologies in Iraq. Since the Islamic State is using Islamic rhetoric to legitimize its claims, other Muslim nations who are vehemently opposed to the Islamic State’s apocalyptic narrative must denounce its ideology and take the lead in defeating the insurgency. The obstacle to challenging the violent traditions in the Qur’an used by the Islamic State is that there are too many interpretations and not enough influential religious authorities to rule on the legitimacy of these interpretations and advocate the use of Scripture in peace-building and conflict resolution.

Islam today is dealing with an identity crisis and the battle for Islam’s core concepts is being fought across the Muslim world. Christianity went through a similar struggle. Much like the Qur’an, both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament contain
violent passages cited historically and in modern times to justify violence. Unlike the Qur’an and the Hebrew Bible, the Christian Bible is available to the lay reader in thousands of languages and multiple versions or translations. Similar to Islam, Protestant Christianity and Judaism lack a central religious authority to rule on the legitimacy of a new interpretation or a challenge to Biblical Scripture.

Despite some ardent insistence by the Islamic State that its actions are justified through Scripture, the words were uniquely revealed at a specific time in humanity’s history to a specific people. It is precisely because human beings differed in their interpretation of Scripture that divisions within all three monotheistic faiths occurred. Meanings ascribed in the past must be understood within their historical context and reevaluated for the present. Given the current state of discord in Islam and the increasing sectarian rift, there should be serious discussion about the context and meaning of often-cited passages within Islamic Scripture that can be nuanced to unite rather than divide. This dialogue can be the catalyst for universally accepted, peace-building teachings by internationally respected scholars, both Shia and Sunni, followed by congruent adoption and echoed sentiment by local clergy, and finally acceptance and practice by the faithful.

To facilitate their agendas of peace-building and conflict resolution, political and military leaders should openly collaborate with religious leaders advocating the same desired peace. Respected religious and political leaders must challenge the authenticity of citations and interpretations used by religious extremists with the words of God that promote peace and conflict resolution. Otherwise, religious extremists across the world will continue to use Quranic text to justify violence against rival sects and denominations, their “apostate” governments, and other religions.
This chapter reviewed the legal and moral arguments for the use of overhead military assets to conduct counterterrorism campaigns in Pakistan and Iraq. It also examined possible additional courses of action based on the realities that the U.S. has little incentive to cease the use of drone or bomber airstrikes. An unfortunate consequence of drone and air strikes is that destroyed targets and dead combatants are the measurements of success. With no U.S. combat troops in Pakistan and a minimal number of U.S. advisors on the ground in Iraq and Syria, the U.S. does not have an incentive to cease the bombings and actively work towards a political solution. Marginalized groups in Pakistan and Iraq have legitimate political and socioeconomic grievances against their governments. Ultimately, the radical ideology espoused by the Pakistani Taliban and the Islamic State will only be defeated if Pakistan and Iraq create truly inclusive governments that protect and provides rule of law to every citizen.

Although the War on Terror has raged for over 15 years and there is little sign that the root social and political causes will be addressed in the near future, there are many lessons learned that can be applied to future conflicts. The final chapter will provide recommendations for how to deal with complex, intractable conflicts based on counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, and conflict resolution theories.
CHAPTER IV
LEARNING LESSONS?

The previous chapters detailed the complex anthropological, political, and societal issues facing Pakistan and Iraq and concluded that military means alone do little to address the root causes of the population’s grievances. Countless experts have authored books and journal articles explaining the complexity in conflict areas around the world. The complexity is understood by many military leaders, policymakers, intelligence professionals, scholars, think-tank experts, university professors, and Americans throughout the country.

The question remains: why doesn’t the U.S. focus on supporting the development of effective governance in countries plagued by insurgencies rather than focusing on providing military support? The simplest answer: governance is complex, time-consuming, and nuanced while killing enemy combatants is easy, quick, and straightforward. This is especially true when the “us versus them” construct allows the U.S. to label its enemies as religiously motivated zealots who oppose freedom and democracy. And perhaps today more than ever in the nation’s recent history, the U.S. itself is suffering from a crisis of “us versus them” across multiple layers of identity. With the upcoming presidential election, divisions over which candidate to vote for are fueled by race, gender, and socioeconomic factors at a minimum. Americans identifying as “us” often vilify “them” no matter the issue. Americans are further divided over issues such as climate change, homosexuality, immigration, and abortion to name a few. It is much simpler to label someone who does not share your beliefs as “them” rather than attempting to understand why they hold those beliefs.
If there is so much division among Americans today over domestic issues, it stands to reason Americans would also be divided over foreign policy issues. The “us versus them” construct has led to an unstable and unpredictable counterterrorism strategy with constant policy reviews and vacillating strategies. This next chapter will focus on official U.S. strategies, that if resourced and implemented properly, could support more effective governance in conflict areas and curtail the spread of radical ideology. Unfortunately, while these strategies pay excellent lip service in detailing a holistic government approach, the reality is the DoD has the resources it needs to conduct its military campaign while many other organs of government remain under resourced to advocate for and increase effective governance. This chapter will conclude with an overview of principles for dealing with intractable conflicts with specific applications to the War on Terror.

I. CURRENT U.S. GOVERNMENT EFFORTS

As previously mentioned in the introduction, the perceived failure of U.S.-led counterinsurgencies campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq make large-scale U.S. troop deployments unacceptable to the American public as well as the current presidential administration. Nevertheless, there are important aspects of counterinsurgency doctrine that could be incorporated into U.S. policy. According to U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine, the prerequisites for an insurgency are a lack of government control, revolutionary leadership agitating for change, and vulnerable populations. Additionally, the doctrine acknowledges “the political and military aspects of insurgescies are so

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bound together as to be inseparable: military action is valuable only where it supports the political strategy.”

And perhaps the most important declaration is that the majority of insurgencies end with some sort of political compromise rather than a clear winner and loser.⁴ Although this is official doctrine produced by the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff and therefore applies to all branches of the U.S. military, recent Commanders in Chief seem to ignore this important point in their public rhetoric. Former President Bush stated in May 2003 that the Coalition had helped to “defeat the Taliban, to help destroy the terrorists and to bring freedom to the Afghan people.”⁴ President Obama announced in August that the Islamic State is “inevitably going to be defeated” but that the multiple terrorist networks that have grown out of Islamic State ideology would continue to conduct attacks as the Islamic State loses ground in Iraq and Syria. It is understandable that the U.S. does not want to engage in a traditional counterinsurgency campaign requiring a long-term, costly troop contribution. Moreover, the U.S. must acknowledge that these radical groups are insurgencies, some local and some transnational, and that some form of political compromise is necessary for stability since the last fifteen years of conflict prove it is impossible to defeat these groups through military power alone.

Currently, the U.S. government has adopted a counterterrorism strategy to address the growing number of groups targeting the U.S. and its allies. The principle documents governing the actions of the U.S. government are the 2011 National Strategy for Counterterrorism (NSC) and the 2015 National Security Strategy (NSS). The NSC

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² Ibid., III-10.
³ Ibid., III-11.
makes it clear that the U.S. strategy to counter AQ, its adherents, and affiliates is guided by four core principles: adhering to U.S. core values, building security partnerships with key partner and ally nations confronting terrorism, applying counterterrorism tools and capabilities appropriately, and building a culture of resilience. The document details the need for an approach that utilizes all the resources available to the U.S. government so that the campaign “…harnesses every tool of American power—military, civilian, and the power of our values—together with the concerted efforts of allies, partners, and multilateral institutions” to defeat AQ and counter its ideology. The NSS is drafted periodically by the Executive Branch to provide the U.S. Congress with an outline of the major national security concerns facing the U.S. In the introduction, the Obama Administration stated the U.S. would lead by example with purpose, strength, capable partners, all the instruments of U.S. power, and a long-term perspective. The NSS also made it clear the U.S. would no longer conduct large-scale counterinsurgency campaigns, opting for a “…more sustainable approach that prioritizes targeted counterterrorism operations, collective action with responsible partners, and increased efforts to prevent the growth of violent extremism and radicalization that drives increased threats.” The document also stressed that the U.S. military is not and should not be the principal means of engagement in the world and that “…our first line of action is principled and clear-

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6 Ibid., 2.


8 Ibid., 9.
eyed diplomacy, combined with the central role of development in the forward defense and promotion of America’s interests.”

In May of this year, the U.S. government took an important step to codify the roles of our diplomatic and development agencies. The U.S. State Department is the lead government agency responsible for countering violent extremism (CVE). The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is tasked to partner with the State Department to bring their development expertise and analytic tools to assess fragile states and economic vulnerability. Together, the State Department and USAID are supposed to implement a strategy to “…deepen our understanding of the underlying dynamics feeding violent extremism and integrate a variety of efforts to blunt the spread and erode the appeal of violent extremism.”

Although the U.S. government has attempted to counter violent extremism, to include radical Islam, the efforts have been piecemeal and not codified in an official strategy. Therefore, this long overdue strategy is a commendable effort to focus the State Department and USAID on CVE, especially as the document highlights the need for both national governments as well as local, credible actors to counter violent extremism.

Although both of these documents acknowledge the need to confront the threat of terrorism in partnership with U.S. allies and using all the resources available to the

9 Ibid., 4.


11 Ibid., 2.

12 Ibid., 6.
government, the military continues to remain in the lead for carrying out U.S. counterterrorism strategy. An important indicator is following the money. The most recent governmental analysis detailing the cost of the War on Terror prepared for the U.S. Congress was in December 2014. According to this report, the U.S. government has spent $1.6 trillion with 92 percent going to the DoD while only 6% of the budget supported foreign aid programs and diplomatic operations.\(^\text{13}\) This amount did not include operations targeting the Islamic State which have cost $9.3 billion dollars from August 8, 2014 to August 31, 2016.\(^\text{14}\) The U.S. Department of Homeland Security, tasked with CVE in the U.S., recommended in June 2016 that its budget be increased to $100 million after the meager $10 million it received in fiscal year 2016 “…does not in itself offer the chance to level – much less gain advantage against – increasingly aggressive efforts to recruit and radicalize our youth by violent extremist organizations at home and abroad.”\(^\text{15}\)

Multiple U.S. government documents correctly recognize the need for the U.S. to use other than military means to combat terrorism, but the budget allocations prove it is easier to task and rely on the military to produce short-term battlefield results at the expense of long-term planning and a whole-of-government approach often touted by the

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The U.S. government continues to deal with the intractable problem of the War on Terror using the same methods it has used since 2001 while expecting a different outcome. This is the definition of insanity. The next section will provide a framework for looking at the conflict through the lessons learned from the Intractable Conflict Lab, a research facility with locations in New York and Munich, Germany. The Lab’s team consists of researchers and practitioners from across multiple disciplines to incorporate the latest in complexity theory, psychology, sociology, and the experience of peacekeepers, mediators, diplomats, and negotiators to produce a realistic and tested framework to deal with complexity and intractability.16

II. DEALING WITH INTRACTABLE PROBLEMS

The situations in Pakistan and Iraq, as well as the ongoing conflicts in other parts of the world, are complex with multiple internal and external actors perpetuating the conflict. These conflicts are constantly evolving, especially as newer, more radical groups join the extremist landscape. As described in the previous section, the current strategies are not thoroughly implemented or remain under resourced. Furthermore, the DoD remains in the privileged position as the “go to” organ of the U.S. government to address conflict. Intractable problems, such as countering violent extremism, require a new set of principles to address the way the conflict is resolved or managed. The following twelve principles provide a framework for assessing intractable conflicts and addresses the importance of purposefully looking at the conflict through differing lenses to facilitate different outcomes.

16 Coleman, The Five Percent, 78.
A. RESPOND TO DYNAMICS, NOT EVENTS\textsuperscript{17}

Intractable problems often evolve over prolonged periods of time. The conflicts have patterns established through years of interaction by various parties. However, the difficulty in dealing with intractable conflicts is that when they manifest as a crisis situation, parties engaged in the conflict “…are guided by the presenting situation and blind to the dynamics unfolding across its different phases.”\textsuperscript{18} With respect to counterterrorism, every attack on the U.S. or Western interests causes a negative, public reaction by allied heads of states and governments. There are calls for war and justice against those who perpetrated the attack. However, reacting to attacks on the West with equally destabilizing attacks plays a role in perpetuating the conflict. It also only attacks the symptom (violent manifestations for social change) not the disease (ungoverned spaces and ineffective governance). Therefore, the U.S. should mete out justice a bit more judiciously and consider that for every action it takes to counter a specific event, it may lose sight of the longer term goal to counter extremist ideology. This goal can only be achieved through a nuanced understanding of complex political and social dynamics.

B. THINK IN LOOPS, NOT LINES\textsuperscript{19}

Since complex problems are constantly evolving, possible courses of action to address these conflicts must be non-linear. Rather than linking how “…someone’s action in a conflict caused a reaction from someone else…” it is important to uncover the

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 89

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 90
numerous variables and factors that can affect the likelihood of conflict. For example, the current conflict in Iraq is often labeled as a simple sectarian issue rooted in the belief that Sunnis and Shias have been in conflict since the creation of Islam. Instead, it is helpful to understand how multiple actors, to include the U.S., influenced and framed the problem as sectarian to keep the largely Sunni Ba’ath party from holding power. Understanding the ways in which factors either reinforce or inhibit feedback into the loop is a powerful tool for assessing possibilities for changing the dynamic. If the issue simply was sectarianism rooted in 7th century history, there would be little hope in resolving an ancient conflict plaguing the Muslim world. However, once there is an acknowledgment that multiple factors determine why and how conflict begins, the complex nature can be seen as positive in that it affords actors numerous ways to address the root causes of the conflict.

**C. AIM TO ALTER PATTERNS, NOT OUTCOMES**

The U.S. has on numerous occasions touted victory through superior military power over its enemies. In May 2003, former President Bush famously declared the U.S. mission in Iraq was accomplished and lauded U.S. planes and missiles for destroying the “enemy” and its infrastructure. Over the years, the world has come to realize that the outcome of a quick military victory can be achieved while simultaneously causing long-term instability. One of the key inhibitors to long-term analysis to highlight patterns is

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20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., 95.

that “…immediate crises and pain associated with intractable conflicts tend to be considerable.”23 The U.S. must take a strategic pause as it determines possible courses of action when dealing with a conflict. It is understandable that the U.S. would want and need to react to a violent attack on the homeland or its interests in order to appear strong and steadfast. However, quick reactions often oversimplify a complex situation for the sake of expediency, causing greater complexity in the future. Therefore, rather than quickly declaring an outcome, the U.S. should look for long-term responses to conflict in order to affect and change previously established negative patterns that contribute to violence.

D. PRIVILEGE EMOTIONS24

The fear and frustration U.S. citizens experienced after the terrorist attacks on 9/11 are now the constant emotions felt by citizens of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen, and numerous other countries where the U.S. conducts counterterrorism operations. As U.S. bombs and missiles are dropped daily across the world, the U.S. cannot discount the deep emotional distress they cause as well as how this distress and anger continue to fuel anti-American sentiment. Much of the scholarship on conflict woefully neglects the importance of emotions in both instigating and resolving conflict. However, not only are emotions an important factor in conflict resolution, they are fundamentally central to the conflict.25

23 Coleman, The Five Percent, 96.
24 Ibid., 97.
25 Ibid., 98.
E. THINK DIFFERENT

Misconceptions and misunderstandings are a hallmark of intractable conflicts as actors view the opposition through narrow filters such as “…bias, selectivity, short-term crisis focus, and the prevention of loss.” Rather than seeking information to humanize the conflict or the opposition, an actor will normally look to sources that reconfirm the already existing biases and negative emotions. The cognitive framework actors bring to a complex situation heavily influences how they analyze information and ultimately draw a conclusion. Over thirty years of research in cognitive science found that as cognitive frames become physically present in a brain’s synapses, an actor will totally disregard information that is inconsistent with a dominant perspective. Therefore, it is imperative to seek conflicting perspectives and information to ensure a static decision-making process does not increase intractability.

F. KNOW THAT CONFLICT AND PEACE COEXIST

Even during the most difficult and disastrous conflicts, there are moments where peace and conflict share space among actors who are supposed to be in conflict with one another. The Hadassah Ein Kerem hospital in Jerusalem is a bright example of Jews, Israeli Arabs, and Palestinians working together to provide care for everyone, regardless of their ethnic or religious identity. Although the U.S. government is responsible for

26 Ibid., 98
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 99.
29 Ibid., 100.
making decisions to safeguard American freedoms and territory, it should also make
decisions to increase the probability of constructive relations between the U.S. and the
Muslim world. Each example of actively peaceful coexistence, whether between
members of different faiths, Sunnis and Shias, or historically hostile ethnicities to name a
few, should be highlighted as evidence of changing societies and grassroots support for
stability. Furthermore, lessons learned from those evolving conflict should be gleaned
for possible application to current and future conflicts.

**G. SEE LATENT POTENTIAL**

Positive encounters between opposing parties can have a tremendous effect on
conflict resolution. In an intractable conflict, these moments are extremely rare as the
two parties are often unwilling to interact with each other and the routine experiences are
overwhelmingly negative. However, if the possibility exists to have members of
opposing parties meet, it can be illuminating for both sides to hear the drivers and
concerns of the other. It also helps dispel many of the erroneous rumors each side has
heard about the other, leading to a nuanced understanding of the opposition that could
lead to a concrete humanization of those commonly labeled as the abstract “enemy.”

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32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
H. RESPECT THE LOGIC OF THE CONFLICT\textsuperscript{34}

In many intractable conflicts, whether the War on Terror or the war between Los Angeles street gangs, there are “…dedicated and exhausted people who are caught in a trap fighting for their…dignity for a sense of belonging and voice, and for survival.”\textsuperscript{35} It is simpler to label radical Islamists as illogical religious zealots fueled by an intense hatred of the West and modernity. However, there is logic in the conflict when a society that is persecuted by its own government while simultaneously targeted by an outsider chooses to take up arms against an aggressor. If the U.S. does not respect the logical conclusion that the use of violence contributes to more violence and retribution, then the conflict will become increasingly intractable. Individuals living in collective societies such as Pakistan and Iraq will avenge the deaths of their family members and fight simply because there is an outside invader or occupier in their country.

I. OPEN IT UP\textsuperscript{36}

An “us versus them” construct automatically conjures up an image of people divided across a real or imaginary line. The more segregated and static an individual or a group feels, the more resentment builds against “them.” By contrast, “communities that maintain more complex crosscutting structures and social networks have been found to be more tolerant, less destructive, and less violent when conflicts do spark.”\textsuperscript{37} In Pakistan, the majority of Pashtuns are physically closed off from the rest of the country as they live

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 102.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 103.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
in the socioeconomically depressed tribal areas. In Iraq, the Shias create barriers to Sunni political participation. This lack of movement, whether physical, political, psychological, or otherwise, leads to an inability to adapt to an evolving situation as patterns of behavior become deeply ingrained.\textsuperscript{38} Therefore, it is vital for communities in conflict to find opportunities to break down the multiple barriers that perpetuate their conflict. The more interaction the parties have, the less violent they will be as their identity shifts from a simple “us versus them” to one that acknowledges complexity and diversity as sources of strength rather than barriers to unity.

**J. LOOK FOR SIMPLE SOLUTIONS INFORMED BY COMPLEXITY**\textsuperscript{39}

Although there are countless variables that contribute to the violent actions of an individual or group, there are often a “…minimal set of mechanisms that can account for that complexity.”\textsuperscript{40} For example, with the cases in Pakistan and Iraq, there are clear “us versus them” constructs between the government and a marginalized segment of the population who have become increasingly extremist and violent since the U.S. began its War on Terror campaign in 2001. However, intractable conflict is so difficult to resolve because multiple, complex variables tend to detract actors from the root causes of the conflict. Therefore, it is important to sift through the complexity and find the key elements that sparked and continue to fuel the conflict. This often requires all parties to dedicate time and energy to uncovering both historic grievances as well as current triggers.

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\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 104.  
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
The U.S. currently suffers from a strategic planning gap. However, any student of history can point to the successful, long-term planning achieved after World War II with the Marshall Plan. Additionally, the U.S. missions to increase stability in Africa, the Philippines, and Columbia have involved decades of planning, but a “…long period of time is …important when attempting to destroy established terrorist networks or defeating insurgencies.” When attempting to counter violent extremism and stabilize countries plagued by terrorism, actors must use proven and effective methods. Otherwise, both outside interveners as well as the local population will suffer from disillusionment as “…too many cycles or promises and hope…” prove ineffective, causing greater distrust between the parties and increasing the intractability.

Renowned American diplomat Henry Kissinger correctly lamented, “it is not often that nations learn from the past, even rarer that they draw the correct conclusions from it.” And yet history is so important when addressing intractable conflicts. For example, many Americans remain largely ignorant that numerous policies, such as supporting corrupt, tyrannical regimes in the Muslim world, have lacked long-term

K. EMPLY EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

L. ANTICIPATE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Ibid., 105.


43 Coleman, The Five Percent, 105.

44 Ibid.

planning and commitment. These actions fuel anti-American sentiment due to their unintended consequences. U.S. support to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and their combined support to radical Islamists during the Cold War a is a perfect example.

The Cold War sparked a bitter “us versus them” rivalry between the U.S. and the former Soviet Union and dominated the conflict landscape from the 1950s through the 1980s. Beginning in the 1950s, the U.S. viewed the Kingdom as ‘Islam’s Vatican’ as Presidents Truman and Eisenhower “…saw Islam as a counter to Soviet moves in the Middle East and the influence of the radical, secular forces aligned with the left.”46 The Kingdom, flush with oil revenue from the U.S., mounted a wide-ranging campaign of spreading their Wahhabism to the rest of the Sunni Muslim world during the Cold War. The Kingdom’s objectives were to “…bring Islam to the forefront of the international scene, to substitute it for the various discredited nationalist movements, and to refine the multitude of voices within the religion down to the single creed of the masters of Mecca.”47 The Saudis liberally distributed funds in order to achieve Sunni doctrinal uniformity to Wahhabism and established a vast network of Wahhabi mosques, as “…more than 1,500 were built around the world in the last half century, paid for by Saudi public funds.”48

The American public remains largely uninformed of the role U.S. foreign policy decisions played in fueling radical Islam on a global level due to its strong ties to Saudi


48 Ibid., 72.
Abdulaziz.<i> The Saudi government advertised the jihad through their clerics and mosques and “all aspects of Saudi Arabian life after 1979 became infused with the spirit of jihad, no longer defined purely as...‘struggle’ but rather as ‘holy war’”</i><sup>49</sup> USAID also assisted the violent jihadist narrative by providing the University of Nebraska-Omaha and its Center for Afghan Studies with $51 million between 1984 and 1994 to create textbooks filled with extremist and militant Islamic teachings as part of a covert plan to instigate resistance to the Soviet Union’s ideology as well as their physical occupation of Afghanistan.<sup>50</sup>

During the anti-Soviet jihad, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia each funneled no less than $3 billion into Afghanistan in a global competition for supremacy that ultimately empowered the violent, religious extremist ideology.<sup>51</sup> Afghanistan truly became the battleground for global jihadists when between 1982 and 1992, “…some 35,000 Muslim radicals from 43 Islamic countries in the Middle East, North and East Africa, Central Asia and the Far East…” participated in the jihad.<sup>52</sup> They made connections with Muslims all over the world, and those same connections have spawned countless other terrorist organizations since the anti-Soviet jihad.

Sadly, it appears that intelligence services or governments involved in supplying or training the radical Islamists spent little time (if any) considering the possible

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<sup>51</sup> Bronson, <i>Thicker Than Oil</i>, 9.

<sup>52</sup> Ahmed Rashid, <i>The Taliban</i> (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 130.
consequences of bringing these mujahideen together. Zbigniew Brzezinski, the U.S.
National Security Advisor from 1977 to 1981, who advocated for arming the mujahideen,
claims, “What was more important in the world view of history? The Taliban or the fall
of the Soviet Empire? A few stirred-up Muslims or the liberation of the Central Europe
and the end of the Cold War?”53 The unintended consequence of winning the war against
communism is that same radicals the U.S. supported against communism during the Cold
war eventually turned on their patron on September 11, 2001 and continue to plan attacks
against the West today. Therefore, as the U.S. continues to take short-term actions such
as arming rebels in Syria or conducting drone strikes throughout the border area of
Pakistan, the U.S. must consider the unintended consequences of its actions and how its
actions have historically contributed to long-term instability and protracted conflict.

This chapter analyzed the guiding documents for U.S. counterterrorism policy as
well as countering violent extremism. It concluded that, although the rhetoric is well-
written, the funding and resources provided for a whole of government approach do not
exist. Furthermore, as the U.S. continues to make the same mistakes by relying far too
heavily on the U.S military to address terrorism, there are few if any differing outcomes
possible without a new framework to analyze and address conflict.

53 Ibid.
CONCLUSION

Mainstream Muslims do not advocate the violent interpretation of Islam espoused by groups like the TTP or the Islamic State. This is clearly evidenced by over a billion Muslims today who live peacefully in countries with non-Muslim rulers and who do not advocate for war with non-Muslims. They adhere to Islam’s central belief that peace is the preferable state of international affairs and war should only be waged under unavoidable circumstances. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, consisting of 57 states spread over four continents, promotes “international peace and security, understanding and dialogue among civilizations, cultures and religions and promote and encourage friendly relations and good neighbourliness, mutual respect and cooperation…”¹ These states peacefully coexist with their non-Muslim subjects and non-Muslim states. TTP and Islamic State rhetoric fall on deaf ears amongst these Muslims.

The reality is there are many who subscribe to radical Islamist ideology and support groups such as the TTP and the Islamic State. The U.S. will not win the fight against these groups or their ideology through military means alone. In order to confront radical Islamism, the U.S. must take responsibility for its role in fomenting and supporting the ideology for its own purposes during the Cold War. It must recalibrate its relationships with Muslim countries and be the vanguard for freedom and democracy. Otherwise, our hypocrisy in supporting dictatorial, corrupt, and sectarian regimes will continue to fund and fuel terrorism for the foreseeable future.

Additionally, the U.S. has proved it lacks an appreciation and understanding of the root causes of grievances that cause instability in Pakistan and Iraq. Military defeat of TTP and the Islamic State is necessary but insufficient to bring stability to Pakistan and Iraq, respectively. Several U.S. officials declared victory in Afghanistan in 2002 when the U.S. militarily defeated the Taliban.² Yet Afghanistan and Pakistan suffer from Taliban insurgencies today. As previously mentioned, former President Bush declared the U.S. mission in Iraq was accomplished in May 2003 after the U.S. displayed its military might with awe-inspiring and destructive airstrikes.³ Yet Iraq and Syria are plagued by the Islamic State insurgency.

Critics of airstrikes, whether manned bombers or drones, are morally justified in questioning their use as a tool in the U.S. counterterrorism campaign. They produce collateral damage, most notably the death of innocent civilians and the destruction of property. However, alternatives such as a large-scale troop deployments would likely result in even greater collateral damage. It is an unfortunate fact of war that civilian casualties will occur. Critics blame the U.S. when civilians are killed. Yet, the blame for civilian casualties must also fall on the terrorists themselves who hide among innocent civilians (men, women and children alike) in order to blacken the eye of the U.S. with propaganda. The same terrorists the U.S. targets with airstrikes are responsible for countless attacks on men, women, and children. Only an honest and transparent host


nation government can effectively educate its population on the need and reality of 
airstrikes in order to turn public opinion against anti-State and anti-U.S. groups.

Additionally, the U.S. would be remiss in not using any and all tools at its 
disposable when confronting the threat posed by transnational terrorists. Terrorism is an 
asymmetric threat conducted by non-state actors for the express purpose of 
psychologically terrorizing their victims. Terrorists employ myriad tools in their quest to 
inflict harm and enemies of the U.S. will employ any means available in order to harm 
American citizens and interests. If another attack on U.S. soil emanates from Pakistan or 
Iraq, the presidential administration would undoubtedly be asked if it had done 
everything possible to prevent it. Therefore, drones and targeted airstrikes should 
continue to be an important part of U.S. counterterrorism policy. The key word is policy. 
The act of terrorism has existed for millennia precisely because its tactics continue to 
adapt to changing environments, threats, and countermeasures. The tools used in a 
counter-terrorism campaign must be innovative and ever-evolving, but they must be 
correctly viewed as mere tools of a larger, broader policy designed to provide effective 
governance and rule of law to ungoverned or under-governed areas where terrorists 
thrive. Ultimately, only good and effective governance can change the conditions that 
allow terrorists to succeed. In the interim, the U.S. has limited options to neutralize the 
threat emanating from this part of the world. Regardless, this reality does not absolve the 
U.S. from constantly seeking to fight a just war in accordance with both domestic and 
international law for the purposes of creating long-lasting peace.

Military victory is just the beginning of a long journey to stability, a lesson the 
U.S. has yet to relearn since the successful Marshall Plan in Europe. If the U.S. does not
do more to pressure the Pakistani and Iraqi governments to address the root causes of minority grievances, groups such as the TTP and the Islamic State may be defeated militarily, but the mantle of minority disenfranchisement will surely be taken up by another group. In order to counter the spread of radical extremism, Pakistan, Iraq, and any other country suffering from a religious insurgency must “…address the section of the society that is the most conservative, because it is from there that the violence usually comes.”

The state must address the basic grievances of any conservative population and allow opportunities for them to voice their concerns politically rather than resorting to violence. The first step to reconciliation between a country plagued by an insurgency is for the government to acknowledge and incorporate the diversity of its population. As the counterinsurgency theorist Dr. Bernard Fall so accurately stated during the Vietnam War in 1965, “when a country is being subverted it is not being outfought; it is being out-administered.”

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4 Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon*, 86.

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