SPECIAL ISSUE: A DECADE OF ‘WAR ON TERROR’

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Opinion polls can, on the one hand, provide surprising insights not available through sound analysis. On the other hand, they can confirm trends that had already been visible and thus can be seen as stating the obvious. The most useful opinion polls are those that have been conducted over a long, continuous period, covering more or less the same material. The Transatlantic Trends series conducted by the German Marshall Fund meets these criteria. The series started in 2005 and the most recent results have just been published. It is unfeasible and not necessary to review all the questions and answers. Trans-Atlantic relations have become far too complex for that. Moreover, one can easily consult this material at www.transatlantictrends.org.

For brevity’s sake, I will mention just a few important items, including that the differences in opinion between Americans and Europeans are more interesting than the points of agreement. First, however, we should note the surprising finding that, according to the recent opinion survey, relations between the U.S. and Europe did not suffer any lasting damage resulting from the George W. Bush presidency (2001-2009). Research showed that at the moment President Barack Obama entered the White House European public opinion could be characterized as euphoric optimism. The underlying bonds are apparently strong enough to survive strong political differences between European politicians, like Schröder and Chirac, on the one hand, and an American president like Bush, on the other.

One important trend identified in the survey concerns the increasing orientation of the U.S. towards Asia at the expense of Europe. This trend is far from new or surprising, but seems to have become by now a permanent theme. While the percentage of American respondents professing this belief represents a slim majority (51%) of those surveyed, a similarly thin majority (52%) of those surveyed in Europe answered that the U.S. remains a more important partner than Asia. There are considerable differences, however, among the respondents in various European countries to this question: Britons, Poles, and, to a somewhat lesser degree, the Dutch see the U.S. as the most important partner, i.e., more important than Asia. Respondents in France, Spain, and especially Turkey, by contrast, see Asia as more important for their national interests. We see again how European diversity calls the tune.

Another interesting topic, against the background of the differences between the U.S. and Europe over the American intervention in Iraq and the current joint actions in Afghanistan, concerns the readiness to support the promotion of democracy elsewhere in the world. The percentage of European respondents favouring such efforts has remained high since 2005 when it reached 74%; today it stands at almost 70%. On the other hand, support for spreading democracy has declined in the U.S. from 52% in 2005 to 37% today.

European and American respondents also differ in their attitudes towards the Arab-Israeli conflict. In answer to a question regarding which side should be pressured to force an opening, American opinion clearly supports more (political) pressure on the Palestinians. In Europe opinion leans in the other direction and favours more pressure on the Israelis.

Finally, that support for NATO remains constant on both sides of the ocean is another striking result. This result is even more remarkable given the differences between the U.S. and the European allies over various strategic issues (Germany’s withholding of support from the Libya operations, for example) and the size of defence budgets. The recent remarks by former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates about the danger of a “two-tier Alliance” speak volumes. It calls into question how enduring NATO shall prove to be under pressure from the opposing forces exposed by the results of this survey.

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The divisive pressures were evident within weeks of 9/11, and intensified over time. On balance, the elements of the War on Terror and the operations conducted under its banner have arguably had a net negative impact on the transatlantic relationship. The experience has demonstrated that all allies are vulnerable to attacks by determined domestic or foreign individuals or groups who chose to attack soft targets to create fear and disrupt normal ways of life. But it has also highlighted very different attitudes toward vulnerability, the meaning of 'war,' the use of force, religion’s role in international relations, and shared responsibilities for joint responses to terrorist threats, all of which tend to complicate transatlantic solidarity. Both the cooperation and the complications will be part of future transatlantic dealings with the challenges posed by international terrorism.

"Nous sommes tous Americains"

President George W. Bush declared a War on Terror on September 20, 2001 following the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center buildings in New York, the Pentagon, and other intended targets in Washington. Bush, addressing a joint session of the U.S. Congress, declared: “Our War on Terror begins with Al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated.” The language initially used by Bush was subsequently expanded to the more grandiose “Global War on Terrorism (GWOT)”

At the time that Bush gave birth to the War on Terror, the transatlantic relationship had been solidified by reactions to the horrendous attacks that took almost 3,000 lives - mostly Americans, but including nationals from every region of the world. As a sign of this solidarity, British Prime Minister Tony Blair had come to Washington to coordinate responses to the attack and was in the audience in the U.S. Capitol for the President’s speech. On September 12, all NATO governments had agreed that the attacks warranted invocation of NATO’s Article 5 collective defence provision, proclaiming that they would be regarded as attacks on all allies who would therefore respond with assistance to the United States. Starting with Le Monde’s September 12 proclamation “Nous sommes tous Americains,” European public opinion demonstrated the solidarity.

However, the veneer of European empathy for the United States and support for a strong response temporarily hid different perspectives on the nature of the required reaction. The most obvious divisions grew out of pre-existing European perceptions of Bush and his administration as unilateralist and prone to rash and militarist approaches to international problems. Most Europeans had not fully trusted George W. Bush from the first days of his administration earlier that year. The questioning intensified with a number of actions taken by the administration in its early months, including departure from the SALT II strategic arms accord with...
Russia, refusal to participate in the International Criminal Court, and rejection of the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gas emissions. NATO’s reaction to the terrorist attacks was quick and unequivocal, and was initially applauded by the Bush administration. Two months after the attacks, the U.S. ambassador to NATO, R. Nicholas Burns, argued that NATO had responded strongly to the terrorist challenge, and that the response demonstrated NATO’s continuing relevance: “With the battle against terrorism now engaged, it is difficult to imagine a future without the alliance at the core of efforts to defend our civilization.”

However, in spite of Burns’ brave words, the Bush administration in the first weeks sought help from the allies mainly through bilateral channels, not through NATO. Some Pentagon officials privately dismissed NATO’s formal invocation of the alliance’s mutual defence provision and complained that the alliance was not relevant to the new challenges posed by the counter-terror campaign. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld famously asserted that “In this war, the mission will define the coalition - not the other way around.”

**War mentality**

The terrorist attacks on the United States and the nature of the American response had a major impact on U.S.-European relations, leaving fundamentally different impressions on Americans and Europeans. The ‘war mentality’ adopted by the Bush administration seemed to warrant all necessary steps to defend the country, irrespective of the views of other countries or the accepted norms of international law. Europeans, for the most part, although shocked and sympathetic, did not see the attacks as changing global realities in any profound way. They remained convinced that international cooperation and law were vitally important foundations for international stability and, indeed, for a struggle against international terrorism.

While the initial phases of the War on Terror left scars on relations among governments in the transatlantic alliance, the subsequent Iraq phase produced divisions not only between the United States and many allied governments but also among European governments and between American and European public perceptions of what was required for alliance solidarity. Immediately following the 9/11 attacks, if not before, some key officials in the Bush administration began to act on the assumption that Saddam Hussein was a part of the terrorist problem that should, and could, be eliminated. By early 2002, it seemed clear that the United States was intent on bringing about a regime change in Iraq in addition to removing the Al Qaeda threat from its Afghan base.

While the United States was laying the groundwork for an attack against Iraq, several European allies were not prepared to come to
the same conclusions reached already by Bush administration officials. Europeans generally agreed that Hussein was a problem and that his regime was in clear violation of international law. Further, they shared some of the U.S. frustration that international sanctions had done much to hurt the Iraqi people but little to undermine Saddam’s rule. However, few Europeans believed that Saddam Hussein was a major supporter of international terrorism who was in possession of threatening weapons of mass destruction, as the U.S. administration claimed.

Most Europeans and many European governments perceived the Bush administration as determined to go to war against Iraq while caring little what other countries thought, irrespective of how unilateral action might affect the future of international cooperation, and with little regard for the impact on international law.

Preventive war

For its part, the Bush administration further fanned the flames of European concern when, in September 2002, the White House released a policy statement on the National Security Strategy of the United States. The paper focused on “those terrorist organizations of global reach and any terrorist or state sponsor of terrorism which attempt to gain or use weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or their precursors.” With regard to such threats, the document claimed it was promulgating a strategy of pre-emption, consistent with accepted international law, saying “as a matter of common sense and self-defense, America will act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed.” It then added,

“...while the United States will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively against such terrorists.”

However, many Europeans (and others) interpreted the document as making the case for preventive war - asserting the right to attack a presumptive enemy before it had developed the ability to attack the United States. In the view of many Europeans, this amounted to a unilateral assertion of rights beyond the accepted norms of international law which could be misused by the United States or copied by other countries with destabilizing results.

Some European governments, led by Tony Blair’s Britain, supported and participated in the attack on Iraq. Others stood on the side lines and criticized, most notably France and Germany. As for public opinion, an in-depth analysis of European public opinion following the Iraq war came to the conclusion that opposition to the war was at least partly rooted in the perception that the United States was acting unilaterally, and without reference to international opinion. According to this analysis,

“It makes a significant difference whether a potential military action involved a unilateral U.S. move or one supported by NATO or the U.N. In Europe support increases from 36% for the U.S. acting alone to 48% for an action under a U.N. mandate.”

As the United States struggled to move Iraq from a war in progress toward self-rule and democratic elections, the allies softened their reaction to the requests for assistance from the United States but stopped far short of providing the kind of help the United States wanted. The allies were careful, however, to avoid giving President Bush any ‘victory’ that he could use to good effect in his re-election campaign. This reluctance was reinforced by the fact that Bush administration claims about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and ties to terrorist groups, used to justify the war, were not supported by the evidence, validating European reticence about participating in the conflict.

By 2004, U.S. prestige in Europe had dropped to an all-time low. The image of U.S. intelligence capabilities, brought low by American claims that Saddam Hussein had an active weapons of mass destruction program and was a major supporter of international terrorism, had suffered as well. The Euro-Atlantic debates over Iraq had left obvious scars on transatlantic relations as well as on intra-European ties.

These troubled times had led many in Europe to look for alternatives to the existing structure of transatlantic relations, focusing primarily on intensifying European integration to turn the European Union into a counter-balance to American power and influence. They fed support for the European Constitution agreed by EU governments in 2003. Such attitudes toward U.S. behaviour also led to the ‘rump’ meeting of France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg in April 2003 that produced agreement on establishing a separate EU military planning cell independent of NATO, which U.S. Ambassador to NATO Nicholas Burns subsequently called “the most significant threat to NATO’s future.”

EU as ‘balancer’

U.S. unilateralism was not an entirely new phenomenon, but the Bush administration had carried it to new levels, convinc-
ing many Europeans that American unilateralism and hegemonic behaviour were becoming the norm in the relationship. The suggestion by some that the Bush administration behaviour was an anomaly in American history was undermined when Bush was re-elected for a second term. The campaign was won in part on the argument that the United States was in the middle of the GWOT, and that the middle of a war was not the time to change Commanders in Chief.

Once the November 2004 elections had awarded George W. Bush another four-year term, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who had stood behind the Bush administration on Iraq in spite of strong opposition to the war at home as well as around Europe, flew to Washington to try to get U.S.-European relations back on track. During Blair’s White House talks, President Bush responded to his British friend’s efforts by acknowledging that “the world is better off, America is better off, Europe is better off when we work together.”

The European allies responded to the Bush victory by compromising on Iraqi debt, agreeing to forgive much of that debt, in spite of Iraq’s potential future oil income. But French President Jacques Chirac continued to call for a multi-polar world, and President Bush said he would use the ‘capital’ he earned in the elections in support of his policy preferences. These positions left questions about how quickly U.S.-European relations would recover from the Iraq and 9/11 traumas.

The failure of the European Union Constitution to win approval in 2005 referenda in France and the Netherlands did not signify popular rejection of the ‘balancer’ argument, but were based far more on the desire to preserve national identities and cultures and on concerns about economic consequences than on any grand strategic arguments. But this failure did squelch talk about the EU as a ‘balancer,’ and led to serious introspection among EU governments. How could one imagine the EU counterbalancing the United States if even the most ‘Gaullist’ of European countries, whose government had promoted the concept of making the EU an international pole of power, could not win popular approval for a document that would establish the platform for such a role?

Even before the defeat of the EU Constitution, there were serious questions about the EU balancer concept. In a new balance of power system, the EU would have been required to align itself with Russia and China from time to time in response to disagreements with the United States. One presumes this also could mean that the United States would be free to align with other countries, let’s say India and Japan, or even Russia or China, against the European Union. It doesn’t take much imagination to envision how unstable international rela-

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld famously asserted that “in this war, the mission will define the coalition - not the other way around.” (photo: U.S. Navy/Johnny Bivera)
tions could become in such an environment. Moreover, how comfortable would Europeans feel about aligning themselves with autocratic or even authoritarian states against the American democracy?

One answer, of course, is that the EU could engage in “soft balancing,” as Robert Pape suggested at the time, by adopting measures that do not directly challenge U.S. military preponderance but use international institutions, economic statecraft, and diplomatic arrangements to delay, frustrate, and undermine U.S. policies that run contrary to perceived European interests. This, however, is not much different from the current state of transatlantic relations.

The debate in Europe over the U.S. invasion of Iraq reflected the fact that there were very different attitudes and assumptions among EU member states concerning the relationship with the United States. While some European states opposed the U.S. action based on their judgment that the case for war had not been made, others lined up in support. The divisions among allies and even within allied governments were based not just on the merits of the case for war but also on differing images of Europe’s future and the role of the United States in it. When the model of the EU as a balancer came into question, the idea of a uniting Europe with the framework of continued transatlantic cooperation had some new life.

In addition, the change of leaders in two key countries - France and Germany - substantially improved the dynamics of their bilateral and alliance relations with the United States. When Christian Democrat Angela Merkel assumed the chancellorship in Germany in 2005 she consciously sought to repair some of the damage to Germany’s relations with the United States, and to make NATO “a high priority for German foreign policy.”

Similarly, when Nicolas Sarkozy won the French presidency in 2007 he brought with him a fundamentally changed attitude toward NATO and relations with the United States. Sarkozy’s decision to return France to NATO’s integrated military command and to develop the European Union’s Security and Defence Policy in NATO-friendly directions was welcomed by the Bush administration.

Many European governments remained supportive of U.S. policy even though they all faced public opinion that opposed the war in Iraq and thought little of U.S. leadership in general. George Bush’s “fence mending” trip to Europe in February 2005 helped establish a better atmosphere for the U.S.-European dialogue, and even made some progress toward coordination of U.S. and European approaches to international terrorism, Iran and other issues. Good will was evident on both sides. But many underlying suspicions and unresolved issues remained.

Until the 2008 U.S. elections, American policy toward Europe took more traditional forms, with burden-sharing complaints focused on allied efforts in Afghanistan, some of which reflected unwillingness on the part of some to put their forces at the same level of risk as those of other allies. Even though it was clear that NATO needed to negotiate a new strategic concept, the allies preferred to wait until a successor to George W. Bush had been elected. Their acceptance of a key role for NATO in far-off Afghanistan did not mean they wanted to settle on a new alliance concept with the Bush administration. This none-too-subtle preference reflected the continuing European mistrust of the Bush administration and its attitudes toward transatlantic relations. When Robert Gates was selected to replace Donald Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defense late in 2006, one of the main sources of suspicion was removed, but the mistrust was not entirely mitigated.

Obama

When Barack Obama succeeded George W. Bush as President of the United States in 2009, European governments and publics breathed a loud sigh of relief. Obama was the kind of leader they thought would be more understanding of and even committed to many European values and perceptions that had been rejected by the previous administration. The initial honeymoon period in U.S.-European relations included a different U.S. rhetorical approach to the struggle against terrorism. Obama made it clear he was redefining the War on Terror, narrowing its focus to a war against Al Qaeda and to prevent the Taliban from re-establishing a sanctuary for terrorists in Afghanistan. Over time, the administration moved away from describing U.S. counterterrorist policy as a ‘global war’, which many Europeans had always found inappropriate and counterproductive. The President also promised to wind down American involvement in Iraq, and to move toward ‘Afghanification’ of the conflict in Afghanistan. He promised to shut down the U.S. detention facility for suspected terrorists on the military base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and rejected the use of torture in dealing with terrorist suspects.

In time, it has become clear that changing the overall character of the U.S. approach to terrorism is more complicated than producing declaratory policy. American counterterrorism policy no
longer features Iraq at its centre as the U.S. withdraws the last of its combat troops there. The Obama administration hunted down and killed Osama bin Laden, and has conducted a fairly successful campaign along the Afghan/Pakistan border to eliminate other Al Qaeda and Taliban leaders. The administration mounted a surge of military forces into Afghanistan intended to turn the tide in the struggle against the Taliban. However, there remain doubts about the future ability of the Afghan regime, led by the corrupt and politically ineffectual government of President Hamid Karzai, to assume responsibility for security throughout the country, allowing U.S. and NATO forces to reduce and then eliminate their combat role. The leading 2009 symbol of the changed U.S. policy - closing Guantanamo’s detention facility - has not been accomplished, not for lack of will but for the difficulty of finding an acceptable way of dealing with the prisoners still held there.

On the positive side of the ledger, the transatlantic allies have developed a wide array of cooperative approaches and venues for dealing with the threat of international terrorism. The allies agree that they should work together to deal with terrorist challenges and have placed no formal limitations on their cooperation toward that end. The new NATO strategic concept, agreed at a summit meeting in Lisbon in November 2010, declared that “terrorism poses a direct threat to the security of the citizens of NATO countries, and to international stability and prosperity more broadly” and that the allies would

“enhance the capacity to detect and defend against international terrorism, including through enhanced analysis of the threat, more consultations with our partners, and the development of appropriate military capabilities, including to help train local forces to fight terrorism themselves.”

On the other hand, future transatlantic cooperation against terrorist threats will remain troubled by the many historical factors, domestic political circumstances and military capabilities - or lack thereof - that have complicated cooperation from the beginning. Many Americans still believe that the United States is at war against terrorists, while the concept of a ‘war on terrorism’ still does not resonate in Europe. There is more inclination in Europe to try to mitigate the political, social and economic conditions that give rise to terrorism than there is in the United States, leading to different assessments of what is required to deal with the terrorism challenges. There is also the constant challenge of combating terrorism while not appearing to be warring with the entire Muslim world.

The death of Osama bin Laden has already become the reason, or perhaps the excuse, for pulling more quickly out of Afghanistan, the main theatre of the war against terrorism. From this angle, this huge success in the ‘war’ could be a major factor in undoing its further prosecution. However, differences over the future conduct of a War on Terror do not just fall on either side of a dividing line in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. American public opinion no longer offers majority support for the war effort in Afghanistan, becoming much more like European opinion. The economic crisis in the United States and internationally will further reduce the will on both sides of the ocean to spend limited resources on a war that is perceived as either having been won - by virtue of the elimination of Osama bin Laden - or as unwinnable, and therefore not worth additional cost in lives and fortune.

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State weakness has become a prime concern for U.S. national security, and so-called ‘ungoverned territories’ are central to this concern. However, we need to differentiate between different kinds of ungoverned territories, and give special attention to zones of competing governance - places that are governed by entities other than the forces of an established nation-state - and the hierarchy of loyalties within them. This article describes key characteristics of these areas, and offers implications organized around three activities: research (more refined analysis and clarity of terms are needed), policy (improving state legitimacy may be more important than addressing weaknesses in capacity or will), and strategy (we must consider alternatives to our state-centric strategies for tackling non-state security threats).

‘Weak states’

Within the last ten years, U.S. national security strategy has focused increasingly on how ‘weak states’ provide opportunities for transnational terrorist and criminal networks to find a safe haven and facilitate the kinds of trafficking and black market transactions that could contribute to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.2 However, the term ‘weak state’ is problematic. Many scholars and policymakers refer to the absence of a central government presence in a particular region of a country, often incorporating other terms like ‘ungoverned space’ or ‘lawless area.’ For example, the National Intelligence Council has described “failed or failing states” as having “expanses of territory and populations devoid of effective government control.”3

Similarly, the U.S Government Accountability Office (GAO), in its 2007 report Forces that Will Shape America’s Future, defines “failed or failing states” as “nations where governments effectively do not control their territory.”4 Susan Rice and Stewart Patrick describe weak states as lacking “the capacity and/or will to perform core functions of statehood effectively.”5 In her June 2011 Congressional testimony, Shari Villarosa, Deputy Coordinator of Regional Affairs for the U.S. State Department, described how her organization “defines terrorist safe havens as ungoverned, under-governed, or ill-governed physical areas where terrorists are able to organize, plan, raise funds, communicate, recruit, train, transit, and operate in relative security because of inadequate governance capacity, political will, or both.”6

Myriad reports and articles suggest that dire threats to U.S. national security may be originating from places where a central state authority is absent, mainly because it is either unable or unwilling to govern that territory. This perspective has come to play a prominent role in U.S. strategies and policies to counter the threat of terrorism. As Liana Wyler recently noted, “the past three U.S. National Security Strategy documents all point to several threats emanating from states that are variously described as weak, fragile, vulnerable, failing, precarious, failed, in crisis or collapse.”7 A recent report by the American Security Project describes how “the challenge of ungoverned spaces remains a core issue in the management of the threat posed by transnational terrorism. A lack of government capacity allows terrorist groups to find sanctuary.”8 As a result, the U.S. has spent billions on programs meant to prevent state failure and strengthen weak states, providing equipment, training and funding in order to shore up their military, police, and border security capabilities - the idea being that increased kinetic force projection capabilities (and to a minor degree, increased provision of services) within the state will lead directly to reduced security threats from its ungoverned spaces.9
Nuanced perspective

However, when we examine specific attributes of these ungoverned spaces and their propensities to offer a safe haven to terrorists and criminals, we find that a more refined and nuanced perspective is necessary. If an area is described as ‘ungoverned’ one may assume that nobody is providing any services for the common good, like security or law and order. These kinds of ‘no man’s land’ - where there is truly nobody in charge, nobody providing the slightest sense of order - are relatively rare, and include the most remote parts of African jungles and deserts, distant ocean passages, and huge tracts of frozen land in northern Canada, Greenland, northern Russia and Antarctica. These are unstable and insecure places that offer relatively few benefits to terrorist or criminals, other than isolation from prying eyes. There is no infrastructure to use for establishing viable training facilities and operational headquarters; transportation to, from or through these kinds of places can be difficult and expensive; the climate and terrain may render these places inhospitable or even uninhabitable; and, as a result of this confluence of factors, attracting new recruits or financial support becomes increasingly difficult. As Angel Rabasa notes, “if the territory is so undeveloped that terrorists cannot communicate, move funds, or travel from remote locations to urban areas, it will be difficult for them to organize and execute attacks. As a result, completely ungoverned territories lacking even those basic assets would hold little appeal for a terrorist group that, like any organized entity, requires at least a semblance of structure to operate.”

Instead, it is more often the case that criminal and terrorist networks thrive under the protection of local power structures (these can sometimes involve both state and non-state actors) in places where they can move and operate invisibly. In fact, invisibility within a secure territory that has a functioning infrastructure may be the most important kind of safe haven a clandestine network can have. Rather than a chaotic, unstable ‘ungoverned space,’ these groups are much more likely to prefer places where someone other than the state is providing security and other basic services, and where their activities can be conducted with relative openness and impunity. In essence, zones of competing governance can provide order and infrastructure, things absent in truly ungoverned territories.

Thus, for the purposes of understanding and countering the most complex modern security challenges, we must focus on a more critical - and far more common - type of ‘ungoverned space,’ one that is actually not ungoverned at all. Rather, these are sometimes called a ‘zone of competing governance’ or a ‘region with parallel governance structures’ - in essence, a place governed by entities...
other than the forces of an established nation-state. Within these zones, a diverse array of forces seen by locals as having legitimacy or power to govern may include tribal leaders, warlords, clan patriarchs, or sometimes even mafia dons or leaders of terrorist or insurgent groups. In short, the importance of these regions lies not in the absence of governance, but rather, the manner in which they are governed, and by whom.\(^{11}\)

**Zones of competing governance**

There are many factors that contribute to the existence of these zones. In some cases, a state’s capacity or will to provide critical services (like security, health, education, economic assistance, etc.) is limited, and their lack of presence in this zone creates an enabling opportunity for other forms of governance. In other cases, inhabitants of a zone of competing governance may reject the state’s claim of legitimate authority, and direct their loyalties instead toward informal power structures within ethnic groups, clans, or tribal systems.\(^{12}\) Within these zones of competing governance, those who have influence and power operate under a different set of rules than the formal governments of nation-states. Trust is established not by a legal system or formal contract between a leader and those governed, but by informal systems of traditional customs, patronage, kinship and other means. Rather than a truly ‘ungoverned area,’ there is actually some sense of order here: a functioning security and intelligence apparatus, some forms of commerce and transportation, even a local customs-based mediation system for resolving disputes. But this order is not controlled or perhaps not even sanctioned by the nation-state.

There are several kinds of zones, including rural and urban, in which these non-state forms of governance take place. A rural zone of competing governance will typically be located in rough terrain at a fair distance from any major presence of the nation-state government. From dense jungles to arid deserts, the isolation afforded by these places allows maximum freedom and flexibility for organized non-state actors. This kind of geographic terrain may also be of particular interest to terrorists and criminals if it offers a bounded territory that can be defended by locals from outsiders or government forces. Several regions of Yemen, for example, are often described by scholars and the media as ‘lawless’ and desperately poor, although locally-based informal governance systems are common. Other examples include the dense jungle systems of eastern Peru, Moro communities on the island of Mindanao in the Philippines, and eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Some zones of competing governance transcend the border regions of multiple states. As described in greater detail later in this article, the border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan offers a prominent example of this - particularly areas of southeast Afghanistan and northwest Pakistan, which is populated by a diverse mix of Pashtun tribes and warlords whose militias are often targeted by (or sometimes allied with) various elements of Taliban, influential leaders of the Al Qaeda network, and Kashmiri separatist groups. Other examples include Kurdish regions of southern Turkey and northern Iraq, including (but not exclusively) where elements of the PKK/Kongra-Gel have considerable influence; the Sahel region of Africa, including northern Mali where an estimated 200,000 Tuaregs run their own affairs without government interference; and the Iraq-Syria border, where tribes and communities living on both sides of the border have facilitated a vibrant weapons smuggling route through Iraq’s Ninawa province.

In contrast to these geographically large rural areas, urban zones of competing governance may exist within parts of a city, like Karachi, where Taliban militants from the tribal areas come to take refuge among the hundreds of thousands of Afghan and Pakistani refugees in the kacha abadi (slums) such as Quid Abad, Sohrab Goth and Kiamaree.\(^{13}\) Further, not all zones of competing governance exist within weak states or aspiring independent nations; witness the powerful mafia presence in places like Italy, Russia and Ukraine - where it is widely acknowledged that the most powerful (and widely feared) forces in certain places are not of the government - or some particularly troublesome banlieues of Paris, where the police often fear to tread.

Hybrid zones of competing governance (both rural and urban) also exist, encompassing several cities and rural parts of a particular region. For example, in southern Lebanon, the radical Shiite militia Hezbollah has tremendous influence in the areas of commerce, housing, politics, education, religion, and social activities of southern Lebanon. Indeed, nothing meaningful can be accomplished in this area without Hezbollah’s awareness (and tacit approval). For some time, Hezbollah members have not only been ‘above the law’ they have ‘been the law.’ With an annual budget estimated at over $250 million, the group runs a network of schools, charities and clinics, along with its own satellite television and radio stations. In essence, southern Lebanese know and recognize the power held and exercised by Hezbollah; for some, this power is viewed as legitimate, and for others it is not (although recent statements by the organization’s leader Hassan Nasrallah have indicated an interest in improving perceptions of its legitimacy).\(^{14}\)
In Afghanistan, there is limited knowledge of how many Pashtun tribes populate the border region with Pakistan, but there is ample literature on the traditional lifestyle and rules of conduct (like *pashtunwali*) of these tribes. Law and order in these tribal areas has traditionally been maintained by *Arbakai*, militias that operate within a limited geographic area and carry out at least three common functions: 1) enforce the decisions of the *Jirga*, an assembly of tribal leaders; 2) maintain law and order; and 3) protect and defend borders and boundaries of the tribe or community. While Afghanistan is clearly a weak state, ‘strengthening’ the state is unlikely to change the power and influence of these tribal governance structures, in part because of low perceptions of legitimacy toward the nation-state. For example, numerous reports from the region describe how Afghans are forced to pay bribes to police and government officials. Among Pashtuns, this produces a stronger affinity toward tribal governance structures, for whom honour and integrity are such vital parts of life. Thus, addressing the problem of state weakness here is perhaps less important than tackling endemic corruption.

In other cases, corruption and bribery help provide revenue streams that sustain the power and influence of informal governing systems. Along the Turkey-Iraq border, for example, local representatives of Kurdish socio-political networks collect so-called transfer taxes or customs fees from truckers, weapons smugglers and drug traffickers as they pass through territory under their control. Leaders of these Kurdish networks benefit from the tax payments and employ standard patronage systems to assure loyalty. Networked men get jobs, and their loyalty to this system helps to sustain their families while ensuring the continued socio-political power of these Kurdish leaders. Similar arrangements of patronage and corruption are pervasive in Nigeria and other African countries.

In sum, there are myriad examples that illustrate how zones of competing governance are markedly different from truly ‘ungoverned’ spaces. Here we find some semblance of order and security, provided by entities who are often suspicious of outsiders, and who draw on local disenchantment (or even hostility) toward a corrupt, ineffectual or completely absent nation-state regime. These zones of competing governance may compound pre-existing challenges of border and transportation security, facilitating smuggling routes for trafficking of any type of contraband, and potentially providing a safe haven for terrorists. However, they are not demographic blank slates; they are home to complex societies, some of which lend themselves to terrorist and insurgent penetration while others do not.

**Implications for research, policy and strategy**

This discussion raises the notion that state weakness on its own is not necessarily the primary source of the most critical security challenges facing the U.S. and our allies. Thus, we should revisit the policy assumption that strengthening states will lead to greater overall security. Several implications flow from this discussion, and can be organized around three levels of activity: research, policy and strategy.

Our strategies of engagement in these zones of competing governance require new kinds of information and analysis. The nature and salient characteristics of these zones vary, and within each we need to understand the local hierarchy of loyalties, existing structures of influence and governance, and the complex landscape of grievances between tribes and the nation-state. Questions to study include who has legitimate power, and why; what are the informal networks of power distribution, and whether they are based on tribal/clan/ethnic affiliation; and how these informal governing systems negotiate their relationship (if any) with the nation-state.

Our research should provide ways to differentiate between tribal militias, warlords, armed groups, and criminal organizations that foster instability, or those that actually maintain stability within their spheres of influence. Tribes, clans, warlords etc. protect...
their own. This raises an important question: under what conditions would tribal leaders see it in their tribe’s best interests to facilitate (or prevent) the activities of criminal networks, terrorists, or WMD proliferators? To paraphrase a recent observation by Stewart Patrick, the challenge for researchers and policy analysts is to discern more carefully which zones of competing governance are likely to present which baskets of transnational problems. Such distinctions will allow them to direct limited resources to address the priority challenges of in critical zones and tailor responses to the key incentive structures in those zones accordingly.

In addition to greater clarity and granularity, the terminology used in our research and analysis (as well as the policies they support) must reflect a greater sensitivity to the perceptions of zone inhabitants. Calling these ‘ungoverned spaces,’ implying the absence of governance, is not only misleading conceptually, it also suggests an inherent bias toward the central government’s legitimacy to govern, regardless of the specific nature of that regime. In other words: identifying places within Yemen, Pakistan or Nigeria as ‘ungoverned’ implies that only the presence of the central government would transform them into being ‘governed.’ And yet, as described throughout this article, governance of some form is already taking place, just not under the authority of a nation-state.

To populations who reside within such zones, the nuances of the different terms used matter, as with the former we are emphasizing the legitimacy of a central government at the expense of local informal governing structures which may, on the local level, seem far more legitimate than a corrupt, authoritarian or inept central government. The questions of ‘who governs’ matters most to the local populations being governed. If the outside observer’s standard approach is to favor a central government, it may automatically set one up to be at odds with local values, beliefs, and willingness to be governed by that authority. In our efforts to counter the challenges of transnational terrorism, organized crime and WMD proliferation, the U.S. cannot afford to alienate potential allies.

Thus, engaging non-state actors in zones of competing governance requires a new language infused by cultural relevance and an understanding of political dynamics at the community level. There are many factors that produce and sustain zones of competing governance, and these vary widely across different contexts, so a one-size-for-all approach is clearly insufficient at both the policy and strategic levels. Further, U.S. and international policies and strategies intended to deal with a ‘trouble hotspot’ often focus on strengthening a state’s capacity to project force or impose the state government’s version of law and order. And yet, ‘strengthening’ a state that is viewed by locals as illegitimate (or perhaps even corrupt and apostate) could exacerbate their preference for alternative governance systems and lead to increased conflict and alienation. In contrast, better results might be produced by focusing on improving a government’s soft power, with an eye toward improving the relationship between the nation-state and society in these areas where the state currently has limited influence.

This highlights the importance of strengthening a state’s perceived legitimacy, in order to foster a willingness within zones for states to play a dominant governing role, even if this supplants traditional power structures. Indeed, a lack of national regime legitimacy has already been identified by many as a key issue in the weak states policy debates. In 2005, the U.S. Agency for International Development described weak states as having “weak or non-existent legitimacy among its citizens,” and the aforementioned 2007 GAO report explains that in weak states “citizens largely do not perceive the governments as legitimate.” From this perspective, a key question for policy is how to make it in the tribe’s best interests to cooperate with, or even assume a secondary role to, the nation-state.

U.S. security strategy should encompass a commitment to improving the legitimacy of a central government’s presence in these zones, especially by tackling corruption, providing accountability and delivering critical services. Further, it is not only important to address the myriad factors that de-legitimize a government (including corruption, malfeasance, preferential treatment, nepotism, and oppression), it is also critical to influence local perceptions of these things. Among the oft-heralded benefits of democracy, perhaps the most important element to highlight here is accountability - that is, a government must be seen to more accountable to the governed than those non-state elements with whom they are competing for hearts and minds.

For example, in the Arbakai system described earlier, there are two mechanisms for accountability: the Jirga and the tribal population at large, among whom the Jirga’s decisions are made known and are empowered by tribal custom to confront Arbakai members who do not uphold those decisions. These forms of accountability help reinforce legitimacy in this form of governance. In comparison, widespread corruption and bribery involving Afghan police and government officials generates a stronger affinity among Pashtuns toward tribal governance structures, for whom honour and integrity are such vital parts of life. Thus, strengthening Afghanistan’s military and police forces is perhaps less important than tackling endemic corruption and perceptions thereof.
Beyond the need for accountability and transparency, governments must also be seen as effective in providing critical services to those it wishes to govern. As described earlier, local non-state power structures in zones of competing governance may garner more loyalty and affection than the state by providing physical security (for example, the Arabkai militia groups in the Pashtun tribal regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan); providing economic assistance for the poor and elderly (as Hezbollah does); building parks, sponsoring sports teams and providing school supplies to children (as do a number of Brazilian gangs); selling discount goods to members of the community (a common activity in the Tri Border Area of South America); and helping locals after natural disasters (or, in the case of Hezbollah, helping people in areas most affected by their 2006 war against Israel). The overall challenge for governments, then, is to provide a level of services and legitimacy that makes other service providers redundant and unnecessary.

U.S. policy toward these zones should encompass more than equipping the military and police forces of weak states to better impose their will on a probably suspicious or even inhospitable population. Funding, programs and expertise are needed from across an array of U.S. agencies, helping foreign governments address critical development, agriculture, energy, transportation, legal and communication needs of the local population. Altogether, our policy emphasis should be on strengthening trust between the state and those it seeks to govern. Political integration between tribes and a central government should be a long-term goal, but only under the conditions that the central government is seen as worthy of this integration. Establishing legitimacy, transparency, meritocracy in both the public and private sector, and the rule of equitable and fair laws enforced by an independent judiciary should be seen as important as creating stronger and more professional security and police forces. In the end, the most effective policies for combating today’s complex security challenges may be those that build institutionally strong states with the will and capacity to provide all manner of human security services to its people and is politically inclusive, transparent and legally accountable to its people, and a responsible member of the international community.

At the same time, a purely state-centric approach is insufficient for combating non-state security threats. If we rely solely on state-level entities to address critical sub-national security challenges - especially those related to potential safe havens within zones of competing governance - we may be overlooking a critical resource in the struggle against terrorism, organized crime and other armed groups. Non-violent non-state actors can provide an important intelligence and policing function, the effectiveness of which is both in their own and the state’s best interests. While informal governing powers in these zones are less concerned about ‘country’ or ‘nation’ than protecting family, tribes, customs, we must remember that these are at risk from the same kinds of security challenges as a nation-state government.

Engaging tribes or other informal governance systems requires expanding our policies and funding beyond a purely state-centric approach, while working to improve (and not undermine) an already fragile perception of state legitimacy. Perhaps there are opportunities for the U.S. to provide assistance as an ‘honest broker’ for productive interaction between a state and powerful non-state actors in these zones, toward a mutually beneficial objective of countering terrorist and criminal network activity and especially WMD proliferation. Ultimately, a state-centric approach to confronting the complex security challenges we face today is unlikely to supplant the many kinds of informal authority that provide governance in these parts of the world.21

Conclusion

In sum, the U.S. and its allies are pursuing a global security strategy influenced largely by the paradigm of state weakness and ungoverned spaces. Conventional efforts seek to improve a state’s capabilities or political will to effectively counter an array of complex security challenges (including terrorism, insurgency and organized crime) that originate at the level of sub-state actors. However, the analysis presented here suggests that today’s security strategies should consider alternative or additional ways of understanding the nature of the security threat environment. In many places where the strength or influence of the state is in question (at best), we still find a functioning social and political order, one which violent non-state actors may find inhospitable. Incorporating an appreciation for these zones of competing governance is a useful first step toward developing the kind of sophisticated security strategies needed for a world in which the decentralized connectivity between individuals and groups is rapidly becoming more important than the Westphalian nation-state system.
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1. An earlier version of this paper was published as ‘Zones of Competing Governance’ in the Journal of Threat Convergence, Vol. 1, Issue 1 (Fall 2010), p. 10-21.
2. For example, see Liana Sun Wyler, ‘Weak and Failing States: Evolving Security Threats and U.S. Policy,’ CRS Report for Congress, August 28, 2008 (p. 6); and Condoleezza Rice, ‘The Promise of Democratic Peace: Why Promoting Freedom is the Only Realistic Path to Security,’ Washington Post (December 11, 2005) in which she describes how weak and failing states serve as “global pathways” that facilitate the “movement of criminals and terrorists” and “proliferation of the world’s most dangerous weapons.”
10. Ibid, p. 6
11. For more on this, see Angel Rabasa, ‘Ungoverned Territories,’ Testimony presented (February 14, 2008) before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation), p. 6.
14. For example, Nasrallah recently called upon his followers to heed traffic signs and pay their electric and water bills, reflecting a need for Hezbollah members to be seen as good citizens in order to improve the proportion of the population in southern Lebanon that views them as a legitimate source of governance. See Associated Press, ‘Hezbollah tries to break out of militant mold,’ (February 18, 2010), online at http://www.ap.org.
15. The traditional institution of Arbakai exists in a variety of regions, but sometimes under different names; for example, in the FATA region of Pakistan, it is called Salwishti or Shalgoodn, and in Kandahar it is known as Pattanai. For more information, please see Mohammed Osman Tariq, ‘Tribal Security System (Arbakai) in Southeastern Afghanistan,’ Crisis States Research Center, London, UK (December 2008).
21. For more on this, see Anne L. Clunan and Harold A. Trinkunas, eds. Ungoverned Spaces: Alternatives to State Authority in an Era of Softened Sovereignty (Stanford University Press, 2010).
Television is a weapon for strategic communication and violence. Al Qaeda and the Taliban have capitalized on it to articulate a narrative, and drive their themes and messages. Osama bin Laden’s attack on the World Trade Towers on 9/11 stands out. Planes destroyed the twin towers. But the weapon that provided impact globally was television. Through that medium, horrifying images were communicated and strong emotional responses evoked.

Al Qaeda’s growing sophistication

Al Qaeda’s grasp of new media technologies is impressive. But unfolding events such as the ‘Arab Spring’ present new challenges to a group battered by Bin Laden’s death. His successor, Ayman al-Zawahiri, has tried to carve out a role in these scenarios and failed. In May, he unveiled a video declaring: “On more than one occasion, I have called upon the Arab people in general and the Egyptian people in particular to revolt against the regimes of corruption and tyranny, which oppressed us.” Nobody much cared.

The Arab Spring may prove a dagger thrust into the heart of violent Islamist ideology. It is an outpouring of frustration, resentment, and rebellion against authoritarian governments that have used oppression, corruption and patronage to constrain freedom and opportunity except for favoured elites. It is motivated by a desire among citizens - notably younger generations in nations in which the young form significant percentages of the population, but which has drawn in older generations as well - to take control of their own destiny. The demonstrators want to decide their future themselves. They are not looking for Islamists like Zawahiri to impose their version of religious law, substituting one form of authoritarian rule for another. Critically, the Arab Spring is a profoundly Arab and Muslim expression. The West did not initiate it, and doesn’t sponsor, drive, or control it. That knocks out the underpinnings from Bin Laden’s 1996 fatwa, which defined Al Qaeda’s rationale for action in its criticism of foreign, non-Muslim parties. That political reality stiffens its challenge in the current political environment.

Still, video remains key to its efforts to recruit and mobilize within the global Muslim community. The power of modern electronic media lies in its capacity to achieve resonance: it affords immediate, direct access to the mind of a listener or viewer. It provides visual context for a message. It is hard to change fixed beliefs and the best political communication rarely tries to do so. As Tony Schwartz, who produced what is arguably the single most powerful television political ad in history (the 1964 U.S. presidential campaign ad Daisy), would put it, effective media provides stimuli that evoke feelings an audience already has and provides a context for a viewer to express these feelings. It takes what is unconscious in the mind, makes it conscious, and directs an individual to support a particular message and a narrative that gives meaning to the message. The challenge is less to get things “across to people as much as out of people.” Al Qaeda has shown a clear grasp of this political truth in its use of the best techniques of Western political communication to promote its own narratives and drive its themes and messages.

Al Qaeda is both a vertical hierarchy and a horizontally dispersed
The media space in which the ideas and ideology of violent Islamists operate starts at the grassroots, with one-on-one relationships, and reaches upward to include paid and earned media. All elements of this space may interact with the others. Their words and actions aim for political impact in this space. Their kinetic operations are geared to achieving political information effects, not winning tactical military engagements. What matters is how the target audiences perceive its actions. Their tactics are geared to tapping into the emotions and existing dispositions of intended audiences to forge support for its narratives and to motivate people to action. It operates throughout this media space, and defeating it requires engaging simultaneously at every level.

In political communication, video provides context. It combines emotion and persuasion to shape the political environment. It has a unique power to turn attitudes into political will, and to galvanize ideas into action. Al Qaeda operatives grasp that. Their sophisticated videos give global range and power to its rhetorical appeals to its target audiences. They use a variety of distribution channels, including the Internet, cassettes, mobile phones and DVDs. Some videos are picked up and shown as news items on Western broadcasts, providing new reach into mainstream audiences. They are adept at uploading a video simultaneously to several websites and posting messages on numerous others to attract audiences throughout the Muslim diaspora. Many of the products are aimed at terrorist-cell leaders, who can download them to create DVDs or cassettes which can be shown in appropriate venues. Responsibility for the production of these videos lies with an entirely different cell than those that do the fighting.

Al Qaeda understands better than most of its Western adversaries that winning a political debate rests as much as anything on how the debate is framed. Although its messages are negative, it maintains impressive message discipline in casting its actions in terms and with images that drive a narrative about standing up for the dignity and integrity of Islam, battling injustice and repression at the hands of the West, fighting against foreign occupation, rebuff-
ing a modern Christian Crusade to dominate Muslims, anti-Zionism, nationalism and related themes.

These videos legitimize violent tactics. They arouse fear among adversaries through images of gross brutality, such as beheadings. They espouse doctrine and ideas through speeches by leaders such as Ayman al-Zawahiri, and until their deaths, Bin Laden and Iraqi terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. They glorify suicide attacks. They record sniper attacks and destruction using weapons such as improvised explosive devices to demonstrate the ability to achieve military success. They show how to use weapons and kill people.

Iraq: capitalizing on battles

Al Qaeda videos produced in Iraq demonstrate Al Qaeda’s strategy and tactics in the use of videos. That war may be winding down, but it is far from over. The duration of the U.S. presence remains unclear. Importantly, videos used in Iraq have wider application. Al Qaeda will use images from this conflict to argue its broader theme that the war exposes the U.S. - the ‘far enemy’ - as fundamentally hostile to Islam and Muslims, and must be defeated. Its videos have attacked Americans as crusaders; abusers of women and prisoners; sponsors of violence who destroy cities, homes and families; and as infidels who seek to destroy Islam, divide Iraq and Muslims, kill innocents while protecting their own troops, and spread injustice and repression. The videos also tout success stories, martyr biographies and operational news. Most are short, but some are much longer. The wedding of martyrs, for example, is a 30-minute documentary about the ambush of a U.S. patrol in Iraq.

Two examples show off Al Qaeda’s political savvy. Produced by a group calling itself The Flag of Truth (Raya ul-Bayinah), The Re-emergence of the Crusaders twisted the meaning of a single sentence that President George W. Bush uttered to Congress into a broadside against American credibility. “This Crusade, it’s going to take a while,” Bush stated. The magic word was “Crusade.” The video mash-up intercut the statement over and over with denunciations of Muslims by Christian Evangelical leaders, images of American soldiers bearing Christian symbols and images that suggested mistreatment of Iraqi civilians. It portrayed the American presence in Iraq as an effort to promote Christianity, divide and destroy Islam, and humiliate and undermine the faith of Muslims.

It argued that to achieve these goals America will do or say anything to win, including murdering innocent Iraqi civilians. It is powerful media.

The Republic of Fallujah was a one-hour documentary produced by al-Arabiya Television. A key segment featured the family of Hajj Mahmood, a resident of the Iraqi city of Fallujah, who volunteered for the Red Crescent during the first battle for the city in April 2004, the Coalition’s Operation Vigilant Resolve. The Mahmoods cooked and delivered food to needy families and fighters. Coalition forces called off the operation after an agreement was reached with local residents to keep insurgents out of the city. After the second battle, Operation Phantom Fury, in November 2004, al-Arabiya went back to see what had happened to the Mahmoods. The segment is a powerful before-and-after look that jihadis used to advance the argument that they were fighting against a brutal and unjust foreign presence. The “before and after” segment tells a simple, easily understood story. The “before” images depict a happy middle class household. The “after” images depict images of a home totally destroyed. Insurgents turned it into a compelling message denouncing the arrogance of American power and the destructive consequences of American tactics in Iraq.

The video’s impact turns, as did The Re-emergence of the Crusaders, on the combination of words, music and images that Iraqis saw on television. Indeed, so powerful are video images that, as George Washington University Professor Marc Lynch observed, Al Jazeera’s media coverage of the first battle, where its crews were present, “contradicted the coalition’s narrative so graphically and dramatically that it determined the outcome of that battle.”

It is not clear who actually destroyed the Mahmood home. Battle may have destroyed it. Insurgents may have destroyed it in order to create a photo-op to discredit American operations. A key lesson is that the Al Qaeda insurgents are ruthless in capitalizing on any battle to develop and drive the messages that support their rationale, and they show sophistication in comprehending what images help achieve that goal.

Charismatic leaders

The fortunes of war can shift rapidly. Al Qaeda built its global appeal in no small measure around Bin Laden’s charisma. That quality was not inherent. It was a smartly constructed image rooted in a well-devised narrative, articulated in images and language, about a virtuous, humble man who worked hard, had ability and dreams and, moved by the grace of God, left his rich lifestyle to lead a jihad in harsh surroundings. Bin Laden symbolized Al Qaeda’s ideal: a warrior-leader, a modern Saladin, engaged in a historical struggle that is a part of divine destiny. Images reinforced this narrative: jihadi propaganda depicted him in images in which he wore com-
Al Qaeda will try to imbue other leaders with charisma. That won’t be easy. Actual leadership, as much as ideas, fuel causes. Deaths of charismatic leaders matter. Bin Laden cohorts like Zawahiri will fight on, but they must climb a steeper slope. For such groups, effective propaganda requires viable, effective, articulate leaders.

The Taliban: violence as a strategy

The Taliban tried hard to dominate the information battle space. It has learned from Iraqi insurgents. It has built a formidable network to define its goals and get out its narrative, especially at the grassroots level in Pashtun areas. There is irony here. When they ruled Afghanistan, the Taliban banned television. Today they distribute videos to drive their messages. The social philosophy may be medieval, but it embraces the latest technology.

A media committee produces videos accompanied by Quranic chants (‘nasheeds’) delivered to Al Jazeera, transmitted on cell phones, posted on Facebook, using through channels such as its websites alemarah-leanet, shahamat.info, and Al Emirah (‘The Emirate’), which it maintains against efforts to shut it down by switching providers, and finally a YouTube account, ‘Istqlalmedia’. Uploaded videos are stored on multiple file-hosting services, creating dozens or hundreds of ways to access them on the Internet. The Taliban also distribute DVDs to villages, where they can be viewed individually or in small groups. The production values of the videos can be excellent.

The videos employ songs, religious chants and poetry appealing to nationalism and Islamic pride, and to convey a greater sense of coherence than they actually enjoy. Songs serve as ring tones for cell phones. Pamphlets, magazines, mobile and satellite telephones, radio and television, fax, Twitter, text-messaging, night-letters and the Internet are used in tandem with video. Propaganda is expressed in multiple languages, including English, Pashto, Dari, Urdu and Arabic.

Rapid response has become standard. Taliban spokesmen waste no time contacting journalists after attacks. They use email and text messages to issue press releases. There is a mantra. They denounce International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) injuries to civilians or to their property, such defiling Islam by burning the Quran. Much claims are false. Rarely do they disclose their own casualties or identify their commanders. The focus in their videos is on combat success, and the videos are couched in the language of combat, even as they drive messages about the clash of Muslim and Christian civilizations, hammer “Jews and Christians and their rented Afghan Army,” blast Hamid Karzai’s government as an American puppet, and condemn ISAF as occupiers. One Dari-language video has invited ‘Believers’ for jihad to fight government corruption in Kabul.

Osama bin Laden’s death created a void for Al Qaeda. Most of the current violent Islamist leaders lack Bin Laden’s charisma and global appeal, although Anwar al-Awlaki is an excellent communicator for Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (photo: Wikimedia/Muhammad ud-Deen)
More recently, Al-emera has uploaded a video that dismisses as American propaganda media reports suggesting that Taliban officials may negotiate peace. Reportedly, rumours about talks are creating distrust among mid-level Taliban leadership, which is divided over the issue. The video may also represent an Al Qaeda effort to quell that discourse and communicate resolve.27

International audience

Taliban content lacks the political sophistication of Al Qaeda videos but they do have power. Two videos illustrate its approach. One depicts the cold-blooded murder of sixteen captured Pakistani policemen. A masked Taliban commander accuses the police of killing Pakistani children in Swat. “These are the enemies of Islam who originated from Pakistan, who have abandoned Islam,” he pronounces.28 The video has three confluent objectives. First, argue that the Taliban message stands for justice. Second, demoralize Pakistani police. Third, show that they are powerful.

Does it work? Polling in Pakistan by Pew Global Attitudes Research29 has shown that Taliban violence alienates Pakistanis, although support for using the Pakistan Army to fight extremists has diminished over the last two years from 53 per cent to 37 per cent. Polling data suggests that Afghans also hold no love for them.30 One can argue that the Taliban strategy of violence against civilians is misfiring. Not accidently do they try and deny responsibility for civilian injuries or deaths. It may prove their Achilles Heel. But Taliban violence instills unease and excites fears that neither the Afghan nor Pakistan governments can protect their citizens.

One must avoid hasty generalization. While Taliban violence against civilians turns off many, Muslim youths yearning for excitement are finding it in the DVD stalls in Kabul. Taliban attacks that kill American or ISAF forces excite them. The videos include images of exploding military vehicles, troops “tossed high in the air,” and “terrified foreigners being dragged and mutilated.”31 Journalist Pamela Constable reports that the videos sell for prices comparable to those of pop videos bring.32

Why do Afghan youths root for Taliban murderers? Journalist Neil MacFarquhar observed in years of covering the Middle East that people in the region whatever rationale the U.S. articulates about standing up for the little guy, “the U.S. is almost always seen as promoting its own self-interests,” and they “harbor a certain admiration for anyone willing to stand up for it.”33

The second example of the Taliban’s approach is POW videos, another favourite topic. In one, captured Pfc. Bowe Bergdahl is presented as downcast and frightened. He states: “I’m a prisoner. I want to go home. This war isn’t worth the waste of human life that has cost both Afghanistan and the U.S.”34 The audiences are not Afghans but Americans and ISAF forces. The objective: demoralize.

Clearly the Taliban seek to demonstrate the ability to succeed, create momentum, demoralize the enemy. What has changed is that today the Taliban have an international audience. Information Operations (IO) specialist Jack Guy, who served as a senior IO consultant in Afghanistan in 2010, observes that “the Taliban have focused on specific countries like Spain and the Netherlands successfully to encourage them to bring their troops home. It’s difficult to obtain reliable metrics on how successful other Taliban media or ISAF media has been.”35

Like Al Qaeda, the Taliban continue to develop sophistication in the use of video propaganda, recognizing that destroying the will of an adversary to fight, neutralizing enemies, and winning over the complicity or support of target audiences matters as much or even more than anything to who wins or who loses a war.
6. The center for International Issues Research identified versions of this video on Arabic, Chechen and Indonesian websites in a variety of languages.


15. See, e.g., video of suicide attacks. The attacker speaks in English, asking his parents to be proud that he is a martyr: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bel7Tr49hE.


18. The account @alemaharweb was opened in 2010 and posts tweets in Pashtun. Some tweets are also sent in English. See: JM Tuazon, “Taliban boosts propaganda with English tweets,” GMA News Online, May 13, 2011: http://www.gmanews.tv/story/220521/technology/taliban-boosts-propaganda-with-english-tweets


23. See, e.g., http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vi3gQ8lnbQE; and, posted on YouTube’s site, the Open Source Center Report of 30/11/09 detailing the elements of the 7-minute, 38-second video: http://www.4law.co.il/tal1.pdf.


30. See: “Views improve sharply in Afghanistan, though criticisms of the U.S. stay high,” ABC News, January 11, 2010, reporting on a poll by ABC News, the BBC and ARD German TV, which showed that more Afghans saw the Taliban as the main source of their country’s strife, while fewer blamed the U.S. and NATO forces.


32. Id.


35. Interview with Jack Guy.
In late May 2011 six combatants of the Pakistani Taliban attacked a marine-airport base close to the harbour city of Karachi. Only after heavy fighting were Pakistani forces able to overpower the attackers. Four were killed, two escaped. In the attack, the Pakistani army lost ten of its men and seventeen were injured. Two valuable reconnaissance planes went up in flames. It is generally assumed that the attackers got help from the inside.

The attack was worrying because presumably the marine base functioned as a storage facility for nuclear weapons. Several days after the attack a representative of the Taliban, however, denied that they had been after those weapons. This charge would be used by the United States to pressure the Pakistani army into fighting the Taliban. “Pakistan is the only Muslim nuclear-power state” the spokesman told a Wall Street Journal reporter, and the Taliban are not trying to change that. The aim of the movement is “to take over Pakistan, and its weapons.”

This announcement would probably not have reassured Western nuclear- and defence-experts. When the Taliban has the opportunity to get their hands on a nuclear weapon, it is believed they will not hesitate to do so. Moreover, besides the Taliban there are at least a dozen other terrorist groups, such as Al Qaeda, who are seeking nuclear weapons.

This article examines the security situation concerning the Pakistani nuclear arsenal. First and foremost it will focus on the physical safety measures taken to protect those weapons. Also of great importance is the relationship with the United States, an ‘ally’ which has invested a lot of money in equipment and in the training and education of security personnel. The article starts with an analysis of the political context in which Pakistani nuclear armament took place and a description of the advancement of the nuclear arsenal and the radicalization of the country.

Hereditary enemy India

The foreign and defence policy of the Pakistani government is to a large extent determined by its relations with its neighbour India. The country was established in 1947 when the Islamic federal states of British-India declared their independence. Due to the mixed population of the states the separation was far from peaceful. A civil war broke out between the Muslim minority and Hindu majority in India, resulting in hundreds of thousands of deaths. Millions of people had to flee their homes and settle elsewhere.

The Hindu rulers of the largely Islamic state Jammu and Kashmir chose to join India, which led to the occupation of the state by Kashmiri and Pakistani troops. After India also deployed its troops the UN decided to divide the state along the battle lines whereby India ended up getting the largest part. Hence, Kashmir has remained a source of tension, resulting in another war in 1965 after Pakistani infiltration attempts.

In 1971 not Kashmir, but the Bengali part of Pakistan became the cause of a war. This eastern part of Pakistan, which felt discriminated against by the country’s western provinces, had
American President Nixon meets with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, then Pakistan’s President. After Pakistan lost Bangladesh in a war, Bhutto advocated a nuclear weapons program as ‘compensation’ (photo: White House Photo Office/Robert L. Knudsen)
been troubled by unrest for years in part due to Indian agitation. When the Awami League, which strived for independence, won the elections, a rebellion broke out. The fighting resulted in millions of Bengali refugees fleeing to India, which came to the rescue of the Awami League. The Pakistani army was eventually forced to capitulate. Eastern-Pakistan gained independence under the name Bangladesh.

A fourth Indo-Pakistani war erupted in 1999, again in Kashmir, where Pakistani infiltrators occupied an Indian border district. India reacted with a military offensive which forced Pakistan to withdraw its troops from the region.2

Nuclear weapons as compensation

Although most Pakistani military adventures did not meet with success, the loss of Bangladesh was especially painful. In January 1972, shortly after the lost war, the then Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto arranged a meeting with a group of atomic physicists to discuss the possibility of a nuclear arms program. Most of those present responded enthusiastically, whereupon Bhutto, a long-time advocate of nuclear weapons, promised that the government would do whatever it takes to create a bomb. Dr Munir Ahmad Khan, at that time employed by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and a supporter of the atomic arms program, became head of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PEAC), which had been established in 1957. This commission coordinated nuclear research and managed, among other things, a commercial reactor of 137 MW that had been supplied by Canada as well as a uranium mine.

However, to create an atomic bomb additional knowledge was required. In order to acquire this knowledge M.A. Khan sent abroad several Pakistani physicists for research purposes. In 1972, two of them worked for some time at a centre for theoretical physics in Milan, where they conducted research on atomic fission. Moreover, in a company in the Belgian city of Mol a team of three researchers collected information on uranium enrichment. Several Pakistani physicists who had been involved with the Manhattan project also went to work at the PEAC.

In March 1974 Dr M.A. Khan put together a team of scientists and technicians to start working on the creation of a bomb. The commitment of the team got a strong boost when India detonated an atomic bomb two months later. Bhutto announced that Pakistan would start its own nuclear program to break the Indian atomic hegemony on the subcontinent. This program would be peaceful, he declared. The CIA did not believe this statement and stated that Pakistan which, like India, did not sign the 1969 Non Proliferation Treaty, would have nuclear weapons within ten years.3

A.Q. Khan and his network

Support for the nuclear program came shortly after this from an unexpected source. In September 1974, Bhutto received a letter from Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan who had studied metallurgy in West Berlin and Delft and received a PhD from the University in Leuven, Belgium. Two years earlier, Khan had gotten a job at a company in the Belgian city of Mol a team of three researchers collected information on uranium enrichment. Several Pakistani physicists who had been involved with the Manhattan project also went to work at the PEAC.

In his letter Khan offered his services to Bhutto and urged Pakistan to use ultracentrifuge for its uranium enrichment program. Bhutto arranged a meeting between M.A. Khan, the head of the nuclear arms team, and the Khan from Almelo. This meeting led Pakistan to switch to the ultracentrifuge process for the enrichment of uranium. The ‘Dutch’ Khan would become a participant in the Pakistani nuclear weapons program.

From its founding, Pakistan has struggled with identity problems

Pakistani nuclear weapons program. From the second half of 1975 the team started to obtain the same machinery used by Urenco for its uranium enrichment. Most orders were made by Dutch companies using Khan’s expertise. These orders were mainly for controlling-equipment for the engines of the centrifuges. His activities caught the eye of the BVD, who found out that Khan had been asking ‘suspicious questions’ at a fair for nuclear materials in Switzerland. As a result FDO reassigned him to a different job. On December 15 1975 Khan unexpectedly left for Pakistan, taking with him copies of designs for centrifuges and other equipment as well as the contact information of almost a hundred Urenco suppliers.

In Pakistan Khan worked for the PEAC for a couple of months but left after a conflict and built up his own firm. Bhutto gave this new company authority to conduct autonomous work on uranium enrichment. By the beginning of 1978 Khan had produced working prototypes of centrifuges derived from the German G-1 centrifuges that were being used in Almelo. To honour and thank Khan, in
Analysis

1981, President Zia-ul-Haq changed the name of the company to Khan Research Laboratories (KRL).5

In the middle of the 1980’s KRL started using the faster P-2 models that were derived from the G-2 examples from Germany. This was also the time when Khan, a sociable man, started to build a network for the buying and selling of nuclear hardware via middlemen and various foreign companies. Thus, KRL sold parts of a P-1 centrifuge to Iran in the late 1980’s. Later on Khan would also do business with, among others, Libya and North Korea. In 1990 he offered his expertise to Saddam Hussein, to help him with the enrichment of uranium. The Iraqi leader, who suspected a trap, did not accept this offer.6 It is unclear whether the Pakistani government was informed about Khan’s business. In early 2001 Khan, who was known as the ‘father of the Pakistani bomb,’ was fired as the director of KRL. In 2004 he confessed his business dealings on national TV after which he was placed under house arrest for a short period of time.

A delayed bomb

The search for a usable nuclear weapon continued throughout the 1980’s. Of great importance was the acquisition by Khan around 1982 of the blueprint of a Chinese bomb that had been tested in 1966. Because the West had stepped up its checks on businesses dealing with nuclear technology, Pakistan turned more and more often toward its ally China for equipment. From the late 1980’s on, China also started to give advice on the production of an atomic bomb.

It is as good as certain that around that time Pakistan had the capability to produce a number of nuclear bombs. In collaboration with China some ‘cold tests’ were executed. However, Islamabad operated cautiously and waited with its six atomic tests until two weeks after India detonated five nuclear weapons in 1998.7

A fragile state

From its founding, Pakistan has struggled with identity problems. In the first place, it lacked a party or political dynasty that could shape the nationalist ideology in a practical way. In India the Congress Party and the Nehru family had taken up these roles. They created a somewhat stable base for the country in its early decades. Pakistan’s founding father Jinnah died shortly after independence, and the country lacked an inspiring national party. The latter’s absence was mainly caused by the structure of the country: the peripheral province of Baluchistan and the so-called ‘tribal areas’ on the border with Afghanistan feel little connection with the rest of the country. The position of East-Pakistan has already been described.

The army was the only national symbol in this situation, and therefore played a leading part in the political system. For three long periods the country has been ruled by military leaders with varying opinions regarding politics. Ayub Khan (1958-1970) was a Western-oriented military man who wanted to modernize the country – with an iron fist, if necessary. Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988) on the other hand, held conservative Islamic views. Under his leadership the country adopted a sharia-based constitution. Pervez Musharraf (1999-2008) was a pro-Western, moderate Muslim.

From the late 1960’s Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a Western-educated landowner from Sind and leader of the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) was the main opponent of the military. He won the 1970 elections in West-Pakistan and pursued Ayub Khan’s modernization efforts. Allegations of election fraud and a coup by Zia-ul-Haq forced him out after seven years. Bhutto was sentenced to death and executed in 1979.

Zia’s rule was dominated by the consequences of the Russian occupation of Afghanistan in late 1978. This situation drew Pakistan out of its isolated position because the United States needed the country in order to support the Islamic fighters there. The battle against the Soviet Union gave Zia the opportunity to speed up the Islamization of Pakistan. He supported radical Islamic parties and allowed conservative, especially Saudi, organizations to open mosques and Quran schools. A broad-based opposition against his reign was led by Benazir Bhutto, the daughter of Ali Bhutto.8

Zia-ul-Haq died in a plane crash in 1988.9 This cleared the way for elections, which were won by Benazir Bhutto’s PPP. She formed a government, but due to internal disputes and accusations of corruption, she did not hold power for long. This was the beginning of an unstable period in which Bhutto and her arch rival Nawaz Sharif, leader of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) alternated as government leaders.

In 1999 army commander Pervez Musharraf led a new military coup. He tried to create an appearance of legitimacy by conducting a referendum but did not succeed in overcoming the increasing chaos in the country. His support for the American attack on Afghanistan after 9/11 won him the enmity of the Islamic extremists, who tried to assassinate him several times. Their attack on Benazir Bhutto in December 2007 proved more successful.

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On paper, Pakistan’s nuclear procedures guarantee security

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The PPP won the 2008 elections, and they shaped a coalition with
a split off faction from the PML. This government began impeachment proceedings of Musharraf, who resigned as President in August. Asif Zadari, the widower of Benazir Bhutto and her predecessor as leader of the PPP, was then elected President, a position he still holds.\textsuperscript{10}

This history explains why Pakistan is often described as a fragile state. The country is plagued by endemic corruption, and terror attacks by Islamic activists occur on a daily basis. Add to these the bloody conflicts between Sunni and Shia groups and the everlasting tensions surrounding Kashmir and it will become clear why experts on nuclear security worry about Pakistan as a nuclear superpower.

The nuclear security situation

Pakistan currently has approximately 100 nuclear weapons and the missiles (built with Chinese help) and airplanes (supplied by the U.S.) to transport those weapons. Every year the country produces at least 100 kg. of highly enriched uranium suitable for weapons production. Since 1998 it also produces plutonium which can be used to create more advanced arms. Parts of the Pakistani nuclear program can be found at around twenty different locations throughout the country, including uranium mines, gas centrifuge installations to enrich uranium, and facilities to produce plutonium.

What are the dangers for Pakistan’s nuclear power? The greatest danger would be an increase in instability to the point where the command structure of the (military) security system could no longer function. In such a situation the nuclear arms or parts could fall into the wrong hands.

A second danger is the collaboration of employees of the nuclear program with members of radical organizations. The expansion of the activities of the Pakistani Taliban in the west of the country where some of the nuclear facilities are located also poses a threat as do attacks by various terrorist organizations on installations elsewhere in the country.

It should be noted that Al Qaeda showed interest in atomic weapons in the late 1990’s. Supposedly, representatives of Osama bin Laden met with employees of Khan’s KRL in 1998 although without any results. Al Qaeda did get limited assistance from various radicalized former employees of the PEAC, including the famous scientist Sheikh Bashiruddin Mahmood. In 2001 Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, then the organization’s second in command, obtained advice on the production and transport of nuclear material and biological weapons from them.\textsuperscript{11}

In 2009 senior Al Qaeda leaders declared that the movement would like to have access to nuclear weapons. Other radical Muslim groups have threatened to attack nuclear installations but rather as a response to the cooperation between Pakistan and the United States. Recently there have been attempts to kidnap staff members of nuclear installations. It remains unclear who was behind those attacks.\textsuperscript{12}

A further security problem arises from the fact that various terrorist groups traditionally have good relations with the Pakistani Intelligence service, Inter Services Intelligence (ISI). Militants from, for example, the Pakistani Taliban - not to be confused with its Afghan namesake - were trained by the ISI and closely collaborated with this organization during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The ISI is therefore often described as a ‘state within a state’ with its own foreign - i.e. anti-Indian - policy and operates virtually unchecked by the government.\textsuperscript{13}

Part of the ISI policy is the training and coaching of terrorist groups that operate in the Indian part of Kashmir. Those groups, such as the Lashkar e Taiba (Army of the Pure) which was responsible for the infamous Mumbai attacks in 2008, also conduct attacks on ‘unbelievers’ in Pakistan itself whenever they see fit. The Pakistani Taliban, who are not participating in the Kashmir conflict, are held responsible for the assassination of Benazir Bhutto.\textsuperscript{14}

How is the security of Pakistan’s nuclear weapon complex regulated? In the first decades the security of the nuclear facilities was

Abdul Qadeer Khan, the ‘father of the Pakistani bomb’ (photo: U.S. State Department)
controlled by the army, and little is known about this. Because
the program was a secret, the researchers, especially those from
Khan’s KRL, had a great deal of freedom. Shortly after his coup
in 1999, Musharraf established the National Command Authority
(NCA) which took shape a year later. The NCA was set up to control
the entire nuclear arms complex, including its military branch.
The Prime Minister is chairman of the ten-member NCA board. In
the first years Musharraf himself, as President, held this position.
Besides the Prime Minister, the NCA consists of the chairman of the
Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Ministers of Defence, Internal Affairs, and
Finance, the chairman of the Strategic Planning Commission, and
the commanders of the three army units. There should always be
consensus within the NCA on the possible use of nuclear weapons.
However, the chairman’s vote is decisive.15

On paper these procedures guarantee security, but the 2001 attacks
raised worries in the United States about Pakistan’s nuclear arms.
This concern primarily related to two things: an uprising within
the army, by which the fundamentalists would get their hands on
one or more bombs, and ‘slow theft,’ a situation where unreliable
employees steal small amounts of nuclear material to hand over to
terrorists who can convert it into a ‘dirty bomb.’

Right after 9/11 high-level negotiations took place between
nuclear experts from both countries. The Pakistanis supposedly
gave the Americans an insight into their command- and control
structure regarding the security of their nuclear arsenal. After 2001
Islamabad also was to have started the construction of an under-
ground tunnel system for the storage and transportation of nuclear
weapons. Washington did its part by giving advice, providing train-
ing facilities, and donating security equipment, worth a total of
around 100 million dollars.16

There also would have been discussions about separated storage
for the nuclear-fuel-core weapons and for the detonators (trig-
gers) with their conventional explosive cores. The main goal of
this measure is to prevent nuclear weapons from ‘accidentally’
being used in tense times. The separated storage and the related
additional time needed to make the weapons ready to use enforces
a pause for reflection. However, the assemblage and transportation
make the weapons vulnerable to terrorist attacks, as several war
games showed.

The Americans also assisted with the establishment of a Personnel
Reliability Program (PRP) similar to the one they use themselves to
screen new employees for nuclear projects. The program includes
extensive background investigations of everyone involved, plus
attention to their relatives and associates. The investigations
focus on religious beliefs and the chances for radicalization. Travel,
phone calls, and Internet behaviour are mapped and analysed.
Moreover, the employees need to write reports on themselves and
their co-workers and are periodically subjected to psychological
tests.

The implementation of the PRP was easier said than done. A 2002
study pointed out that employees in high places were exempted
from certain parts of the investigation. Only after the 2004 revela-
tions about A.Q. Khan’s network was the program taken more
seriously.17

The Washington-Islamabad relationship

The U.S. also uses intervention teams to secure itself against the
danger of Pakistani nuclear arms falling into the wrong hands. In
emergencies those teams are able to remove the triggers for the
bombs, which are not radioactive and therefore easier to handle.
The teams were established and possibly also deployed several
times during the collapse of the Soviet Union whereby sometimes
nuclear weapons were stored in one of the unstable, newly inde-
pendent republics.

The American investigative journalist Seymour Hersh wrote in
1992 that he received information from sources connected with
intelligence services that this unit has been training for years
to disable Pakistan’s nuclear weapons. Recently the teams have
been strengthened with a unit from the Joint Special Operations
Command, an elite counterterrorism group. According to Hersh,
an intervention team was on its way to Pakistan in the summer of
2009 after receiving a message about the disappearance of a part
of a nuclear bomb. When it turned out to be a false alarm, the
team was stopped in Dubai.18

The success of the intervention teams depends on the reliability
of the information they receive. When this is lacking, an operation
can result in a bloody failure. Therefore the deployment of the unit
is a delicate and controversial matter.

Officially it is not possible to get American confirmation of the
existence of the intervention teams. Islamabad states that there is
no need for such American actions and that they will not be toler-
ated. Pakistan claims that its security system is sufficient and its
army, based on the British tradition, is totally trustworthy.

The uncertainty about the existence of the intervention teams
shows the deep distrust which characterizes the relationship
between the two countries. Many Pakistanis are convinced that
the United States has a preference for India and that it will always
favour that country when it comes to nuclear weapons. For that
reason, Pakistani commanders are reluctant to share secrets regard-
ing their weapons. In public the impression is maintained that
the relationship is based on trust and close cooperation. American
foreign affairs expert Leslie Gelb remarked: “The Pakistanis have
learned how to deal with us, and they understand that if they don’t tell us what we want to hear, we’ll cut off their goodies.”

Despite this mutual distrust the general opinion of government officials and security experts is that Pakistan has greatly improved the security of its nuclear arsenal. The American chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mullen, summarized as follows the situation in July 2011, after the death of Osama Bin Laden and the attack on the Karachi navy base: the nuclear weapons were, because of improved training of the security staff, “physically more secure.” The Pakistanis have managed to introduce a relatively trustworthy PRP, which could still be improved at certain points. Mullen also confessed that he was not fully informed about Pakistan’s nuclear program. “There are limits to what I know and to what anybody outside Pakistan knows. But I know that they have invested a great deal, they’ve improved their procedures, and they take it very seriously.”

Continuing concern

Despite this progress security experts remain worried about Islamabad’s atomic power. The biggest danger lies in the possible ties between Muslim extremists, the military, and members of the ISI, particularly in lower and middle management positions within the organizations. It is suspected that people in these positions were also involved in the protection of Bin Laden. The attack on the airport in Karachi where the attackers knew various security protocols and even the locations of the security cameras is seen as a blueprint for future attacks. David Albright, a prominent expert in the field of nuclear security, however, considers the chances of terrorists getting hold of a bomb in this fashion slight. It is one thing to get around the security system on a military base with inside help, but it is something totally different to gain access to a bunker in which nuclear weapons are being stored, he says.

Albright is more worried about the previously mentioned possibility of extremists or their associates stealing nuclear material during the production process. Many different people are involved in this process which reduces the chances of discovery. This scenario would also fit the recent growth of intolerance within Pakistan which is characterized by the assassinations of the Punjabi governor and the Christian minister of minorities by, respectively, Muslim terrorists and a bodyguard. Both of the victims were engaged in the revision of a controversial law on slander of Islam. Moderate Islamic parties also applauded the assassinations.

The growing bigotry and radicalization have also become evident in the great popularity among younger officers, according to some Pakistani sources, of preachers who denounce Western/Indian and ‘Zionist’ plots and call upon soldiers to characterize themselves firstly as Muslims and only secondly as Pakistanis. For this reason the issue of Islamabad’s fast-growing nuclear arsenal will retain a prominent position on the agenda of nuclear security experts for quite a while.

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Would you like to react? Mail the editor: redactie@atlcom.nl.

2. Oskar Verkaaik, Pakistan (Amsterdam, 2006), 48-80.
5. A.Q. Khan, ibid.
8. Verkaaik, ibid., 61-76.
9. The general opinion is that sabotage caused the plane crash which killed Zia-ul-Haq.
15. Kerr, Nikitin, ibid., 11, 12.
16. Bajoria, Otterman, ibid.
19. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. The Guardian, 5 January and 2 March; Hersh. ibid.
Afghanistan

Between ‘civilian surge’ and negotiated peace

Oliver Jones and Kirsten Kaufman

With the 2nd Bonn Conference on Afghanistan due to start in December 2011, and with increasing acceptance by key political figures of the need for a negotiated settlement in Afghanistan, it is important to examine the prospects for such a settlement.

The current situation

At the NATO Lisbon Summit, attended among others by Hamid Karzai, the Afghan President, and Ban Ki-moon, the UN Secretary General, it was agreed on a “transition strategy” for Afghanistan, which is to phase in the handover of the country’s provinces to Afghan security forces starting next year, and completing the shift within four years. With several security concerns in the international community over the reality of fewer boots on the ground, the international community is concerned of ensuring a stable security platform in 2014.

Current statistics demonstrate that force levels inside Afghanistan are at their highest level with more than 141,000 foreign troops deployed (of which roughly 130,500 are part of NATO’s ISAF). Afghan forces also number over 280,000, though current information suggests that only a single battalion sized unit of these is considered capable of unassisted operations. International and Afghan Government forces have apparently increased pressure upon the Taliban with special operations which have dramatically increased from the summer of 2010 when 2,974 Insurgents were killed or captured, of which 235 were considered ‘leaders,’ to early 2011 where around 12,500 Taliban had been killed or captured with roughly 1,500 of these considered ‘leadership.’

However, insurgent attacks remain at a high level. Despite evidence to suggest that the number of attacks had fallen year on year from 2010, more than 800 insurgent attacks were recorded in the first week of June 2011. Assassinations are also becoming a more popular tactic of the Insurgency, with the Kandahar area alone reporting between 5 and 10 assassinations per month in 2011, up from less than 5 per month in 2010 and less than 1 per month in 2009. Civilian deaths have been increasing as well, largely as a result of casualties caused by insurgent activity. In the first six months of 2011, according to the UN, 1,462 civilians were killed, up from 1,054 in the first six months of 2009 with at least eighty per cent of these inflicted by insurgents. As a consequence, Afghans are feeling less safe.

Ethnic and social divisions are also in evidence in the current Afghan conflict. In particular it is clear that in more socially conservative Southern Afghanistan, the strength of the Taliban is significantly higher than in Northern and Central Afghanistan. These areas tend to be Pashtun dominated, though the Taliban themselves are by no means an ethnically orientated organisation. Taliban strength in Southern Afghanistan is not only a reflection of numbers, but is also visible in the loyalty and quality of recruits. Further North, fighters utilised by the Taliban tend to be of far lower commitment, sometimes operating as effective mercenaries, rather than ideological recruits.
Corruption is widespread and affecting all the levels of government and political authorities, thus affecting legitimacy, according to Pino Arlacchi, MP, Vice Chair of the European Parliament Delegation with Afghanistan.

The EU’s major effort in the country is carried on the basis of EU police training missions, specifically EUPOL Afghanistan. According to Allison Weston, Acting Head of Conduct of Operations Division, Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability, in charge of the EU police Training Mission, the training and building of a police infrastructure will be important as ISAF troops are being withdrawn. Expectations are modest, while more focus is being put on justice and the rule of law, and on developing a Ministry of the Interior and National Police Force.

Current peace initiatives/negotiations

Several initiatives have been started which aim to bring about a negotiated resolution to the conflict. First amongst these is the Afghan ‘High Peace Council’ which is tasked with orchestrating a peaceful Afghan settlement with the Taliban and associated groups. An initiative of Hamid Karzai, the Council was created as a result of the June 2010 Afghan ‘Peace Jirga,’ a conference designed to create consensus on how to approach peace negotiations with insurgent forces. However, the 70-strong Council has been criticized, holding only 9 female members and including a significant number of warlords, former insurgent commanders and former members of the communist government. The Council has also proven controversial with political opposition groups in Afghanistan, some have accused Karzai of attempting to use the Council as a source of political legitimacy in the aftermath of his controversial election. The Jirga itself was condemned by the Taliban and other militant organizations such as Hezb-i-Islami, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Taliban forces even attempted disruptive attacks against the Jirga in June 2010. Hekmatyar’s group has presented a separate peace deal to the Afghan government, though this is outside the Peace Council/Peace Jirga activities. So far the Peace Council has achieved little visible success in negotiations with the majority of groups.

The ‘Taliban’ is not a monolithic organisation: various insurgent groups may each require a separate peace

The ‘Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program’ which offers an effective amnesty to former fighters who renounce violence is also ongoing. Progress so far however has been limited, with reports as of June 2011 listing 1,700 fighters as having subscribed to the program which has had over $140 million pledged to it. This scheme suffers from some significant flaws as a model for negotiated peace. Foremost amongst these is the fact that it does not represent a model for a political settlement. Because of this, it is only ever likely to attract those fighters who have very weak political commitments to the Taliban’s cause. This program, although helpful in demobilizing limited numbers of anti-government fighters, holds little prospect of expanding to become the basis of a lasting end to the armed struggle of the Afghan Taliban.

However, there has been more promising recent evidence of apparent negotiations between the U.S. government and representatives of the Quetta Shura Taliban held on at least three separate occasions in Qatar and Germany. More recently reports indicate that these negotiations have broken down as a result of the government of Hamid Karzai deliberately leaking information on the talks. This is likely caused due to concerns within the Karzai government of being side lined by direct U.S.-Taliban negotiations. This fear was probably compounded by the centrality of Tayeb Agha to the negotiations, as he has previously promoted the idea that negotiations should take place between the U.S. and the Taliban, with the Karzai government in a secondary position. Tayeb Agha has held several positions within the Quetta Shura Taliban, including heading the Taliban’s political committee (tasked with developing the Taliban’s political objectives) and as Mullah Omar’s personal secretary.

According to Ambassador Simon Gass, NATO Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan, 5 key points are necessary for making the transition in 2014 a success and creating a stable security platform in Afghanistan. The first is to build strong civilian support, by development, good governance, and improvements in rule of law. Second is the need to establish a post 2014 framework in the international community by developing U.S.-Afghan security relations, Afghanistan relations with the EU, NATO, and other organizations as well as trade and investment. Grass’ third point is that of a civilian-diplomatic surge by encouraging civilian participation in the political process. Fourth, the international community needs to continue training of Afghan national security forces, including the military and police. Finally, it is necessary to keep military pressure on insurgency, even as troops levels are being reduced.

There also exists the possibility that the Taliban may well send representatives to the upcoming Bonn conference, as a part of the Afghan delegation. Such a move would be hugely significant and may well serve to increase the significance of the event, with
the chance of a preliminary peace deal being revealed there that has had input from all sides. A recent letter apparently written by Mullah Omar however has dismissed the international conference in Bonn. Despite the dismissal, the letter does apparently soften Taliban positions on peace with the Kabul Government, and suggests the Taliban do not desire complete power over Afghanistan. This may indicate a desire to become part of a non-violent Afghan political process.

Thomas Ruttig, Co-Director of the Afghanistan Analysis Network, believes that it is necessary to invite and increase participation by civil society in the upcoming Bonn Conference. It is necessary to invest in empowering members of civil society in Afghanistan to participate in the political process, specifically voting. Ruttig suggests empowering members of civil society before the 2nd Bonn Conference by hosting a round table discussion between Afghan civil and political forces and encouraging more Afghan participation in the upcoming meeting. Civil society participation was marginalized and not taken seriously in previous conferences.

Obstacles to resolution

First amongst these are concerns over the links between Al Qaeda (AQ) and the Taliban(s). Governments from across the world share an interest in ensuring that Afghanistan cannot become a safe haven for global Salafi militancy. Some evidence does suggest however that AQ and the Taliban (at least the Quetta Shura) hold significant divisions, recognition of this, and desires to reach a peaceful accommodation. This may have a relation with the recent UNSC decision to formally divorce the two organizations, previously lumped together in UNSC Resolutions. This UNSC move may also demonstrate the strength of the desire of the international community to reach a negotiated peace within Afghanistan.

Perhaps the most significant obstacle to negotiations lies in the preconditions set on both sides before official peace talks may take place. The Quetta Shura Talibam and other groups such as Hezb-i-Islami have both previously called for the withdrawal of all foreign forces as a precondition of negotiation. The U.S. government meanwhile has listed: disarmament, abandoning Al Qaeda and acceptance of the Afghan constitution as its conditions, though, it must be noted, in February 2011 Hillary Clinton has revised this position, citing this list as “necessary outcomes” of negotiations rather than preconditions (speech at the Asia Society, New York).

Divisions within the Insurgency also represent problems for peace talks. The ‘Taliban’ is not a monolithic organisation but a name often applied to several groups. The Quetta Shura; Haqqani Network; Mullah Dadullah Front; Hezb-i-Islami are several of the better known groups. The Quetta Shura controls what may most accurately be described as the Afghan Taliban. Its leadership, including Mullah Omar, has strong links to or were part of the Taliban government of Afghanistan prior to 2001. However, even successful negotiations with this group may not end the conflict. The structure of the organisation, based on personal loyalty and relationships, leaves it vulnerable to fragmentation. Other insurgent groups, who cooperate with, but are not part of the Quetta Shura Taliban may require a separate peace.

As important regional powers with particular interest in Afghanistan, both Iran and Pakistan could also present potential problems to any peace process. Pakistan holds some influence over two of the three major insurgent groups in Afghanistan. Both the Haqqani Network and Hezb-i-Islami have reportedly been linked to Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence. Pakistan has implied an ability to force the Haqqani network to the table, but this is not guaranteed, especially if Pakistan feels threatened by Afghan-Indian relations. Conversely Indian suspicion of any settlement with Islamist groups in Afghanistan might serve to encourage Pakistani cooperation. Iran also has some influence on the situation though its interests are more complex. Iran has a strong interest in seeing the establishment of a stable Afghan neighbour, with a government able to challenge the narcotics trade and to curtail the activities of Salafi inspired groups. Iran is opposed to any U.S. military basing rights in a stable Afghanistan; as such Iran’s position on peace negotiations will depend on the specifics of the deals offered by each side.

Finally, negotiations may require a shift in current U.S. tactics in Afghanistan. The significantly increased use of drone strikes and ‘kill or capture’ raids is liable to be detrimental to any peace process. Not only do such attacks undermine trust and harden attitudes, but in the longer term these attacks also degrade the ability of the Taliban leadership to control their organisation: Taliban command and control structures are very much based on personal relationships, which these raids can sever. Leadership in hiding becomes much harder to contact for all sides in the conflict. The Afghan government, alongside NATO and the U.S. may well find themselves negotiating to figures that have become irrelevant to the leadership of the Taliban, as Lawrence Korb (Center for American Progress) affirmed.
Concluding thoughts

In conclusion there are several key points which require highlighting with regards to the current situation in Afghanistan and the future of any resolution to the conflict.

Firstly, it is important to note that the idea of talks is taken seriously by the Taliban. Despite a continuing high level of violence including several recent high profile attacks against the foreign presence in Afghanistan, such as the assault on the British Council and the devastating truck bomb targeted against American military personnel, the Taliban appear to considering the possibilities for a negotiated settlement. Indeed the occurrence of such significant attacks in recent weeks may well be indicative of a desire for an enhanced negotiating position from the Quetta Shura leadership. The presence of individuals such as Tayeb Agha suggest at the very least that high level leadership is aware of peace talks, if not tacitly supporting them. Recent dismissals of peace talks, although worrying, do not necessarily indicate a lack of will on behalf of the leadership. This may have resulted from a desire to re-assure its domestic audience, and lower echelons of its commitment to their struggle and as a further mechanism to gain concessions.

It is also key to note that the process of negotiated settlement will likely be a lengthy process. Although the potential for Taliban representation at Bonn does exist, it would be a mistake to assume that the Bonn Conference will bring about a peaceful resolution or that the conference will result in significant progress towards a deal. As an example, the British Government was involved in negotiations with dissident Irish republican groups from at least the 1970’s before a lasting peace settlement was reached in the late 1990’s. It must also be said that even if/when negotiations do finally resolve the conflict with the Taliban, this will not mean peace and stability for Afghanistan. Splinter groups, separate organizations such as Hezb-i-Islami and the Haqqani Network and those involved in the production and trafficking of narcotics will all remain involved in sub-state violence. These groups may require their own distinct solutions to conflict, or may remain unable to resolve their differences with the Afghan political system. To use Northern Ireland as an example again: to this day small groups continue to perpetrate a low level of violence in pursuit of political goals.

Finally it is important to stress that any deal will likely result in a weakening of the Afghan State. Some analysts have suggested that the Taliban might push for some form of autonomy over the Afghan South, an area where they retain a significant level of support. Any ceding of power to Taliban authorities may encourage similar demands from other political and ethnic movements; in particular many within the ‘Afghan National Front’ political alliance would like to see a decentralization of power from the Karzai execu-

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1. This article is based on a Note produced for the Atlantic Treaty Association, September 2, 2011. This Note is the result of a report from an Evening Debate organized by the Security and Defense Agenda and further research by the ATA Secretariat.


3. Figures for April 2011, figures obtained from: Livingston; O’Hanlon ‘Afghanistan Index’ (September 2, 2011).
Since this summer the Netherlands has started training Afghan police forces in North-Afghanistan. In total 545 people are sent to Kunduz, Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif to educate and train Afghan police forces in what is called a civilian mission. This terminology is not without its challengers.

A new political row over the police training mission in Afghanistan erupted on September 6, after Defence Minister Hans Hillen described the mission primarily as a military one. Hillen said it was ‘strange’ that the Kunduz project could not be described as a military mission when most of the participants are soldiers. ‘In the Netherlands we only want to see the soft side of such an expedition, because we want to make the world a better place. But life is hard, especially in Kunduz.’

Cyber

The Ministry of the Interior declared Dutch government websites may no longer be secure after the digital theft of internet security certificates from the Dutch IT company DigiNotar. The cabinet is looking into whether the Iranian government played a part in...
• QADDAFI’S WHEREABOUTS UNKNOWN

From August 13 the rebel forces were breaking into the Dutch government websites. Internet security experts said it was possible the hacking originated from Iran and involved state support.

Relations between Iran and the Netherlands deteriorated earlier this year when a Dutch-Iranian woman was executed in Iran in January. She was arrested after taking part in demonstrations. She was also accused of drug smuggling. In April the Iranian embassy in The Hague criticized the Dutch government after an Iranian asylum seeker set himself on fire in Amsterdam and died.

NATO

NATO officials are sceptical about the expectation that the alliance will carry out its ambitious structural reforms by the deadline of June 2012. The sources believe it will take until at least the end of 2012 before the 14 agencies are merged into three more efficient umbrella organizations. An allied diplomat said that the 28 NATO nations still have a lot of influence on the NATO reforms and there are half a dozen thresholds that still have to be crossed.

Arab Spring

Libya

On July 28 Abdel Fatah Younis was assassinated. Younis was a defecting general who became the National Transition Council’s (NTC) top military commander. The general was accused of wanting to bring the Libyan militias under his own control. The circumstances surrounding the killing have yet to be explained but it is suspected that General Younis had made unauthorized contact with Colonel Qaddafi. This situation painfully exposes the tribalism between the rebels.

From August 13 the rebel forces were surrounding and effectively besieging Tripoli. They captured key towns like Zawiyah, Bab al-Azizia, and Sabratha. The rebels also managed to enter Bab al-Azizia, Qaddafi’s main base in Tripoli, with the help of continuous bombing by NATO jets. Not long after, the rebels were posing with the new national tricolour on the iconic statue of a fist grasping an American fighter jet and were firing celebratory rounds in the streets of Tripoli.

• The NTC’s chairman Mustafa Abdel Jalil (‘granddaddy’) is widely respected in Libya and abroad. It is questionable what the future will bring now Libya is in the hands of civilians and fighters who are naturally separated regionally and fragmented along religious beliefs and tribal lines. Moreover, there is a traditional deep-seated anti-African sentiment in the Libyan society, leading to numerous arrests of black Libyans based on accusations of being Qaddafi mercenaries. In the meanwhile Qaddafi is nowhere to be found and rumours about his whereabouts have varied widely. Unrest will continue, so much is clear.

Syria

On Sunday July 30 the Syrian army responded to a pro-democratic protest in Hama with unprecedented violence. The crackdown resulted in at least 80 deaths. It was one of the bloodiest days of the Syrian revolt so far.

The Attorney General of the central Syrian province Hama, al-Bakkour, has resigned in protest of the brutal government reaction to the protests. He is the highest official to leave the government so far and this could mean a major blow to President Assad. Bakkour released a video in late August describing the killing of hundreds of jailed peaceful demonstrators by government forces. He also said 10,000 people had been arbitrarily arrested. The government is trying to aver the blame of over 420 murders from security forces, saying the deaths were caused by ‘armed gangs.’

There is a large difference between the situation in Syria and Libya. Contrary to the rebels in Libya, the rebels in Syria are not in control of any cities. The Syrian army and security forces do not show any signs of fracture. Western intervention is barely considered. Activists in Syria claim that their revolution is substantially different from other revolutions in the Arab world and they stress the lesson that absolute power will no longer go unchallenged and repression will not get them off the streets.

On the 18th of August the U.S., Canada and the E.U. called for the resignation of Assad. The E.U. decided, two weeks later, to stop all imports of Syrian oil. Multiple countries in the U.N., including the U.S., U.K., France and Germany, called for sanctions against Assad and his direct associates after the brutal crackdown of the pro-democratic protests in the country.

The plan meets fierce opposition from China and Russia. The Russian ambassador to the U.N. has said that Moscow
**PALESTINIAN BID FOR STATEHOOD**

will veto any plan for sanctions. India, Brazil and South-Africa are reluctant toward sanctions as well. The five opposing countries feel that the NATO intervention in Libya surpassed its UN mandate to protect the civilians. They want to prevent a similar situation in Syria.

Russia stated the West should be wary that ousting another secular leader in the Middle East could open the way to radical Islamic forces. Iran is less patient toward its ally. Iran has generally followed the Syrian government in blaming a foreign conspiracy for the unrest, but now departs from that position by urging Assad to listen to his people’s ‘legitimate demands.’ The relationship with Iran is key to Assad’s regime.

**The Middle East**

**Israel**

- The conflict between Israel and Turkey has reached a new low. On Friday September 2, Turkey said that it was downgrading its diplomatic and military ties with Israel. In addition, Turkey expelled Israel’s ambassador. These announcements display Turkey’s anger at Israel’s refusal to apologize for a commando raid last year against a Turkish ship bound for Gaza, during which nine people died. Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, expressed regrets but refuses to grant a full apology to Turkey. Netanyahu said that Israel needs a T urkish ship bound for Gaza, during a mission in which nine people died. Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, expressed regrets but refuses to grant a full apology to Turkey. Netanyahu said that Israel needs to continue training security forces in Iraq. Turkey has promised to lobby for support of the Palestinians bid for statehood at the annual gathering of the U.N. General Assembly that starts on the 20th of September. The Obama administration has begun a campaign to avert a confrontation over the Palestinian plan, but American officials fear it may be too late. The administration has made clear that it will veto any requests in the U.N. security council to make a Palestinian state a new U.N. member.

- The American State Department issued a formal diplomatic message to more than 70 countries, urging them to oppose any unilateral moves by the Palestinians at the U.N. The intent of the message was to narrow the majority the Palestinians expect to have in the General Assembly. An American veto could inflame emotions and bring anti-American sentiment to the forefront across the region.

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- The European Union is divided on the issue. Among others Germany and the Netherlands are prepared to abstain or vote against the resolution, whilst France, Spain and possibly Britain might vote in favour. Analysts say Europeans should speak with one voice, otherwise their ‘credibility’ across the Middle East will be ‘tainted.’

**Palestine**

- The Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, will be bidding for recognition of a Palestinian state at the annual gathering of the U.N. General Assembly that starts on the 20th of September. The Obama administration has begun a campaign to avert a confrontation over the Palestinian plan, but American officials fear it may be too late. The administration has made clear that it will veto any requests in the U.N. security council to make a Palestinian state a new U.N. member.

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**Iraq**

- Insurgents attacked a bus filled with Iraqi Army soldiers on the September 6, killing eight soldiers and the driver. The attack adds to a new wave of violence which has swept across Iraq in recent weeks. The recent increase in attacks has raised fears about a resurgence of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia. The organisation appeared significantly weakened over the past two years.

- The U.S. considers a plan to keep a small force of 3,000 to 4,000 U.S. troops in Iraq after the deadline for their withdrawal end of this year. Defense Secretary Panetta is in favour of the plan, even though this would mean breaking the longstanding pledge by Obama to withdraw all the U.S. forces from Iraq by the deadline. The small force would have the task to continue training security forces in Iraq.

- The plan still needs approval by both the White House and the Iraqi government. It reflects the friction between Obama’s promise of complete withdrawal and the widely held view among commanders that Iraq is not yet able to provide for its own security.

**AfPak**

- On the sixth of August a NATO transport helicopter was shot down by the Taliban. As a result 38 people died, of which 30 Americans and 8 Afghans. Among the casualties were commando’s belonging to Navy SEAL Team 6, the special forces unit which killed Osama bin Laden in Pakistan in May of this year.

- Last August turned out to be the bloodiest month for the American military in Afghanistan, since the mission started in 2001. Experts attribute the deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan to the American announcement to withdraw completely by 2014.

- In the end of August Atiyah Abd Al Rahman, the number two in the Al...
HEAVY ATTACK ON KABUL

Qaeda network after Bin Laden’s death, was killed in Pakistan by an American unmanned aircraft. On the 5th of September the Pakistani intelligence service, in cooperation with the CIA, arrested Younis al-Mauritani, a key figure of the Al Qaeda network. He is known as the ‘Minister of Foreign Affairs’ of the terrorist organization. American Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta is convinced that the loss of more leaders of the terrorist network will lead to destabilization of the network and possibly bring the organization on its knees.

On Tuesday September 13 Taliban fighters attacked multiple buildings at the embassy district of Kabul, including the NATO-headquarters and the American embassy.

The attacks lasted for twenty hours and were therefore the longest since the war began in 2001. The attackers had ensconced in a nearby building from where they launched multiple rocket and mortar attacks. An Afghan civilian and a policeman were killed, as well as six terrorists. The attack was believed to be the work of the Haqqani network, which is closely connected to the Taliban.

Piracy

Germany plans to lobby other E.U. countries to allow the deployment of private armed guards on their merchant ships in high-risk areas as the piracy crisis escalates. Somali piracy costs the world economy billions of dollars each year. International navies are stretched because of the need to combat the menace over large distances.

The move to protect vessels with private armed guards is a decision to be made on the national level, declared the European Union. The International Maritime Organization warns for a potential escalation of violence. The initiative is likely to face legal and practical difficulties. The decision would have to pass both houses of the German Parliament and would face opposition from the left. It will also prove difficult to persuade foreign port authorities to allow armed groups into their harbours.

The move may potentially create a mechanism for governments to divert from their responsibility to protect sea routes as stated in the U.N. convention on the Law of the Sea. This convention requires nations to tackle piracy on the high seas. The German government has ruled out the deployment of police and military forces. Such protection would only be possible when ships sail under the German flag and most ships are registered under other flags.

Asia

China’s military rise

Rumours that China has tried to sell weapons to the Qaddafi regime, despite the U.N. weapons embargo, are denied by the Chinese government. A Chinese official did confirm that Qaddafi’s regime sent representatives to China to discuss buying weapons from arms companies long after the imposition of U.N. sanctions, but the Chinese government was unaware of the visit at that time. The official stressed that no actual contracts were signed and no arms shipments were made.

Since all weapons manufacturers are state owned it is hard to believe that the government was unaware of the visit. The revelation that China discussed selling weapons to the Qaddafi regime is hugely embarrassing for Beijing, which is already struggling to improve relations with the victorious rebels.

The speed and magnitude of the Chinese military buildup are considered ‘potentially destabilizing’ according to a highly ranked official of the American D.o.D. after publication of the annual Pentagon report on Chinese military development. The Chinese People’s Liberation Army consists of 1.25 million ground forces, the biggest army in the world. The Chinese army is well under way to accomplish its ambitious modernization plans by 2020. The focus of the Chinese military is mostly regional with 1,200 short-range missiles aimed at Taiwan, which is seen as a part of China by the Chinese government.

The Chinese expenditure on defence, around 160 billion dollars in 2010, was still considerably less than the American defence budget of almost 700 billion dollars. A Chinese general was surprised about the American worries surrounding Chinese military spending. He said China has ‘no interest in challenging the U.S. military’ and China does not publicly respond on the ‘enormous American military expenditures’ either.

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Meeting

Empowering women in Afghanistan - stability through rural development

On September 7 2011, the Netherlands Atlantic Association and the American Embassy in The Hague organized a conference about the empowerment of women in Afghanistan. The purpose of the conference was to raise awareness of the importance of gender in the development of Afghanistan. It was moderated by Eva Gross (Free University Brussels).

Progress and potential

Fay Hartog Levin, the United States Ambassador to the Netherlands, provided an overview of development in Afghanistan during the ten years since 9/11. According to Hartog Levin, progress has been made, but it is the violence that reaches the media. There are multiple ways to achieve progress in Afghanistan. First, there is the inevitable military way for creating security. Hartog Levin said that the Dutch contribution was invaluable in Kabul, Uruzgan and currently in Kunduz. Second, in the civilian campaign many development workers contribute to the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Finally, diplomacy tries to achieve peace and stability through a political solution. The last decade saw improvement in the fields of economy, infrastructure, education and healthcare. There was much attention for women’s rights. Women constitute the majority in agriculture, which makes the Netherlands an ideal partner for support, because of the country’s vast experience in that sector.

The second speaker was the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, Uri Rosenthal. According to Rosenthal the position of women in Afghanistan has improved but there is still a long way to go. The Minister made clear that women’s rights and opportunities are not just desirable, but essential. Women represent fifty percent of human capital, therefore it is in the interest of every country to actively involve women in the society, economy, and in political decision-making. Rosenthal explained that the police training mission will involve women in the process. In addition, security is about the rule of law and therefore there is attention for educating prosecutors, lawyers and judges. Rosenthal added that improving women’s access to justice is not only about empowering women - it is also about educating men. The international community must help consolidate Afghanistan’s achievements, but the Afghan government and people need to find their own balance between progressive goals and traditional values.

The next speaker, Melanne Verveer, Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women’s Issues from the U.S. Department of State, addressed the role of women and agriculture in Afghanistan’s economic development. Verveer stated that investing in women is crucial to combat corruption and to improve the political decision-making process. Enhancing the status of women is not only morally and legally righteous, but also economically better. The smaller the ‘gender gap,’ the greater the development and independence of a country. Verveer ended with the proverb: “If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk together.”

Palwasha Kakar, Afghan Deputy Minister of Women’s Affairs, stressed the importance of involvement of the international community. She emphasized that there can be no equality without security. Kakar illustrated the lack of equality by descri-
Kakar’s speech was followed by the first of the two panels. The panel consists of three speakers: M.J. Abbitt Sushka (Private Sector and Gender Advisor), Ahmad Zekria (Coordinator Dutch Consortium in Uruzgan) and Paula Sastrowijoto (Ministry of Foreign Affairs in The Hague). Sushka spoke about the Accelerating Sustainable Agricultural Project (ASAP). A project designed to revitalize and improve global competitiveness of Afghanistan’s agricultural sector. She highlighted micromanagement projects as an important factor of development programs. Zekria stated that 80 per cent of the Afghan people rely on agriculture for their income. Women participate widely in the heavy agricultural labour, contrary to popular belief. Sastrowijoto highlighted the differences between the regions of Afghanistan. Women in Uruzgan are less organized than in other regions, therefore micromanagement projects in Uruzgan have proven to be less successful. Education is needed to raise awareness of the female population. Education, Sastrowijoto said, is the key to bring change. Zekria added that in order for education to work, there needs to be a transformation of the ‘mindset’ of the people. Education is often seen as something negative. Sastrowijoto stated that cooperation with religious leaders is a way to achieve this change in imagery.

The speakers agreed on the need to look beyond one specific field and concentrate on sector integration to achieve a more complete and durable development. Education cannot work without healthcare and food supply. Culture is important and therefore development plans need to focus on regional or provincial areas. A way to achieve cultural and local understanding is through cooperation with NGO’s who know the specific local circumstances.

The second panel consisted of four speakers: Palwasha Hasan (The Afghan Women’s Network), Abdul Rahman Ayubi (Director of Operations for National Solidarity Program), Ella van den Heuvel (Dutch MoD, former ISAF gender advisor) and Sarah Kathleen Rose (USAID). Hasan thinks it’s worth investing in Afghan women, because they constitute a large proportion of all agricultural workers, and rural development is essential for Afghanistan. However, according to Hasan, women must earn higher positions based on merit and not just gender. Support of influential women like Hillary Clinton and Catherine Ashton helps the empowerment of women in Afghanistan. Ayubi identified the limited range of Afghan governance outside Kabul as the biggest problem. The solution would be community rural development, which would enhance social cohesion among the population. Institutionalization of villages and local governments is needed to accomplish this. Ayubi stated that development programs should not be funded completely from foreign aid, but should contain a personal contribution of at least 10 per cent. This stimulates local ownership by involving the population and contributes to a more long-term development.

Van den Heuvel stressed that gender is not one specific policy, but is entangled in a diversity of policies. Gender should not be looked at exclusively, but should be taken into account constantly. Rose agreed on this and said gender related issues go as far as education, health care, legislation and beyond and therefore a wide approach is needed. She also supported the argument about culture: Western ideas and laws should not simply be imported to the Afghan society. Women need to learn how to demand their rights and make sure they are implemented. This could be done through educating these women in certain skills like representation and presentation.

In a final remark, Eva Gross stated that Afghan women should not be seen as victims, but rather as victors of change and human resources for productivity and development.

Rianne Mastop and Bart Mol