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Examining the Suicide Terror Movement in Afghanistan

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“When you do not have guns or bomber planes then your body is the only weapon that you use to resist people killing your families.”²

What is behind the surge of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) and suicide attacks in Afghanistan? Suicide attacks in particular are a recent phenomenon in Afghanistan, increasing by 42 percent from 2006 to 2007.³ This article will examine some of the factors behind the increasing use of suicide and IED attacks as tactics of unconventional warfare in Afghanistan. It will analyze the strategic environment in which these types of operations are used and provide some policy recommendations for countering future IED attacks.

It is important to understand that unconventional warfare is a “strategy of necessity” for the weaker side in an insurgency.⁴ As an asymmetric warfare tactic, suicide terrorism provides incentives for insurgents. In Afghanistan, IED and suicide missions are founded upon three fundamental aims – to compel the United States and ISAF to leave the perceived homeland of Pashtuns, to undermine the legitimacy of the U.S. backed government in Kabul, and to create a desperate environment that provides little alternative but to join the suicide jihad movement. While current evidence shows the Taliban have been only slightly successful in changing perceptions, the momentum could easily shift to their advantage.

Current Events & Trends

Recent attacks have been the most violent since U.S. operations began in 2001. On February 17, 2008, more than 100 Afghans were killed when a suicide bomber detonated his explosives vest at a dog-fighting match, targeting the chief

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² Ahmed, a former deputy minister for education under the Taliban in 2001. Interviewed by United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), *Suicide Attacks in Afghanistan (2001-2007)*, Kabul: August 2007, p. 80.

³ Program for Culture & Conflict Study, Security Incident Database, Naval Postgraduate School, 14 March, 2008. www.nps.edu/programs/ccs/National/Security/securit_incidents07.html (accessed 15 April 2008).

⁴ Jeffrey Record, *Beating Goliath, Why Insurgencies Win*, Potomac Books, Inc., Washington, D.C. 2007, p. 132.

of Arghandab police, Abdul Hakim Jan.⁵ Two days later, another suicide bomber drove his vehicle into a Canadian convoy passing through a crowded border town killing at least 36 – many innocent civilians caught in the middle of a devastating conflict.⁶ In January, three Taliban associated with the Haqqani Network attacked the famous Serena hotel in Kabul, one of the most popular tourist and business venues in Afghanistan.⁷ One attacker detonated a suicide vest he was wearing at the entrance to the hotel.⁸ In 2008, there have been over 60 suicide attacks already⁹ - it is clear, these operations are on the rise in Afghanistan.

While IED attacks rose only slightly from 2006 to 2007, suicide attacks increased dramatically by 42 percent {See Table 1 in Appendix}. The highest increase came in July from one attack in 2006 to 18 suicide attacks in July 2007 – this marked a 1700% percent increase from the year prior {See Figure 1}. From January to March 2007, attacks increased ranging from 133 percent to 550 percent. Only in the extreme winter months of 2007 did attacks follow a declining trend.

For this article, we have separated suicide events from IED events, although the traditional definition of an IED includes suicide channeled attacks. As defined by the National Academy of Sciences, an IED is “an explosive device that is placed or fabricated in an improvised manner”¹⁰ which could include setting up a grenade to be triggered by a trip wire, a rocket propelled explosive to be detonated by remote control, or a mine that has been altered from its original form and placed on a road. IEDs could assimilate destructive, noxious, pyrotechnic or other violent means in order to maim or harm a person. An IED

5 Allaudin Khan and Noor Khan, “Suicide Attack at Afghan Market Raises Two-Day Toll to About 140,” Washington Post, February 19, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/18/AR2008021802009.html?sub=AR> (March 15, 2008), and CCS Research Staff, “Suicide Attacks on the Rise,” *The Culture & Conflict Review*, Vol. 2, #2, March 2008, <http://www.nps.edu/Programs/CCS/Journal/Mar08/Serena.html> (March 19, 2008).

6 Taimoor Shah and Carlotta Gall, “Suicide Attack Kills 36 in Afghanistan,” *New York Times*, February 19, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/19/world/asia/19afghan.html?_r=1&oref=slogin (March 15, 2008).

7 Bill Roggio, “Haqqani Network behind Kabul hotel attack,” *The Long War Journal*, January 15, 2008, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/01/haqqani_network_behi.php (April 22, 2008).

8 Livingston, Kari, “Taliban Responsible for Serena Hotel Attack,” *Associated Content*, January 14, 2008, http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/540951/taliban_responsible_for_serena_hotel.html (January 21, 2008) and *Associated Press*, “Kabul attacker wore police uniform; toll at 8,” *MSNBC*, January 15, 2008.

9 Security Incidents Database, Program for Culture & Conflict Studies, 2008.

10 Committee on Defeating Improvised Explosive Devices: Basic Research to Interrupt the IED Delivery Chain, “Countering the Threat of Improvised Explosive Devices,” National Research Council of the National Academies, Washington DC, 2007. p. 1.

may use military components, but are typically constructed with non-military parts.¹¹ All IEDs contain “explosive materials, detonators, and triggering mechanisms; they are often cased and may use shrapnel.”¹² Generally, explosive devices made of chemical, biological, or radiological material are not classified as IEDs.¹³

While IEDs were used fairly often against the Soviet Union during their ten year counterinsurgency in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989, there was not one case of an Afghan-led suicide attack.¹⁴ The tide changed on September 9, 2001, when the Taliban sanctioned two Arab al-Qaeda agents to carry out an assassination mission on the Northern Alliance military commander, Ahmad Shah Massoud.¹⁵ Since then, the numerical increase from 2005-2007 has invoked comparisons to Iraq. Richard Haas, president of the Council on Foreign Relations raised the idea that “we’re seeing the beginning [of the] Iraqification of Afghanistan.”¹⁶ To put these incredible numbers in context, let’s look at some of the trends that have developed since 2006.

The greatest number of suicide attacks occurs most often in the southern and southeastern regions of Afghanistan where Taliban presence is greatest and security is weakest. However the attack trend has recently shifted north as the Taliban seek to disturb districts with minimal security presence. The United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) collected data of suicide attacks in Afghanistan and found that attacks in Kabul and Khost are 88 and 90 percent more likely to occur before 13:30. Similar tendencies were found in Kandahar and Afghanistan as a whole {See Table 2}. Trends were not as consistent on a weekly timeframe. However in 2006, Kandahar appeared to follow a high pattern of suicide attacks at the beginning of the week. UNDSS suspects that the attackers may have used Fridays for spiritual preparation, Saturdays and Sundays for logistic preparation, and execution of their attacks in the beginning of the week.¹⁷

11 United States Department of Defense, Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, Joint Publication 1-02, April 12, 2001 (As Amended Through October 17, 2007).

12 Committee on Defeating Improvised Explosive Devices, p. 1.

13 Ibid.

14 Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars*, Penguin Press, New York, 2004, p. 134.

15 Amin Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival*, I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., London 2006, p. 229.

16 Glenn Kessler and Michael Abramowitz, “Bush Brings Afghanistan, Pakistan to the Table,” *Washington Post*, September 27, 2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/26/AR2006092601565.html> (March 19, 2008).

17 UNAMA, p. 44.

UNDSS found that in 2005, Body Borne IEDs (BBIED) were not used as often as Vehicle Born IEDs (VBIED); however the trend has shifted to the former as they are relatively cheaper and more effective in creating casualty counts and striking a psychological scar on civilians.¹⁸ BBIEDs achieved roughly 6 victims per attack, while VBIEDs achieved just over 4 victims per attack in 2006.¹⁹ BBIEDs are the most difficult of IEDs to detect and prevent against. They are easily concealed in Afghan clothing and provide the wearer the ability to enter into closed spaces such as market places or buildings where vehicles or other explosive mediums can not enter. As well, they give the suicide attacker the ability to move relatively close to their target and in congested places, create a substantial casualty count. Problems arise if a suicide assailant is nervous, confused, or emotionally unstable to perform the attack, thus setting off the device too early or late. This is usually remedied by remote controlled detonation, a tactic used in Iraq and recently seen in Afghanistan, which provides a spotter the ability to detonate the BBIED at just the right time and prevent accidental detonations from taking place.²⁰ A recent event in Kandahar in which a 10 year-old boy approached a joint military patrol with his hands in the air and then detonated his explosives shows that some operations which appear to be suicide attacks may actually be forced bombing operations.²¹ We are also noticing the use of burkhas for concealment purposes.²² Men use the burkha to evade detection and search procedures by a mostly male dominant security force.

We have seen how a trend towards suicide attacks has emerged, but what explains the phenomenon within a society that traditionally has never used suicide tactics before? One way to answer this question is to look at it through the lens of insurgency warfare. Suicide tactics are essentially an act of desperation by the weak against the strong. All suicide and IED tactics have one thing in common within the role of an insurgency – they seek to undermine the influence of the occupying state by maximizing the psychological and emotional impact such violent and brutal acts have on the mass public,²³ not only in Afghanistan, but in Europe, the United States, and other democratic nations that

18 Ibid., p. 51.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., p.53.

21 Murray Brewster, "Suicide bomber as young as 10 hits Canadians," The Globe and Mail, May 17, 2008, sourced in Afghanistan News Center, <http://www.afghanistannewscenter.com/news/2008/may/may172008.html#9> (May 30, 2008).

22 AP, "Afghan bomber in female garb kills 12, self," The Seattle Times, May 16, 2008,

http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/nationworld/2004418350_afghanistan16.html (May 27, 2008).

23 Ami Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, Polity Press, 2005; Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, Robert A. Pape, 2005

are forced to decide every two to four years whether to commit more troops or pull out of Afghanistan.

Strategic Logic of Suicide Attacks

In examining suicide as a tactic, we can not look at just a single attack but, “the existence of [a] protracted suicide terrorist campaign”.²⁴ University of Chicago Professor, Robert Pape argues the use of a suicide campaign is aimed directly at foreign nations occupying a perceived homeland. Within Afghanistan and Pakistan, suicide organizers attempt to elicit broad support from those with nationalist goals of liberating their perceived homeland from US and Western occupation.²⁵ While some may be motivated by personal, religious, or other reasons, the underlying objective is nationalist, as was evoked by Taliban spokesman, Mohammad Hanif in 2006 in which he explained that Taliban suicide missions are influenced by the “pure nationalist emotions of our people.”²⁶

Suicide campaigns are typically conducted by groups that have relatively limited resources and could not conceivably carry out offensive warfare in a symmetric fashion.²⁷ Most successful attacks are done in a coordinated asymmetric environment – one in which the occupying power cannot control. As Pape explains, organizers of the campaign understand the need to manipulate events enough to affect the greatest level of public opinion.²⁸ Suicide and IED attacks take on the greater dimension of psychological warfare, not only on the local population, but foreign population where legitimacy to wage a counterinsurgency is at least periodically being questioned by constituents.

Since insurgents realize open field warfare is a sure loss they need to fight the classic “war of the flea.”²⁹ Mullah Rocketi, a former Taliban commander who now supports the Karzai government, explained that in 2006, the Taliban adjusted their battle because they could not perform “frontal assaults;” it was evidently more effective to use suicide tactics.³⁰

24 Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, Robert A. Pape, 2005, p. 20.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

26 Interview by Christian Science Monitor, “Taliban Turn to Suicide Attacks,” February 3, 2006, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0203/p01s04-wosc.html> (March 16, 2008).

27 Bruce Hoffman, “The Logic of Suicide Terrorism,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 291, No. 5, June 2003; Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror*, Columbia University Press, 2005.

28 Pape, 2005; Mohammed M. Hafez, “Rationality, Culture, and Structure in the Making of Suicide Bombers: A Preliminary Theoretical Synthesis and Illustrative Case Study,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 29: 165-185, 2006.

29 Phrase coined from: Robert Taber, *War of the Flea, The Classic Study of Guerilla Warfare*, Potomac Books Inc., 2002.

30 Scott Baldauf, “Taliban Turn to Suicide Attacks,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 3, 2006, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0203/p01s04-wosc.html> (March 16, 2008).

In relation to large scale insurgency and warfare operations, suicide attacks are relatively easy to plan and carry out. A suicide attack can be done by virtually anyone. There is no requirement for physical stature or strength; in fact those with physical and mental incapacitations have often been used in Iraq and Afghanistan.³¹ Suicide terrorism is appealing to the mild-mannered citizen who avoids confrontations, is shy, or lacks the appropriate tough demeanor that killing another person requires. According to Randall Collins, suicide bombers provide the tactical advantage of normalcy until the last moment when they detonate their device.³²

Not only are suicide tactics easier for insurgents to execute than open warfare operations, but strategically they are more effective. Part of the strategic logic is to utilize soft targets and perform operations within a theatre of soft targets while disavowing such socially formidable behavior. Taliban have often placed children and women in vehicles packed with explosives in order to evade detection and provide suicide attackers closer access to their targets.³³ The spokesmen for the Taliban often issue rebuttals to allegations of civilian casualties after their attacks; even offering apologies for “collateral damage”. In this way, the process of disassociating responsibility for civilian collaterals is a similar “hearts and minds” repair process that US forces use after innocents are inadvertently killed in combat operations. Considering how the local population can be easily divided by single inadvertent actions on both sides is a peripheral point to keep in mind when constructing counter-narrative campaigns.

As an organizational philosophy, the Taliban understand the public relations hazard civilian targeted attacks, or events which inadvertently maim civilians, can have. They have publicly apologized for killing civilians more than once and appear at least “acutely aware” that they need the support of the local population in order to succeed.³⁴

Manna from afar

31 In January 2008, two mentally disabled women were strapped with remote controlled explosives and used as unwitting suicide bombers at a busy market in Iraq. Reuters, “Factbox-Security developments in Iraq, Feb.1,” AlertNet, February 1, 2008, <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/ANW134851.htm> (March 20, 2008).

32 Randall Collins, “Suicide Bombers: Warriors of the Middle Class,” Foreign Policy, January 2008, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=4131 (March 15, 2008).

33 UNAMA, p. 20.

34 Dan McNorton, “The ‘Iraqification’ of Afghanistan?” Afghan Update, September 2007, No. 13, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, http://www.unama-afg.org/news/_publications/Afghan%20Update/2007/Afghan-update-september-2007.pdf (March 19, 2008).

Foreign support is an underlying exponent of the insurgency.³⁵ Jeffrey Record explains in *Beating Goliath* how foreign assistance in an insurgency can often “blur the distinction” between the weak and strong elements in the theater of operations.³⁶ Foreign help can come by way of material, financial, or intelligence support and can be both intentional and unintentional. The Soviet-Afghan War is the most recent example of insurgencies that were assisted from outside influence (U.S., Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan) and successful. However, without sound strategy and local support, an insurgency may never mature to the tipping point that shifts momentum from the foreign power to the insurgents. This is a key point for the U.S. to consider in waging its information operations campaign against the Taliban. The less local support they have, the more successful we will be.

The sudden surge of suicide attacks can best be explained by outside assistance. The Haqqani network, thought to be operating in North Waziristan is lead by Maulawi Jalaluddin Haqqani, a Pashtun military leader broadly admired for his involvement in fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s.³⁷ He is widely credited with introducing suicide bombing to Afghanistan and his son Sirajuddin Haqqani is known to be much more violent than his father. Sirajuddin is accused of coordinating beheadings and suicide bombings that target a high number of civilian casualties.³⁸ His intensity marks the rise of a new generation of unflinching militants who are replacing deceased or less vital insurgent leaders. To increase the number of victims, insurgent groups are taking on foreign tactics used in Iraq such as ball-bearing packed bombs and powerful C-4 explosives not previously seen in Afghanistan.³⁹ The new generation of leaders is often setting aside old Taliban doctrine that attempted to minimize civilian casualties.

Along with more vicious leaders, Taliban insurgents are building greater levels of cooperation and synchronization of tactics across dimensions and borders. U.S. Army Major General David Rodriguez, top commander of NATO forces in eastern Afghanistan stated, “They are increasing in their coordination. They’re cross-fertilizing their tactics, techniques and procedures and also again

35 Seth Jones, “Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan,” RAND Counterinsurgency Study, Vol.4 June, 2008.

36 Jeffrey Record, *Beating Goliath, Why Insurgencies Win*, Potomac Books, Inc., Washington, D.C. 2007, p. 133.

37 Steve Coll, p. 157.

38 Associated Press, “Taliban’s bomb expertise grows as regard for civilians cast aside,” Moby Media Updates, February 21, 2008.

39 Ibid.

getting resourcing mainly from al Qaeda.”⁴⁰ Al-Qaeda has learned how to capitalize on the tribal elements much quicker than the U.S., Karzai, or Musharraf regimes have. Anthony Cordesman explains that where the government institutions have failed in working with tribal elements in Pakistan, Al Qaeda has succeeded.

“What al Qaeda has done is establish a very clever structure providing money, training, technical help and ideological efforts which reach deep into the Taliban, into the refugee camps and into the Afghan movements.”⁴¹

The security dilemma in Afghanistan is directly linked with that in Pakistan and there is no reason to consider their problems as unique.

The South Asia Security Dilemma

Within the realist school of thought, states never know the intentions of other states and thus respond to perceived capabilities. If one state makes a move to increase its own security, that move decreases the security perception of its rival, thus provoking an in-kind response. This is the classical notion of a security dilemma, something we see between Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India.

Since the 1970s, Pakistan with the support of Saudi Arabia, U.A.E. and tacit support from the U.S. conducted an experiment in what Thomas H. Johnson calls “social engineering”.⁴² They fundamentally marginalized and dismantled the traditional tribal elements in Pakistan and Afghanistan and supplanted them with radical Muslim extremists, used to drain the Soviet Union from its power in Afghanistan.⁴³ Using radical extremists as a strategic hedge to operate in both the Kashmir on the Indian border, and Afghanistan on the west, Pakistan now finds itself trying to bring this “Frankenstein”⁴⁴ under control.

In September 2005, General John P. Abizaid, head of the United States Central Command, stated in reference to Afghanistan, “it makes sense that as NATO forces go in, and they’re more in numbers, that we could drop some of

40 David Morgan, “Al Qaeda influence grows on Afghan/Pakistani frontier,” Reuters, February 27, 2008.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/topNews/idUSN2632529920080226?feedType=RSS&feedName=topNews&rpc=22&sp=true> (March 19, 2008).

41 Ibid.

42 Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, “No Sign until the Burst of Fire: Understanding the Pakistan - Afghanistan Frontier,” *International Security*, Vol., 32, No. 4, Spring 2008, p. 33.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., p. 32.

the U.S. requirements somewhat'.⁴⁵ According to RAND analyst, Seth Jones, the Pakistan and Afghanistan governments interpreted this statement as a sign that U.S. long-term security interests in Afghanistan were diminishing.⁴⁶ This forced each government to align themselves strategically with partners in the region that could ensure at least short term welfare of their security. In a classic balance of power fashion, Afghan President Hamid Karzai turned to India, historically a strategic partner to the Northern Alliance for future security guarantees. Elements in Pakistan reacted and quickly rebuilt a relationship with the Taliban by providing military equipment, arms, ammunition, medical aid, supplies, intelligence and other logistical support that has provided impetus for a re-energized insurgency in Afghanistan.⁴⁷ By the end of 2005, suicide attacks were at 15. Within the first six months of 2006, there were 33 suicide attacks and 129 IED events.⁴⁸ A significant jolt was provided to the Taliban after 2005 which began the urban suicide campaign we see today.⁴⁹

Profiles of Suicide Attackers in Afghanistan

A distinctive demographic of suicide militants are found in Afghanistan as opposed to other areas of the world where suicide attacks occur. Specifically, many are poor, under-educated or illiterate, and are often recruited from Pakistani Deobandi madrassas that are hostile to Shia'a Muslims.⁵⁰ Different demographics are seen in Palestine, Sri Lanka, and Iraq with many coming from middle-class backgrounds, educated, and not always indoctrinated into radical ideologies.⁵¹ Understanding the unique demographic in Afghanistan will help the U.S. gauge their psychological operations appropriately.

In 2007, UNAMA interviewed 23 individuals incarcerated or awaiting trial in connection to suicide attacks in Afghanistan; 21 of the 23 were Afghan nationals and two were Pakistani nationals - one from Karachi and the other from Waziristan. Of the 21 Afghan nationals, fourteen had spent time as refugees in Pakistan and two were refugees in Iran.⁵²

45 Eric Schmitt and David S. Cloud, "U.S. May Start Pulling Out of Afghanistan Next Spring," *New York Times*, September 14, 2005, p. 3.

46 Seth Jones, "Pakistan's Dangerous Game," *Survival*, The IISS Quarterly, Vol. 49, No. 1, Spring 2007, pp. 15-31.

47 Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, 2008; Matthew Cole, "Killing ourselves in Afghanistan," *Salon.com*, March 10, 2008, <http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2008/03/10/taliban/print.html> (March 19, 2008)

48 Naval Postgraduate School, "Security Incident Database," Program for Culture & Conflict Study, 14 March, 2008. www.nps.edu/programs/ccs/National/Security/securit_incidents07.html (accessed 18 March 2008).

49 Sean M. Maloney, "A violent impediment: the evolution of insurgent operations in Kandahar province 2003-07," *Small War & Insurgencies*, 19:2, June 2008: 201-220

50 UNAMA, p. 28.

51 Robert Pape, p. 200.

52 UNAMA, p. 69-70.

While many are poor, illiterate, and refugees within Pakistan, they all have different personal reasons for suicide missions. Some, like Ghulam, a 16-year old from Waziristan was “utterly uneducated”, not knowing whom President Musharraf or President Karzai were. His naivety allowed him to be lured into Afghanistan to blow himself up with a promise of 10,000 Pakistani rupees upon completion of the mission. In interviews, Ghulam did not comprehend he would have been killed without receiving the monetary reward.

In relation to other jobs, the Taliban are paying quite well, around \$10-\$20 to join in an attack⁵³ – which plays an important function in the recruitment process. Subsequent followers will earn \$200 as a lower tier fighter versus \$70 a month if one becomes an Afghan National Police (ANP) officer.⁵⁴ As an ANP officer, one makes about \$4 a day, whereas the Taliban offer \$12 a day.⁵⁵ For more adventurous fighters, rewards can reach \$850 for planting an IED, \$1000 for the head of an official or foreigner, and \$2600 for killing a soldier.⁵⁶ While some cases are purely of pecuniary motivations, others are ethno-nationalist in origin with religious underpinnings.

A curious pattern showed many failed suicide bombers with critical impressions about the Taliban and some thought Taliban were too harsh in their policies.⁵⁷ More however, were angry at the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan and the perceived endemic corruption within the Afghan government. One mentioned the dishonor placed on women held in captivity at U.S. detention facilities.⁵⁸ Many say Americans are taking advantage of their country, but were willing to allow foreign troops to remain “if they are here to help rebuild the country.”⁵⁹ Many acknowledge they do not know where aid is coming from as

53 Max Hastings, “The World Cannot Walk Out on Afghanistan,” *The Guardian*, 12 September 2006

<http://www.arabnews.com/?page=7§ion=0&article=86448&d=12&m=9&y=2006> (March 20, 2008).

54 “Afghanistan: Police casualties high due to lack of training, equipment,” *IRIN*, 12 June 2007

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=72685> (March 20, 2008).

55 Ranchel Morarjee, “Taliban goes for cash over ideology,” *Financial Times*, 25 July 2006

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/c3b3fa7a-1c06-11db-a555-0000779e2340.html> (March 20, 2008), and “Taliban offers fighters

more money,” *United Press International*, 26 July 2006

http://www.upi.com/NewsTrack/Top_News/2006/07/26/upi_newstrack_topnews/3767/print_view/ (March 20, 2008).

56 Phil Zabriskie, “Undeclared,” *Time*, 14 July 2003 [http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,501030721-](http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,501030721-464487,00.html)

[464487,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,501030721-464487,00.html) (March 20, 2008) and Nelofer Pazira, “Return to Kandahar: The Taliban threat,” *The Independent*, 21

August 2006 <http://news.independent.co.uk/world/asia/article1220617.ece> (March 20, 2008).

57 UNAMA, p. 82.

58 *Ibid.*

59 *Ibid.*, p. 83.

convoys hastily zoom past their towns.⁶⁰ Thus a great deal of education is still required to reach not only those in Afghanistan but in the tribal areas of Pakistan where most of the future suicide militants inhabit. Information campaigns should focus on the lack of education among the rural youth – particularly those with little access to modern media platforms.

Many of these suicide militants represent the classical “altruistic attacker”⁶¹ who commits an act because it benefits society in some way. He justifies his action as having some greater social legitimacy. As long as he believes there is “social approval” such attacks will continue.⁶² The attackers tend to either rationalize civilian casualties as bi-products of foreign occupation and thus foreign culpability or they believe true Muslims will be justly martyred as a result. Cracks in U.S. legitimacy are already showing in the southern Taliban dominated provinces of Afghanistan where development is non-existent. If al-Qaeda and Taliban can win the war of hearts and minds in these Pashtun dominated areas, behavior traditionally considered taboo, such as suicide terrorism could become more widely accepted.

Clarifying a Pashtun Narrative

“The true Pathan is perhaps the most barbaric of all races with which we are brought into contact (...) cruel, bloodthirsty and vindictive in the highest degree...”⁶³

Pashtuns are an ancient ethnicity whose origin is not agreed upon by scholars. It is believed that they already resided in the eastern highlands and mountains of what is now Afghanistan when Alexander’s armies passed through the area to invade India in the 4th century B.C.⁶⁴ As a culture, their love of freedom is unmatched anywhere in the world – even America’s mythological idea of freedom cannot stand up to the Pashtun practice of it. For this reason, it is no surprise they resisted efforts to conquer them by Persians, Greeks, Indians, Kushans, Huns, Mongols, Mughals, Arabs, Turks, British, and Soviets.⁶⁵

60 Ahto Lobjakas, “Afghanistan: Should NATO Rethink Its Strategy In Fighting The Taliban,” Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, 19 September 2007 <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/09/3a4ae633-cd83-40a9-8487-8eaed0fbd4fc.html> (March 20, 2008).

61 Robert Pape, p. 187.

62 Ibid.

63 William Crook, 1896, as quoted in, A Handbook of the Fighting Races of India, P.D. Bonarjee, 1899, Thacker, Spink, & Co., p. 11.

64 Leon Poulada, “Pashtunistan: Afghan Domestic Politics and Relations with Pakistan,” in Ainslie Embree Pakistan’s Western Borderlands (Dehli: Vikas Publishing House) 1977, p. 126-151.

65 Ibid.

Throughout their history, the Pashtuns have been known as fierce fighters. At the battle of Maiwand in 1880, the British were decimated by the Pashtun army led by Mohammad Ayub Khan. Of the 2,476 British soldiers, 971 were killed, 168 wounded; 331 camp-followers killed, 210 horses slaughtered.⁶⁶ A legendary Pashtun heroine, Malalai encouraged warriors on the battlefield with this legendary couplet⁶⁷,

*Young love, if you do not fall in the battle of Maiwand,
By God, someone is saving you as a token of shame.*

British often wrote of the Pashtuns in an iconic fashion, both with admiration of their valor and independence, and disgust at the inability to govern them. "(...) they are a wild, lawless turbulent race, to whom law and order are things to be scoffed at."⁶⁸ Because of the time-honored absence of government they "develop a strong individualism among its members."⁶⁹ The British still greatly respected the Pashtun's "resolute look, upright gait, tall and muscular frame, and firm step (...) qualities of the genuine man."⁷⁰ The Pashtuns have since been esteemed for their character and their commitment to their tribal code.

The Pashtun code which defines him is Pashtunwali. As Dupree explains, "this is a stringent code, a tough code for tough men, who of necessity live tough lives."⁷¹ Concepts such as nang (honor), melmastia (hospitality), nanawati (asylum), and badal (revenge) are represented within Pashtunwali. Understanding these concepts, particularly badal and nang in terms of their implications with the ongoing insurgency is important for the U.S. military. It is also important to understand that the philosophy of the Pashtun and Muslim religion, customized to individual tribal nuances, are imbued in different ways within all ethnic groups in Afghanistan.⁷²

The concept of badal (revenge) may be used as an impetus to carry out suicide attacks if it is targeted at those who have committed a grievance against the suicide attacker. Ironically, it is Pashtunwali that "demands blood vengeance, even on fellow Muslims,"⁷³ in order to regain one's nang as opposed

66 Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan*, Princeton University Press, Oxford, 1973. p. 411.

67 Ibid.

68 P.D. Bonarjee, *A Handbook of the Fighting Races of India*, Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co. 1899, p. 9

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid., p. 10.

71 Louis Dupree, p. 127.

72 Ibid., p. 127.

73 Louis Dupress, p. 104.

to mainstream Islam that calls for moderation. However, the idea of a badal suicide attack could be argued against by those who suggest Pashtuns do not fight in a clandestine manner, but would rather display to the community who exactly is carrying out the right of badal. The act of badal is both a social responsibility and a personal undertaking. While some Pashtuns may fulfill badal through suicide, the majority will not and thus any message developed by an information campaign should emphasize the cowardly nature of suicide attack – that which takes nang away from the Pashtun. This will likely be supported by an already decided population (72 percent) whom do not agree suicide attacks are justified.⁷⁴ Although, since this number becomes somewhat distorted when looked at by individual provinces (See Figures 3 and 4), information campaigns will need to be directed more prominently in some areas than others.

The Afghan family is the primary social and economic unit. Within rural Afghan society, the extended family is the “only organized economic unit”.⁷⁵ Sons are the breadwinners and the only means of support for the immediate family and often the extended family. Therefore it is important to emphasize the tragic loss suicide attacks will bring to a Pashtun’s family. Parents should be reminded that their will be great loss in financial and familial support if their sons’ are compelled into suicide militancy.

These messages should not be delivered from western sources. The more Pashtun in origin, the more likely the message will be favorably received. This means recruiting local Pashtuns to write, disseminate, and transmit messages on airwaves, television, internet, and print media to include handwritten night letters countering those which Taliban employ.

Conclusion

This essay has examined the current trends in suicide and IED attacks in Afghanistan as they relate to the ongoing insurgency. We have attempted to lay out a very complex and detailed topic as concisely as possible. The underlying message is that the U.S. is losing the information battle to foreign elements that have infiltrated the tribal system much better than we ever could. They are exploiting the weak, oppressed, and poor and sending them out as suicide bombers – one by one, in an asymmetric fashion. Moderate Pashtuns in Afghanistan and Pakistan need to reframe the message and remind their countrymen of the Pashtun culture and traditions the Taliban and al-Qaeda have dishonored and are attempting to subvert for their own radical ideologies.

74 UNAMA, p. 98.

75 M. Jamil Hanifi, “The Family in Afghanistan,” in *The Family in Asia*, ed. Man Singh Das and Panos D. Bardis, 47-69. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979. p. 50.

Further studies should look deeper into Pashtunwali as well as the nuances of Salafist Muslim identity to develop narratives that will appeal to members of those constituents. Further studies and surveys on the demographics of those most likely to appeal to suicide terrorism are also essential. In the end, even if we do not stop suicide and IED attacks, we at least empower those with the greatest potential to do so.

Table 1: Security Incidents in Afghanistan 2006-2007⁷⁶

Month	Security Incidents			Suicide Attacks			IED Attacks		
	2006	2007	Change	2006	2007	Change	2006	2007	Change
January	60	114	90%	2	13	550%	13	19	32%
February	61	86	41%	3	7	133%	21	11	-91%
March	63	116	84%	5	15	200%	19	20	5%
April	116	161	39%	4	10	150%	24	23	-4%
May	94	156	66%	7	13	86%	16	31	48%
June	142	150	6%	11	10	-9%	22	26	15%
July	111	146	32%	1	18	1700%	14	19	26%
August	125	138	10%	10	11	10%	19	19	0%
September	120	135	13%	14	11	-21%	12	23	48%
October	137	121	-12%	11	10	-9%	23	13	-77%
November	144	109	-24%	12	8	-33%	8	14	43%
December	129	95	-26%	12	5	-58%	21	14	-50%
Total	1302	1527	17%	92	131	42%	212	232	9%

⁷⁶ Security Incident Database, Program for Culture & Conflict Study, Naval Postgraduate School, 14 March, 2008. www.nps.edu/programs/ccs/National/Security/securit_incidents07.html (accessed 18 March 2008).

Table 2: Daily Timing of Suicide Attack⁷⁷

Location	Before 1:30 pm (13:30)		After 1:30 pm (13:30)	
	Y2006	Y2007	Y2006	Y2007
Afghanistan	77%	66%	33%	44%
Kandahar	65%	56%	35%	44%
Khost	83%	88%	17%	12%
Kabul	82%	90%	18%	10%

Figure 1: Suicide Attacks 2006 - 2007

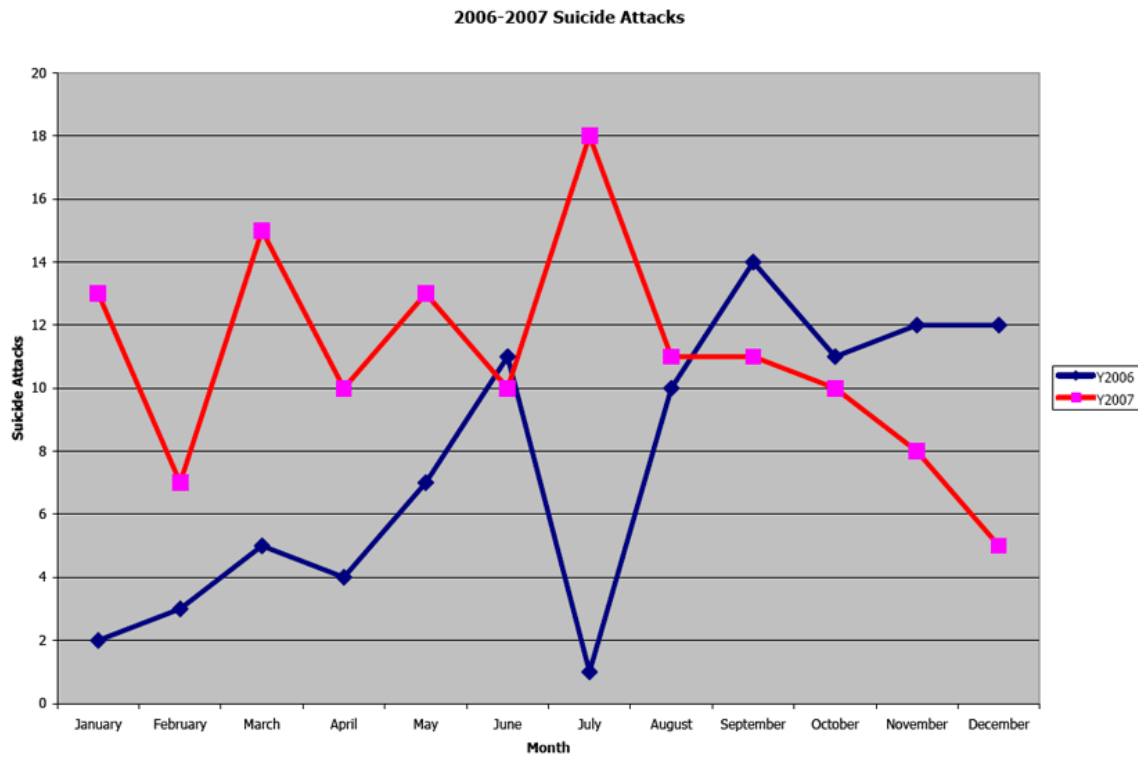
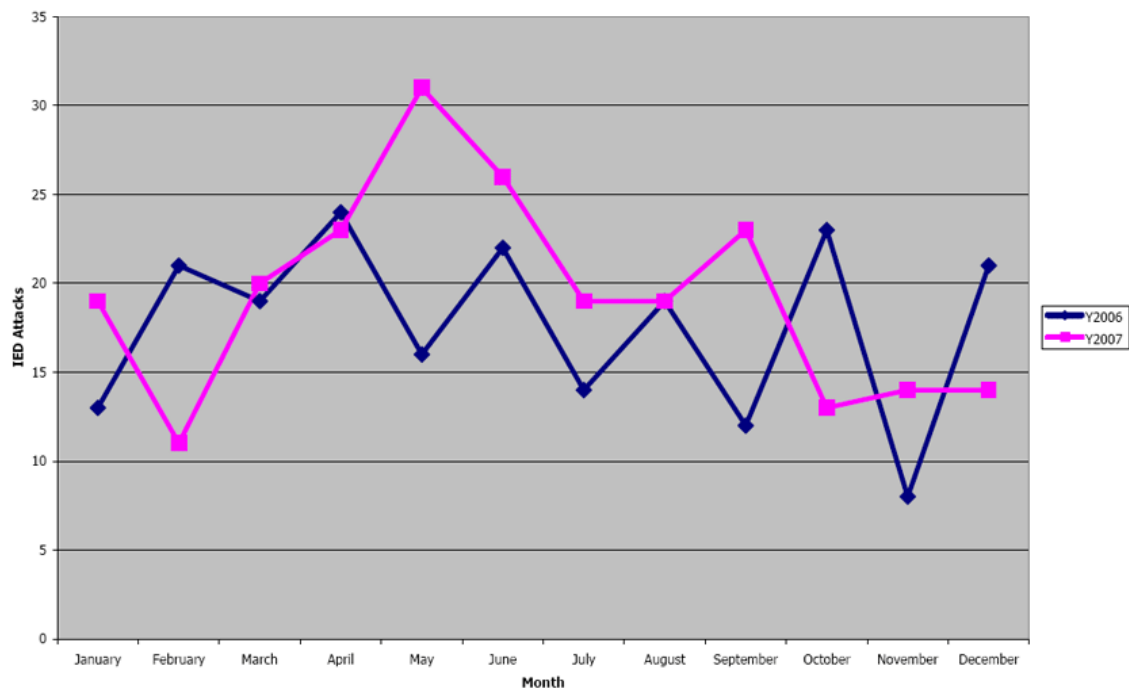


Figure 2: IED Attacks 2006 - 2007

⁷⁷ UNAMA, p. 44.

2006-2007 IED Attacks



Source: Security Incident Database, Program for Culture & Conflict Study, Naval Postgraduate School, 14 March, 2008. www.nps.edu/programs/ccs/National/Security/securit_incidents07.html (accessed 18 March 2008).