

CTX

Volume 4, No. 3 2014



ISSN 2162-6421 (online)
8/1/2014



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From the Editor

This issue begins with a familiar landscape: the eastern border area of Afghanistan, specifically the Paktika valley region. Major Mike Hutchinson gives a personal account of the work he and his team, ODA 3325, did to dislodge the Taliban from an area considered to be one of their strongholds. In the process, not only was the team able to defeat the insurgents militarily, but more importantly, they found a way to reverse the trend of economic decay that years of fighting had brought to the population. Following this article is a thoughtful discussion by Captain Caleb Slayton of the ways in which U.S. military education about Islam falls short of its goal of preparing operators to effectively and respectfully navigate within the Muslim world. The urge to fit Muslims into “good” and “bad” categories through coded language, he tells us, is doing a serious disservice to both Islam and our forces.

Up next is Julia McClenon, who describes the devastating effects that official discrimination and injustice are having on the indigenous Uyghur population in Xinjiang Province in western China. From McClenon’s perspective (she has been living and working in China), Xinjiang represents a living primer on how to drive an oppressed people to terrorist violence. This article is followed by Captain David Hammond’s essay on the unintended consequences that an incomplete understanding of the rules of engagement can have on SOF who operate in highly volatile and uncertain conditions. Based on his experience as a judge advocate general (military lawyer), Hammond offers five methods by which higher commanders can defuse a sense of disenfranchisement and the subsequent loss of morale among deployed forces.

Major Margus Kuul takes a hard look at NATO’s expectation that NATO SOF must fulfill three Special Operations mission sets: direct action, special reconnaissance, and military assistance. Given the reality that most SOF contributors cannot afford to meet these three mission requirements on their own, he asks whether it’s time to reassess. Colonel Imre Porkoláb then brings us another in a series of essays on SOF in the era of “cool war.” As the nature of future warfare becomes more irregular, disruptive, and secretive, what does this mean for innovative leadership?

The final feature article in this issue, by Dr. Ali Fisher and Dr. Nico Prucha, describes and analyzes the way in which jihadist networks are becoming increasingly resilient by using Twitter accounts and nodes to spread both doctrine and information. They illustrate how messages from some principal users are repeatedly retweeted in a way that may make the networks impervious to disruption.

The CTAP interview with former DEA officer Kirk Meyer focuses on his work from 2008–2011 to establish the first Afghanistan Threat Finance Cell. Through utter determination and a willingness to make the most of every available asset,

Meyer's team was able to develop an in-depth understanding of local drug trafficking and crime networks, their relationships with the Taliban, and their potential breaking points.

CTX's own Ryan Stuart contributes a review of Phil Klay's book, *Redeployment*, a collection of short stories about American servicemen in and around Operation Enduring Freedom in Iraq. The stories Klay tells are fiction, but, as Stuart implies, probably not by much.

I'm writing this letter from New Delhi, where I'm meeting with CT professionals to discuss the various kinds of terrorism India faces, and what India has been doing to combat them—a reminder that all sectors of the globe deserve attention from CTX, not only the Middle East. So, please keep those contributions coming.

Look for back issues of CTX at GlobalECCO.org/journal and “like” Global ECCO on Facebook, where you can stay up-to-date on news, events, and the CTFP community. The quality of CTX depends on our readers, who are our main contributors. We'd appreciate getting your feedback at [GlobalECCO.org](mailto:CTXEditor@globalecco.org).

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About the Contributors

Dr. Ali Fisher specializes in delivering insight into complex information ecosystems through network analysis and big data. Using insights from data analysis, Dr. Fisher has worked as an advisor, strategist, and author on methods of achieving influence across a range of disciplines, including public diplomacy and strategic communication, counterterrorism, child protection, human security, and public health. His books include *Collaborative Public Diplomacy* (2012), *The Connective Mindshift* (2013), and *Trails of Engagement* (2010). He received his PhD from the University of Birmingham.

Captain David Hammond is a judge advocate in the U.S. Army. He is presently assigned as the battalion judge advocate for 2d Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington. CPT Hammond's previous assignments include command judge advocate, Special Operations Task Force–West, Helmand Province, Afghanistan, 2013–2014; operational law attorney, Task Force Spartan, Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, 2011–2012; trial counsel, 3d Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, Fort Drum, New York, 2010–2011; and trial counsel, U.S. Army Research, Development, and Engineering Command, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland, 2008–2010.

Major Michael Hutchinson graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 2003 with a BS in Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies. He deployed to Anbar Province, Iraq, with 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment from 2004 to 2005. Upon completion of the Special Forces Qualification Course in 2008, he was assigned to 3rd Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne), leading Operational Detachment–Alpha (ODA) 3325 in Paktika Province, Afghanistan, during two deployments between 2009 to 2012. ODA 3325 became one of the first Village Stability Operations teams, and returned to the same location in Paktika Province for a total deployment period of 20 months. MAJ Hutchinson is currently attending the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) and expects to graduate with an MS in Defense Analysis in December 2014.

Major Margus Kuul has been on active duty in the Estonian armed forces since 1998; he joined the Estonian Military Intelligence Battalion in 2008, where he continues to serve. MAJ Kuul graduated from the U.S. Marine Corps Basic Officer Course and Infantry Officer Course in 2001, and the Estonian National Defence College Basic Officer Training course in 2003. MAJ Kuul was deployed in Iraq in 2005 as a light infantry platoon commander.

Julia McClenon is a writer, researcher, and editor who helped found and develop the *Combating Terrorism Exchange* journal at NPS in 2011. She then served as a U.S. Foreign Service officer in China from 2012 to 2014, where she was the inaugural chairwoman for the Ambassador's Civil Society Subgroup on Religion (title translated from the Chinese). In 2014, McClenon helped open the Sino-U.S. Friendship Association for Guangzhou University. She has presented to Chinese audiences on topics ranging from American civil liberties and the mechanics of

four-stroke engines, to the poetics and history of hip hop and spoken-word poetry. Her BA in Interdisciplinary Studies is from Global College, Long Island University.

Kirk E. Meyer served for 23 years with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) as an assistant special agent in charge of the multi-state Chicago Field Division. His last two overseas assignments were in Afghanistan, where he served from 2006 to 2008 as the DEA assistant country attaché. From 2008 to 2011, he was the founding director of the Afghanistan Threat Finance Cell, which worked to identify and disrupt funding streams to terrorist organizations and to target high-level public corruption. Meyer received numerous performance awards from the DEA, and in 2011 was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal by General David H. Petraeus. Since retiring from the DEA, he has been the senior manager of the Financial Intelligence Unit at GE Capital, Americas.

Colonel Imre Porkoláb is presently the Hungarian National Liaison representative at NATO Allied Command Transformation in Norfolk, Virginia. COL Porkoláb played a pivotal role in developing the Hungarian Defence Forces' SOF capability while serving with the Ministry of Defence, Joint Forces Command, and then as commander of Hungary's SF battalion. He has served in both Iraq and Afghanistan. COL Porkoláb holds a PhD in military leadership.

Dr. Nico Prucha of the University of Vienna focuses on jihadi online activities related to Syria and the organized opposition. He is also a fellow at the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy, University of Hamburg. His research centers on textual and audiovisual content analysis of jihadist activity online, specifically focusing on extremist shari'a interpretations of hostage taking and executions. He has written frequently on the subject and blogs for Jihadica.com.

Captain Caleb Slayton is an active-duty officer in the U.S. Air Force, where he serves as director of the AFRICOM Theater course for Special Operations Forces. He completed a master's degree in Middle East and Africa Security Studies from NPS and graduated with honors in Arabic from the Defense Language Institute. Capt. Slayton lived for 10 years in various regions of Africa, and completed study immersions in Cameroon and Tunisia. Capt. Slayton writes on African security issues, religious dynamics, and military operational culture.

Ryan Stuart is the layout and design director for *Combating Terrorism Exchange*. She is a voracious reader of books on many subjects and is one of Goodreads.com's Top 100 Reviewers. She earned her BA in English from California State University, Sacramento and has taught English as a Second Language, as well as classes in fiction and nonfiction writing. She has written hundreds of short stories, four screenplays, one stage play, and two unfinished novels. Stuart is currently finishing (much to her relief) a third novel.

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Building the Future: An Unlikely Coalition and a Road in Rural Afghanistan

A SPECIAL FORCES OPERATIONAL DETACHMENT—ALPHA (ODA) comprises 12 soldiers with different specialties and roles: leadership, intelligence, weapons, engineering, communications, and medical. In that regard, ODA 3325 was not unlike any other team, but the team I had the good fortune to lead from 2009 to 2012 brought together a notable collection of oddly useful skills. Our intelligence sergeant possessed a degree in geology and a strong mathematical background. Our senior engineer held a degree in molecular biology and had been a local politician prior to joining the Army. Our senior communications sergeant was a professional motocross¹ racer whose mechanical and technical skills surpassed those of even the contracted maintenance personnel we encountered. Seven members of the team had completed the Army Ranger School, three had previously served in the 75th Ranger Regiment, and all but I were graduates of the grueling Combat Diver Qualification Course. The team's personality, therefore, was highly aggressive, extroverted, and detail-oriented. Taken at face value, such a personality may seem ill-suited to counterinsurgency operations; however, in one place, at one time, it was a perfect fit. Despite numerous mistakes and obstacles, the team persevered toward a grand dream: creating a new economic corridor in restive Paktika Province, Afghanistan.

MAJ Mike Hutchinson, U.S. Army



In light of nine years of war, insurgency, and occupation, it is no wonder that events in Paktika unfolded as they did from 2010 to 2012; everything that happened during our time there was predictable, except perhaps the outcome. If the enemy of progress is isolation, then its best friend must be connection. That is why we were on the rugged southeastern border of Afghanistan trying to build a road.

The operational detachment—alpha team I had the good fortune to lead from 2009 to 2012 brought together a notable collection of oddly useful skills.

Shkin: January 2010

Shkin is the vilest place in Afghanistan.
— Colonel Rodney Davis, 2003²

As our helicopter swooped downward in ever-shrinking circles toward the landing zone, we surveyed the physical terrain that would frame our problem. Small adobe-and-stone houses punctuated a landscape of hard-scrabble farm plots in the valley. A shuttered bazaar sat visible on the Pakistani border, while a rutted dirt road snaked away westward into the snow-topped mountains of Paktika Province in southeastern Afghanistan. We saw neither pedestrian nor vehicle traffic; this was a land of isolation and deprivation, hardly worth a fight, and yet it had witnessed some of the nine-year conflict's most violent confrontations.

This was a land of isolation and deprivation, hardly worth a fight, and yet it had witnessed some of the nine-year conflict's most violent confrontations.



Commander Aziz demonstrates the scale of an improvised explosive device detonation in Spedar Pass; his engineers found and cleared this IED prior to our convoy's reaching it.

To say that Aziz—called *Karwan*, or “Commander,” by his soldiers and close allies—despised the Taliban is a gross understatement.

Upon arrival, we met the infamous Commander Aziz. His battlefield record in the region was long and distinguished—perhaps as long as the list of third-hand criminal accusations leveled at him by journalists in Kabul. He was stocky, with a thick, black beard, and sported a pressed set of modified fatigues in a black-and-green-tiger-stripe pattern. He wore a crisp, clean baseball cap with new Oakley sunglasses perched on the brim. To say that Aziz—called *Karwan*, or “Commander,” by his soldiers and close allies—despised the Taliban is a gross understatement. He described in detail the predations of foreign fighters, his imprisonment in the 1990s, and his near assassination in 2006. He outlined the enemy disposition surrounding Shkin, from indirect-fire positions to infiltration routes. Aziz saw himself as the gatekeeper. He protected the only “good” tribes of Paktika—those immediately surrounding his base—with a laser focus commensurate with his responsibilities. In his eyes, however, those responsibilities ended at the borders of Barmal District, in which the informal district of Shkin was located. Through this limited perceptual lens, which essentially extended no further than the range of his aftermarket rifle optics, there was nothing beyond Shkin but the enemy, and his fellow Afghans were derelict in their duty to fight.

On the third day, we prepared to participate as partners in the first of what would eventually be several hundred *shuras*.³ Mohammad Azzam sat nervously in the briefing room with us. Azzam was the district governor of Shkin, and since Shkin was not recognized by the central government in Kabul, neither was he.⁴ Aziz outlined for us the talking points for the meeting: reporting procedures for the discovery of IEDs, theft of the Ahmadzai Waziri tribe’s commercial trucks by the Kharoti tribesmen in the village cluster of Rabat, and a religious appeal for Afghan patriotism. Azzam’s role, as usual, would be as the religious foil to Aziz’s iron fist. When I finally was able to speak, I asked Aziz, “What should I say?” “Nothing,” he replied. “Not this time. I will introduce you, but that is all. Until you see the area and hear how the people argue, and see how the Pakistanis keep the fire burning, you might say the wrong thing.”

We walked through the main gate and over to the shura building, which was a simple plywood structure with a sand-filled blast wall on its east side to protect against rocket fragmentation. The wall had done its job; pockmarked from shrapnel and beginning to split at its seams, the barrier ensured that the building would collapse from extensive rot and a leaky roof rather than from explosions. The scene, in fact, provided a perfect allegory for Aziz’s protection of eastern Paktika Province. Aziz entered first, followed by Azzam, with me and my best interpreter in trail. We were the last to arrive, as is customary in these meetings. On the border, he with the most guns and money is most honored, and the simple tribes of Shkin were no match for our firepower and deep pockets. Our thrones were therefore the most intact of the plastic lawn chairs arrayed around the room.



Following the mullah’s opening prayer, the script began. Sher Nawaz stood first to speak, which was his right as the leader

of the most powerful tribe, the Ahmadzai Waziri. He was followed by the Banzai Kharoti leader, Mir Afzal. Azzam punctuated the series of monologues with a tirade regarding the un-Islamic practices of the Taliban in a forceful, authoritative tone that seemed completely contradictory to his previously timid demeanor. It was as though he spent the course of each week hoarding his energy for a two-minute burst of emotion. I sat silently behind Aziz as my interpreter whispered the main points of this political theater. No debatable observations or inflammatory statements emerged. It was no wonder the previous Special Forces team had praised the functioning local governance of Shkin: despite its rustic trappings, the shura might have been televised on C-SPAN.⁵



Sher Nawaz, head elder of the Ahmadzai Waziri tribe, speaks to Commander Aziz

Before Aziz could conclude the meeting, however, a younger man stood up, pointed his finger at the Kharoti elders, and began to shout. A disgruntled murmur passed through the assembly, as I turned to my interpreter with a quizzical look. “That is Daria Khan, a Langikhel Kharoti from the town of Rabat,” he stated. “He used to work for Aziz, but now he is just a thief and a troublemaker. He is probably the one who stole the Waziri trucks.” “What’s he saying?” I asked in a clear tone, as the roar of the argument began to rise. “He says the elders in Rabat are all Talibs that pay money to Chamtu, a very bad guy. He wants to raise a force to fight the Talibs and says Aziz and the other Kharoti leaders need to support him.” Aziz deftly defused the tension, adjourned the meeting, and led our contingent out of the building. My curiosity was piqued; addressing Aziz by his title, I said, “Tell me about Rabat, Karwan.”

It was no wonder the previous Special Forces team had praised the functioning local governance of Shkin: despite its rustic trappings, the shura might have been televised on C-SPAN.

“Money as a Weapon System”: 17 March 2010

A large, laminated map of eastern Paktika hung from a piece of ¾-inch plywood in the briefing room. Aziz’s military map-reading skills were adequate to visually depict for us Rabat’s internal and external tribal conflicts, as well as its attractiveness as an insurgent facilitation hub and piracy mecca. Five clans were spread across a confluence of intermittent streams that together formed a small but permanent river. Over about the past decade, as the snowpack from the mountains melted in April, Rabat had been experiencing increasingly destructive annual flash floods that eroded the villagers’ best plots of land. As the arable land shifted, so did the balance of power among the five tribes, and by 2010, things had reached a critical juncture. The Issakhel and Langikhel were now competing for the orchards, as the Abbaskhel slowly encroached on grazing land from the north. To the east, the neighboring Othmanzai Waziri tribe maintained a shaky truce with the Kharoti in Rabat; the slightest provocation could ignite a tribal war.⁶

Rabat had been experiencing increasingly destructive annual flash floods that eroded the villagers’ best plots of land. As the arable land shifted, so did the balance of power among the five tribes.

Aziz traced the crumbling dirt road from the border at Shkin, northwest through Tora Tangay, on to Rabat, and then jabbed his finger forcefully on a narrow pass north of the town.

“This is Spedar. It is the worst of places. Many ambushes—one of the 7th Group engineers was killed there a few years ago. Every time I go there, it is a fight.”





Our convoy enters the Spedar Pass from Rabat village as a storm is visible in the distance

As Chamtu's group left Rabat and moved on to other camps and ambush sites, the tribesmen of Rabat essentially took turns extorting any through-traffic.



A patrol moves toward Spedar

Our interpreter provided me with a hushed biography of each malik as he entered. "That is Malik Asgrar. He is the biggest Talib supporter here. Malik Bengal is an okay guy, but he is afraid," and so on.

"Why is it so important?" I asked. "There are other routes around further in the mountains."

"Those routes are hard to drive. The trucks might break. If the trucks break, the Talibs will mine all the ways out, and it will cost us."

Having seen the incredible ability of an Afghan to drive a low-riding Honda Civic over the roughest of passes, I wondered aloud whether the road's condition similarly affected the large "jingle" trucks, which carried commercial supplies.

"It is possible, just like for us," Aziz acknowledged. "But if they break, it is expensive in time and money. That's why they pay the toll in Spedar."

This toll went not only to the Taliban and Chamtu, the local Taliban leader whose name had come up in the shura. As Chamtu's group left Rabat and moved on to other camps and ambush sites, the tribesmen of Rabat essentially took turns extorting any through-traffic. Aziz stated plainly that it was their best means of making money.

"When can we go to Rabat?" I asked him. "The team needs to see it firsthand."

Aziz quickly replied, "We can go tomorrow. We will summon the *maliks*, the leaders of each clan, when we arrive. You will see how they act."⁷

The drive to Rabat, though only 15 kilometers from Shkin, took more than two hours. To call the route at that time a "road" is an insult to civil engineers worldwide. As we emerged from the mountains and descended toward the cluster of clan villages that composed the town, the area appeared from a distance to be a dustbowl. Once we had dismounted our vehicles and proceeded on foot along the flanks of the convoy, however, we walked through the most lush greenery and orchards we had seen so far in the region. This land was indeed worth fighting over. We entered the Rabat bazaar, a shanty town of closed mud huts, by way of a circuitous path that revealed a defaced and abandoned elementary school. Numerous crumbling masonry culverts and dams dotted the route. Our interpreter noted our surprise at the engineering attempt and informed us, "CARE International put them here when the Taliban was in charge. But they are hollow like this place now."

We entered the lone teahouse situated beside the lone auto shop, which was adjacent to the lone pharmacy. Even the mosque seemed decrepit. The maliks of Rabat slowly arrived, and our interpreter provided me with a hushed biography of each as he entered. "That is Malik Asgrar. He is the biggest Talib supporter here. Malik Bengal is an okay guy, but he is afraid," and so on. When Malik Abdul entered the room, all rose, including Aziz. Apparently, Abdul was the man upon whom the sentiment of the town turned. He led the Langikhel clan, whose superior agricultural land provided them with a relative degree of power over their similar-sized neighbors. The Langikhel and Issakhel maintained a non-violent but increasingly tense dispute regarding ownership of the productive orchards on the southern side of Rabat's central stream. Both clans were similarly suspicious of the northern Abbaskhel clan's intentions vis-à-vis grazing rights. All clans agreed that their eastern neighbors, the Othmanzai Waziri, provided the primary threat to Rabat's land and water. Consequently, the clans viewed the local Taliban group as a necessary evil; it maintained the status quo

by denying both Othmanzai encroachment and political power plays by any single clan in Rabat. The Taliban, for their part, adeptly manipulated each clan to aggrandize their own political power and ensure that their fighters had access to food, shelter, information, and protection. I shook Malik Abdul's hand in the ritual manner, and as he proceeded to his seat beside Aziz, the invocation by the mullah began.

We discussed Chamtu and his Taliban operatives, the theft of Waziri trucks, the extortion of commercial traffic—all the sins of Rabat's clans. Malik Asgrar countered each point as it was raised, and Aziz's patience began to falter.

"Security is my responsibility. If you do not side with the government and stop supporting the Talibs, I will be back, and it will not be for tea," Aziz warned the room. Asgrar sat silently this time, with a determined glare.

"What are we to do?" asked Malik Abdul. "It is fine to say the government supports us, but who will get here first? This matter is not about supporting the Taliban; it is about our survival. Even if we stand, we will be weakened, and when we are weakened, the Othmanzai will come. Perhaps they will come with the Ahmadzai as well. The Banzai are safe by your base, but there are no bases here."

As we left the teahouse and the elders dispersed toward their respective villages, I saw Daria Khan. "What can we do to change things here? What will convince the elders?" I asked him. Without hesitation, he responded, "Kill Chamtu."

In our operations center in Shkin, the team debated what was to be done. Spring had not yet arrived, and we had used the winter months to visit the majority of the region's communities, which spanned five districts and approximately 644 square kilometers. Every place we went, we witnessed the same passive acceptance of poverty and the psychological control that fear of the Taliban exerted. Abandoned bazaars, crumbling infrastructure, and failing crops throughout the valleys provided a visual context for this hopelessness. Most families reluctantly sent at least one son to join the Taliban ranks, while also sending a son to the government security forces; this was both to hedge their bets for the uncertain aftermath of the coalition forces' withdrawal and to glean what little income they could from all available sources.

When we'd arrived in-country in January, we had expected to continue the previous ODAs' strategy in Shkin: strengthen control of the border. This approach matched Aziz's perception of the security situation, the desire of the supportive Shkin tribes, and even the doctrine put forward by the Army's field manual on counterinsurgency. In 2010, however, a mission called Village Stability Operations (VSO), which was a grassroots effort to connect rural areas to the central government in Kabul through their respective district administrations, was *en vogue*. Under this construct, our team would need to find a strategically relevant community that actively desired to resist the Taliban. We would live in their village and mentor their security and local governance efforts, while delivering small-scale sustainable development projects to reward participation and slowly rebuild civil society. Given the political shift in our headquarters to support this nascent mission, and the debate in Kabul over the proposed Afghan Local Police (ALP) program, we knew we would soon receive a change of mission.



"jingle" truck

"What are we to do?" asked Malik Abdul. "It is fine to say the government supports us, but who will get here first? This matter is not about supporting the Taliban; it is about our survival."

In 2010, a mission called Village Stability Operations, which was a grassroots effort to connect rural areas to the central government in Kabul through their respective district administrations, was *en vogue*.

I drew the boundaries of a corridor running from Karachi, Pakistan, to the Ring Road highway in Ghazni, explaining: “This is where the people are, and this is where the chance for profit is.”

“We’ll tell them they’re going to create a new Torkham Gate, without Kabul, without ISAF. They’ll build it, and they’ll own it.”

“Tell me where we get to fight someone to inspire the buy-in for the grand plan.” All eyes turned to a tiny point on the map to the northwest: Spedar.

As we scribbled notes and graphics on a six-foot-square map of the region, and glanced at hydro-topographical maps and graphics of population density, a subliminal outline emerged from the optical illusion of our military map. I drew the boundaries of a corridor running from Karachi, Pakistan, to the Ring Road highway in Ghazni, explaining: “This is where the people are, and this is where the chance for profit is. From the port at Karachi, north by rail to South Waziristan, then by road to Kabul and Kandahar, and it all cuts right through here.”

Greg, our intelligence sergeant, chimed in, feverishly drawing circles on the map. “There’s a lot of potential, but we’ll have hard sells in Rabat and Surobi just to reach the hub in Orgun. And even if we convince Rabat, we’ll have to secure Spedar before we can do anything else.” He continued by highlighting the points of political pressure we could use to sway Rabat. Rob, the team’s engineer-cum-resident politician, noted that political maneuvering could produce verbal and written commitment, but behavioral commitment was a step further. “They need to believe that the profit will come, and they need to believe it’ll stay after we leave. We can’t just secure the corridor; we need to pave it. At that point, they’ll be so invested they’ll have to fight for it.” Other team members noted that in the *Money as a Weapon System–Afghanistan* (MAAWS–A) directive, as well as our discussions with development organizations and the Provincial Reconstruction Team, no appetite for road paving existed.⁸

Greg retorted, “ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] and the Asian Development Bank already started paving the road from Sharana [the provincial capital] to Orgun, but had to stop when the Talibs took control of Sar Hawza. I know that a contract for the stretch from Orgun to Rabat was on the table before the development staffs decided to get out of the road-building business. A stretch from Rabat to Shkin would naturally tie into the road-paving project from Wana to Shkin that’s already underway. If we secure the corridor and the Afghans clearly rise up against the Talibs, and in return all that the people want is the road, ISAF will have no choice but to finish the road paving they started in Sharana. If we build it, they will come.”

I sat quietly for a moment, considering what the team had proposed, and then gave my assessment. “We’ll never sell this to the tribes in our words. We need Afghans to sell it for us. To convince them, we’ll need to inspire them. We’ll tell them they’re going to create a new Torkham Gate,⁹ without Kabul, without ISAF. They’ll build it, and they’ll own it. MAAWS–A is for dollars. This profit will be in rupees.” In other words, if the locals secured the corridor, they would make money regardless of the pending U.S. withdrawal of troops—and contract dollars—from Afghanistan. The most aggressive member of the team (which is quite an honorific, given his peers in the circle) stated the final point of the strategy plainly. “I love your theory, but these people respect strength. That’s why they respect the Talibs. Tell me where we get to fight someone to inspire the buy-in for the grand plan.” All eyes turned to a tiny point on the map to the northwest: Spedar.

Picking a Fight: 29 April 2010

Aziz’s assertions that every trip through the Spedar Pass resulted in a fight were not entirely accurate; when dismounted forces cleared the high ground that flanked the road prior to convoy arrival, the trip involved nothing beyond discovered IEDs. If we were to provoke an engagement, we needed to appear

vulnerable. Our convoy therefore consisted of only six lightly armored Humvees carrying 40 personnel—12 Americans and 28 of Aziz’s men—at the height of the midday sun, and we ceded the dominant high ground to the enemy. We also took pains to ensure that, shortly after our departure, the Taliban’s information network confirmed that our final destination was Orgun, which would require traveling through the pass. This allowed the enemy enough time to gather forces, but not enough to prepare and emplace complex explosive devices. Our firepower on these six vehicles would still outmatch what the enemy could realistically muster, but by allowing the Taliban access to the best ground and secure withdrawal routes, we knew they would fight. To further ensure a clash, we publicly reiterated our standing rule—one that endured throughout our two years in Paktika: so long as IEDs and mines were not used against us, we would not use air power or artillery.

Aziz dispatched two of his most adept mine-spotters, dressed in full Taliban garb, through the pass on local motorcycles a half hour before our arrival. Our vehicles moved as quickly as the narrow, pitted road that climbed into the mountains north of Rabat would allow, with the result that intermittent bursts of speed were bracketed by slow crawls over eroded water crossings. The Taliban historically preferred to fight at the northern end of the pass, where the tall, craggy peaks provided a thick covering of cypress forest and commanding views of the road and the Orgun valley. Sure enough, as we rounded the final left turn into this traditional kill zone, the ambush we had been expecting began with a sustained burst of PKM machine gun fire. Only our first four vehicles could fit within the kill zone, and the rocky terrain prevented mounted off-road maneuver, so our two trail vehicles were effectively neutralized at the outset of the fight. Gunners in

the lead vehicles returned fire with heavy weapons, while the remainder of the force dismounted and began a volley of rifle fire. Bullets pierced the thin turret armor of the Humvees as we emplaced our 60-millimeter mortar. The first round from this weapon, aimed directly at the enemy position less than 200 meters away, silenced the din. The trail vehicles’ dismounted personnel had organized a squad to flank the western high ground and started up the hill; by the time they completed the tiring ascent, the Talibs had retreated toward their stronghold in Hybati, carrying their equipment and casualties. Chamtu, as we found out, was unharmed. We nevertheless did not immediately attempt to pursue the Talibs. Our ultimate goal, then and throughout our time in the province, was to cultivate the perception of government strength at the expense of the Taliban, and we had achieved this. Controlling perceptions is more decisive than controlling physical terrain, and infinitely more important than attempts to kill the enemy.

We continued to the large base at Orgun, approximately 32 kilometers north of the pass, and received the infantry battalion commander’s blessing to focus our



ODA 3325 and Commander Aziz's Special Squad of Afghan National Police prior to a combat operation



As we rounded the final left turn into this traditional kill zone, the ambush we had been expecting began with a sustained burst of PKM machine gun fire.



I considered how many points would require fixed fortifications to hold the road; it would be a daunting task of construction, if the political gambit even worked.

tribal engagement efforts in Rabat. Successfully convincing the clans to secure the mountainous stretch from the Bermel Valley in the east through the Spedar Pass to the north would facilitate ground resupply of the commander's isolated bases near the Pakistani border, as well as enable his holistic governance and development objectives for eastern Paktika. He welcomed the ODA's participation in the group's meetings, which provided an avenue to advance our concepts regarding the economic development that would follow security in the corridor. Once our scheme became a part of the Battlespace Owner's larger plan, it would be difficult for our headquarters to disapprove the concept. We drove south toward Rabat, proceeding cautiously through Spedar

without incident. As I surveyed the high ground, I considered how many points would require fixed fortifications to hold the road; it would be a daunting task of construction, if the political gambit even worked.

We met again with the maliks, and Aziz pressured them for support. "Why are you afraid of Chamtu? We beat him easily, and you have hundreds more men," he demanded.

"You beat him this time, but he is still alive, and now he is surely angry," replied Malik Bengal. "If he thinks we support you, he will come at night to our houses, not fight us in the pass." Clearly, a comparison of available firepower would not sway them. I whispered in Aziz's ear, "Tell them about your plan."

Aziz nodded, continued with his normal line of discussion, and once clear of the perception that I had influenced his words, he channeled his inner Socrates: "Malik Abdul, how many Jingle trucks come through here each week?"

"Maybe a dozen, sometimes more."

"But a hundred reach the bazaar in Orgun each week, and this is the shortest route from Wana." "True, but the route from Gomal is smoother, so they can make up the time."

The series of questions continued until the seed was planted. If the route through Rabat were secure and free of tolls, and the road were in good condition, more trucks would come. The truckers would prefer to stop in Rabat rather than in Surobi. An influx of trucks and weary travelers required more shops, service stations, and even hotels. Malik Abdul's expression betrayed his agreement, although his words remained resolute: Rabat would not side against Chamtu.

We left the meeting, and as we approached the southeastern turn toward Shkin, Aziz's ICOM radio crackled. A Taliban assassination cell had attempted to reach the house of Sher Nawaz, but not to fear, Aziz reassured us: the Ahmadzai had trapped them and killed them all. The route through the Bermel wadi to the east was faster than the one we were on, although much less secure, and after we turned onto it, our vehicles raced through the tree-lined washout to meet the Ahmadzai tribesmen. When we arrived, a group of Aziz's

As we approached the southeastern turn toward Shkin, Aziz's ICOM radio crackled. A Taliban assassination cell had attempted to reach the house of Sher Nawaz.



men from Shkin, sporting the proper policeman's rubber gloves, was already there snapping photographs for evidence. The inventory of seized equipment suggested that this was a highly sophisticated team of killers. Their car's rear axle sagged under the weight of a variety of specialized breaching charges, anti-personnel mines, handheld GPS devices, and an amount of small arms and ammunition that would have made the Irish Republican Army proud. Aziz took the four bodies to the Barmal District center for repatriation or burial, after which we returned to Shkin. As I sat in the operations center that evening writing my daily report, I knew that a crystal ball was not necessary to see our future; in short order, we would be re-missioned as a VSO team. Our headquarters would expect us to ally with the Ahmadzai, but in our minds, the tribe was merely the foothold—we needed another shura in Shkin, and we needed Rabat's maliks to be there.

Rabat's Changing Allegiance: 5 May 2010

The preparation for the shura between Shkin and Rabat was intensive: we held several preliminary meetings with the Shkin elders, collectively and individually. Azzam jotted copious notes and eventually produced a draft agreement that codified Rabat's unequivocal support to the Afghan government. The maliks of Rabat would no doubt resist; so long as Chamtu lived, they would prefer the status quo to the risky venture of siding with the government. It was Aziz's idea to produce formal, written agreements signed and sealed with a thumbprint. He explained to us that through the pressure of cultural norms, these agreements would deny the signatories the ability to provide financial or material support to the insurgency. Signed documents would not change private attitudes, but their existence would provide a framework free of meddling from resistant elders, which would make it possible to recruit the young people into a local defense force. Pending approval of the ALP decree, these *chalwesti*—the Pashtun traditional defense force—could make the transition into a legitimate security force under the Ministry of the Interior.

Every Shkin elder memorized his role in the script and his key talking points in preparation for facing the maliks in the upcoming shura. Some elders would appear nervous concerning Rabat's intentions toward the Gol Kot watershed on the border with the Othmanzai and worry that if Rabat failed to give full support to the government, a tribal war was inevitable. The veiled threat of a tribal war with Ahmadzai support against Rabat was, after all, the maliks' worst-case scenario. Other elders would use self-fulfilling prophecies of Rabat's inevitable commitment to the government to show solidarity with their Banzai Kharoti kinsmen in Shkin. The most vocal group would use Islamic principles

Every Shkin elder memorized his role in the script and his key talking points in preparation for facing the maliks in the upcoming shura.

Commander Aziz addresses members of the Gayankhel tribe near the Manekandow Pass





An Afghan village typical of those found in the mountains near the Pakistan border

Rabat was committed, albeit reluctantly. The onus was now on my team to find Chamtu.

to denounce Chamtu and his group, suggesting that the Taliban-allied maliks were religiously flawed and therefore a legitimate target. Sher Nawaz, with his college-educated wisdom and eloquence, would mediate the discussion, providing a moderating force so as not to threaten the maliks too far. We were confident that, given enough collective pressure, the maliks' only remaining argument would be a lack of defensive fortifications in the community. We began coordinating for the materials and heavy equipment required to construct these defensive positions. We would build it, and they would come.

When the shura adjourned after less than two hours, the tribes' and team's combined preparations appeared to have worked: the maliks of Rabat emerged from Azzam's office looking stunned. The nervous group, under Aziz's escort, returned north to the village and sent word to Chamtu. It read simply, "You cannot come to Rabat. We have an agreement with the government. We have no choice." Several days later, we received word that a delegation from Chamtu had indeed arrived and sat with the elders, where the message was reiterated. That night, several rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) struck the wall of Malik Abdul's house. No one was hurt; Daria Khan arrived with a dozen heavily armed men to stand guard until dawn. Rabat was committed, albeit reluctantly. The onus was now on my team to find Chamtu.

A Lucky Turn: 8 June 2010

For two weeks, we neglected our normal routines, shuras, and patrols. Chamtu was the only goal. Aziz and the ODA team repositioned to Orgun to shorten our response time to Rabat. We received additional resources from our chain of command to aid in the search, but after two weeks, we still had not found our "white whale."¹⁰ Chamtu's group attacked the Surobi district center with mortar fire, prompting another patrol. Aziz was clearly frustrated, as were the members of the team.



"I'm not feeling well today," Aziz told me as our patrol made ready to go out. "My deputy, Faqir, will lead the patrol."

This news further demoralized the team, because Faqir lacked Aziz's competence and leadership skills, and had a volatile personality. All I could answer was "Alright, Aziz, we'll tell you what we find." We intended to head south along the western edge of the Orgun valley with a convoy of eight Humvees and 45 personnel, along the foothills of the rugged mountains that divide east and west Paktika. At Zama, we would turn southeast toward the Surobi district center, meeting with locals in the bazaar and with the district governor to gain information regarding Chamtu's whereabouts. Faqir nodded absentmindedly as we briefed the route and talking points for each meeting. His clear lack of comprehension, coupled with his subsequent abrasive barking of commands, did not bode well for the patrol's prospects. We drove through the lush greenery lining Orgun's southern approach with little hope of a productive day.

In short order, Faqir took a wrong turn, and we found ourselves drifting aimlessly through ominous mountain passes in the Taliban stronghold of Charbaran. Our attempts to guide Faqir back to the valley were unavailing, but finally our interpreter passed him the message, "Turn east at the next pass and keep going." He obliged, and we found ourselves cresting the mountains through a dense alpine forest. As we descended, we were relieved that, if nothing else, we were heading

in the right direction. The forest continued to thin; my Humvee was third in line as we reached the tree line. I heard an excited shout from my gunner. My eyes shifted to the left, tracing the turn of his turret, and widened as I met the return gaze of Chamtu's entire force, comfortably encamped perhaps 75 meters away. No orders were given; our convoy wheeled left and accelerated.

The rapid thump of heavy machine guns and the staccato racket of every light weapon was punctuated by intermittent explosions from our grenade launcher and enemy RPG-7s as our vehicles jostled over the uneven terrain. The shocked Talibs retreated in the only direction they could—into the open valley—and when the skirmish ended, 23 of them lay dead. With no additional enemy fire from the mountains, it seemed clear that none had escaped the assault. The fight was over almost before it began, and as we secured our final position, our intelligence sergeant frantically moved from body to body with a picture of Chamtu. "I think this is him, guys... I think we got him," he finally called out. We gathered in a circle to look upon the white whale—there was little doubt in our minds that this was indeed Chamtu. What doubt remained was cast aside as the reports confirming our assumption flowed in to Aziz from villagers across Surobi District: "Chamtu is dead. They're all dead."

Several days after the fight, we returned to Rabat with equipment and supplies to begin work on the town's fort, and were welcomed as heroes.¹¹ The men of the future ALP unit, emboldened by the patrol's success, were standing in formation, ready to participate in the defense of their community. Working alongside Aziz and his soldiers, the once-contentious tribes erected their unified fort within three days. The maliks were overjoyed; freed from Chamtu's influence, they began to believe that an economic revival was possible. As one elder later stated after the Rabat defense force became a full-fledged ALP unit, "Before there were ALP on this road, there were thieves. Now we have ALP, the bad guys are gone, and there is security on the roads. They're solving a bigger problem, not just a small problem."¹² As the team drove away again toward Shkin, we spied a newly raised Afghan flag fluttering in the breeze on the highest peak above the town.

Catastrophic Success: 5 August 2010

Word spread rapidly of Chamtu's death, as well as of Aziz's decisive victory two days later in an arranged fight against the Taliban stronghold of Pirkowti, about 32 kilometers north of Rabat.¹³ Seventeen tribes from Orgun to Surobi quickly signed agreements to support the Afghan government. My thoughts were initially preoccupied by self-satisfaction, but that was short-lived. Frankly, I was not prepared for the effort needed to expand our activities into these newly won-over areas so rapidly. Aziz's original zone of responsibility around Shkin had encompassed roughly 10 square kilometers. The addition of Rabat had extended his bubble to 50 square kilometers, and with the new tribal signatories, we now found ourselves duty-bound to defend over 600 square kilometers and over 100,000 people. We did not possess enough equipment and material to build any additional community fortifications, or to supply local defense forces with radio communication. I thought hopefully of the impending approval of the ALP decree, which promised to outfit our irregulars once they were properly trained and vetted by the Ministry of the Interior. Still, even if a signed decree materialized, no supplies had yet been procured; we had no means to supply, support, and mentor so many local police formations, especially over such distances.

My eyes shifted to the left and widened as I met the return gaze of Chamtu's entire force.



I had failed to adequately plan for our best-case scenario, and it very nearly ended the expansion of the corridor at Rabat.

The Taliban, though weakened and off-balance, responded. A shopkeeper in the Surobi bazaar found the severed head of the most prominent elder of the Adikhel Kharoti tribe, a new and staunch supporter of VSO, sitting in the road. The killing sent shock waves through the Shkin-to-Orgun corridor. I had failed to adequately plan for our best-case scenario, and it very nearly ended the expansion of the corridor at Rabat. To complicate matters, our deployment was drawing to a close, and most of our equipment had already been packed and sent to Bagram. At that point, we were capable of little more than shuras and token patrols. Luckily, Aziz's skill as a mediator held the fragile alliance together. Winter was coming, and our team was forecast to return in six months. The new team that arrived to replace us would later incorporate the Shkin and Rabat *chalwesti* into the nascent ALP program. I briefed our long-term plan, and left simple guidance: "Don't lose ground."

Entering the Next Phase: Spring 2011

ODA 3325 returned to Paktika Province in March 2011. This temporal and physical separation from the problem had allowed us to generate and validate creative solutions to solidify the gains of 2010. To fortify the corridor, we designed a relatively cheap but persistent program to furnish each district governor with a suite of rented heavy equipment, including flatbed trucks to move it. With this equipment, the governors were able to demonstrate a new level of responsiveness to local needs and grievances by digging culverts and trenches, grading pitted roads, and building earthen barriers to delimit land dispute resolutions. Just as importantly, when the equipment was not being used for these purposes, it was available to rapidly erect village fortifications. Our headquarters and supportive ISAF brethren provided a seemingly endless supply of reinforced barriers, plywood, and beams. By June 2011, over 400 ALP recruits defended 14 posts that secured the 60-kilometer stretch from Shkin to Orgun. The traffic began to flow, and as we predicted, the bazaars began to grow. Paving eventually resumed, connecting Orgun to Rabat with a ribbon of shimmering asphalt and stone bridges. Travel time diminished from two hours to 30 minutes. A later contract through the Asian Development Bank promised to pave the tortuous route from Rabat to Shkin as well.

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Our political and administrative burdens mounted, however, as the effort to secure the corridor expanded. In the beginning, talk of the enemy dominated the shuras. Now, Aziz found himself mediating tribal disputes, assisting in the parking and sewage management of Orgun, and periodically answering summons to Kabul to speak with Afghan president Hamid Karzai. My team was stretched thin supporting the ALP against periodic attacks while still expanding the fortification of the corridor. Two additional communities located about 19 kilometers to the north of Orgun had petitioned to participate in the ALP, which brought our influence to the edge of the Zadran tribe in Zerok District. VSO had moved far beyond the village concept in eastern Paktika, and signs of stress began to appear. In some communities, elders exercised their authority under the VSO construct to replace ALP leadership, in direct defiance of Aziz. Taliban supporters forwarded fabricated tales of ALP extortion to Kabul. The ODA team was simply overworked, and I was oblivious to their concerns; the road was all I saw anymore. As they relayed the sorry state of our vehicles and infrastructure, I would begin talking about potential expansion in Gayan District or Zerok District. Naively, perhaps, I told myself that with a concerted effort, we could

quickly secure the final district remaining to link the corridor to Ghazni and the Ring Road: Sar Hawza.

The Edge of Influence: July 2011

Sar Hawza District was affectionately referred to as “the Taliban headquarters” by the citizens of Orgun. Some commercial traffic braved the route to the provincial capital of Sharana, but the burnt-out hulks of dozens of vehicles that lined the road testified to the truth of its lawless reputation. In particular, a sharp bend in the road, which Americans referred to as “Gulruddin” due to the inaccurate label on our military maps, was notorious as a convenient location for the extortion and execution of civilians, as well as for pitched ambushes on military convoys. The Afghans had a different name for this final hurdle on the road: Shwaykamar.

Shwaykamar held a special form of psychological control over the population. Beaten dirt roads and several cuts led north to Marzak village, and then over the mountains to Naka District, the birthplace of the Haqqani family and the notorious Haqqani crime network.¹⁴ Marzak was the Taliban’s rear area during Operation Anaconda in 2002 and had never truly been wrested from their control.¹⁵ From this base of operations, large groups of Taliban fighters projected at will a mere seven kilometers southeast into the Shwaykamar area. Few families in Orgun lacked a victim of beheading, and they all refused to drive west without military escort. As a result, no matter what progress our original corridor might make, without control of this terrain to the east, our stronghold of Paktika would remain, essentially, an island unto itself.



One of Aziz’s squad leaders, Manaeshe, speaks with the elders of Gulruddin village during the construction of the Shwaykamar observation post

The Last Domino

The team’s original plan had envisioned reaching this point after 36 months of slow and steady expansion. Now, after a mere 16 months, from our latest village fortification on the hill above Shatowray village in Sar Hawza District, we found ourselves surveying the next move—the last move to open the road to Kabul. This push, however, would be different: no village existed from which to recruit ALP, and both the Sulaimankhel tribes and Hassankhel Kharoti clans populating the area were decidedly hostile to VSO. We also found that Aziz’s cult of personality had little sway across Sar Hawza. We had encountered obstacles from competing power brokers in the past; the Othmanzai of northern Bermel and the Pirkowti tribe had both successfully denied our political and military maneuvers. However, these tribal areas were easily isolated and bypassed as the corridor crept northwest. We could not bypass Shwaykamar, and so we could not bypass the influence of Mullah Yaquob.

Yaquob was short and unimposing, and was missing his right arm below the elbow. He, like most of his generation, had fought the Russians in the 1980s, and done so very effectively. The veteran mujahedeen commanders who led the siege of Orgun and the defense of the Khost-Gardez Highway through the Sata-Kandow Pass (1985–86) had returned home to the Sar Hawza and Zerok Districts following the conflict. Their fame and influence still eclipsed the rising star of Commander Aziz, and he did not like to be reminded of this fact. Each shura

Sar Hawza District was affectionately referred to as “the Taliban headquarters” by the citizens of Orgun.

We would probably have better luck convincing the Taliban's Mullah Omar to provide constables than these suspicious tribesmen.

with Yaquob and his followers followed the same bad script: We exchanged greetings and pleasantries, extolled the value of the ALP program, and when that inevitably failed, reiterated the veiled threat of direct action against Marzak and Shwaykamar. The tribes were unimpressed; they knew, as we did, that without tribal support, we would have to convince the Afghan National Army (ANA) or Afghan National Police (ANP) from Sharana to come in and secure the point. We would probably have better luck convincing the Taliban's Mullah Omar to provide constables than these suspicious tribesmen.

We first approached the ANA brigade commander to discuss options. Provincial governor Mohibullah Samim, perhaps our greatest political supporter, went so far as to order the commander to man a post if we built it for them. The political and economic reality of his brigade's operations, however, would never allow such an action. The ANA units in Orgun and Sharana were adequate garrison troops and enjoyed a degree of popular respect. They also received some fringe financial benefits due to their proximity to the profitable businesses in the bazaars. Given the relative comfort and status of their routines, commanders were reluctant to risk open confrontations in the Taliban's territory, especially if failure meant loss of prestige and position. The Afghan chain of command understood the political balancing act required to maintain officer morale; as a result, a common response to an undesired request for support was to forward the request to a higher rung in the chain of command, where the proposal was inevitably denied. In this manner, the ANA brigade commander, skilled in the political tactics of delay, avoided committing troops to Shwaykamar. Governor Samim persisted in his efforts, but we were impatient, as well as uncertain that we could overcome the institutional top-cover of the Ministry of Defense. Aziz therefore turned to another strong supporter, in words if not in deeds, for help manning the outpost: Paktika provincial chief of police Daulat Khan.

Daulat Khan was a thin, jovial man, always dressed in a pressed uniform adorned with as many badges as the bazaar could provide.

Daulat Khan was a thin, jovial man, always dressed in a pressed uniform adorned with as many badges as the bazaar could provide. His office was littered with parting gifts from American military advisors, and the walls were covered with pictures of him speaking at the most fashionable gatherings. He was not, however, a particularly ambitious man. Daulat did not desire promotion, but rather coveted a strong reputation in the province of his birth. He had provided Aziz with an increasing amount of administrative and logistical support as our effort expanded, and was more than happy to claim his share of credit for its success as a result. Aziz would, through this self-interested patriot, find the forces required to seize Shwaykamar from the Talibs.

With the agreement to man the proposed outpost settled between Aziz and Khan, we began to consolidate a massive amount of construction material and the entirety of the region's leased heavy equipment. This operation would unfold during the month of Ramadan, which provided its own set of limitations and complications. Nonetheless, the effort proceeded. On 20 August 2011, the advance guard of this enormous column of trucks and equipment, spearheaded by a platoon of Aziz's men with ODA advisors, arrived in Shwaykamar and secured key terrain. Several hours later, a combat train of more than 50 vehicles began to arrive. Bulldozers and excavators slid down the ramps and set to work on the first task: cutting a road up the mountain. Within three days, the fortification was complete, and we prepared the defense in anticipation of Daulat Khan's arrival. Each night, the Talibs probed the position by firing inaccurate volleys of RPGs. We began to wonder whether Daulat Khan would honor

the agreement, but on the fourth day, 40 ANP arrived to man their posts. The probing attacks quickly ceased.

Aziz watched the men arrive and take their places, then unexpectedly jumped on an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) and sped toward the town of Sharana, as my ATV and two Humvees raced to keep pace and ensure he arrived safely. When he reached the bustling Sharana bazaar, Aziz rode in a wide circle, announcing on his megaphone, “Shwaykamar is taken! The road is open!” Additional riders were dispatched to the Orgun bazaar to proclaim the news. With the final fortification manned and functioning, one third of the ODA remained to provide support while the rest of us returned to Orgun to refit the column and plan the next iteration of VSO expansion. We arrived in Orgun on 24 August, and on the morning of 26 August decided to purchase food from the bazaar to break the Ramadan fast with Aziz and his men. The scene that unfolded four days later was unimaginable.

Eid al-Fitr, the holiest of Islam’s holy days, marks the end of Ramadan; in 2011, Eid fell on 30 August. Traditionally in Orgun, families reassemble from across the country, flooding the bazaar with revelers and music. The music had fallen silent in 2006, when the Taliban regained control of Shwaykamar and effectively isolated Orgun natives working in Kabul and beyond from their families. With the road now open for the first time in five years, we found that the bazaar, despite its significant expansion over the past several months, was woefully unprepared for the mass of the diaspora’s return. The streets bulged with arriving Hilux trucks and taxicabs ferrying hundreds and thousands of the previously displaced back to their ancestral home. On the night of Eid, we broke the fast in Aziz’s dining room, then drove toward the bazaar with our escorts. The music, cheering, and ceaseless snapping of celebratory rifle fire grew louder as we approached. The throng became too dense for our Land Cruiser to transit, so we paused and sat on the roof and the hood, watching the surreal scene in amazement. I turned to Paizullah, my perpetual bodyguard when I was walking among the people, and shook his hand as he smiled at the sight.

Paizullah was killed the following month as we expanded into Sar Hawza. I like to think that in that moment in the bazaar, his smile reflected the underlying lesson I carry from Paktika. Aziz and I had made so many mistakes in the last 17 months, and these mistakes were not without significant cost in resources and human suffering. The gains we had made remained fragile and reversible. But at least now, the villagers had seen what was possible; they saw for themselves that their hopelessness was unfounded, and that a motivated group of people can achieve what was previously accepted as impossible. Given enough motivation, there is no such thing as a no-win scenario. ❖

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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When he reached the bustling Sharana bazaar, Aziz rode in a wide circle, announcing on his megaphone, “Shwaykamar is taken! The road is open!”



The Orgun bazaar expanding for Eid al-Fitr celebrations

NOTES

- 1 Motocross is a type of motorcycle racing that typically takes place on dirt-track courses with obstacles such as jumps and berms.
- 2 Tim McGirk, "Battle in 'the Evilest Place,'" *Time*, 27 October 2003: <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,526466,00.html>
- 3 Shuras are traditional meetings of the communal and religious leadership to make decisions for the community.
- 4 Shkin is a community that lies at the southern tip of Barmal District on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, and is officially recognized as a part of Barmal District. Due to intertribal feuds and an increasingly strong alliance with Aziz and his base at Shkin, however, the local tribes decided that Shkin should be its own district. These tribes first forwarded the proposal to the central government in Kabul in 2008, but to the author's best knowledge, it is still an unofficial district with an unofficial governor.
- 5 A television channel in the United States devoted to the live broadcasting of government hearings.
- 6 Rabat is composed of five Adikhel Kharoti clans with a total estimated population of 10,000. Each clan is roughly similar in size, although the agricultural quality of their land and access to water determines the relative power structure between them. The Langikhel clan is most powerful, followed by the Abbaskhel, the Issakhel, the Ibrahimkhel, and the Adikhel (not to be confused with the Adikhel sub-tribe, to which each clan belongs). Each clan occupies roughly three square kilometers of land that is generally delta-shaped; one point of each triangle converges on the Rabat Lgad stream near the town's bazaar, while in the hills beyond the outer edge of each triangle is the clan's grazing area.
- 7 In Rabat, unlike the other communities of the region, the clan leader is called the malik (or "king," in Arabic). Without the support of the maliks, it is difficult to achieve anything of substance in Afghanistan. And while it is possible to undercut the influence of one tribal leader in favor of another or a preferred coalition of leaders, we used this approach only as a last resort. We had to take such a tack, for example, in Sar Hawza.
- 8 United States Forces–Afghanistan, *Money as a Weapon System—Afghanistan: Commander's Emergency Relief Program (CERP) SOP*, USFOR–A Pub 1-06 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Forces–Afghanistan, December 2009): [http://www.usma.edu/cnrcd/siteassets/sitepages/government%20publications/maaws-a,%20usfor-a%20cerp%20sop%20\(dec%202009\).pdf](http://www.usma.edu/cnrcd/siteassets/sitepages/government%20publications/maaws-a,%20usfor-a%20cerp%20sop%20(dec%202009).pdf)
- 9 The Torkham Gate is the primary entry point for commercial traffic into Nangarhar Province and eastern Afghanistan.
- 10 This is a reference to the white sperm whale that is hunted throughout the famous American novel *Moby-Dick; or, The White Whale*, by Herman Melville (1851).
- 11 Yaroslav Trofimov, "U.S. Enlists New Afghan Village Forces," *Wall Street Journal*, 1 July 2010: <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052748704103904575336933258787038>
- 12 Lizette Hart, "Connecting Islands: ALP Brings Villages Together," DVIDS, 23 December 2011: <http://www.dvidshub.net/news/81721/connecting-islands-alp-brings-villages-together#.U4Tmyj7n8dV>
- 13 For a detailed account of this action, see Linda Robinson, *One Hundred Victories: Special Ops and the Future of American Warfare* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2013).
- 14 See Lars W. Lilleby, "The Haqqani Network: Pursuing Feuds under the Guise of Jihad?," *CTX* 3, no. 4 (November 2013): <https://globalecco.org/the-haqqani-network-pursuing-feuds-under-the-guise-of-jihad>
- 15 For a detailed account of Operation Anaconda, see Imre Porkoláb, "When the Goldfish Meets the Anaconda: A Modern Fable on Unconventional Leadership," *CTX* 3, no. 3 (August 2013): <https://globalecco.org/when-the-goldfish-meets-the-anaconda-a-modern-fable-on-unconventional-leadership>

ANP and Special Squad soldiers prepare to slaughter a goat during Ramadan at the Shwaykamar observation post, August 2011



Education on Islam for Special Forces Needs an Overhaul: Africa as a Case Study

ISLAM IS AND SHOULD BE A CORE EDUCATION TOPIC FOR SPECIAL OPERATIONS units. Dozens of nations' armed forces have been engaging enemies in Muslim-majority countries for decades. Besides violent engagements, Special Forces partnerships are growing in places like Morocco, Senegal, Niger, Chad, Somalia, and Kenya. In many Western countries, religion is a side note, an asterisk. But in West and East Africa, Islam determines much of life's patterns. The aspects that think tanks, inter-religious foundations, universities, and formal military courses must strive to explain are the visible tension and variation inside Islam itself. This tension can lead to violence where Muslims and non-Muslims alike are the victims. Because militaries are in the business of security and stability, understanding the causes of violence in any social context is obligatory.

The strategy for teaching Islam to Special Forces members has included various approaches, without losing sight of two very important objectives. The first objective is to gain an honest understanding of Islam, especially as it relates to military and diplomatic engagements. Security-sector assistance and long-term military partnerships are possible only when mutual cultural understanding is present. The second objective is to gain mutual respect through inter-religious dialogue, to correct misperceptions, and to avoid overgeneralizing the "source" of violent extremism.¹ In this paper, I argue that while these objectives are noble, the method and specific instruction for achieving the objectives, which are influenced by media accounts and even "moderate" Muslims, have been overgeneralized to the point of becoming unhelpful and potentially dangerous. These sincere but misleading approaches will ultimately achieve the opposite of their intent.

Furthermore, in recent contingencies, religion has been labeled a taboo topic. Special Operations forces are told to avoid the topic in every instance. This injunction ignores two important factors: (1) religious discussions do not harbor the same heated undertones in every region, even between Muslim regions, and (2) religion is often the most important, if not the favorite, topic for an African Muslim. How does one build a relationship when a prime topic of discussion is consciously avoided?

Instruction and the Media on Islam

This may be an optimistic assumption, but most Special Forces operators have received some kind of formal education on Islam. In initial education models, SF members learn the basic "five pillars" of Islam, which focus on praxis, or the outward expression of the religion. Members with a more personal interest may receive a deeper education on Islamic beliefs and the theological pillars, including a discussion of *tawhid*, *iman*, *adl*, and reward and punishment.² Due to more recent events and the conflicts in the Middle East, Special Forces members are digging deeper to understand the sources of violent extremism, the roots of Islamist teachings, and dangerous *takfiri* ideology. In most curricula, the military member will be reminded that the violent extremist Salafist ideology represents a

Capt. Caleb Slayton, U.S. Air Force

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Religion is often the most important, if not the favorite, topic for an African Muslim. How does one build a relationship when a prime topic of discussion is consciously avoided?

Takfir is the practice of calling out unbelievers, specifically Muslims who have supposedly turned away from proper Islam. The *takfiri* terrorist takes this accusation to the extreme.

very small minority of the world's Muslims.³ That small percentage, however, can do a lot of damage physically, socially, and psychologically.

The “takfiri” title used to describe today's terrorist groups and activities is important. *Takfiri* is related in its root to the word *kafr*. *Kafr* can be translated as “unbeliever” and *kufri* as “unbelief.” Takfir is the practice of calling out unbelievers, specifically Muslims who have supposedly turned away from proper Islam. The takfiri terrorist takes this accusation to the extreme conclusion and deems “apostate” Muslims a legitimate target because they have abandoned Islam. Al Qaeda and its various branches—Al-Shabaab in Somalia and Kenya, Ansar al-Sharia in North Africa, and Boko Haram in Nigeria, to name a few—are takfiri terrorist organizations.⁴ Most Muslims and non-Muslims alike agree that takfiri terrorism is the enemy of all.

There are two additional items that must be clarified from the previous explanation. First, despite the vigorous efforts of a few well-respected Muslims

to remove teachings on apostasy from Islam altogether using Islamic methods of *kalam* (rational argument), the majority of Muslim clerics hold the belief that someone who leaves Islam deserves death.⁵ The takfiri terrorist, however, bypasses the moderate Islamic justice system, which makes “proving” apostasy almost impossible and leaves the punishment up to God. Second, in expediting the punishment of supposed apostasy, the takfiri terrorist utilizes an extreme interpretation of shari'a law, often called Wahhabi Salafism, which bases all legal interpretation on the literal and legalistic reading of the Qur'an and Hadith and rejects other valid legal methods, such as consensus (*ijma'a*), analogy (*qiyās*), or personal judgment and independent reasoning (*ijtihad*).⁶



What begins as a simple explanation of Islam is necessarily transformed into a theological and legalistic discussion of what it means to be Muslim. The Salafist thought that can lead to violent takfiri extremism is often called an ideology. But as Anna Simons points out, this takfiri theology has been around since the beginning decades of Islam in 700 AD, and arises from a fundamentally religious outlook more than an easily corrected or logically defeated ideology.⁷ Ideology and religion aside, a correct understanding of this aspect of Islam can help counterterrorism professionals to directly identify the perpetrator of unjust violence and the violator of human rights. In addition, this education for SF personnel can serve to correct stereotypical assumptions about all Muslims, thus righting destructive prejudices.⁸

Nowadays, all Muslims tend to be placed neatly into one of two categories: “good” or “bad.”

As is already made clear in the previous paragraphs, it is important to know who is defining the problem and who, overall, can claim to represent the Muslim *ummah*, the “global population of Muslims.” Media machines, policy think tanks, Muslim professors, and Western academics are striving to define and label these Islamic phenomena. Misrepresenting all Muslims as terrorists is just as

dangerous in the long run as the extreme counter-approach that the moderate moguls have come up with of late; nowadays, all Muslims tend to be placed neatly into one of two categories: “good” or “bad.”

Deciding Who Is Good or Bad

Drawing from my own review of media (in Arabic, French, and English), think tank papers, research reports, and lectures from Special Operations curricula, I have developed a list of the terms most commonly used to describe these two categories, as shown in table 1.⁹

On the one hand, having a chart to give us the “answers” is very handy. In the struggle to define a Muslim, there will be those who claim to have the “correct” definition, which, at the political and diplomatic levels, might conceivably be useful to accept. This may aid in a very surface understanding of various Muslim movements, but there are simply too many social, cultural, historical, environmental, and self-interested actors in this “name game” to render such a dichotomy very useful, especially in regard to ground-level, relational interactions. A few of the labels are completely misleading but still very tempting for the secular Western audience to apply. The best analysis of Islam and Muslims, as with any other large ethnic or religious group, looks at each region, state, province, and village on its own merit. When Special Forces members are directly engaged in-country at these several levels, doing everything from assisting in combat to advising on civil-military relations, there is no one representative answer to what it means to be Muslim.

“Good” Islam/ Muslims	“Bad” Islam/ Muslims
Moderate	Takfiri
Secular	Jihadi
Democratic	Salafi
Sufi	Islamist
Quietist	Khomeinist
Modernist	Wahhabist
Pro-Western	Shari’a Supporter
Reformist	Fundamentalist
Liberal	Extremist/Radical

Table 1.

The “Bad” List: Wahhabi and Salafi

Wahhabi Islam is a school of thought related to the Hanbali tradition of jurisprudence. Wahhabis are found mostly in the Persian Gulf states, notably Saudi Arabia, where the ruling Saud monarchy continues a fragile power-sharing agreement with the Wahhabi religious establishment—each giving tacit and active consent, and therefore legitimacy, to the other. Saudi Arabia is not officially categorized as a state sponsor of terrorism, but it is certainly difficult to balance the realpolitik of Saudi Arabia’s international relations when Wahhabi thought is so closely connected with more extreme Wahhabi teachings. The international political realm has a tightrope to walk in its relations with this enormously important country when considering the “bad” and “good” columns of table 1.¹⁰

What is Salafism? According to the Jordanian Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, Salafism is not regarded as a school of jurisprudence or theology.¹¹ In most definitions, it is labeled as *Salafi thought*, which gives it more of a philosophical or ideological connotation.¹² According to *The Muslim 500: The World’s 500 Most Influential Muslims 2013/14*, a publication by the Jordanian Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, “Salafism seeks to revive the practice of Islam as it was at the time of Muhammad and can be critical of too much emphasis being placed on thinkers from after this period. Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al Wahhab (1703–1792 CE) was an important figure in the resurrection of this ideology, therefore Salafism is often simply known as Wahhabism.”¹³

Salafi movements and their active and passive followers are too politically and economically influential to label as “bad” (even calling them a *minority*

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In Saudi Arabia, the ruling Saud monarchy continues a fragile power-sharing agreement with the Wahhabi religious establishment.

Labeling Salafism as “bad” per se completely disregards the diversity of its leaders and followers.

undersells the impact), especially in the Arab world. The “Top 50” section of *The Muslim 500* lists more than a dozen Salafi figures, and for at least the three editions prior to the 2013 edition the top slot went to a Salafi, Saudi Arabia’s King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud.¹⁴ Salafi political parties exist in force from Morocco to Kuwait. Their leaders and religious teachers are avid Facebook users. They are often the respected voice defending Islam in disruptive areas such as Syria and Lebanon.¹⁵ Their movements are as varied as they are influential. Not only is it misleading to regard Salafi thought as a less-important minority sect, but labeling Salafism as “bad” per se completely disregards the diversity of its leaders and followers. Many Salafi thinkers trace their ideas to Wahhabi scholars. Other less-studious and more-zealous Salafis tend to focus on modern Muslims’ apparent decadence and lack of religious duty and practice. But there are Salafi movements that are leaning toward political compromise, others that reject violence, and still others that want nothing more than to retreat in silence and give themselves completely to the individual study of the Qur’an and Hadith.

An Al Jazeera report on Salafism in West Africa described three types of Salafism. Purist Salafism is nonviolent and seeks to reform Islam away from Sufi and “heterodox” movements, basing its teachings on the Qur’an and Hadith alone. Political Salafism, which works alongside the political establishment in support of a political party or regime, could be considered a subset of general Islamism or political Islam. Finally, jihadi Salafism is the violent form of Salafi thought associated with takfiri groups.¹⁶ With these categories in mind, the Moroccan reformed jihadi Salafist Sheikh Fizazi believed that there was hope to bring Salafi followers away from violent extremism and focus on purist Salafism alone, a movement to which King Mohammed VI of Morocco gives active support.¹⁷

At the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2011, there were those who wanted to give the Salafist movements a chance and those who prophesied only chaos if Salafists were given a share of government. In some cases, the former were correct. The latter cases may have been examples of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Respected analysts like Robin Wright, in her book and corresponding blog titled *The Islamists Are Coming*, came down somewhere in the middle: the behavior of any Salafist movement completely depended on the country, its history, and its unique political environment.¹⁸ Depending on the context, during the Arab Spring many analysts and Arab Muslims applied a “let’s wait and see” attitude to Salafist and Islamist groups.

Islamism and the Muslim Brotherhood

A large number of Muslim scholars are endorsing what they consider to be the “cure-all” for “bad” Islam: “good” religious education. As in Morocco and also in Mauritania, there are efforts to reform violent extremists by correcting their Islamic theology and takfiri ideas through re-education. More recently, the outspoken target for religious re-education has been Muslim Brotherhood supporters and sympathizers. Analysts, Muslim and non-Muslim, have been generally baffled by the split-offs, evolution, pacification, revolution, and resurgent extremism of the Muslim Brotherhood. There is a historical and ideological connection between Brotherhood teachings and violent Islamist groups, and it is well documented that some Muslim Brotherhood splinter groups formed the base of many of today’s takfiri groups. The various Brotherhood branches today, however, do not all maintain the same links and strategies. Some have played important roles in Egypt’s economic development and in political administration at the local level. Syria’s former president Hafez al-Assad and Egypt’s former president Hosni



King Mohammed VI of Morocco

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Mubarak not only kept the Brotherhood on the “bad” list but also resorted to extreme measures to politically marginalize or even physically exterminate its members, a trend that has only deepened under each president’s successor.

In 2012, a U.S. military officer instructor triggered a chain reaction of reform in the Department of Defense’s approach to teaching Islam when he was accused of indirectly describing all Muslims as the enemy and showcasing his research claiming that the Muslim Brotherhood is embedded in and seeking to dominate the American government.¹⁹ The partisan language and gross overgeneralizations of the instruction were not in line with the educational objectives of understanding and respecting Islam and Muslims. In Egypt today, however, the Muslim Brotherhood clearly remains on the “bad” list. The government of General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi not only banned all Muslim Brotherhood activity after deposing the Brotherhood’s elected president Mohamed Morsi, but also removed all Brotherhood associates from religious establishments and criminalized any direct or indirect contact with the Brotherhood or its activities.²⁰ The Egyptian courts have recently rounded up thousands of people suspected of being Muslim Brotherhood activists, and so far have condemned over 700 to death in questionably legal trials, most in absentia.²¹

Egypt announced its stance on the Muslim Brotherhood to the rest of the world, tacitly encouraging neighboring countries to follow its lead.²² So far, only Saudi Arabia has done so to the extent that Egypt would like.²³ Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, and Jordan are still working hard to come to a political compromise with their Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi parties; Tunisia and Bahrain reject the idea that the Muslim Brotherhood is globally united. Its various offshoots in different countries have developed independent movements capable of enjoining more-moderate principles.²⁴

The Muslim Brotherhood, far from being an elite band of radicals, represents a large portion of society in Egypt and, to a lesser extent, the Arab world, whether religiously, theologically, or just socially. Some Brotherhood leaders elsewhere in the region are looking at Egypt and learning to tone down their rhetoric, and to favor the more moderate popular sentiment above hardline political Islamism.

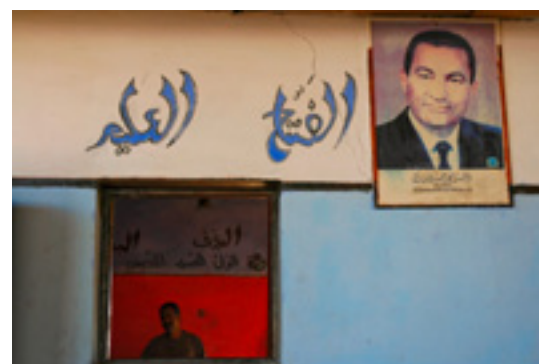
The United States, for its part, prefers stability above all, and has refused to come down in favor of any side. This careful position has led parts of moderate Egyptian Muslim society to discredit the United States for attempting to mediate between all religious parties in Egypt, including the Brotherhood.

Jihadis

The term *jihad* is often linked to the other “bad” Muslim titles to make them even more “bad.”²⁵ In most media contexts, *jihad* refers to Muslims who resort to violence to promote their beliefs. Moderate Muslim scholars and academics



Syria's former president Hafez al-Assad



Egypt's former president Hosni Mubarak

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood political party provides Egyptians voting data.



The most important jihad is the struggle to live a good life, eschew temptation, and support one's family.

continue to correct the improper view of jihad by explaining that the most important jihad is the struggle to live a good life, eschew temptation, and support one's family. However, in this sense, *jihad* needs more than just these two contextual definitions; it requires a third, a middle way. The first kind of jihad is the internal fight to be a good Muslim. The second kind is the takfiri jihad taken on by terrorists with the intent to wipe out all apostate Muslims, and the people and governments who support them. The first definition is related to moderate Islam, and the second to Salafi or Wahhabi extremist teachings. The third kind of jihad sits somewhere between these two.

To support the inner jihad as the only legitimate jihad and condemn the takfiri jihad as un-Islamic is only partially correct. The conflict in Syria, continuing rhetoric against Israel, and the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq remind us that even moderate Muslims will find clerical and Qur'anic support to defend their brethren, and Islam itself, from slaughter, invasion, and slander.²⁶ One does not need jihadi teaching to be inspired to defend one's own country or neighbors; any patriotic citizen of any creed would do the same. Thus, those who are not actively joining takfiri groups in Syria but continue to support the defense of helpless Muslims feel they are fulfilling proper jihad. The many Muslims who support this middle jihad mix with the takfiri jihadists in blogs, comments, and reactions to current events. They often comment on the same news article or event to support their own ideas.

Using one simple example among many: The Maghreb countries (Morocco to Tunisia) have reported on their attempts to deter and prevent Muslims from fighting in Syria. The online news source Magharebia, which typically receives barely a dozen comments on its articles, released a news article on this policy in February 2014 and was flooded with hundreds of diverse reactions. In between the pacifist and takfiri reasoning was the middle jihadist, who believed he should fight simply to protect Muslims from dying. As one commenter railed, "Cracking down on jihad! By God this is unfortunate. [Is it] not enough that

Tahrir Square, Egypt:
The Original Revolution



men are extinct! Still you ban jihad! No, you want us to stay idle and watch our brothers tortured and women raped so that your conscience would rest.”²⁷ Call it self-defense or simply nationalism, as a great deal of the West would, but many Muslims still call it jihad.

Secular, Liberal, Pro-Western, and Shari’a

Every Muslim believes in shari’a law.²⁸ When shari’a is placed on the “bad” list by Muslims and non-Muslims, neither is offering a true definition of shari’a. The non-Muslim often imagines only the sensational aspects of shari’a, without realizing that shari’a is part of everyday Muslim life. The Muslim who calls shari’a bad is either catering to the sensationalism or has in mind an unvoiced, more liberal image of shari’a. Shari’a is what explains how to pray, how much alms to give, family law, inheritance, and how to determine what is prohibited, neutral, or obligatory and the associated punishment or reward. What the majority of Muslims do not prefer is the extreme interpretation of shari’a that forgets mercy and abuses the death penalty.²⁹

At the same time, non-Muslims support the idea of secular Islam, comparing it to their own idea of “secular.” Many Westerners have shed their religious identities in practice and claim to be religious primarily as a nominal heritage. When a Muslim calls himself (or herself) secular, however, it doesn’t mean that he does not observe religious practice. A secular Muslim supports shari’a but does not believe that a government or institution should force its observance. A secular Muslim would rather that each individual Muslim be motivated to observe Islam, and shari’a, as he or she sees fit. When reporters lean too far and condemn shari’a in practice, a flood of Muslim commentators will correct them. For example, in the comments section of a recent article reporting on events in Libya, one commentator represented the moderate voice: “Implementing the shari’a of God in all affairs of life is necessary for the adjustment of this life and its stability.”³⁰

In between the pacifist and takfiri reasoning was the middle jihadist, who believed he should fight simply to protect Muslims from dying.



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Having a secular government but a very religious population is a source of pride for African Muslims.

The term *fundamentalist* can be as unhelpful as the terms *secular* and *shari'a* unless we reevaluate our ethnocentric viewpoint.

The miscommunication between Muslims and Westerners runs much deeper. Most Muslims fear what Westerners think of as “secular.” As Muslims look at Europe and North America, they hope that more-moderate Islam does not degenerate into liberal morals, the rejection of religion, and the increase of atheism. The individualistic and secular Western culture doesn’t quite grasp the concept that a secular Muslim can still be religious. The famed African scholar Ali Mazrui described the dichotomy of “Christian legacy and liberal secularism” as one of the most confusing dualisms of the colonial heritage for Africans to grasp.³¹ Most of the Muslim world lives in collectivistic societies where family takes precedence over the individual. A Muslim society will not stand by as its values erode into immorality.

The shari'a debate is central to North African politics. In Egypt, the competing parties argue about the extent and implementation of shari'a. Tunisia is again an example of diversity within the “good” and “bad” Muslim categories. Tunisia’s Ennahda party, associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, not only refused to put shari'a to a referendum vote but also, through its main leader, Rashid Ghanouchi, may even advocate for freedom of conscience in religion—“to leave or embrace any faith.”³²

As many Muslim countries debate the extent to which shari'a and Islamic culture should be codified in their constitutions in order to preserve the faith, many sub-Saharan African countries are proud of their secular constitutions.³³ If asked, a Muslim from Senegal, Mali, or Niger will recount his proud Islamic heritage and observe that these countries remain 90 percent or more Muslim without their citizens being forced into observance by law. Having a secular government but a very religious population is a source of pride for African Muslims, two characteristics that many Arab countries have yet to balance.

Fundamentalism and Modernism

Many of the terms on the “bad” list are related, such as *Wahhabi*, *Salafi*, or *Islamist*. *Fundamentalism* is another term often associated with extremism, but again, it is an example of cross-terminology and, in this case, a little hypocritical. A fundamentalist Christian is someone who believes that the Bible is literally true: that Jesus was God and said and did the exact things found in the scripture. How one acts on these beliefs may place a Christian in a more extremist or pacifist camp, but the definition remains the same.³⁴

While a growing number of Christians believes that the Bible should not be taken literally, and that it may contain numerous historical mistakes and mythical influences, you will be hard-pressed to find the same degree of secularizing ideas among Muslims. The vast majority of Muslims believe that Muhammad was the final prophet and that through him, the perfect Qur'an was relayed without error. The Muslim world is fundamentalist in this sense.³⁵ It is how the words are interpreted and how shari'a is then applied, however, that divides the moderates from the extremists. The term *fundamentalist* can be equally as unhelpful on the “good” and “bad” list as the terms *secular* and *shari'a* unless we reevaluate our ethnocentric viewpoint.

Islamic modernism is also varied in its definition and application. Islamic modernism emphasizes the need to transform Muslim thought and Qur'anic exegesis with changes in society, technology, and “Westernization.” Modernism implies reconciling scientific advancements and cultural shifts with religious imperatives.

In Islam, it can refer to a liberal interpretation of the Qur'an where many shari'a requirements evolve to fit a modern reality, or it can relate to acquiring and utilizing modern conveniences to advance Islam, thus allowing Islamic teachings to meet a wider audience's legalistic needs.

Examples of the latter case are Iran's Ruhollah Khomeini and the Brotherhood's Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb. They did not reject modernization but sought to mold it and apply it to their Islamist, "fundamentalist" cause. To these modernist Islamists, "Islam was the answer to the social, political, economic and cultural decline of the ummah."³⁶ Another modernist who was more accommodating and moderate in his dialectic approach to reasoning was Muhammad 'Abduh of nineteenth-century Egypt. An Al-Azhar University notable and mufti (scholar of Islamic law) of Egypt, 'Abduh issued a *fatwa* (a formal legal opinion) favoring unity between the Muslim and Christian sects of diverse South Africa, rather than have them abide by strict shari'a legalism.³⁷ The *fatwa* may have been controversial, but it recognized the multifarious nature of Africa's Islamic environment.

Pluralism in Sub-Saharan Africa

The overgeneralization of Islamism, Islamists, and political Islamic influence often results from the fact that the Middle East has dominated most analyses of global Islam for decades. Western news media are tempted to apply 10 years of Middle East analysis to the entire region south of the Sahara, based on the assumption that one Muslim culture is like the other. Political Islam in sub-Saharan Africa, however, is just as weak as the region's governmental institutions and political culture. For a dozen historical, cultural, and religious reasons, political Islam is not the force in the Sahel (the Muslim-majority region just south of the Sahara proper) that it is in the Middle East.

There is no one picture of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa, no unified leadership or go-to mufti. In modern Morocco, for example, Sufism is all but institutionalized, with regular government-sponsored festivals and well-cared-for shrines, while across the continent in Kenya, Sufism is barely visible.³⁸ Sub-Saharan Muslim communities rely on local marabouts, imams, lamidous, and scholars who are loosely tied to a legal school—or more often, who rely on personal study, flexibility, and independent reasoning.³⁹

Africa as a whole is said by most scholars to contain an Islam highly influenced by Sufi thought. Sufism is on the "good" list. Since many Sufi teachings are abhorred by Salafists and takfiris, this may be a decent indication that it belongs on the "good" side. Generally speaking, Sufism is a mystical, esoteric branch of Islam in which religious texts and poetry have a metaphorical meaning that serves to bring one's being closer to goodness and God's love. Overgeneralization, however, again cripples the analysis. *Sufi Islam* is a very broad term.

Sufi Islam and its various mystical practices, which vary widely between regions, molded well with the spiritual foundations of Africa's traditional cultures.⁴⁰ Salafi purists are unsettled with the way that pre-Islamic African traditions are woven into Sufi ritual. Sufi leaders and *tariqas* ("orders") can be political or apolitical.⁴¹ Some of the most powerful reform movements, such as the uprising of 1881–85 under the famous Mahdi Muhammad Ahmad, were led by Sufis. Uthman dan Fodio, who founded the Sokoto Caliphate in Nigeria in the early nineteenth



The Brotherhood's Hassan al-Banna

Salafi purists are unsettled with the way that pre-Islamic African traditions are woven into Sufi ritual.

century, was also a Sufi scholar and reformer. In present-day Senegal, the most powerful Mouridiyya Sufi order has at least four million followers, while Senegal's presidents and politicians hail directly from either the Mouridiyya or Tijaniyya order.⁴²

Many present-day Sufi leaders boldly voice their opposition to takfiri teachings. Other Sufi orders have moved to cleanse and reform what they consider syncretistic practices in African customs, similar to a Salafi quietist approach. Depending on the country and village, Sufism can be political or quietist, reformist or traditional, competitive or sublime.⁴³

Generally speaking, sub-Saharan African Muslims are more moderate, more secular, perhaps more “Western” than their North African counterparts.

Generally speaking, sub-Saharan African Muslims are more moderate, more secular, perhaps more “Western” than their North African counterparts, probably because Middle East politics is not reflected as strongly in sub-Saharan societies. This is not to assume, however, that they are any less “Muslim.” It will serve Special Forces well to interact often with their African counterparts to keep a finger on the religious pulse. For better or worse, the cultures are changing with the times, and Islamist teachings are influencing many sub-Saharan Muslim communities.⁴⁴ Hasty government or community backlashes made in response only threaten to add fuel to the fire of radicalism.

Democracy

If Western democratic values are what Western policy makers prefer for Muslim-majority countries, they will have to first consider all the misconceptions discussed here. Freedom of religion does not necessarily mean freedom of conversion.⁴⁵ *Secular* does not mean “godless.”⁴⁶ What a “majority” of Muslims prefer in terms of democracy does not imply that the minority will rest easy if their values and beliefs are in jeopardy. Tunisia appears to be treading in the “correct” direction politically, but its secular president, Moncef Marzouki, admits that every court opinion and constitutional paragraph is a tightrope walk of verbal gymnastics, balancing de jure and de facto compromises and legal intent.⁴⁷

Irony of Analysis

The irony behind the misleading “two column” education and understanding of Muslims is that it achieves the opposite effect of its aim. Instead of encouraging mutual respect, it results in confusing confrontation. Instead of dissecting and explaining Islam, it waters down the reality while espousing tolerance and compromise. In the end, all these blunders have angered and will continue to anger the very populations that this information approach seeks to engage. Those at the top levels of political discourse are avid supporters of tolerance and religious dialogues. Leading Middle Eastern and Western scholars have signed multiple petitions promising to support mutual understanding.⁴⁸ These efforts are bold and necessary and should continue, but their failure arises from assuming that the political consensus of top-level scholars’ definitions of Islam can capture the practice of every Muslim in every cultural context. Defining “proper Islam” does not necessarily describe everyday Muslim practice, and non-Muslims should avoid taking for granted that the elites and pundits who appear in international media speak for the Muslim masses.

Many Muslim scholars and “moderates” have also succumbed to the “two column” style of teaching Islam, which is counterproductive to education,

counterterrorism, and their own political strategy. In some cases, the fumble is caused by difficult Arabic-to-English translations of religious terms. It is also the result of variations in Islamic practice, the political diversity of Islam, and the pressures placed on Muslim representatives to “explain” their faith to a skeptical and demanding Muslim and non-Muslim population.⁴⁹ The Qur’an and Hadith are clear on the fact that Muslims are to be united. There is one *ummah*, and indeed, the broad analysis at the scholarly and political levels ultimately attempts to effect this concept.⁵⁰

The Qur’an and Hadith are clear on the fact that Muslims are to be united.

Don’t Stop Learning and Talking

For Special Forces personnel and policy makers alike, the answer to this problem of in-depth understanding involves some of the same steps: Seek out dialogue, personal and communal, with faith systems that are unlike one’s own. Approach every engagement with patience and tolerance, even if one does not accept the others’ beliefs. Engage and research each Muslim community as its own entity. Do not allow political and emotional baggage from past experiences to determine one’s picture of the counterpart.

This educational approach is politically and religiously sensitive. In many ways, it contradicts the image of a global Islam.⁵¹ This method does not intend to incite, create, or even highlight division. The differences are already present, and implying an orthodox or singular Muslim identity not only is counterproductive but also makes military partnerships and long-term relationships at every level impossible. The *ummah* of believers prays toward Mecca, but how they govern their faith and how they act on the ethical imperative to promote and preserve Islam varies greatly, particularly in Africa. Cooperation must occur in the reality of ethnic, cultural, and ritual diversity.

The military needs continued education on Islam that supports tolerance, dialogue, and compassion. Mutual respect occurs at the lowest level of interpersonal reaction; the more generalized that analysis becomes, the less useful it is. What exactly is a “moderate” Muslim? It all depends on whom you ask. And you can ask, after building a sincere relationship, without depending on a cheat sheet of catchphrases and misleading titles. ❖



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NOTES

- 1 These two objectives are largely the approach of conventional military forces as well.
- 2 The most important doctrinal point in Islam is *tawhid*, meaning “the oneness of God.” *Iman* means “faith” and explains the most important items a Muslim must believe about God and his creation. *Adl* means “justice” and is concerned with how God administers justice in relation to our perception of justice. God is always just.
- 3 The exact number is impossible to quantify, as this paper explains. It may be possible to approach a round number for active extremist fighters, but placing a figure on active sympathizers is very difficult. According to one Gallup poll, 7 percent (91 million) of the world’s Muslims were identified as radicals based on their favorable response to the 9/11 attacks against the World Trade Center. Dr. John Esposito and Dr. Dalia Mogahed went on to explain that the radical sentiment is more politically motivated than religious, hence ebbing and flowing with current events. See John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam?: What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007).
- 4 Some defectors from other named terrorist groups such as Ansaru in Nigeria, Ansar Dine in Mali, and al Shabaab in Somalia were less comfortable with the indiscriminate targeting of Muslims under the takfiri branding. Groups like Ansar Dine also preferred a less harsh form of shari’a, compared to al Qaeda’s preference. Not even all terrorist groups abuse takfiri thought in the same manner.
- 5 Abdullah Saeed and Hassan Saeed, *Freedom of Religion, Apostasy and Islam* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2004), 88.
- 6 Ibid., 42, 51, 80.
- 7 Anna Simons, *Axis of Trouble: Male Youth, Factional Politics and Religion* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2005).
- 8 The early brand of takfiri thought came from a group called the Khawarij. This group believed that a Muslim who sinned had ceased to be Muslim and therefore was an apostate to be killed. The counter to this early group was the Murji’a, who believed that such condemnation should be “suspended” until after death, when God would determine the status of apostasy.
- 9 The “good” category is in no particular order. The “bad” category is arranged roughly from category to subcategory, where all Islamists may be influenced by Khomeinism or Wahhabism but not all Islamists are Salafists, not all Salafists are jihadists, and not all jihadists are takfirists. The terms *Islamist*, *shari’a supporter*, *fundamentalist*, and *extremist/radical* are in no particular order. “Takfiri” is the only word in red because, according to this author, it is the only category that is unambiguous—regarded by both Muslims and non-Muslims alike as a clearly destructive force. In terms of policy, it can be argued that every other category may contain non-terrorists, with whom most governments will negotiate.
- 10 Due to Saudi Arabia’s oil wealth and the imperative within Islam to spread the religion and support Islamic instruction, it is often the Wahhabi variant of Islam that is exported to sub-Saharan Africa. Saudi Arabia funds scholarships for African students to learn in Saudi Arabia and provides resources for madrasa and mosque construction in many African countries.
- 11 The main Muslim schools of jurisprudence are Shafi’i (Sunni), Hanafi (Sunni), Maliki (Sunni), Hanbali (Sunni), and Ja’afari (Shi’a). The main schools of theology include Ash’ari (Sunni), Maturidi (Sunni), Mu’tazili (influencing Islamic modernism), Ja’afari (or Twelver), Isma’ili (Shi’a), and Zaidi (Shi’a). Salafi/Wahhabi theology is often placed in a category all its own. Historically, it is related to the Sunni Hanbali school; scholars who seek to diminish its influence on majority Sunni belief, however, assign it its own category.
- 12 More-moderate Muslims will claim that Salafi extremists reject the centuries of Islamic dialogue and reasoning that condemn the takfiri practice and instead favor tolerance. Salafists, however, will point to a series of well-read scholars of Islam to support their own claims, and cite the Qur’an literally, regardless of context, to support their extremist teachings.
- 13 Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, *The Muslim 500: The World’s 500 Most Influential Muslims of 2013/14* (Amman: Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, 2014), 29: <http://www.usislam.org/pdf/The-Muslim-500.pdf>
- 14 Ibid., 36.
- 15 The heavy-hitting rebel groups in Syria such as Saqour al-Sham, Liwa al-Tawhid, Liwa al-Islam, and Jaish al-Islam proudly carry the Salafist title but strongly oppose takfiri teachings; in fact, a few of them welcome non-Muslim fighters. The Syrian rebel landscape is one that attempts to differentiate between Salafist and takfiri; groups like al Qaeda in Iraq and the Levant (aka Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham) and Jabhat al-Nusra (or al-Nusra Front) are overtly takfiri.
- 16 Mohamed Salem Ould Mohamed, *Purist Salafism in the Sabel and Its Position on the Jihadist Map* (Mecca: Al Jazeera Center for Studies, 17 July 2012): <http://sport2.org/download/1570>
- 17 Sheikh Fizazi went to prison for his involvement in the 2003 Casablanca terrorist attacks. After renouncing his takfiri Salafist beliefs, he was pardoned by King Mohammed VI and now hopes to reform other takfiri youth. But he remains a Salafi in thought and practice. Other influential Salafists, like Salman al-Ouda of Saudi Arabia, also repented of their extremist Salafism but still support Salafi ideals, including defending Islam and Muslims in Syria. See Mohamed Saadouni, “Salafi Cheikh Fizazi Talks Reconciliation,” *Magharebia*, 11 April 2014: http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/reportage/2014/04/11/reportage-01
- 18 Robin Wright, ed., *The Islamists Are Coming: Who They Really Are* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2012).
- 19 Spencer Ackerman, “Top U.S. Officer: Stop This ‘Total War’ on Islam Talk,” *Wired*, 10 May 2012: <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2012/05/dempsey-islam-irresponsible/>
- 20 Al Jazeera’s Arabic network has been an overt supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood, reflecting the foreign policy of its base in Qatar. Al Jazeera reporters have been accused of stirring up insurrection in Egypt, and had their offices looted and destroyed. Al Jazeera sees itself as the voice of justice against the indiscriminate Egyptian courts of recent times.
- 21 “Mass Egypt Death Sentences ‘Breach International Law,’” BBC World News, 25 March 2014: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26726901>; “Court Confirms Egypt Muslim Brotherhood Death Sentences,” BBC World News, 21 June 2014: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27952321>
- 22 Daniel Atzori, “Egypt, Saudi Arabia Ban Muslim Brotherhood,” *About Oil*, 23 April 2014: <http://www.abo.net/oilportal/topic/view.do?contentId=2232818>
- 23 Habib Toumi, “Saudi Arabia Sacks Preachers for Brotherhood Links,” *GulfNews.com*, 12 May 2014: <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/saudi-arabia-sacks-preachers-for-brotherhood-links-1.1331677>
- 24 Ibrahim Hatlani, “Bahrain between Its Backers and the Brotherhood,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 20 May 2014: <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2014/05/20/bahrain-between-its-backers-and-brotherhood/hb8a>

- 25 Examples include Islamist jihad, Salafi jihad, takfiri jihad, radical jihad, and extremist jihad.
- 26 Omar Fahmy, "Sunni Clerics Call for Jihad against Syria's Assad, Allies," Reuters, 13 June 2013: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/06/13/us-syria-crisis-sunnis-jihad-idUSBRE95C16U20130613>; Abdul Rahman Al-Rashed, "Thousands of Jihadis Going to Syria," Asharq Al-Awsat, 2013: <http://www.aawsat.com/leader.asp?section=3&article=732228&issueno=12616>
- 27 Yasmin Najjar et al., "Maghreb to Tighten Noose on Syria-Bound Jihadists," Magharebia, 26 February 2014: http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2014/02/26/feature-02
- 28 Harris Zafar, "Muslim without Sharia?," *Washington Post*, 19 January 2012: http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/guest-voices/post/muslim-without-sharia/2012/01/19/gIQAPEbIBQ_blog.html
- 29 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 30 April 2013), 41: <http://people.unica.it/patriziamanduchi/files/2012/04/The-Worlds.pdf>
- 30 Aya Elbrqawi and Essam Mohamed, "Is Derna Becoming an Islamist Emirate?" Magharebia.com, 8 April 2014: http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2014/04/08/feature-01
- 31 Ali A. Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1986), 249.
- 32 Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, "Islamutopia: A Very Short History of Political Islam," *International Affairs at LSE* (blog), London School of Economics and Political Science, 11 April 2012: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/ideas/2012/04/islamutopia-a-very-short-history-of-political-islam/>
- 33 The leader of the Muslim Brotherhood party in Tunisia, Rachid Ghannouchi, admitted that if instituting shari'a law as a government policy were put to a vote, the majority would vote in favor. For this very reason, the Muslim Brotherhood refused to put it on the ballot, out of concern that the Tunisian polity was too divided and fragile for such a step. See Fatima El-Issawi, "Islamists of Tunisia: Reconciling National Contradictions," *International Affairs at LSE* (blog), London School of Economics and Political Science, 13 April 2012: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/ideas/2012/04/islamists-of-tunisia-reconciling-national-contradictions/>
- 34 Many Muslim apologists utilize the negative connotation of *fundamentalism* to segregate those they regard as extreme. The *Muslim 500* annual report claims that "fundamentalists" represent only 3 percent of the world's Muslims, using the following definition: "a highly politicized religious ideology ... characterised by aggressiveness and a reformist attitude toward traditional Islam." Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, *The Muslim 500*, 26.
- 35 Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 2, 15–16: <http://zog.es/Ebooks/Various/Khomeinism%20Abrahamian.pdf>. Abrahamian, speaking in the context of Shi'a Khomeinism, argued that the term *fundamentalism* fits no concrete description and therefore is of no value in describing Muslims. There are Muslims who embrace modernity and science and still believe the Qur'an to be free from error.
- 36 Adib-Moghaddam, "Islamutopia."
- 37 Charlotte A. Quinn and Frederick Quinn, *Pride, Faith, and Fear: Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 132.
- 38 Ibid., 15.
- 39 Abdullah Ahmen An-Na'im, "Islam and the Human Rights in Sahelian Africa," in *African Islam and Islam in Africa: Encounters between Sufis and Islamists*, ed. David Westerlund and Eva Evers Rosander (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1997), 80; Quinn and Quinn, *Pride, Faith, and Fear*, 8. Respected institutions like Al-Azhar University in Egypt, along with universities in Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Jordan, southern Iraq, and Qom in Iran, all compete for the reputation of "most prestigious" Sunni or Shi'a Muslim center. In most of Africa, traditional Muslim scholars exercise their own legal opinions and do not follow any single legal school.
- 40 David Westerlund and Eva Evers Rosander, eds., *African Islam and Islam in Africa: Encounters between Sufis and Islamists* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1997).
- 41 John Hunwick, "Sub-Saharan Africa and the Wider World of Islam," in Westerlund and Rosander, *African Islam and Islam in Africa*, 28–54.
- 42 Quinn and Quinn, *Pride, Faith, and Fear*, 96.
- 43 Geert Mommersteeg, *In the City of the Marabouts: Islamic Culture in West Africa*, trans. Diane Webb (Long Grove, Ill.: Waveland Press, 2012), 138.
- 44 As more African students become exposed to and influenced by more conservative, Salafist, and "corrective" Islamic studies, there is a culture shift occurring at the deeper social and cultural reaches of many societies. See Lansiné Kaba, "Islam in West Africa: Radicalism and the New Ethic of Disagreement, 1960–1990," in *The History of Islam in Africa*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion and Randall Lee Pouwels (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2012), 189–208.
- 45 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *The World's Muslims*, 63.
- 46 Esposito and Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam?* This resource does an excellent job of detailing Muslim attitudes without reciting Islamic teachings. While more than 50 percent of Muslims do report supporting democracy, they are not an overwhelming majority (defined as 85–90 percent), and they do not embrace liberal social values in their desire for democracy.
- 47 "Latest World News—Talk to Al Jazeera—Moncef Marzouki: The Price of a Revolution," YouTube video, 24:59, from a news clip published by Al Jazeera English on 9 February 2013, posted by "LatestWorldNews24h," 1 April 2013: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h6sjNO5epIU>
- 48 Drew Kumpf, "The Kingdom of Jordan: Intra-Faith Dialogue, Inter-Faith Diplomacy," *The Review of Faith and International Affairs*, 20 March 2009: <http://www.daveedgr.com/news/the-kingdom-of-jordan-intra-faith-dialogue-inter-faith-diplomacy/>
- 49 Making a "bad" list assures non-Muslims that something is being done about the errant, warped interpretations of Islam that make it less attractive. The "bad" list can be used as a preaching tool to make moderate Islam look more sincere.
- 50 "The Amman Message," The Amman Message, n.d.: <http://www.ammanmessage.com/>
- 51 The influential and moderate Ali Gomaa of Egypt argues that the concept of the Muslim *ummah* is as foundational as Islam itself. To deny the unity of the *ummah* is to deny a basic Islamic teaching. See Ali Gomaa, "A Journey into the Muslim Mind," MuslimVillage, 24 September 2013: <http://muslimvillage.com/2013/09/24/44003/journey-muslim-mind/>



Pounding on the Detonator: How China Is Radicalizing Its Own Uyghur Population

“THE MOST REBELLIOUS TERRITORY IN THE QING EMPIRE” IS HOW historian Joseph Fletcher once described the land known today as Xinjiang Province, in northwestern China.¹ While China’s Qing Empire lasted until only 1911, the rebelliousness has continued unceasingly into the twenty-first century. Today, we are seeing an unprecedented increase in violent rebellion among the discontented Uyghur population from whom Xinjiang’s historical unrest originates. So far in 2014, there have been violent attacks perpetrated by Uyghur ethno-nationalists every single month, with two attacks occurring in May alone.

On 22 May 2014, two SUVs exploded in a crowded market area of Ürümqi in northern Xinjiang after explosives were thrown out of the two vehicles and into the crowd: at least 31 people died and more than 90 were wounded. Two weeks earlier, a knife attack in the metropolis of Guangzhou—a southern city near Hong Kong previously known as Canton and home to over 14 million people—killed six people and terrified thousands at one of the world’s busiest train stations. In April, Ürümqi saw a combination knife-and-bomb attack that was less fatal but left nearly 80 people injured. In March, an attack at a train station in China’s southwestern Yunnan Province, bordering Myanmar, left 33 dead, including the attackers after they rampaged through the train station stabbing and slashing bystanders. Less than a month prior, another explosives-and-vehicle attack in Xinjiang Province left all 11 attackers dead.

Over the past 100 years, Uyghur ethno-nationalists have executed bombings both inside and outside of Xinjiang Province, and even outside of China, attacking police convoys, shopping centers, government buildings, public transportation, factories, private residences, and other targets. These attacks have caused injuries and casualties among civilians, military personnel, and government employees. Uyghur militants have targeted both Han (the majority Chinese ethnicity in China) and Uyghur police officers, and have launched attacks on other People’s Republic of China (PRC) security forces as well. They have even assassinated their own Muslim clerics for being too accepting of government restrictions. While incisive attacks and assassinations were more commonplace during the 1990s, ethno-nationalist Uyghur extremists have shifted their tactics to include more bombings and wider-scale, more-public attacks. Suicide bombings also began to increase markedly in 2008 and have continued, including the most recent suicide attacks at Tiananmen in 2013 and nearly every attack so far in 2014. Knife attacks abound, and knives are frequently used in one-off attacks by disgruntled peasants, factory workers, and average *laobaixing*² involved in civil disputes throughout the country, in addition to extremist Uyghurs. Data clearly indicate a steady rise in Xinjiang-based and -focused violence since the late 1980s generally, and in the past few years particularly.

China’s constantly transforming and ever-repressive tactics and strategies for dealing with this dissatisfied group appear only to be enraging and, in effect,

Julia McClenon



Today, we are seeing an unprecedented increase in violent rebellion among the discontented Uyghur.

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radicalizing the very population authorities fear empowering. But before we uncover the excessive, clever, and sometimes hidden policies of Beijing, we must first provide a caveat concerning two important terms: *terrorism* and *Uyghur*.

This Article Is Terrorism, Says China

The PRC's definition of *terrorism* is problematic, and at best, transparently self-serving; at worst, it falls critically short of the international norms of human rights.³ For example, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the regional security organization whose member states include China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, defines a terrorist act as

*any act connected with intimidating the population, endangering human life and well-being, and intended to cause significant property damage, ecological disaster or other grave consequences in order to achieve political, religious, ideological or other ends by exerting influence on the decision-making of governments or international organizations, or the threat of committing such acts.*⁴

In sum, as American journalist Joshua Kurlantzick has put it, “Beijing’s definition of terrorism includes any group or individual it perceives to be a threat to the regime.”⁵ Period. Beijing’s open-ended phrases leave dangerous room for the regime to apply the label wherever it deems useful and convenient. As governments test the limits of their countries’ new anti-terror laws, pressure from the international community to very carefully define *terrorism* should not let up. Indeed, under China’s definition, purely peaceful activism can easily be described as terrorism, an absurdity that no self-respecting democracy or republic should tolerate.

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Consequently, in this paper, I avoid the labels of *terrorist* and *terrorism* in discussing the violence perpetrated by the troubled, and troublesome, Uyghur ethnic group, mostly so as not to legitimize the loose manner with which China and its counterterrorism partners define and apply these terms. Additionally, some instances of ethnic violence over the past two decades show signs of simple opportunism, and weak or one-off affiliation and coordination between the individuals involved. While undoubtedly *some* of the violence suffered by China at the hands of angry Uyghurs may accurately be labeled as terrorism—particularly incidents within the past 10 years—it is not the aim here to make those determinations, nor, might I argue, is it even necessarily helpful to do so.

“We Now Face Our Deepest Winter”⁶

The Uyghurs have much to be angry about. Their grievances can be identified as economic inequality, perceived foreign occupation of their lands, lack of religious and political freedom, and lack of political autonomy. The greater, macro-level context informing their struggle is one of historical injustice and spoiled nationhood.

Today’s definition of *Uyghur* is rather nebulous, owing to the complex history of those it attempts to label.

The term *Uyghur* in this paper refers to an ethno-linguistic Turkic people who have been residing for millennia in and around the Tarim and Dzungarian Basins, the oases of the Taklamakan Desert, and the surrounding and intervening mountain ranges of present-day northwestern China.⁷ Today’s definition of *Uyghur* is actually rather nebulous, owing to the complex historical background

of those peoples it attempts to label.⁸ *Uyghur* may actually refer to a variety of overlapping and intermixing ethnic groups who have undergone several mass religious conversions, the most recent being to Islam in the fifteenth century. The term is used here with a conscious awareness of the modernity of this identity formulation.⁹

Economic inequality is pervasive and severe between Uyghurs and Han Chinese. Although Czech researcher Jitka Malečková and American economist Alan B. Krueger both argue against the correlation between disparities in living standards and violent crime such as terrorism, economic hardship and inequality are nonetheless grievances of Xinjiang's violent perpetrators that are repeatedly cited by both Eastern and Western scholars and journalists who cover China.¹⁰ The numbers speak for themselves. In a mini-census in 2005, just over twenty-two thousand Uyghurs and Han were surveyed in Xinjiang, and from this sample population, it was found that Uyghurs earn, on average, *less than half* of what Han Chinese earn. The data also directly revealed that around 50 percent of all Uyghurs surveyed had only attained primary (elementary) education or lower, inhibiting them from even being eligible for many higher-paying jobs. These findings are supported by a more recent Al Jazeera report by Raymond Lee covering the socioeconomic hardships that are affecting Xinjiang Uyghurs as well.¹¹ According to Lee's analysis, the population is dealing with ongoing land expropriation, government corruption, and social exclusion, which cause "accrued anger [to be] translated into enormous social grievance against the government."¹²

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Xinjiang's natural resources are being tapped at great profit to the Chinese government, while little or none of this profit flows to the local people.

Xinjiang's natural resources are being tapped at great profit to the Chinese government, while little or none of this profit flows to the local people.¹³ Uyghurs in Xinjiang know these resources are valuable and that their community is being helplessly exploited by the Han Chinese: during his lengthy field studies in the region, anthropologist Justin Rudelson heard the locals joke that the train from eastern China comes into Xinjiang "making the sound 'ach, ach, ach' (I'm hungry)," and leaves "making the sound 'toq, toq, toq' (I'm full)."¹⁴ Uyghurs also know that the Lop Nor nuclear test site in southern Xinjiang has polluted their soil and groundwater with heavy metals to the point that locals are experiencing birth defects and other health problems.

Uyghur ethno-nationalists may also resent what is perceived by some to be outright occupation of their lands by the Chinese. American political scientist Gregory Gause asserts that "terrorists are driven ... by their opposition to what they see as foreign domination."¹⁵ They also desire more political representation. As Sophie Richardson, the Asia advocacy director at Human Rights Watch, testified before Congress, "Uyghurs are still excluded from the decisions about the future of their homeland," and one reason is because Han continue to dominate party and local government positions.¹⁶ The few Uyghurs who do make it into government positions are generally understood to have been handpicked and carefully appointed by Beijing.

Han typically live in the newer neighborhoods, likely as compensation for their willingness to migrate to the region at the government's request.

As is often the case with religion throughout the PRC, despite Beijing's promises, Uyghurs are also restricted from practicing their religion as they choose. As just a handful of myriad examples: They may attend only legally sanctioned and certified mosques; preached material must be approved beforehand; they must apply for permission to leave the country years in advance for *hajj* but may still be arbitrarily denied; and their Han neighbors are employed by the government to watch their activities and report anything suspicious.¹⁷ Mosques may be shut down and imams removed or defrocked without notice. Community organizations receive similar treatment: in 1997, the shutdown of at-risk youth shelters and removal of their leaders in Yining led to peaceful demonstrations that deteriorated into violent riots. James Millward speculates that mosque grounds were even turned into pig pens during the Cultural Revolution.¹⁸

Fueling Uyghurs' anger further, the government treats Han and Han-dominant areas of Xinjiang differently from Uyghurs and their neighborhoods. For example, Han neighborhoods are developed and receive government investments, and according to Hong Kong-based political scientist Chien-Peng Chung, Han typically live in the newer neighborhoods, likely as compensation for their willingness to migrate to the region at the government's request.¹⁹ This is in contrast to Uyghur neighborhoods, which may be completely razed even when they are inhabited, such as has been done in Kashgar.²⁰ The more tractable northern areas encounter relatively lax enforcement of religious



restrictions, whereas in the south, policies are enforced to—and beyond—the precise letter of the law. There is also the direct, daily humiliation of racism and discrimination, through comment and action, in public and in the workplace, especially where more Han Chinese are present.²¹

These factors combine to form an “emotional thrust,”²² which leads Uyghurs to use violence as a way to communicate their plight and resist the Chinese state and its policies. While the examples of grievances outlined here are by no means the full story, they serve to outline why Uyghurs are discontented to the point of becoming susceptible to radicalization. The next section describes how and why radicalism is increasing in direct response to Beijing’s policies and actions against Uyghurs and their identity.

History, History, History Repeats

It was just before Communism’s victorious rise in the mid-twentieth century that the two East Turkestan uprisings came about. These two movements and their short-lived republics—the Turkish Islamic Republic of East Turkestan and the Second East Turkestan Republic—have been written about extensively in historical briefs of the region; however, a critical detail is often left undiscussed, despite its effects on today’s tense reality. This detail is one of geography: the first republic was established in the southwestern oasis regions of Kashgar in 1933, at the same time that a separate anti-Chinese khanate was also established in the southern city of Khotan; the second republic was established in 1944 in the northwestern areas of Ili, following a series of rebellions against the Chinese state. Modern anti-Han sentiments in Xinjiang are historically rooted in the geographic areas of the province that correspond to these historical uprisings.

Even before the more familiar twentieth-century incidents, about one hundred years after the Qing dynasty attempted in 1759 to annex what is now Xinjiang, a military commander of Tajik ancestry named Yaqub Beg led a successful mass rebellion against Qing rule, and established an emirate in the southern Xinjiang city of Kashgar.²³ Like the later East Turkestan movements, this uprising was also ethnically motivated, pitting the Uyghur and Hui (a separate and distinct ethnic group of Muslim Chinese) populations of the region against the Han Chinese. In contrast, the Uyghur dwellers of the Turpan region to the north have a track record of amiable cross-cultural relations with the Han Chinese dating back centuries. Not coincidentally, it is in the north that the Chinese government set up the new regional capital of Ürümqi.

Friendly Neighborhood Insurgents

The southwestern rebel strongholds of Kashgar and Khotan are the closest cities to a little-known section of the Chinese border that abuts Afghanistan and leads into the Wakhan Corridor: a nearly



Yaqub Beg



The Wakhan Corridor is a perfectly, and frighteningly, ungoverned channel through which to funnel goods and ideas to an increasingly beleaguered and desperate Uyghur populace.



two-hundred-mile-long stretch of Afghan territory sandwiched between Tajikistan and Pakistan that directly connects Afghanistan to China. The approximately 50 miles of border is so unheard of that even seasoned experts and academics in the field are unaware of it. Historically, the Wakhan Corridor was used to travel between the Tarim Basin in Xinjiang and the historic region of Badakhshan—today’s northeastern Afghanistan and southern Tajikistan—and was a critical feature of the ancient Silk Road. This is a perfectly, and frighteningly, ungoverned channel through which to funnel goods and ideas to an increasingly beleaguered and desperate Uyghur populace. Rounding off this volatile frontier just as it connects with China is the disputed Indian state of Jammu and

Kashmir, where uprisings against the government in New Delhi have been boiling over for decades. The provinces that converge on this border area thus are home to generations of veterans of armed conflict against states.

As effectively as the Cultural Revolution erased local histories throughout China, the independent streak running through the non-Turpan Uyghur areas across Xinjiang did not fade. While China has purposefully used these local geographic histories to its advantage, such as investing resources primarily in northern Ürümqi, the Uyghurs may themselves begin to harness geography in their struggle by reaching across the border. Their not-so-distant insurgent neighbors may be more than happy to help out, and are certainly already equipped to do so.

Call and Response: Fighting Violence with Violence?

China’s responses to dissident attacks, and to the threat of East Turkestan separatism, are causing an unnecessarily dire situation in Xinjiang. The state uses an impressively comprehensive mixture of suppressive policies that combine soft, information-centric tactics and campaigns with violent kinetic, often lethal operations. Chinese counterterrorist campaigns usually receive coverage in the West for their physically brutal character; because there is a plethora of information and analysis available on this angle of China’s repression, however, I touch on it only briefly here. My focus in the subsequent section is on China’s much larger and relatively unknown information-oriented operations, which all but cripple their dissenters.

The most famous of China’s anti-terrorist campaigns against its East Turkestan dissidents is the ruthless “Strike Hard” campaign, which is initiated and rescinded as needed, usually in the run-up to or aftermath of major protests, incidents of unrest, or violent attacks. The campaign has allowed for a range of repressive measures, including: legal proceedings against suspected terrorists to be expedited or circumvented altogether, the torture of suspects, executions, police sweeps through neighborhoods without warning or justification, intrusive surveillance, targeted assassinations, and a general massive increase in the presence of security forces. Joshua Kurlantzick reported in 2003 that the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) had turned Xinjiang into “a garrison,” noting that the Army ran a drill “conspicuously” near a mosque.²⁴ This is in contrast to an earlier trip report from the mid-1990s by Paul Henze, who characterized the PLA bases as being in “inconspicuous locations,” giving the impression that the increase in security forces is no temporary measure but part of a long-term kinetic strategy

against violent extremists in the region.²⁵ Indeed, later on, in 2010, the Communist Party of China recruited five thousand more special police from within Xinjiang, while the People's Armed Police added a new rapid-reaction unit in Ürümqi. In 2010, there were sixty thousand security cameras in the city of Ürümqi alone.²⁶

The campaign has also mobilized individuals, both directly and indirectly, into informant networks, whereby they sell one another out to the security services to avoid having suspicion fall on their own families. The legitimacy of such accusations is often questionable. The second-order effects of the informant network, however—sowing distrust and discontent between locals and among the minority populations—play neatly into some of China's information operations against the East Turkestan movement.

Informants sell one another out to the security services to avoid having suspicion fall on their own families.

Information Warfare with Chinese Characteristics

Overall, China executes a brilliantly comprehensive propaganda and information campaign that has, in ways, achieved degrees of success with assimilating and erasing Uyghur culture and reframing Uyghurs' self-perception firmly within a Chinese-identity narrative. In this section, we peer into the shadowy and layered world of China's subversive and methodical propaganda to find out just what the Uyghurs have been up against in their fight for survival—let alone for their own autonomous province or nation.

The Pen Is Mightier

One of the most effective moves the PRC has used to undermine Uyghur identity is to grind away the people's literature and oral history traditions. It has done this primarily through a series of language overhauls, beginning with the first rewrite in 1956. At the behest of Mao, written Chinese itself was undergoing its own language overhaul at this time: traditional Chinese characters were abandoned for simplified characters, a first blow for modernization that was felt countrywide. The Uyghurs, for their part, were forced to convert to the Cyrillic alphabet, in a purposeful effort to undermine the influence of Uyghur intellectuals.²⁷ In 1960, the script was changed again, this time from Cyrillic to Latin, further impeding the transmission and comprehension of any cultural records that may have survived to that point. Eighteen years later, in 1978—or in other words, as the next generation came into adulthood—Beijing imposed a modified version of Arabic writing on the Uyghur people. Thus, successive cadres of schoolchildren have lost the ability to read their own history, even recent history, except as promulgated from the central authority.

In addition to having their written history cut off from them, the Uyghur population had three different languages imposed on them within a span of 28 years, four languages if Mandarin Chinese is included, and many more when including dialects from adjacent provinces and Soviet influences during the same era.²⁸

Anthropologists consider the effects of language loss on a culture to be devastating because languages are “like a key that can unlock local knowledge” and are certainly a key to transmitting history and maintaining national identity.²⁹ The generational timing of the language impositions also ensured that not only the culture as a whole but also the microcosm of Uyghur families would be weakened, making Uyghur youth more vulnerable to the influence of the dominant Chinese culture during their formative years. The Uyghur schools have also been

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disrupted by these mandates regarding which language to use for instruction in minority areas.

Every 10 years or less, the Chinese government switches its policy to either allow and encourage, or disallow and discourage, Uyghur language instruction. Because of this, alternating generations of Uyghurs may speak, read, and write some version of their own language, or exclusively Mandarin, inhibiting intragroup communication. According to Rudelson, who spent a number of years in Xinjiang doing field research, Uyghur intellectuals “feel that the younger generation may grow up not only uninterested in reading about Uyghur history, but also unable to simply read.”³⁰ These policies and language shifts have created an important communication gap that helps China in its efforts to assimilate or erase Uyghur culture and identity.

There have also been more direct attacks on the historiography and cultural records of the region and its localities, including the establishment of a regional museum that portrayed only a Han Chinese presence in Xinjiang. Despite purporting to cover thousands of years of the area’s history, the museum reportedly excluded any mention of the actual peoples native to Xinjiang.³¹ (This museum apparently has been shut down.) Beijing also has a long track record of imprisoning any authors, academics, and artists, including those from the Uyghur minority, whom it considers dissident. As a recent example, economist and historian Ilham Tohti was arrested on 15 January 2014 for “inciting separatism,” only a few weeks after he sat for an interview with the Australian Broadcast Corporation.³² Books and music are publicly burned for their supposedly separatist content in sudden and powerful waves of repression. Mass public rallies are held “at which Uyghurs [are] sentenced to jail [or death] without trial,” in an eerie harkening back to the worst years of the Cultural Revolution.³³ Beijing also co-opts up-and-coming Uyghur intellectuals by handpicking them to be educated in the country’s capital based on their compliance with Beijing’s views and policies.³⁴ These assimilated scholars are more widely published and thus become more influential than Uyghurs who are more true to their original culture and sentiments.

There Goes the Neighborhood

With the completion of the transnational railroad in 1962 into Urumqi, the Chinese government shifted the capital of Xinjiang away from the traditional Kashgar and Ili regions—the cultural centers of Uyghur identity—north to the historically more Han-friendly city of Ürümqi. Since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, Han Chinese have been persuaded by the Communist central government to migrate en masse to historically Uyghur lands throughout Xinjiang in exchange for land, money, government or Party positions, or other compensation; ostensibly to develop the region, the central government also built a railway line that connects developed eastern China to Ürümqi. In 1949, Han Chinese made up a mere 5 percent of the population in Xinjiang; by 2010, they comprised 41 percent. In the regional capital of Ürümqi, Han account for nearly 80 percent of the population.³⁵ When the United States encouraged American settlement of the newly independent Mexican state of Coahuila y Tejas in the early nineteenth century, the Spanish-speaking Tejanos were outnumbered by Americans within the span of about 30 years, and the Mexican-American War of 1846 was the result. The Uyghurs are similarly

becoming strangers in their own lands and, likewise, have so far been unable to win back the territory they believe belongs to them.

Islam in a Chinese Choke Hold

The practice of Islam, which underpins modern Uyghur culture even for secular Uyghurs, is also subject to unjust scrutiny and clampdowns. Uyghur religious leaders are sometimes forced to go to re-education camps, where they are taught



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how to be “more patriotic,” and hundreds of thousands of clergy members have been “examined” by authorities; an estimated 10 percent of these were defrocked in the crackdown that came immediately after the April 1990 Baren Township Riot.³⁶ The initial protests were not even related to Islam but were instead in response to the forced abortions that were being carried out to implement the government’s one-child “family planning policies,” as they are often euphemistically called. Uyghurs who work in state institutions (there is no such thing as a truly “private” enterprise in China) are sometimes not allowed to attend mosque services, particularly during Ramadan, and are not allowed to observe the Ramadan fast. Islamic teachers and scholars are also regularly imprisoned and sometimes summarily executed without explanation. Mosques are shut down and destroyed without warning or media coverage, and imams are charged with “spreading material promoting ‘religious extremism’ on the internet” under ambiguous circumstances.³⁷ Uyghur women who wear headscarves, especially in the rebellious Kashgar region, are pulled off the street to have their scarves forcibly removed; Uyghur men are encouraged to shave their beards. According to Kurlantzick, “Government documents smuggled out of the country reveal ... government officials, including [former president Hu Jintao] proposing to use secret agents to infiltrate and ‘quietly smash’ religious groups ... supposedly threatening public order.”³⁸ In schools, the Buddhist origins of certain Uyghur Turkic texts are emphasized over their Islamic roots.³⁹



Hu Jintao



Chinese Identity or No Identity

Nicholas Dynon, an expert on Chinese public diplomacy, writes, “Education reinforcing state sanctioned views of cultural identity ... equips youth with the ability to say, ‘I am Chinese, I am Uyghur, I am not an Arab.’”⁴⁰ Other surreptitious efforts to shape ethnic identity include the revision of history textbooks used in Xinjiang schools to portray Uyghurs not only as being ethnically Chinese but also as having no history separate from that of the Han Chinese people. One such textbook used in Uyghur schools and created by the Beijing-controlled Xinjiang Youth Press

is called *I Am a Pan-PRC Chinese*, as translated from Uyghur by Rudelson. The short-term effects of this kind of education reform and revisionist history, which were implemented in the late 1990s and early 2000s, are difficult to measure, but there are some signs that the PRC has been successful at least in causing confusion among younger Muslim and Turkic Chinese about their non-Chinese cultural heritage. These tactics may even be beginning to disconnect them from their heritage entirely. For example, in a survey cited by Millward in *Eurasian Crossroads*, 43 percent of Uyghurs sampled in the mid-2000s believe that their culture and ethnicity are historically a part of China; 80 percent of Han believe the same of the Uyghur people.⁴¹

PRC tactics may even be beginning to disconnect Uyghurs from their heritage entirely.

The central government has also attempted to divide ethnic minority groups in a bid to prevent cross-minority sympathy, a perception of likeness, or a sense of shared grievances, which could strengthen the minorities in solidarity against the Chinese state. For instance, when the Chinese Communists were first consolidating their control of Xinjiang, they forced the nomadic Kazakh minority into fixed and smaller pastures, while simultaneously increasing the Kazakhs’ political leadership of then-Uyghur-dominant Xinjiang; Beijing still uses this historically oppositional minority relationship to its own advantage.⁴²

The central government has even turned the historic Ili area of Xinjiang into an official “Kazakh Autonomous Region,” which, despite also being historically Uyghur territory, is now governed by Kazakhs and Han.

In conjunction with the information campaigns launched within the Uyghur and other Xinjiang communities, Beijing has also been steadily increasing its nationalist rhetoric and nationwide propaganda campaigns directed toward the Han population and jingoists, “[fostering] intense nationalism through fascist-like mass rallies and xenophobic school curricula.”⁴³ The Xinhua News Agency recently released a series of paintings and slogans from the early days of communism’s rise in China, pulling the patriotic heartstrings of its citizens and appealing to Han Chinese youth, who seem to have a growing penchant for overly zealous portrayals of “mother China.”⁴⁴



China Seals a Deadly Bomb

At the same time that it engages in these active strategic propaganda and information campaigns, the government blocks off any routes for redressing grievances—either historical ones or those arising strictly from these policies. Any protests, for instance, “must be officially approved beforehand and ... the application must specify the protest’s ‘purpose, methods, slogans, or catchphrases.’”⁴⁵ Aside from giving the government the obvious upper hand in physical security for such protests, including the ability to shut them down before they even begin, this pre-approval documentation also presumably gives Beijing advance time to preload all of its media outlets with precisely drafted rhetoric that is relevant and damaging to the movement, as it did in the 2013 *Nanfang Zhoumo* scandal.⁴⁶

Uyghurs and any other dissenters in China cannot safely seek legal representation either, because lawyers are discouraged, with consequential threats, from representing anyone even remotely related to a protest or “any other”⁴⁷ activity that could be deemed “separatist” or “terrorist.”⁴⁸ Even if one does find a brave-enough lawyer, the Chinese government openly describes the judges presiding over such cases as “selected politically qualified personnel drawn from the entire region,”⁴⁹ thus preventing citizens from having any truly just, legal route of appeal to the government.

Uyghurs cannot safely seek legal representation.

Blockades without Borders

Blocking any international avenue of recourse, China prevents Uyghurs from either gaining sympathy from or finding refuge with neighbors by painting the Uyghurs as threats not only to China but to the other countries in the region as well.⁵⁰ Through the SCO, China has secured the return of Uyghurs it deems to be criminals from other member states, which unquestioningly fulfill China’s requests for extradition. SCO members also deny Uyghurs’ applications for asylum without review, thus shutting them out of the region’s legal arenas.

China’s media and communications blockades so severely limit the availability of information that the Uyghurs’ plight simply cannot be fully or accurately portrayed by international media, and thus fails to win the sympathy or intercession of the rest of the world. China has also become so powerful on the world stage that those who might otherwise intervene under similar circumstances are discouraged from doing so out of fear of economic or other repercussions. The difficulty of clearly defining the Uyghur people as an ethnic group probably exacerbates the difficulty that would-be sympathizers have in trying to identify with the people’s plight. The easiest way to solve that problem may be through increased Islamicization of Uyghur identity, something that seems to be happening naturally in response to the intense and complete stifling of Uyghur nationhood. In other words, the common thread of Islam may be the most direct means the Uyghurs have to connect with and gain the sympathy of outsiders, whether they be mainstream Muslims or violent extremists.

The easiest way to solve the sympathy problem may be through increased Islamicization of Uyghur identity.

Uyghurs are effectively blocked off from every major means to redress grievances: legal, direct appeals to the domestic government, peaceful activism, community organization, and regional or international aid from private citizens, organizations, or governments—every angle is occluded by China’s truly comprehensive collection of strategies. This combination of soft and hard

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“Aren’t you afraid of what [Uyghurs] will do to your country?”

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policies, however, can lead to a particular explosiveness. If there is no other way to express their frustration but to detonate, that may just be where the Uyghurs are headed. As Gregory Gause put it, “When a dictatorship controls the political life of a country, responsible opposition cannot develop, and dissent is driven underground and toward the extreme.”⁵¹

China Gets Hit by Its Own Shrapnel

The information and kinetic dimensions of China’s war on terrorism have proven so harsh that these policies are backfiring by further alienating the Uyghur population. For instance, the information bureau’s success at painting Uyghur violence as “evil,” and thus instilling a sense of otherness and eroding sympathy among the non-Uyghur populations, has antagonized Han Chinese into forming serious prejudices against Uyghurs.⁵² Many Han, especially those who have limited or no direct personal contact with Uyghurs, fear, dislike, and discriminate against them as a result of official propaganda. At the same time, paradoxically, as China has implemented a strategy of re-education in Uyghur schools to make students feel more like an integral part of China, Uyghurs’ daily experiences on the ground are giving them a different picture. Racial discrimination against Uyghurs seems to be as cruel as ever. One Han urbanite in Guangzhou recoiled in fear during a conversation when I explained that some Uyghurs have sought new lives in the United States. “Aren’t you afraid of what they will do to your country?” he asked in bewilderment. When I asked why anyone would be afraid of them, he explained to me that “Uyghurs are psychotic people” and “criminals” to be feared and contained. Several years earlier, in 2007, during the time I spent doing ethnographic research on ethnic discrimination in China, sentiments among Han were similarly harsh and unjust.

The harsh physical security measures used by the Chinese government against the Uyghur population are propelling otherwise moderately minded people to begin identifying with the more extreme subgroup. Norwegian Police University College professor Tore Bjørgo writes, “The experience of being beaten up or arrested by the police along with other group members ... tends to redefine their entire relationship to the society.”⁵³ Nick Holdstock, British journalist and author of the Xinjiang exposé *The Tree That Bleeds*, reported that “many Uyghurs claimed [to him] that the adoption of a more conservative approach to Islam ... [only] came after the crackdown” on the Yining protests in 1997.⁵⁴ He went on to write, “The growth in religiosity among Uyghurs in Xinjiang can be seen as a response” to China’s repression and restriction of Muslim identity. Abdullah Mansour, widely considered to be the leader of the Turkistan Islamic Party⁵⁵—a terrorist organization advocating for an independent East Turkestan—claimed in a Uyghur-language video that the 23 April 2013 attack in Tiananmen Square was in direct response to Chinese state actions taken against Uyghur culture.⁵⁶ A report for Al Jazeera on Uyghur unrest also points to China’s repressive policies as a significant motivating cause for the “adversarial orientation” of Uyghurs against Han rule.⁵⁷

Conclusion: Reclaiming Identity, Reclaiming Rebellion

As China’s counterterror policies backfire, the Xinjiang region is undergoing additional social and political changes that are feeding overall instability and, most likely, further violence. The relatively recent reopening of Xinjiang’s borders with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, and India, as well as the little-known Wakhan Corridor into Afghanistan, is bringing a slew of transformations. First, there is

the reuniting of Uyghur families who were separated during the Cultural Revolution and throughout the early Communist era. Estimates vary, but Rudelson notes that between sixty thousand and one hundred twenty thousand minority nationals fled from Xinjiang into what is now Kazakhstan. Although we don't know precisely what percentage of that number were Uyghurs, we do know that Uyghurs made up at least 80–90 percent of the population in Xinjiang Province at that time, so their percentage of that exodus was likely quite significant. Rudelson also mentions that many Uyghurs “fled to India and settled in the Rawalpindi area of today's Pakistan” in the 1930s.⁵⁸ It is not difficult to imagine what those Uyghurs have been exposed to during their lengthy exile in such a conflicted area. There are also significant Uyghur populations in Kyrgyzstan and more-distant Turkey.

Second, the various oases of Xinjiang historically were more closely tied to their most proximate neighbors in Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan than to the Han populations to the east. This is one of the reasons that the oases developed such distinct cultures—bilateral relations with neighboring countries varied sharply from oasis to oasis, exposing each to a unique cultural influence. When China's borders were closed in 1962, not

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Taklamam Desert



The withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan leaves a vacuum of authority in a region already notoriously under-governed.

The revival of Uyghurs' Muslim identity may be leading to a new solidarity that mirrors Xinjiang's not-so-distant rebellious past.

only were thousands of Uyghur families split apart, but the identity-reinforcing relations that each oasis had with Central Asians were all but obliterated. Since the 1980s-era reopening of the borders under Chinese politician and reformist leader Deng Xiaoping, Xinjiang's oases are experiencing a revival of their more traditional non-Chinese and non-PRC identities. Both the deeply personal connections that are being reformed by families, and the significant political and economic relationships that are being dusted off and rebuilt, may have a substantial influence on the overall milieu of Uyghurs' relations with the Chinese state in the coming years.

The reopening of these borders may have other effects as well, due to the overall regional environment. In particular, the withdrawal of U.S. and coalition forces from Afghanistan leaves a well-recognized vacuum of authority in a region that is already notoriously under-governed. Central Asian borders, particularly where they run into northwestern China, are dangerously unpoliced and, even when they are guarded, are easy to pass through with an extra pack of cigarettes or what amounts to a few U.S. dollars. The dearth of authoritative presence and security, particularly in the nearly hidden Wakhan Corridor, presents a welcome mat for the kind of destabilizing influences that an angry ethno-nationalist group like the Uyghurs would gladly welcome.

China's notoriously inhumane and repressive policies are pushing its Uyghur minority to the only other extreme that seems to be left open to them: the violent means of communication we call terrorism. The revival of Uyghurs' Muslim identity due to the rejuvenation of their cross-border relations with Central Asia may be leading to a new solidarity that mirrors Xinjiang's not-so-distant rebellious past. The regional community in Central and South Asia will undoubtedly feel the effects of a rise in Uyghur ethno-nationalist terrorism. We already see the expansion of attacks going well beyond Xinjiang's borders into the rest of mainland China, despite a tremendously restrictive security environment. It would almost be *easier* for Uyghur radicals to target Han in neighboring countries, and as the Vietnamese violently kick out Chinese workers from their country over territorial disputes in the South China Sea, it is not a far cry to imagine further attacks on Han Chinese citizens abroad, carried out by members of an insurgent-empowered Uyghur "nation."

Increased security measures will almost certainly be called for by regional partners in the near future, particularly China's fellow SCO members who have at least some relative influence with Beijing, in a bid to prevent cross-pollination with neighboring *takfiri* radicals and an explosion of new and more violent attacks from radicalized Uyghurs. What China's leadership still does not seem to recognize, however, is that harsher crackdowns only serve to ignite these explosions in the first place. They need to understand that the Uyghur ethnic identity they've been pounding down on so hard is effectively becoming a detonator, before it's too late to cut the fuse of the bomb they themselves have packed. ❖

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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NOTES

- 1 Andrew D. W. Forbes, *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia: A Political history of Republican Sinkiang 1911–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 10
- 2 Literally, “old one hundred surnames,” a term roughly translatable to “an ordinary citizen,” as separate from, say, a government leader or powerful enterprise executive.
- 3 Human Rights in China, *Counter-terrorism and Human Rights: The Impact of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization* (New York: Human Rights in China, March 2011): <http://www.hrichina.org/en/publications/hric-report/counter-terrorism-and-human-rights-impact-shanghai-cooperation-organization>
- 4 Emphasis added. Human Rights in China, *Counter-terrorism and Human Rights*, 45.
- 5 Joshua Kurlantzick, “China’s Dubious Role in the War on Terror,” *Current History* 102, no. 668 (December 2003): 432–38.
- 6 From a poem by Abdurusul Omar, a Uyghur, as translated by Justin Jon Rudelson, *Oasis Identities: Uyghur Nationalism along China’s Silk Road* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 152.
- 7 For a thorough history of eastern Central Asia, see James Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Limited, 2007). For an equally fascinating but more modern history dating from the late 1800s, see S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2004); and Andrew D. W. Forbes, *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia: A Political History of Republican Sinkiang 1911–1949*, 2nd ed. (Bangkok: White Lotus Co., 2010).
- 8 The distinctiveness of the peoples across the different oases and cities throughout Xinjiang clouds the issue further. Each locality has its own history and identity, and Uyghurs from one particular oasis may view Uyghurs from any other oasis as members of an entirely different nationality, such as the Dolans near Kashgar, or the Loplik fishing community near Lop Nor. Pertinently, as Uyghurs begin to piece back together what was lost of their recorded histories in China’s devastating Cultural Revolution, each locality’s intellectual community is now competing with the others to reformulate a narrative of identity. This makes the *Uyghur* label highly subjective, according to whom and by whom the label is being applied. For simplicity’s sake, but in quiet recognition of Uyghurs’ complexly woven histories, I use the term *Uyghur* in this article to refer in general to the Turkic-speaking, predominantly Muslim peoples residing in Xinjiang Province.
- 9 Uyghurs were not widespread followers of Islam until about the fifteenth century. Before that, they went through a series of religious conversions: predominantly Buddhism, but also Manichaeism and Nestorian Christianity. (See Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*.) Even today, the mystic branch of Islam, Sufism, is widely practiced. Before the fifteenth century, the term *Uyghur* was actually used to refer to and differentiate the Turkic Buddhist society residing in Turpan (in northeastern Xinjiang) from the Turkic Muslim societies to the west. Around the time that these Turkic Buddhists began converting to Islam in 1450 CE and up until the mid-twentieth century, the term *Uyghur* completely fell out of use, presumably because it was strongly linked to the Buddhist history of the culture. Only in the early 1930s did the term come to be as closely linked with Islam as it is today. This is significant because Chinese critics point to Islam and religion as the drivers of social instability among Uyghurs, when in fact there are indications that observant Islam may be experiencing a resurgence primarily in response to the repressive policies of the Chinese government.
- 10 Not only is there an economic difference within a given city in Xinjiang, but we can also see an economic and political disparity across the *regions* of Xinjiang, along an unsurprising divide: the northeastern, Beijing-favored, Han-dominated Turpan region including Ürümqi, versus the rest of the province, where 80 percent of Xinjiang’s Uyghurs live. Raymond Lee found socioeconomic development disparities at their extremes in this case, with “the heartland” Uyghur areas in the south suffering the poorest conditions and the mainly Han-inhabited areas in the north enjoying some of the highest GDP-per-capita rates in the entire country. See Raymond Lee, *Unrest in Xinjiang, Uyghur Province in China* (Mecca: Al Jazeera Center for Studies, 9 February 2014): <http://studies.aljazeera.net/ResourceGallery/media/Documents/2014/2/20/2014220921643580Province%20in%20China.pdf>
- 11 Lee, *Unrest in Xinjiang*.
- 12 Ibid., 5.
- 13 Ibid., 4.
- 14 Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, 75.
- 15 F. Gregory Gause III, “Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?,” *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 5 (September/October 2005): <http://www.terpconnect.umd.edu/~mkm/gause.pdf>
- 16 *China’s Far West: Conditions in Xinjiang One Year After Demonstrations and Riots: Roundtable Before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China*, 111th Cong. 10 (19 July 2010) (statement of Sophie Richardson, Asia Advocacy Director, Human Rights Watch): <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-111hhrg57904/pdf/CHRG-111hhrg57904.pdf>
- 17 Nick Holdstock, *Islam and Instability in China’s Xinjiang* (Oslo: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, March 2014): http://www.peacebuilding.no/var/ezflow_site/storage/original/application/3ba335a7680451de2612c693a481eb96.pdf
- 18 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 276.
- 19 Chien-peng Chung, “China’s ‘War on Terror’: September 11 and Uighur Separatism,” *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 4 (July/August 2002): <http://www.cfr.org/china/chinas-war-terror-september-11-uighur-separatism/p4765>
- 20 Jacob Zenn, “China Claims Uyghur Militants Trained in Syria,” *Terrorism Monitor* 11, no. 14 (12 July 2013): [http://www.jamestown.org/regions/middleeast/single?tx_ttnews\[pointer\]=4&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=41115&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=676&cHash=111fdb863851f0ea1f831d12bec28957#U7HDmbEn_Nw](http://www.jamestown.org/regions/middleeast/single?tx_ttnews[pointer]=4&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=41115&tx_ttnews[backPid]=676&cHash=111fdb863851f0ea1f831d12bec28957#U7HDmbEn_Nw)
- 21 Julia McClenon, “From Backwards to Upwards: Ethnic Discrimination in China” (unpublished manuscript, May 2008), Microsoft Word file.
- 22 Lee, *Unrest in Xinjiang*, 5.
- 23 Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, 27.
- 24 Kurlantzick, “China’s Dubious Role.”
- 25 Paul B. Henze, *Xinjiang and Ex-Soviet Central Asia: Impressions of Chinese Turkestan* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 1995), 5.
- 26 *China’s Far West: Conditions in Xinjiang One Year After Demonstrations and Riots: Roundtable Before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China*, 111th Cong. 3 (19 July 2010) (statement of Shirley A. Kan, Specialist in Asian Security Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division, Congressional Research Service): <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-111hhrg57904/pdf/CHRG-111hhrg57904.pdf>
- 27 Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, 101.

- 28 Although the spoken changes to the native tongue were mostly minor pronunciation changes according to whatever alphabet they were being forced to use at any given time, Mandarin exclusively was also intermittently forced on children in the schools. As a result, spoken Uyghur was being learned only at home during those times. Depending on the timing, home-spoken Uyghur sounded different from that taught in schools, and/or from the Uyghur that Uyghurs of other ages spoke. To make matters worse, the Cyrillic-taught Uyghur borrow many Russian words that are unintelligible to traditional Uyghur-speakers; the Arabic-taught Uyghurs use Arabic words unintelligible to the Cyrillic or otherwise trained Uyghurs; and so on. The result is both written and spoken language blockades to cultural cohesion.
- 29 Paroma Basu, "What Happens When a Language Dies?," National Geographic News, 26 February 2009: <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2009/02/090226--dying-languages-india-missions.html>
- 30 Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, 59.
- 31 Ibid., 136.
- 32 Andrew Jacobs, "China Charges Scholar with Inciting Separatism," *New York Times*, 26 February 2014: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/27/world/asia/ilham-tohti.html>; Stephen McDonnell, "Uighur Scholar Ilham Tohti Arrested in China Could Face Life in Prison, Human Rights Watch Researcher Warns," Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 18 January 2014: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-01-18/scholar-arrested-in-china-could-face-life-in-prison/5206180>
- 33 Kurlantzick, "China's Dubious Role," 432–38.
- 34 Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, 135.
- 35 Holdstock, *Islam and Instability*; Chung, "China's 'War on Terror,'" 5.
- 36 Kurlantzick, "China's Dubious Role."
- 37 Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, 135.
- 38 Kurlantzick, "China's Dubious Role," 436.
- 39 Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, 139. For example, one text in question, from the eleventh century, is considered "one of the first Uyghur masterpieces on the aesthetics of the Turkic language." Although the author was born in Kashgar and his mausoleum in Kashgar is considered an important Uyghur historical site, a Han Chinese author published an article in 1986 claiming a Buddhist origin for the book. Rudelson cites this as an example of how "the Chinese disassociate Uyghur history from Islam [...] by claiming Buddhist origins" for Uyghur texts. Ibid.
- 40 Nicholas Dynon, "The Language of Terrorism in China: Balancing Foreign and Domestic Policy Imperatives," *China Brief* 14, no. 1 (January 2014): http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=41799&no_cache=1#.U4Dd0fldXs8
- 41 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 351.
- 42 Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, 35, 133.
- 43 Kurlantzick, "China's Dubious Role," 435.
- 44 "Early PLA Posters, Signatures of an Era," *People's Daily Online*, 30 April 2014.
- 45 Holdstock, *Islam and Instability*, 4.
- 46 In January 2013, a generally progressive newspaper in Guangzhou, *Nanfang Zhoumo*, attempted to publish a call for constitutional reforms on its front page. The head of the provincial level propaganda department edited and censored the article for its final published version without consent of the author or any of the editorial staff at the newspaper. The original version, titled "The Chinese Dream, the Dream of Constitutionalism," was widely leaked, however, and Communist Party censors who attempted to block all the online chatter about the censorship were overwhelmed with protests from as far away as Shanghai. See Reporters Without Borders: <http://en.rsf.org/chine-chinese-censors-pursue-cover-up-11-01-2013,43908.html>. Also see "The New Year's Greetings Incident:" <https://www.wefightcensorship.org/censored/new-years-greetings-incident.html>
- 47 The phrase *any other* is a hallmark ambiguity of China's definitions of *terrorism*. See the introductory section of this article.
- 48 *China's Far West: Conditions in Xinjiang One Year After Demonstrations and Riots: Roundtable Before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China*, 111th Cong. 16 (19 July 2010): <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-111hrg57904/pdf/CHRG-111hrg57904.pdf>
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Kurlantzick, "China's Dubious Role," 437.
- 51 Gause, "Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?," 3.
- 52 Author conversations with Han Chinese in Guangzhou, China, September–December 2013.
- 53 Tore Bjørgo, "Process of Disengagement from Violent Groups of the Extreme Right," in *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, ed. Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan (London: Routledge, 2009), 35.
- 54 Holdstock, *Islam and Instability*, 5.
- 55 Also commonly referred to as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, or ETIM.
- 56 Zenn, "China Claims Uyghur Militants Trained in Syria."
- 57 Lee, *Unrest in Xinjiang*, 3.
- 58 Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, 61.

Stressing Self-defense in the Force: Five Methods to Empower Commanders

INHERENT IN THE UNITED STATES' COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY IN Afghanistan is a tension between the individual warfighter's natural desire to wage conventional war and the strategic leader's attempt to overcome this "institutional inclination."¹ Over the years of fighting this nebulous conflict, that tension has led to a conceptual disconnect between strategic-level policy makers and tactical-level decision makers, which has tended to exacerbate the ground force operator's perception of disenfranchisement. This perceived disenfranchisement is most evident in the arena of battlefield regulation—the rules of engagement (ROE), tactical directives, standard operating procedures, and general orders issued by strategic leaders. Tactical oversight has increased as the years have passed, resulting in progressively cumbersome mission-approval processes. The actions of individual troops in combat are occasionally second-guessed, resulting in formal reprimands and, in rare cases, courts-martial.² Although this regulation and increased oversight is always implemented with a particular policy aim in mind, American troops engaged in direct combat are understandably rarely concerned with the policy origins of a particular rule.

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An internet search for "restrictive ROE" will render thousands of scathing news articles, blogs, and other internet criticisms against the perceived handcuffing of ground forces in Afghanistan. Commentators blame the ROE for a variety of ills, most disturbingly an increase in American casualties. Indeed, several commentators directly attribute American deaths to the restrictiveness of the rules under which U.S. forces operate.³

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If a ground force operator perceives battlefield regulation to be reducing operational effectiveness, or endangering the lives of his comrades, or restricting the "right to self-defense," strategic arguments in support of the regulation will hold little sway in the mind of that operator. Thus, as relevant as the subject might be, the purpose of this article is not to enter the long-standing argument over counterinsurgency strategy and the ROE required to effectively implement it. That debate will continue as long as we pursue ill-defined goals in conflicts against vague enemies. Instead, the aim of this article is to provide practical guidance to commanders, leaders, and operators currently attempting to execute the ROE, regardless of any view on the strategy or policy behind the rules.



The frustration over perceived hyper-regulation of the battlefield discussed in this article does not seem to be a uniquely American problem. Tactical-level operators from the armed forces of other nations deployed in Afghanistan have apparently also struggled with the effects of the national and strategic implementation of rules designed to minimize civilian casualties in combat.⁴ This highlights the problem as one that is potentially universal for modern militaries engaged in counterinsurgency. Although this article addresses the issue through the prism of a U.S. lawyer's experience in Afghanistan, our coalition partners in this and future conflicts may also benefit from the methods outlined here. The concept of unit self-defense, embodied in the ROE of nations and multinational organizations, is after all grounded in *international law*. The unique problems that arise in applying the concept to an asymmetric conflict are therefore international in nature.

Self-defense in the ROE

Strategic leaders create ROE for three purposes: (1) to achieve their military objectives, (2) to remain consistent with national policy, and (3) to meet their legal obligations.⁵ Every battlefield "rule" can be traced to one of these purposes, and often a single rule can serve more than one of these purposes.⁶ A rule prohibiting the destruction of compounds except as a last resort might serve a military counter-propaganda goal, while also serving a U.S. policy goal to minimize civilian casualties and avoid the compromise of sensitive political negotiations. Perhaps no issue is more delicate in the drafting and implementation of ROE than the right to unit self-defense and perceptions that strategic leaders have infringed on it, thereby disenfranchising the ground force operator. As demonstrated by the volume of internet punditry on the topic, these perceptions certainly exist in some sectors of the media, and as a result, among casual American readers. More dangerously, these perceptions exist within the force, and in Afghanistan, self-defense is everything for the individual servicemember. The platoon leader on patrol in a counterinsurgency theater has little use for offensive ROE when the enemy is not easily distinguished from the civilian population. Gone are the days of declaring an entire force hostile and engaging the hostile force based on the type of uniform he wears or the type of vehicle he is in. There are no Soviet-era T-72 tanks roaming the battlefield. Instead, by necessity, the ROE must be conduct-based: they must be reactionary. Ground forces must constantly evaluate enemy behavior and make split-second decisions about whether to employ lethal force based on this behavior.

This is not an easy exercise. There are four inherent difficulties in the application of conduct-based ROE: (1) determining what conduct to attack, (2) determining when to attack it, (3) the subjective nature of these determinations, and (4) the enemy's ability to adapt to the ROE through modified behavior. These difficulties are confronted on a daily basis in Afghanistan, and if not appropriately considered and addressed, they contribute to a sense of disenfranchisement in the force. When the perception that the wrong answer could end a career grows pervasive in a unit, frustration quickly follows and morale suffers.⁷ Leaders must make dedicated efforts to avoid this unraveling, not just because it affects morale, but more importantly, because it breeds hesitation. The methods I describe in the following sections will assist commanders and leaders in the effort to empower subordinate decision making, lessen the conceptual disconnect between strategic policies and tactical decisions, and remove the perception of disenfranchisement from the force.

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I. Understand Self-defense Doctrine and Make It a Pervasive Organizational Theme

All deploying soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines are told that they have the right, and obligation, to defend themselves and their units against hostile acts and hostile intent. But too often, this is all they are told. Moreover, when they are told, it is during a single legal brief provided by a judge advocate, with no command or leadership emphasis on the concept. Unless leaders incorporate self-defense as a pervasive theme, the concept risks transformation into a vague legal formula written on an ROE card, ill-suited for battlefield application.⁸ Principles guide the combat decision making of an effective force, not “adherence to hard and fast rules.”⁹ The failure of leaders and servicemembers to fully grasp the principle of self-defense is a key factor in the perceived disenfranchisement of tactical decision makers.

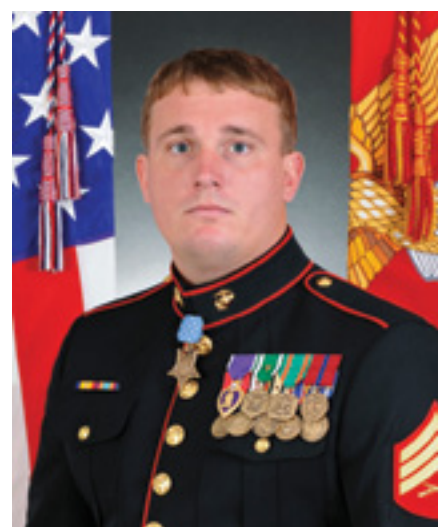
As an illustration, consider the September 2009 events in Ganjgal, Kunar Province, Afghanistan. During the course of the now well-known six-hour battle, several requests for fire and air support were denied or simply not fulfilled. Five American servicemembers lost their lives. Members of the ground force involved in the firefight, including Captain William Swenson, who received the Medal of Honor for his actions that day, publicly blamed politically-driven ROE and tactical directives seeking to minimize civilian casualties.¹⁰ The Army’s investigation into the incident largely blamed absent and negligent battalion-level leadership for the failure. Indeed, a few battalion officers in the operations center that day saw the end of their careers.¹¹ The true causes of the incident may be forever lost to reasonable disagreement, but one truth is readily apparent: the importance of employing assets in self-defense was lost to somebody, somewhere, that day. As a theme, self-defense was not pervasive.

To prevent the disenfranchisement of the force, leaders must ensure that all members understand the nature of self-defense. By “understand,” I mean fully grasp, which requires a deeper understanding of the origins and limits of the concept.

There are essentially two types of self-defense engaged in by U.S. servicemembers: *in extremis* self-defense and U.S. self-defense.¹² *In extremis* self-defense, which involves life-or-death situations, leaves no room for discretion, and individual servicemembers maintain the greatest freedom of action. In the *in extremis* realm, concerns over collateral damage are appropriately minimized, and the only true limitations are the Law of Armed Conflict’s broad requirements of necessity, discrimination, proportionality, and the prevention of unnecessary suffering. Simply put, servicemembers have a right to use all necessary and available means for defense in such a situation, and no strategic concern or rule can defeat this right. Although “*in extremis* self-defense” is not a doctrinal term or a concept expressly recognized in the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff *Standing Rules of Engagement* (SROE)¹³ or other legal scholarship on the subject, the term’s usage has risen to prominence among American commanders, staff officers, and judge advocates in counterinsurgency combat theaters. The term is important in counterinsurgency operations because it distinguishes between the common, everyday defensive use of force on the battlefield under the broad SROE, in which discretion is possible, and the “at the point of death” scenarios in which the ground force commander or individual servicemember must immediately use lethal force to survive or preserve the lives of his comrades.



CPT William Swenson



SGT Dakota Meyer

“U.S. self-defense” is broad and can be subjective and discretionary

Despite universal acceptance of the basic principle, the source and scope of the right to unit self-defense is unsettled.



St. Thomas Aquinas



Hugo Grotius

To the contrary, “U.S. self-defense” is broad, can be subjective and discretionary, and may invite limitations by higher headquarters on the manner and method of execution. For example, strategic leaders may require ground forces to de-escalate a situation through maneuver or withdrawal prior to deploying air strikes on structures. The type of self-defense to be invoked in a particular situation has important implications, and confusing the two concepts invites perceptions of disenfranchisement and the incorrect belief that the ROE, by their very nature, risk lives through restrictiveness. Thus, leaders must examine and understand each of these distinct self-defense concepts.

In Extremis Self-defense

Since their inception, the SROE have directed that “unit commanders always retain the inherent right and obligation to exercise unit self-defense in response to a hostile act or hostile intent.”¹⁴ This notion is not unique to the United States: self-defense is a basic tenet of the rules of engagement for military forces around the world.¹⁵ Despite universal acceptance of the basic principle, the source and scope of the right to unit self-defense is unsettled.¹⁶ The right is not codified in any international convention or treaty and can be attributed to various sources.¹⁷ Several commentators who have discussed the concept have argued that the right is grounded in natural law and has evolved through state practice to constitute customary international law.¹⁸

Writing in the thirteenth century, Saint Thomas Aquinas built on the work of the Romans and recognized self-preservation among man’s “natural inclinations.”¹⁹ From these natural inclinations flow natural laws, or “true directives that every person can easily formulate for himself.”²⁰ Aquinas believed that no authority, or set of positive laws, can circumvent or take away rights grounded in this natural law.²¹ These rights exist by virtue of reason alone.²² Indeed, the founding document of the United States invoked this very principle when it declared certain truths “self-evident,” among them the right to life.²³ Aquinas also recognized that the right to self-preservation is not absolute and must operate with due consideration for the equally desirable goal of a peaceful society.²⁴ In this vein, Aquinas first articulated the principles of necessity and proportionality in the execution of the right to self-defense, declaring unlawful the use of “more than necessary force,” “out of proportion to its end.”²⁵

In the seventeenth century, the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius expanded on Aquinas’s view of the natural-law right to self-defense.²⁶ Grotius also recognized the principles of necessity and proportionality but first articulated the requirement of immediacy as a component of necessity.²⁷ In Grotius’s view, if alternatives exist, then danger is not immediate, and thus force is not necessary.²⁸

Grotius’s views on immediacy became a key principle in the natural-law approach to self-defense,²⁹ and informed the eventual international-law concept embodied in the ROE of Western military forces.³⁰ Under this customary international-law concept of self-defense, troops in immediate danger, without alternatives to avoid it, may use lethal force to protect their lives.³¹ It is their right to do so, but only when the danger is immediate.

U.S. Self-defense

U.S. policy as codified in the SROE diverges significantly from the international legal understanding of self-defense as informed by natural law.³² The SROE's notion of self-defense is broad and encompasses a variety of scenarios that do not amount to an *in extremis* self-defense situation. Indeed, the preponderance of lethal force used by American troops in Afghanistan falls under the broad concept of "U.S. self-defense."

Under the SROE, hostile intent is defined as "the threat of imminent use of force."³³ The decision as to whether a threat is imminent is "based on an assessment of all facts and circumstances known to U.S. forces at the time and may be made at any level."³⁴ Most importantly, "imminent does not necessarily mean immediate or instantaneous."³⁵ Contributing further to the broad nature of U.S. self-defense, the SROE expressly include the ability to "pursue and engage forces that have committed a hostile act or demonstrated hostile intent, if those forces continue to commit hostile acts or demonstrate hostile intent."³⁶

Hostile intent may be manifested in a variety of ways not amounting to an actual attack. For example, U.S. forces might positively identify individuals with heavy weapons two kilometers away, traversing toward a known fighting position historically used to attack friendly elements. U.S. policy does not require the ground force commander to wait to strike until the ambush is underway, or to seek higher approval to strike under an offensive framework. Although lethal force in this situation would, without question, be authorized under current U.S. self-defense principles, it is not an *in extremis* self-defense situation, and there is technically no *right* to self-defense under international law. If deemed appropriate, a higher-level commander could certainly restrict his ground force commander's use of a particular weapon system in such a scenario, or altogether deny the use of lethal force.



This broadness in the SROE is not without detractors. Despite the common complaint in the media and throughout the force that the American ROE are overly restrictive, several commentators call for a narrower definition of *imminence* in order to bring the concept of U.S. self-defense in line with the customary international-law concept.³⁷

The force must understand these concepts, because in a web of complicated policies and restrictions, one simple truth remains at the forefront: a ground force commander has the inherent right to defend his unit in an *in extremis* situation. In combat, this concept trumps all others. No commander may ask his men to die when means of survival remain, regardless of the strategic fallout that might result. This right to self-preservation is as old as time, derived from reason

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and centuries of philosophy and jurisprudence. Every discussion of operational restrictions must lead with this concept, without exception.³⁸

In sensitive political environments, the broadness of U.S. self-defense invites attempts by U.S. strategic leaders to reign in the subjective nature of the SROE. Modern counterinsurgency campaigns come with a host of limitations on the use of combat power, most visibly restrictions on the use of air-to-ground munitions in certain situations. However, if the enemy is using a civilian dwelling to attack American troops, or a hospital or mosque for that matter, and the only method for maneuvering to safety involves the use of indirect fire, there should be no hesitation. American troops are authorized to use all necessary and proportionate means in self-defense. This concept must be indoctrinated, pervasive, and understood at the lowest level of any American military organization. This is not to claim that strategic leaders have ever openly restricted the right to *in extremis* self-defense. No leader would endorse such an approach. Leaders must nevertheless transcend mere token reference to the right to self-defense.

2. Empower Ground Force Commanders in the Use of Munitions in Self-defense

Matrices of approval authorities for the release of bombs, missiles, field artillery, mortars, and even direct-fire weapons are common in Afghanistan.

Increasingly, higher commanders limit the ground force commander's use of certain munitions, even in self-defense. Matrices of approval authorities for the release of bombs, missiles, field artillery, mortars, and even direct-fire weapons are common in Afghanistan. Such documents may span several pages, with contingencies based on contingencies. The *Counterinsurgency* field manual implores commanders to use caution in the use of particular munitions during a counterinsurgency campaign, specifically warning against an "inappropriate" use of air strikes.³⁹

Commanders understandably seek to maintain the ability to control the lethal effects used within their battlespace, as they are the ones our military and society ultimately hold accountable for those effects.⁴⁰ Requiring the ground force commander to seek approval to use a particular munition in self-defense, however, without expressly drawing the critical distinction between *in extremis* and U.S. self-defense, may not only contribute to perceptions of disenfranchisement but could actually disenfranchise by violating the ground force commander's legal right to protect his unit.

The ability of a commander's guidance for fires to distinguish between the discretionary and non-discretionary uses of force is crucial.

A higher commander may decide on the one hand that, given a certain politico-strategic environment, the risk of using a destructive munition in a discretionary self-defense situation outweighs any potential benefit. On the other hand, as a matter of law and policy, if a unit is pinned down receiving effective fire from massing enemy forces spread over a large target area and using the cover of compounds and natural barriers, a ground force commander does not have to wait for approval from a higher headquarters before lawfully using whatever munitions are at his disposal. The ability of a commander's guidance for fires to distinguish between the discretionary and non-discretionary uses of force is crucial. To the extent that any failure in the Ganjgal incident is actually attributable to a higher headquarters' rules-based disapproval of the ground force commander's choice of munition, this important distinction was not made at the time, and the disenfranchisement was not merely perceived but very real.

A properly drafted fires approval matrix can easily account for the *in extremis* self-defense scenario by expressly allowing the ground force commander to determine for himself whether approval is necessary based on the facts on the ground. Fires guidance should state at the outset, “This guidance does not apply in any situation in which the ground force commander determines that seeking the required approval is not possible without risk to life.” This exception to the commander’s guidance for fires should be clearly stated on the controlling document, whether it is a fires appendix to an operations order or a stand-alone policy. Judge advocates and fire support personnel will play crucial roles in ensuring that the entire force understands the concept. But more importantly, the concept will not work without a thorough understanding of self-defense throughout the force. By stressing these principles early in a pre-deployment cycle, and at every available opportunity thereafter, the concept can be ingrained throughout the formation.

Fires guidance should state at the outset, “This guidance does not apply in any situation in which the ground force commander determines that seeking the required approval is not possible without risk to life.”

The incorporation of this framework provides two important advantages. First, and foremost, it increases the confidence of ground forces that the ROE and operational guidance will never put them in a situation that might endanger the lives of their personnel. The ROE themselves cannot endanger lives, but a misapplication or misunderstanding of the ROE certainly will. It is vitally important for commanders to prevent the emergence of the toxic perception among troops on the ground that strategic leaders are overly restricting their ability to defend themselves.

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Second, this framework provides the higher commander with the ability to shape the large majority of lethal effects on the battlefield through the issuance of lawful restrictions on the use of certain munitions in non-immediate self-defense situations. When operators fully understand and appreciate the first advantage, they more readily accept the second.

From an operational perspective, a cautious commander may express concern that the exception might be unnecessarily invoked by a ground force commander who abuses the rule in order to maintain control over the particular munition employed. These concerns should be easily dissuaded. When the ground force commander operates outside of the commander’s fires guidance and invokes the *in extremis* exception, he “buys the rounds,” taking full responsibility for any resulting negative effects. If strategic consequences result from the ground force commander’s invocation of the exception under reported *in extremis* circumstances, a thorough administrative investigation of the matter will provide the command with the information necessary to validate the decision. When the facts show that ground forces were under direct attack and unable to respond effectively with organic weapons or to de-escalate the situation through maneuver or withdrawal, the engagement is a success, and strategic-level considerations are secondary to the legal right to unit self-defense against the immediate threat.

When the ground force commander operates outside of the commander’s fires guidance and invokes the *in extremis* exception, he “buys the rounds,” taking full responsibility for any resulting negative effects.

3. Underwrite Mistakes, Don’t Punish Them

Empowering ground force commanders alone is not enough. For the preceding framework to be effective, strategic leaders must fully endorse the approach. Perceived disenfranchisement in the force is partially attributable to the common belief that harsh consequences may follow a violation of the ROE.⁴¹ When strategic leaders endorse the empowerment of the ground force commander, and self-defense has truly become a pervasive theme in an organization, misapplications of the ROE are going to occur. As the culture of empowerment proliferates,

Too often, commanders shy away from finding that an ROE violation occurred, believing that the violation must result in some sort of adverse action.

servicemembers will grow increasingly prone to broad interpretations of the U.S. self-defense doctrine and might, as a result, misidentify a hostile act, or errantly stretch the definition of imminence in hostile intent.

Individual consequences must not follow these good-faith ROE mistakes.⁴² If a servicemember misapplies the ROE in an attempt to destroy the enemy, a careful analysis must follow. Too often, commanders shy away from finding that an ROE violation occurred, believing that the violation must result in some sort of adverse action.⁴³ This belief is fed by the failure of strategic leadership to fully institutionalize the culture of self-defense. Instead, commanders and leaders should not hesitate to call a violation of the ROE what it is. At the same time, they must underwrite the mistake and disseminate the vignette to the force in the form of a lesson to be learned.⁴⁴ By reserving adverse action or criminal liability for the rare, extreme scenario in which a servicemember deliberately and wrongfully disregards the ROE, thus causing harmful effects, leaders will discourage hesitation and reduce perceived disenfranchisement.

4. Don't Make the Judge Advocate the "ROE Guy"

Judge advocates play an important role in advising commanders as they apply increasingly complex battlefield regulation to difficult circumstances. Complicated scenarios requiring careful analysis do arise. But these are the exceptions. More common are relatively straightforward decisions to use lethal force. Avoiding perceptions of disenfranchisement in the force does not come easy when the lawyer is at the center of every targeting decision.

This viewpoint is not to detract from the role of judge advocates. The ROE with regard to offensive targeting can be fluid and difficult to execute, requiring knowledgeable legal advisors who are ready to assist in the decision-making process. Additionally, due to its broadness, difficult issues might arise in the application of U.S. self-defense in a given scenario. Legal consultation should absolutely occur in the gray areas that naturally arise with such a subjective policy. But when the force fully understands the concept of self-defense, the lawyer should rarely find himself consulted prior to a true defensive situation. Just as a well-run corporation does not run every decision by its general counsel, neither does a well-run military unit ask for a judge advocate's opinion every time it seeks to use lethal force. Some commanders fall into the trap of running routine targeting decisions by the judge advocate:

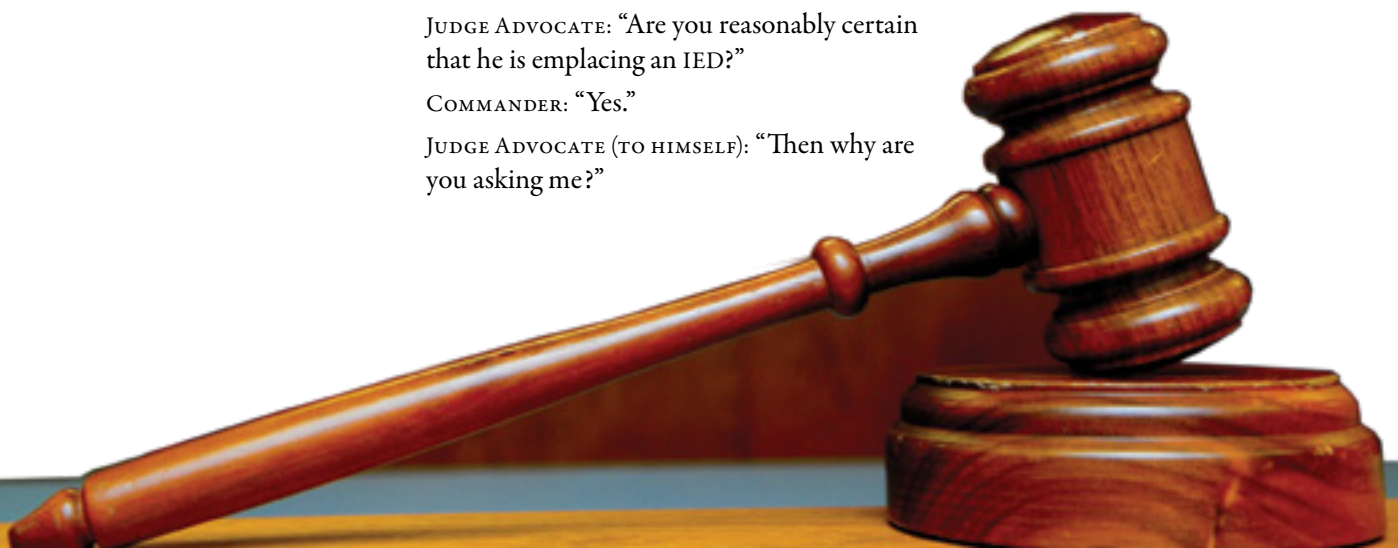
COMMANDER: "This guy is digging in the ground in a historic IED location. Can I kill him?"

JUDGE ADVOCATE: "Are you reasonably certain that he is emplacing an IED?"

COMMANDER: "Yes."

JUDGE ADVOCATE (TO HIMSELF): "Then why are you asking me?"

A well-run military unit does not ask for a judge advocate's opinion every time it seeks to use lethal force.



While the judge advocate should be present or easily accessible during operations, overreliance on legal advice creates an environment of hesitation and bureaucracy, which can trickle down to the ground force operator.

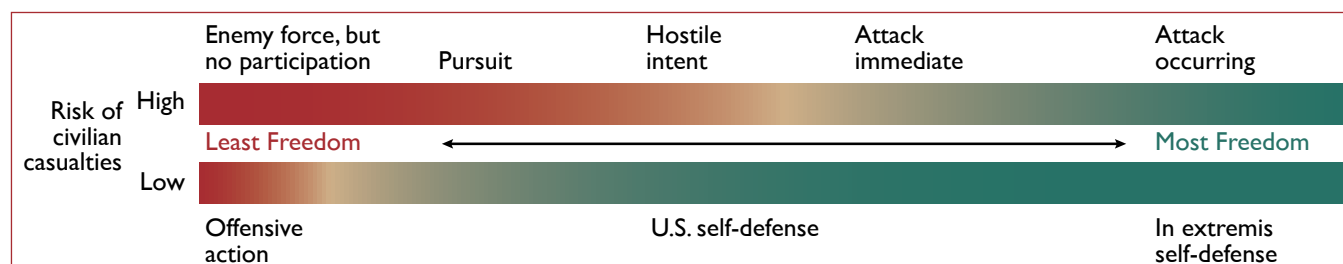
To reinforce the commander's role in the execution of the ROE, commanders should consider briefing the ROE to subordinate commanders, with instructions for subordinate commanders to do the same. An effective top-down, command-driven approach to ROE training would ultimately result in the absorption of the commander's emphasis on self-defense by those responsible for the day-to-day training of troops—the small-unit leaders.⁴⁵ The ROE are the commander's rules, and there is no requirement that the judge advocate solely occupy the domain of ROE dissemination. The ROE lose their true purpose and authority when the lawyer is the “ROE guy.”

5. Take a Practical Approach and Consider the Freedom-of-Action Spectrum

There exists a cold reality in the ROE arena, readily apparent yet infrequently openly espoused. When the enemy is killed, rarely does anyone mourn the loss or allege an ROE violation. When civilians are killed, quite to the contrary, the question “Was the ground force commander following the ROE and tactical directives?” will inevitably arise.

Simply put, a ground force commander's freedom of action within the ROE is directly proportionate to the risk of civilian casualties in any given situation (see figure 1). As the likelihood of civilian casualties increases, the ability of the ground force commander to take a broad approach to the ROE decreases. A practical approach to the ROE will not shy away from this truth. Servicemembers must understand that, prior to taking a broad approach to the definition of *imminence* under U.S. self-defense policy, the risk of causing civilian casualties and thus triggering heightened scrutiny must be considered. Civilian casualties trigger investigations, and investigators ask questions. Appreciating this reality is crucial to the effective implementation of U.S. self-defense doctrine.

As the likelihood of civilian casualties increases, the ability of the ground force commander to take a broad approach to the ROE decreases.



Consider the following hypothetical as an illustration. Utilizing an armed unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), a ground force observes via full-motion video five insurgents engaging friendly foreign forces with small-arms fire. The ROE would unquestionably authorize the use of lethal force against these positively identified hostile acts. Before the ground force commander is able to strike from the UAV platform, however, the enemy forces disengage and begin to travel away from the engagement area, carrying their weapons. Even so, the pursuit provisions of U.S. self-defense doctrine would authorize a strike, although the international legal standard might consider this an offensive use of force. As the insurgents depart the engagement area, three additional individuals with weapons join the hostile group. Suddenly, a previously straightforward situation is murky. The additional three individuals are clearly “bad,” but they have not been observed engaging in hostile acts. Can they be said to have demonstrated hostile intent, simply by

Figure 1: The Ground Force Commander's Freedom of Action Spectrum

Because of the more stringent international standard for invoking self-defense, the threat of disenfranchisement in a foreign military force is potentially greater than it is in the American military.

association with the previously hostile group? Many observers would answer no. The ground force commander may believe otherwise.

In such a scenario, not uncommon in Afghanistan, the ground force commander must consider the freedom-of-action spectrum before using force against the entire group. If he engages and kills all eight insurgents, few on his side will mourn the loss, and few will feel a compulsion to question the decision. If a young child enters the fray at the wrong moment and is injured in the strike, questions will follow. An armchair quarterback might question this use of force, even under broad U.S. self-defense principles, because the three additional individuals were not observed engaging in hostile acts, and were moving away from friendly forces.

Through an understanding of the freedom-of-action spectrum, the ground force commander has the ability to take calculated risks in these difficult scenarios. He must ask, "What is the risk that I might cause a civilian casualty and invite scrutiny? Are buildings nearby? What is the pattern of life in this area?" If, on the one hand, he assesses that the risk of unintended damage is low, he might comfortably decide to disregard the academic legal concerns on the limits of self-defense. On the other hand, if the risk of civilian casualties outweighs the advantage of taking eight insurgents off the battlefield, he might decide on tactical patience. Through this practical freedom-of-action analysis, a difficult ROE question becomes easier to address.

Conclusion

Modern counterinsurgency campaigns are subject to increased international scrutiny unrivaled in conflicts of previous eras, both in the media and in political realms. This scrutiny has the tendency to result in significant battlefield regulation, much to the chagrin of ground force operators. Perceived disenfranchisement in the force at the hands of this regulation is at best a detriment to morale, and at worst an invitation for hesitation and the degradation of combat effectiveness. When understood, emphasized, and correctly applied, the concept of self-defense is a key mitigation tool against this perception. It is unlikely that ground force operators will ever fully embrace the limitations on their capabilities in a politically ultra-sensitive theater like Afghanistan. But as the five points described in this essay demonstrate, these limitations are easier to swallow when (1) they exist within a culture of self-defense, (2) the lawyer's role is appropriately minimized, (3) ground force commanders are free to make tactical decisions on the weapons they employ, (4) servicemembers are permitted to make mistakes in the application of the ROE without the threat that their careers will be damaged, and (5) commanders are encouraged to adopt a practical approach to the broad notion of U.S. self-defense.

Finally, our coalition partners in Afghanistan, and in future conflicts, might similarly benefit from stressing self-defense in the force. The customary international-law concept of self-defense, grounded in natural law, is indeed an international concept, while the broader notion of imminence in the SROE is an American concept. Because of the more stringent international standard for invoking self-defense, the threat of disenfranchisement in a foreign military force is potentially greater than it is in the American military. The concepts discussed here may, with some refinement, be equally applicable to foreign forces operating under a strict international-law concept of unit self-defense. ♦

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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NOTES

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- 20 Ralph McInerny, “The Principles of Natural Law,” *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 25 (1980), quoted in Merriam, “Natural Law and Self-defense,” 46.
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- 28 *Ibid.*

- 29 Magenis, "Natural Law as the Customary International Law of Self-defense," 417–19.
- 30 Trumbull, "The Basis of Unit Self-defense," 133.
- 31 The modern customary international-law requirement of immediacy, although influenced by the natural-law concepts of Aquinas and Grotius, is traced to the famous *Caroline* case. In 1837, on Lake Erie, the British sank the U.S.-flagged *Caroline*, a small steamboat suspected by the British to be carrying arms and equipment in support of a rebellion in British Canada. When the British claimed that the act was lawful in self-defense, the U.S. Secretary of State, Daniel Webster, responded, "While it is admitted that exceptions growing out of the great law of self-defence do exist, those exceptions should be confined to cases in which the 'necessity of that self-defence is instant, overwhelming, and leaving no choice of means, and no moment for deliberation.'" Secretary of State Daniel Webster to Lord Ashburton, letter, 6 August 1842: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/br-1842d.asp, discussed in Merriam, "Natural Law and Self-defense," 59–61.
- 32 Merriam, "Natural Law and Self-defense," 80–81, comparing *Standing Rules of Engagement* (SROE) to natural law and noting a "fundamental problem facing the United States: There is disharmony between the U.S. SROE and the natural law, as found in the international and domestic law that flow from it. The natural law of self-defense stresses the immediacy of the threat as a precondition to the legitimate use of self-defensive force. The U.S. SROE contradicts that immediacy requirement."
- 33 Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Standing Rules of Engagement*, 105.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Ibid. The effect of this language is an authority for the ground force commander to engage in conduct under the rubric of self-defense that many countries consider offensive in nature. For instance, an individual who has emplaced an IED may be pursued until destroyed, as long as he continues to demonstrate the intent to continue placing IEDs. How does one identify this continued intent, once the act is complete? In the case of a remotely detonated IED, the intent may remain as long as the IED is emplaced. In the case of a pressure-plate IED, further intent to emplace IEDs might be reasonably inferred from the act just witnessed. In either case, there comes a time when the hostile act or hostile intent is complete, and the potential engagement becomes increasingly offensive in nature. This highly subjective time-and-space continuum is frequently one of the more difficult targeting issues for commanders and lawyers.
- 37 Eric D. Montalvo, "When Did Imminent Stop Meaning Immediate? *Jus In Bello* Hostile Intent, Imminence, and Self-defense in Counterinsurgency," *Army Lawyer* (August 2013): 31–33; Merriam, "Natural Law and Self-defense," 81, arguing that the "increase in ability to use force in self-defense may come at some cost," by (1) exposing servicemembers to prosecution under the Uniform Code of Military Justice for actions that do not violate the rules of engagement (ROE) and (2) causing an increase in "mistaken killings," thus undermining U.S. legitimacy.
- 38 "ROE philosophy is not derived from ROE classes, but from constant interaction between the commander and his subordinates. Commanders must try and weave ROE into all of their communications." Montalvo, "When Did Imminent Stop Meaning Immediate?," 33, quoting Colonel Eric M. Smith, director, Capabilities Development Directorate, Marine Corps Combat Development Command.
- 39 "The proper and well-executed use of aerial attack can conserve resources, increase effectiveness, and reduce risk to U.S. forces. Given timely, accurate intelligence, precisely delivered weapons with a demonstrated low failure rate, appropriate yield, and proper fuse can achieve desired effects while mitigating adverse effects. However, inappropriate or indiscriminate use of air strikes can erode popular support and fuel insurgent propaganda. For these reasons, commanders should consider the use of air strikes carefully during COIN operations, neither disregarding them outright nor employing them excessively." Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5 (Washington, D.C.: HQ, Dept. of the Army, 15 December 2006), App. E-6: <https://rdl.train.army.mil/catalog/view/100.ATSC/41449AB4-E8E0-46C4-8443-E4276B6F0481-1274576841878/3-24/appe.htm>
- 40 International sensitivity to air strikes and the accountability of senior leaders for their effects is illustrated by the November 2009 relief of Wolfgang Schneiderhan, chief of staff of the German Army, in the aftermath of an air strike in Kunduz Province, Afghanistan. The strike, carried out by the U.S. Air Force at German request, resulted in about 100 deaths, both civilians and insurgents. See Marcus Walker, "German Military Chief Resigns over Afghan Strike," *Wall Street Journal*, 27 November 2009: <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB125922787790365143>
- 41 This common belief is not without justification. For example, in August 2013, First Lieutenant Clint Lorange was found guilty of murder and sentenced to dismissal and 20 years in confinement for violating the ROE in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, in July 2012. Lieutenant Lorange ordered his men to fire on two men on motorcycles who were not engaging in hostile acts or demonstrating hostile intent. The platoon leader claimed he believed the men were Taliban suicide bombers. See David Adams, "U.S. Soldier Convicted of Murdering Two Afghans Is 'Scapegoat': Lawyer," Reuters, 2 August 2013: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/08/02/us-usa-military-murder-idUSBRE97115V20130802>
- 42 Montalvo, "When Did Imminent Stop Meaning Immediate?" 34.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Williams, "Training the Rules of Engagement," 46. Major Williams advocates a similar approach to ROE training to empower small-unit leaders.

NATO SOF Countries' Three Main Mission Sets: Direct Action, Special Reconnaissance, Military Assistance

NATO SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES CONSISTS OF PERSONNEL FROM 27 contributing countries. These countries vary not only in size, manpower, and military and financial strength, but also in their attitudes and level of national political will to support NATO SOF. The 27 contributing nations do, for the most part, share one thing: a lack of discretionary resources. Despite their limited resources, however, many of the NATO SOF countries claim to have three main roles, or mission sets, for their SOF forces: direct action (DA), special reconnaissance (SR), and military assistance (MA).

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From my point of view, NATO SOF is probably dealing with collective self-deception here. From a military perspective, deception is good, but self-deception can be precarious; in the NATO SOF community, such self-deception shows us two things. First, we are being too politically accommodating in failing to identify our shortfalls. Second, the larger NATO SOF countries still have the will to subsidize the smaller ones to perpetuate the illusion of fulfilling all three NATO SOF mission sets. Maybe it must be so, but I do not know. In a nutshell, we all know that those three mission sets have various secondary missions—waterborne special operations, for example—and too often those additional missions have costly price tags.

The larger NATO SOF countries still have the will to subsidize the smaller ones to perpetuate the illusion of fulfilling all three NATO SOF mission sets.

In my opinion, the reality may be that the United States is paying the bill and pumping money into NATO SOF capabilities that will never be fully operational because other member nations cannot afford to develop or sustain them. The problem is not about the equipment. It is about the people and logistical or combat service support. I hardly ever hear people talk about secondary missions and readiness to fulfill those missions at the national level. The lack of secondary-mission capabilities seems to be some kind of national secret, so it is easier within the Alliance to talk about how each NATO SOF country has three main NATO SOF mission sets. The cruel reality is that it is impossible for every NATO SOF contributing country to fulfill all three main mission sets at the strategic level if needed, especially now, after over a decade of unconventional warfare in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The cruel reality is that it is impossible for every NATO SOF contributing country to fulfill all three main mission sets at the strategic level.

Therefore, I ask myself whether NATO SOF should be more specific and start mapping the real capabilities among countries in the NATO SOF community, and thus determine which state needs specific aid. Should NATO SOF be more specific about requirements while talking about the three mission sets? Maybe the thinking is that it is a good thing to avoid being specific until someone else is willing to pay the overall bill (as the United States, for example, is currently doing through various funds).

Sometimes it seems that the United States' only aim is to make NATO SOF countries happy by providing them with military aid.

As it is, many NATO SOF countries probably have hollow SOF capabilities, and the United States and other powerful countries will probably keep spending money to keep this SR/DA/MA illusion alive. Sometimes it seems that the United

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SOF lacks plug-and-play
partners on a tactical level.

States' only aim is to make NATO SOF countries happy by providing them with military aid, with the result that the United States, as a main player in NATO, teaches learned helplessness to the other NATO SOF countries.

The outcome is simple, in the case of real-world conflict. Where NATO SOF must be involved, the United States ends up with SOF partners who request more financial assistance and equipment to fulfill their missions. In my opinion, the United States has spent a lot of money building up different NATO SOF countries' secondary-mission capabilities, which many of them, regardless of need, could never afford in the first place and cannot maintain on their own. In short, at the end of the day, NATO SOF lacks plug-and-play partners on a tactical level.

In conclusion, I raise a question: Should all NATO SOF countries be required to fulfill three mission sets? If the answer is yes, then what kind of secondary missions must be developed, and why? It seems to me that it is just politically comfortable to insist on three main mission sets even when countries cannot begin to fulfill the minimum requirements for one mission set or for secondary missions. Three mission sets seems to be the standard for NATO SOF, and yet this plan never works in practice. ❖

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A Croatian special operations medic signals to an Mi-17 helicopter picking up simulated casualties during a field training exercise.

Leading the Cool War: Building a Sustainable Network inside the Ivory Tower

SOME PEOPLE ARGUE THAT A NEW COLD WAR IS GOING ON, BUT THE characteristics of this war—which Frederik Pohl has called a *cool* war—have totally changed.¹ This cool war, which is also referred to as a shadow war, is being waged against often unseen and networked insurgents and terrorist organizations. Nations that engage in this kind of conflict are drawn to the apparent promise of operating in secret, and also to the mass disruption and irregular warfare that seem likely to be the prevailing form of conflict in the future.² There is no shortage of targets in this war, and it is likely to be a protracted one. A less discussed benefit of this cool war, however, is the unprecedented transformation and constant adaptation that are being demanded of the military forces involved, which is quite an interesting subject if we want to get a sense of the skills required and patterns for future organizational and leadership development.

Building capabilities that are fit for fighting this new kind of war and that will provide lasting value requires deep strategic foresight, research, and an understanding of the future operating environment. As Richard Slaughter writes in the book *Thinking about the Future*, “Strategic foresight is the ability to create and sustain a variety of high quality forward[-looking] views and to apply the emerging insights in organisationally useful ways; for example, to detect adverse conditions, guide policy, [and] shape strategy.”³ But I believe that the safest option we can choose today is not to prepare for specific events but rather to prepare Special Operations Forces and our leaders for the inevitable complex challenges that lie ahead and then make this transformation sustainable.

Although the challenges of irregular warfare have been with us for at least the past two hundred years, we are still looking for answers to the main questions: who will be the masters in future conflict, and what leadership skills will help us prevail as we face future security threats? In the Western world, we have some restrictions as well. We would like these masters to belong to our bureaucratic organizations, so maybe the more specific question to ask is: How can we build *integrated* leaders, who can successfully counter challenges in unconventional and highly complex situations, yet are able to operate as part of a larger bureaucracy? How can we build a network within the Ivory Tower?⁴

In this article, my main goal is to explore the leadership aspects of future warfare and show why integrating unconventional leadership is a key aspect for all organizations that deal with massive disruptions and complex problems. I also contend that embracing the concept of integrated leadership is a must for all future leaders. My case study, which focuses on the cultural shift within one particular organization of the U.S. Special Operations Forces, Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), seeks to understand how a networked organizational culture operating within a bureaucracy can be a model both for operations and for developing future leaders. In the course of analyzing this case study, I have come to understand three points, in particular:

COL Imre Porkoláb, Hungarian Army

A less discussed benefit of this cool war is the unprecedented transformation and constant adaptation that are being demanded of the military forces involved.

How can we build *integrated* leaders, who can successfully counter complex challenges, yet are able to operate as part of a larger bureaucracy?

If an organization is willing to change its ways and adapt to the new demands of the shifting context, it will thrive, not just survive. Thriving is the new survival strategy.

1. An unconventional leader must have a completely different mindset from a conventional one, a mindset that focuses on the constant and relentless development of the self and the organization. An unconventional leader understands that the individuals within the organization need to be ready to decide, move, and act faster than the opposing force, or even the circumstances.
2. Unconventional leaders also have to have a different focus. The ability to comprehend multiple inputs enables them to integrate seemingly disparate and diverse organizational cultures and fuse them into one integrated unit to be able to operate within larger bureaucracies.
3. We need to develop a different understanding of sustainability. Staying in the comfort zone of what is familiar is the most dangerous option these days. It is vital to prepare the organization to be not so much robust and resilient as transformative, or “antifragile,” meaning they actually improve when shocked.⁵ If an organization is willing to change its ways and adapt to the new demands of the shifting context, it will thrive, not just survive. Thriving is the new survival strategy.

The defining characteristic of irregular warfare is the small size of its fighting units and tactics that use these units in innovative new ways. John Arquilla describes three forms of irregular warfare: special operations, guerrilla warfare, and terrorism.⁶ I have chosen the first form as my case study, and through an analysis of the organizational culture and leadership aspects of transformation within JSOC, will identify some essential leadership skills for the future.⁷ I chose to study JSOC because the organization replaced its cumbersome, conventional linear bureaucracy with a shared informational and operational environment that has encouraged both a mindset and cultural shift within the organization, and has enabled its branches to streamline and work more efficiently toward a common purpose.

Transforming the Organizational Culture for Sustainability

The recent campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan have transformed JSOC into the most truly joint command within the U.S. military.⁸ The operational tempo at present is unprecedented and provides notable results, but inevitably brings up two often overlooked questions: is it sustainable and is it adaptive?

A recent book by General Stanley McChrystal, who commanded JSOC from 2003 to 2008, and two articles about him published in open-source journals shed some light on the organizational and leadership skills used by the force to track down and eliminate a highly elusive and networked enemy. These works enable us to identify lessons learned from the transformation of JSOC into a global counterterrorism force.⁹

Leaders believe that they need to know how to build *resilient* organizational cultures. But to succeed in the shaping of an organizational culture, first they have to recognize that their own values play an important role in transforming the culture of the organization they lead. Furthermore, if these leaders are to build truly enduring organizations that will stand the test of time, they have to be aware that organizations are living entities: a collective of human beings who form group structures and operate in complex, adaptive systems like any other living entity. Sustainability is therefore much more than survival or even resilience; it is about *thriving*.

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If an organization is to become a sustainable living entity, it has to be able to adapt. In fact, *adaptability* is perhaps the most essential component for any entity to thrive. To understand how leadership promotes adaptability, I have chosen two specific qualities—mindset and focus—that a leader should be aware of when dealing with adaptation and cultural shifts within his or her organization.

Develop a Growth Mindset to Skyrocket the Organization out of the Comfort Zone

If we want to build an integrated, sustainable, and adaptive organizational culture, we need a specific *mindset*, which then acts as a spark and ignites the leadership transformation process. *Focus* is best understood as the direction, or channel, that guides the leader during this process. It is not enough, however, to initiate the changes and carry them through; the new culture must survive (even in the absence of the original leader), and *sustainable* paradigms can fuel the process of change even after the leader is long gone.

The best thing about our mindset is that we have the power to shape it. Studies show that most people (leaders of large organizations among them) are terrible at estimating their abilities. If they have a *growth mindset*, however, and they are oriented toward leaving their comfort zone for unknown territory (where they face obstacles and where learning can take place), they need accurate information about their current abilities in order to learn effectively.¹⁰ People with this unconventional growth mindset believe that even geniuses have to work hard for their achievements. Such people may appreciate endowment, but they admire effort, since they believe that effort is absolutely necessary to develop ability and turn it into accomplishment. According to this mindset, the hand dealt is just a starting point for development.

This growth mindset was a precondition in JSOC's organizational adaptation to becoming a network, and developing such a mindset has presented JSOC with not only technological and organizational challenges but leadership challenges as well. McChrystal realized the necessity of this precondition and pointed out in an interview that "if organizations aren't ready to move faster, their decision-making processes become overwhelmed by the information flow around them."¹¹ McChrystal understood instinctively that for JSOC to be successful it needed not just to survive, but to thrive through the development of unconventional leadership.

Unconventional leadership is not a new phenomenon. It has been with us throughout the ages, and leaders of irregular warfare have long understood the importance of these skills. Unconventional leadership, however, is quite different from the mere exercise of authority. A compelling vision is necessary to convince key stakeholders to endorse the plan, but even this vision is not enough to make someone a leader. True leaders will attract followers and collaborators who support their vision and buy into it with their own energy and ideas. This is a key to success in the new strategic environment, where we very often have to find solutions under the pressure of time. Unconventional military leaders realize that when they are facing complex situations, operating with decentralized decision making is difficult. The conventional hierarchical military decision-making process implies that the leader at every level of the pyramid is the person in charge of deciding and directing everything below him. By implication, the highest-ranking individual is the one who always has the deepest understanding of

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People with a conventional mindset react to failure by seeking to repair their self-esteem instead of trying to grow and learn.

a problem and the best solutions. This perception is entrenched in the military, but it is unsuitable for highly complex asymmetric situations, especially when we are facing adaptive challenges, because it compels people to stay inside their mental comfort zone.

Staying in the comfort zone provides a false sense of security.¹² As our modern and complex environment changes rapidly, organizations are constantly bombarded with complex problems, and they need to adapt and learn if they are to overcome these problems. Success in a highly complex and difficult environment is about changing qualities, stretching to learn something new, developing oneself and the organization, and staying in the zone of learning. People with an unconventional mindset do not just seek challenge; they thrive on it. The bigger the problem, the more they stretch, and sometimes they stretch so far that they do the impossible.

The opposite end of the spectrum is the conventional (fixed) mindset. Success for such thinkers comes from proving themselves within a limited environment. They thrive on safety and familiarity. Because they believe that intelligence and skills are fixed traits, the thought of developing such qualities further does not even occur to them. People with a conventional mindset react to failure by seeking to repair their self-esteem (by blaming others or the circumstances) instead of trying to grow and learn.

Conventional wisdom says that military units are most likely to succeed in the field when they follow strict command-and-control procedures. Militaries are organized and trained to operate in a hierarchical, rigid top-down structure for a reason, and they tend to stick to this system, which suggests that most military personnel are likely to be closer to the conventional end of the mindset spectrum. But in an asymmetric conflict, when facing an irregular enemy, a leader with a conventional mindset who encourages his troops to settle in the comfort zone, sticks to doctrine, and does not want to experiment with new ideas will eventually lead those troops toward failure.

Focus to Achieve the Multiplier Effect

Most people would think that focusing on one thing is easy, but it is actually pretty difficult. Learning to focus on one thing is possibly one of the best things a leader can do, and is one of the most overlooked areas of leadership. Apple Inc. founder Steve Jobs wonderfully encapsulated this idea when he pointed out that people think focus means saying yes to the one thing that requires your attention, but in fact it means saying no to a hundred other good ideas that are clamoring for attention. From this perspective, focus has two important components: the first one is setting limits (through eliminating what is unimportant), and the second is concentrating on the priority.

To make JSOC more effective, McChrystal first prioritized the development of partnerships with agencies to fuse intelligence and synchronize operations. Working together, the agencies redesigned the bureaucratic ways in which information traveled up the decision-making pipeline and developed a real-time information-sharing environment.¹³ In the next phase of organizational transformation, JSOC combined all elements of intelligence (to find the enemy), drone operators and signals intelligence specialists (to fix the target), various teams of Special Forces operators (to carry out the operations), and analysts and

Learning to focus on one thing is possibly one of the best things a leader can do, and is one of the most overlooked areas of leadership.

experts in exploitation and crime-scene investigation (to pull together and exploit real-time information and feed it back into the cycle for further analysis). This constituted the full cycle of the operations called F3EA (find, fix, finish, exploit, analyze, and disseminate). Such a process was a game changer in modern warfare. The network was operating at speeds that have never been seen before, as the direct result of a new leadership approach that encouraged decentralization, intelligence sharing, and decision making at each respective level of planning and operations.¹⁴

The latest studies reveal that maintaining focus is what distinguishes experts from amateurs and stars from average performers.¹⁵ Psychologist Daniel Goleman also explores this phenomenon and suggests that attention and focus are key to high achievement in many professions.¹⁶ We tend to think of attention as a switch that's either on or off (i.e., we're either focused or we're distracted), but that is a misperception. Focus comes in three varieties: The first variety is "inner focus," which is mainly self-awareness and self-management. The second is "outer focus," which is the ability to recognize broad patterns and complex systems. The third is "other focus," which is the ability to feel empathy for others.

While outer focus is strong in people with the conventional mindset (military leaders who are depicted as great strategists, for example, often do not worry too much about the consequences of their decisions), other focus is more likely an unconventional trait. Unconventional leaders are very sensitive to people, and are motivated to develop the people for whom they are responsible. This empathetic concern is the main reason why an unconventional leader is considered to be a "multiplier." Leadership expert Liz Wiseman points out that the ability to extract and multiply the intelligence that already exists within them is the holy grail of efficiency for organizations that need to make the most of their limited resources.¹⁷ This multiplier ability, along with their natural empathy, can make Special Operations leaders ideal candidates to fully embrace unconventional leadership and cooperate jointly, not only with other military personnel but also in a broader context with all kinds of stakeholders, to successfully carry out the mission.

Unconventional leaders are very sensitive to people, and are motivated to develop the people for whom they are responsible.

Decentralizing command and control in JSOC was just the first step on a long road toward adaptation. To become a learning organization (one that is able to constantly adapt to new circumstances and information), JSOC leadership needed not only to synchronize and fuse different service cultures but also to provide a unifying vision for the entire endeavor. The techniques used at JSOC had a spectacular effect on SOF, and the United States appears willing to deploy these warriors throughout the world wherever they are needed against an irregular threat. These changes support the idea that smaller networked units can (1) have a decisive strategic effect, (2) be especially effective against irregular opponents (the disruptive, complex, adaptive challenges that lie ahead), and (3) be developed, maintained, and deployed for a fraction of the cost of a large-footprint solution because they provide a multiplier effect.

The techniques used at JSOC had a spectacular effect on SOF.

The multiplier effect gives them the ability to fight alongside or through the local population, and to integrate and develop personnel from other organizations in support of the mission. Skillful leaders use psychological appeals, and bring genuine compassion and understanding of the opposing forces and all key stakeholders to this force development process. Through the multiplier effect of using everyone to the peak of his or her ability, unconventional leaders are able to increase the group's output without actually increasing the number of people

To build organizations that are sustainable over the long term, we need to make them antifragile.

working on the project. In today's resource-constrained environment, this is an effective approach to increasing operational tempo and mission effectiveness.

Foster Sustainability to Thrive

Something that is fragile, like a glass, can survive small shocks but not big ones. Something that is robust, like a rock, can survive both. But robustness is only the other end of the survivability spectrum, and can be as much of a dead-end goal for Special Forces as fragility. There are systems, however, that are antifragile: they feed on volatility. Some systems, like the ones explained by Joseph Schumpeter's theory of creative destruction, innovate, progress, and become resilient after a disruptive event.¹⁸ The implications are clear: if we want to build organizations that are sustainable over the long term, we need to make them antifragile.

Statistician Nassim Nicholas Taleb revived the old theory of *hormesis*, which suggests that a small dose of a harmful substance can actually be beneficial to an organism.¹⁹ Rather than merely restoring system equilibrium, the organism under stress overcompensates by building resistance beyond the immediate need in anticipation of future stress; the hormesis response in effect predicts or anticipates the organism's future.²⁰ Such an adaptation is not simply robust; it is adaptive and thus antifragile.

Leaders can build up their skills to be antifragile themselves, and can develop this quality in their organizations as well. Just as our muscles get stronger when subjected to the stresses of walking long distances and lifting heavy things, our minds become sharper and more flexible when we deal with mental difficulties. Our hearts are strengthened and our self-confidence grows when we face problems in life and find a way to succeed.

The prototypical model of antifragility, according to Taleb, is not simply hormesis, but evolution. Evolutionary antifragility operates at the group informational level. Unlike with hormesis, those units that undergo disruption develop attributes that improve the collective of units, and so the entire collective—in our case, JSOC—evolves to withstand such disruption in the future. Thus the antifragility of concern here is the organizational culture, which must be able to survive any given leader. From an organizational perspective, it is imperative to understand that while individual organisms such as group leaders are relatively fragile, the gene pool—the organizational culture they have created—takes advantage of shocks. Just as for a species, stress and harm are necessary for an organization because they trigger evolutionary adaptation in the surviving leadership and guarantee that the future form of the organization will be stronger.²¹

Just as for a species, stress and harm are necessary for an organization.

Sustainability is necessary to win the protracted cool war, and not just the battles in this war. Thus JSOC—and all forces operating in this environment—needs to adapt constantly, to transform itself into an effective organization that is capable of supporting tactics such as sustained swarming attacks, as well as integrating and institutionalizing its networked organizational culture within the larger bureaucratic military system.²²

Final Thoughts

Successful leadership through turbulent times and complex challenges not only results in organizational and procedural changes but also changes people's

mindsets and the organizational culture as a whole. Leaders like General McChrystal typically operate in such a way that their subordinates do not experience anything remotely similar to the conventional model of “following.”²³ These leaders recognize that all people in the organization can be unconventional leaders if (1) they are trusted, (2) they have a level of independence to make decisions, and (3) they play an integral part in the transformation process. Unconventional leaders are also constantly reaching outside of their organizations to find new ways to adapt to a changing environment, and they work to fit the new organizational culture into the larger bureaucratic system of which they are already a part.

Leaders like General McChrystal typically operate in such a way that their subordinates do not experience anything remotely similar to the conventional model of “following.”

Most of us would assume that to adapt, a leader needs to choose from two distinctly different options: conventional thinking and unconventional thinking. The conventional way to do business is based on refining and streamlining operational processes, which improves the system’s capacity and encourages people to use the existing business model. The unconventional option requires experimenting with innovative alternatives to what people are already doing, going beyond the traditional boundaries and moving out of the comfort zone to search for new possibilities and explore new options.

Shifting an organization’s culture is a mental balancing act, and effective leaders will continually explore new, innovative avenues while retaining and streamlining what is already working.²⁴ This balancing act does not come naturally. Good leaders constantly move between the two approaches and test which option brings better results. Leaders therefore need to master both approaches, especially the less well-understood methods of unconventional leadership.

Complex problems and culture shifts present not only stress, but possibilities as well. By the time conventional leaders understand that the world has actually changed, they have often squandered most of the time and energy they had to adapt. Unconventional leaders who have a growth mindset and the ability to focus on multiple factors know that off-the-shelf strategies, although they can streamline the organization’s operations, will not change the game! These leaders want to make their organizations antifragile, and they are the best asset organizations have to achieve what is necessary for the organizational culture shifts that lie ahead in the age of the cool war. ❖

The unconventional option requires experimenting with innovative alternatives to what people are already doing.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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NOTES

- 1 Frederik Pohl, *The Cool War* (New York: Del Rey/Ballantine Books, 1981).
- 2 Ibid. See also John Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders and Bandits: How Masters of Irregular Warfare Have Shaped Our World* (Lanham, Md.: Ivan R. Dee, 2011), 279.
- 3 Richard A. Slaughter, preface to *Thinking About the Future: Guidelines for Strategic Foresight*, ed. Andy Hines and Peter Bishop (Washington, D.C.: Social Technologies, 2006): http://richardslaughter.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/thinking_abt_fut_preface.pdf
- 4 The “Ivory Tower” I refer to is the larger bureaucratic context (a nation’s defense forces) within which all SOF forces exist. This article focuses on the leadership and organizational culture of the SOF, which is best described as a networked structure, or a matrix. This culture is quite different from the larger hierarchical, bureaucratic environment of the military that supports SOF.
- 5 Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder* (New York: Random House, 2012), 17: http://www.riosmauricio.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Taleb_Antifragile.pdf

- 6 Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders and Bandits*.
- 7 A recent book by General Stanley McChrystal, who commanded JSOC from 2003 to 2008, along with two articles about him published in open source journals, shed some light on the organizational and leadership skills used by the force to track down and eliminate a highly elusive and networked enemy. These works enable us to identify lessons learned from the transformation of JSOC into a global counterterrorism force. See General Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (New York: Portfolio / Penguin, 2013).
- 8 Created in 1980 after a disastrous hostage-rescue mission in Iran, Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) is part of the U.S. Special Operations Command, which oversees the various special operations commands of the Army, Air Force, Marines, and Navy. JSOC successfully coordinated and combined Tier 1 Special Forces while supporting conventional forces and intelligence agencies to eviscerate al Qaeda's network in Iraq and kill Osama bin Laden.
- 9 As described in *Foreign Affairs* and *Foreign Policy*, this organizational strategy was very effective against a networked enemy. See Gideon Rose, "Generation Kill: A Conversation with Stanley McChrystal," *Foreign Affairs* 92, no. 2 (March/April 2013): <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/discussions/interviews/generation-kill?page=show>; and Stanley A. McChrystal, "It Takes a Network," *Foreign Policy* (22 February 2011): http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/02/22/it_takes_a_network
- 10 The phrase *growth mindset* was popularized by Carol S. Dweck, who distinguished two different types of thinking: fixed mindset and growth mindset. See Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset* (New York: Random House, 2006). In his book *Extraordinary Minds*, Howard Gardner concludes that exceptional individuals have a special talent for identifying their own strengths and weaknesses. See Howard Gardner, *Extraordinary Minds: Portraits of 4 Exceptional Individuals and an Examination of Our Own Extraordinariness* (New York: Basic Books, 1998). In my opinion, we need to take an inventory of our skills and weaknesses before deciding what to learn and what skills to develop. We then need to concentrate on improving our weakest qualities to an acceptable level, but we should put most of our effort toward our talents. Tom Rath's Strengths test is a good scientific method to evaluate one's strengths and weaknesses: <http://www.strengthstest.com/strengths-tests/strengthsfinder-20-access-code.html>. The same idea is shared by Tom Wolfe in *The Right Stuff* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979). Wolfe's book is about the pilots who engaged in U.S. post-war experiments with rocket-powered, high-speed aircraft and documents the stories of the first Project Mercury astronauts selected for the NASA space program.
- 11 Rose, "Generation Kill."
- 12 Imre Porkoláb, "When the Goldfish Meets the Anaconda: A Modern Fable on Unconventional Leadership," *CTX* 3, no. 3 (August 2013): <https://globalecco.org/when-the-goldfish-meets-the-anaconda-a-modern-fable-on-unconventional-leadership>
- 13 According to *Washington Post* reporter Bob Woodward, beginning in late spring 2007, JSOC and CIA Special Activities Division teams launched a new series of highly effective covert operations that coincided with the Iraq war troop surge of 2007. They did this by killing or capturing many key al Qaeda leaders in Iraq. See Bob Woodward, *The War Within: A Secret White House History 2006–2008* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008).
- 14 With the help of some technological adjustments—but mainly by reorganizing and changing the organizational culture—these teams were able to turn the F3EA cycle around three times a night. In August 2004, the task force carried out just 18 raids throughout all of Iraq; two years later, by August 2006, they were up to 300 raids a month. Peter Bergen credits McChrystal with transforming and modernizing JSOC into a "force of unprecedented agility and lethality," which was a key factor in the success of JSOC's subsequent efforts in Iraq. Peter L. Bergen, *Manhunt: The Ten-Year Search for Bin Laden from 9/11 to Abbottabad* (New York: Crown, 2012), 152–58. Robert H. Scales wrote that "as head of the U.S. Joint Special Operations Command, McChrystal oversaw the development of a precision killing machine unprecedented in the history of modern warfare." Robert H. Scales, "The Quality of Command: The Wrong Way and the Right Way to Make Better Generals," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 6 (November/December 2012): <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/138233/robert-h-scales/the-quality-of-command>
- 15 One of the most well-known of these studies is by Hungarian psychologist Mihály Csikszentmihályi. According to Csikszentmihályi, "flow" is completely focused motivation. In flow, the emotions are not just contained and channelled, but are positive, energized, and perfectly aligned with the task at hand. The hallmark of flow is a feeling of spontaneous joy, even rapture, while performing a task. Mihály Csikszentmihályi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990).
- 16 Daniel Goleman, *Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013).
- 17 Liz Wiseman describes the leadership paradigm necessary for accessing the intelligence and potential of people in organizations everywhere. See Liz Wiseman, *Multipliers: How the Best Leaders Make Everyone Smarter* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010).
- 18 Read more about the Schumpeterian perspectives here: https://notendur.hi.is/~lobbi/ut1/a_a/SCUMPETER.pdf
- 19 A system that overcompensates is necessarily in overshooting mode, building extra capacity and strength in anticipation for the possibility of a worse outcome, in response to information about the possibility of a hazard. This is a very sophisticated form of discovering probabilities via stressors. See Taleb, *Antifragile*.
- 20 For more on hormesis, see E.J. Calabrese and LA Baldwin, "Defining Hormesis," *Human and Experimental Toxicology* 21, no. 2 (February 2002): 91–97: <http://dose-response.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/HETDEFININGHORMESIS.pdf>
- 21 Taleb, *Antifragile*, 82–3.
- 22 "Swarming is a seemingly amorphous, but deliberately structured, coordinated, strategic way to perform military strikes from all directions. It employs a sustainable pulsing of force and/or fire that is directed from both close-in and stand-off positions." John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *Swarming and the Future of Conflict* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2000), vii: http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/DOCUMENTED_briefings/2005/RAND_DB311.pdf
- 23 Frances Hesselbein and Marshall Goldsmith, eds., *The Leader of the Future 2: Visions, Strategies, and Practices for the New Era* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 74.
- 24 Charles A. O'Reilly III and Michael L. Tushman, "The Ambidextrous Organization," *Harvard Business Review* 82, no. 4 (April 2004): 74–81.

The Call-up: The Roots of a Resilient and Persistent Jihadist Presence on Twitter

THE SOPHISTICATED USE OF ONLINE MEDIA PLATFORMS BY INDIVIDUALS and organizations that promote violent Islam augments a blend of audiovisual media interspersed with writings that help to sanction and explain specific ideological dimensions of jihadist activity. This online presence is intended to attract fighters and fundraisers to the cause, and has rapidly evolved into an open subculture that uses audiovisual elements to cultivate and strengthen group cohesion within the mujahid vanguard.¹ It further seeks to propagate awareness among the general public in the hope of mobilizing elements among it as well.

Jihadists have aggressively expanded their use of Twitter, in addition to Facebook and YouTube, especially since the outbreak of violence in Syria. This propagation effort by the so-called “media mujahideen” has been approved and sanctioned by movement leaders, and now contributes to the interconnected jihadist zeitgeist.² For example, as a previous study by the authors has shown, jihadist groups are now using Twitter to disseminate links to video content shot on the battlefield in Syria and posted for mass consumption on YouTube.³ Since 2011, members of jihadist forums have issued media strategies that encourage the development of a media mujahideen. This encouragement has been accompanied by the release of guides to using social media platforms, which often include lists of recommended accounts to follow.⁴

This article focuses on one such guide. The first section briefly examines the rationale for considering Twitter as part of the “electronic *ribat*,” or activist front, and the types of accounts that are important to jihadist activity. The next section analyzes the accounts listed within the guide and the interactions between these users, who apparently are regarded by the author of the guide to be at the vanguard of jihadist activity on Twitter.⁵ The final two sections examine the follower–following relationships between these “important jihadist” accounts, and the way information flows through this network of Twitter users. This analysis demonstrates that jihadist groups have used the opportunity created by the proliferation of social media platforms to create a persistent, as well as ideologically cohesive, presence for jihadist propaganda online. This informal network is likely to have reached a level of interconnection that gives it a high degree of resilience against disruption from individual account suspensions.

The Role of Twitter and the Most Important Jihadist Accounts to Follow

A “Twitter guide” (*dalil Twitter*) posted on the Shumukh al-Islam (SSI) forum outlined the reasons for using Twitter as an important arena of the electronic front (or *ribat*) and identified the different types of accounts that users should follow. The guide, entitled “The Twitter Guide: The Most Important Jihadi Sites and Support for Jihad and the Mujahideen on Twitter” and created by

*Dr. Ali Fisher and Dr. Nico Prucha,
University of Vienna*

Since 2011, members of jihadist forums have issued media strategies that encourage the development of a media mujahideen.

Jihadist groups have used the opportunity created by the proliferation of social media platforms to create a persistent, as well as ideologically cohesive, presence for jihadist propaganda online.

SSI member Ahmad ‘Abdallah, included 66 Arabic-language Twitter accounts, which fellow forum members were encouraged to follow.⁶

‘Abdallah describes Twitter as “one of the arenas of the electronic *ribat*, and not less important than Facebook. Rather, it will be of much greater importance, as accounts are rarely deleted and it’s easier to get signed up” without providing a phone number. Furthermore, Twitter users can follow anyone without having to be accepted as a friend, as on Facebook, but “you will see all of their postings just as on Facebook.”

The Arabic term *ribat* can be very hard to translate and conceptualize in other languages. The term is frequently referred to both in jihadist videos and in print and online literature in the context of religiously permissible warfare; in a modern meaning, it could loosely be translated as “front.” The concept of *ribat* is prominent due to its mention in the 60th verse of the eighth chapter of the Qur’an, the *Surat al-Anfal* (*The Spoils of War*).⁷ It is often used to legitimize acts of war, and is found in bomb-making handbooks or as part of purported theological justifications in relation to suicide operations. Extremist Islamists consider the clause to be a divine command that stipulates military preparation to wage jihad as part of a broader understanding of “religious service” (*ibada*) on the “path of God” (*fi sabil Allah*).

The physical “frontier” of holy war is shifting to encompass the “arm-chair jihadists” on the virtual front.

As the value of the media jihad is understood and used on a tactical and strategic level by militants to further their cause, the physical “frontier” of holy war is shifting to encompass the “arm-chair jihadists” on the virtual front—the professional media teams embedded with fighting units as well as the global network of media supporters. ‘Abdallah assesses the strategic and tactical value of media jihad in his posting and recommends that his readers start using Twitter by following the 66 accounts he lists.

Types of Accounts Important for Jihad and the Mujahideen on Twitter

As ‘Abdallah’s Twitter guide states, “Today I have summarized for you all of the renowned accounts in support of jihad and the *Mujahideen* that convey their news or are in their favour; some are official accounts [by jihadist groups or brigades], some of which are accounts by scholars, ideologues, and supporters. We ask you for your support, even if just by following them.”⁸

‘Abdallah lists five different general account types and recommends individual accounts that could fall within each category (we note here only a few examples of the many that ‘Abdallah cites). The range of accounts demonstrates that the strategy consciously embraces the different roles that users can play within social media networks:

1. **Accounts by Media and News Foundations** refers to all Twitter accounts maintained by the official jihadist media outlets, such as Fursan al-Balagh li-l i’lam (@fursanalbalaagh) or the Ansar al-Mujahideen forum (@as_ansar).
2. **Accounts by Scholars and Writers** includes stars such as the London-based Hani al-Siba’i⁹ (@hansibu), Muhammad al-Zawahiri¹⁰

The range of accounts demonstrates that the strategy consciously embraces the different roles that users can play.

(@Mzmmd_Alzawahiri), or the notorious and industrious Abu Sa'd al-'Amili¹¹ (@al3aamili).

3. **Accounts by Members of Jihadist Forums and Brothers and Sisters Supporting the Mujahideen** provides good examples of “hybrid” users active inside the jihadist forums and social media. This group comprises users who are not necessarily engaged in violent conflicts but who can be regarded as a support network. Members of this support network are media activists in terms of disseminating violent-militant material online while also propagating jihadist ideology in general.
4. **Accounts Supporting the Mujahideen in Greater Syria (*al-Sham al-'izz wa-l-jihad*)** includes media activists in support of prisoners (e.g., @alassra2012¹²) and campaigns by Ansar al-Sham (e.g., @7_m_1_t), a charity that regularly requests money and support (financial, logistical, personnel) in general. Twitter users with handles (usernames) containing jihadist slang and iconography periodically send out tweets thanking groups such as Ansar al-Sham for the money or goods that were received.¹³
5. **Various Accounts** includes activists such as the “unofficial account of *Minbar al-Tawhed wa-l-Jihad*” (@MinbarTawhed), *Israeli Affairs* (@IsraeliAffairs), or the high-profile account *Mujtahid* (@mujtahidd), which advertises “the divulging of secrets of the Al Salul,” an insulting reference to the ruling Saudi family.

Twitter users with handles (usernames) containing jihadist slang and iconography periodically send out tweets thanking groups for money or goods that were received.

'Abdallah's posting concludes with the signature *Abu 'Abdallah al-Baghdadi* and his personal Twitter account, @Ahmed_Abidullah, which has only 375 followers; 'Abdallah had posted a little over 1,000 tweets to the account as of 10 February 2014. This indicates that the account makes its greatest contribution to the cause on Twitter by producing the guide rather than by directly disseminating information to a mass audience.

“The Most Important Jihadi Sites and Support for Jihad and the Mujahideen on Twitter”¹⁴

To analyze in greater detail the nature of the 66 important jihadist accounts listed by Ahmad 'Abdallah, we extracted the profile data for each account through the Twitter API (see figure 1).¹⁵ Two elements that indicate the nature of these accounts are the common languages and the locations of users. This data shows that the majority of accounts were set up in Arabic (56 percent), although a significant number were set up in English (41 percent), with French making up the remainder (3 percent).¹⁶ This is despite the list's being composed specifically of Arabic-language accounts, which suggests that some of the 66 accounts may be bilingual.

Two elements that indicate the nature of these accounts are the common languages and the locations of users.

A second step in understanding this group is to have a sense of where they are. This task is made slightly harder by the fact that few of these users enter meaningful locations in the “location” field on their Twitter profile, and fewer still enable geotagging of Twitter content.¹⁷ Fortunately for our study, however, a surprisingly high number of people set their phone's clock to their current time zone, probably because this allows the time stamps on the tweets they view to make sense. The phone system is set up to define most time zones by a location, such as a major city, which gives an approximate indication of the longitudinal zone in which a user is located (see figure 2).

66 Important Jihadi on Twitter

Locating important Jihadi

A recent posting on *Shumukh al-Islam* identified "The most important jihadi and support sites for jihad and the mujahideen on Twitter"

Followers



Language used

The majority of the users set their Twitter language to Arabic. This data was ascertained from the Twitter API.



It should be noted some users will tweet in more than one language - this shows which language they set up their twitter account with.

Location of timezone

When creating a Twitter account users set a timezone, used to determine the time of tweets in their timeline.



To ease this process users are given the option of entering a nearby city to set the timezone.

Year Jihadi accounts were created

The role of the 'media mujahid' has been promoted since the death of Osama bin Laden in May 2011.

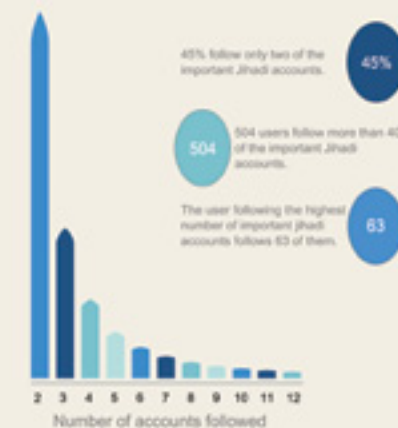


During 2011 members of Jihadist forums, including al-Ansar, issued media strategies and advisory to fellow members. However, as the data shows it took a while for Jihadi Twitter activism to gather pace as the Syrian conflict turned violent.

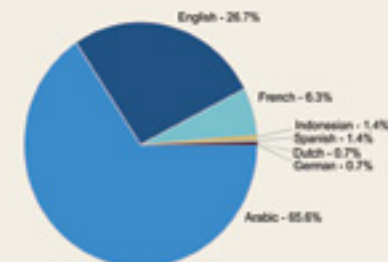
Followers of important Jihadi

129,905 users follow more than one 'important Jihadi' account.

79% of those users follow between two and five of the important Jihadi accounts.



Language used by followers of important Jihadi



Based on the language set on Twitter by the 504 users which follow 40 or more important Jihadi accounts.

Most frequent followers of important Jihadi



Most frequent followers is calculated using the followers of 65 important jihadi. Mujahid was excluded as this account alone had more followers than the other 65 jihadi combined.

Note:

The inclusion of users here is on the basis of appearing in the recent posting "The most important jihadi and support sites for jihad and the mujahideen on Twitter" on *Shumukh al-Islam*. These users are being promoted as important jihadi or supporters, whether or not they would self-define that way. Equally, following important jihadi should not be taken by itself as an indication of allegiance.

Location of timezone for frequent followers of important Jihadi



Based on the location used to set timezone for the 504 users that follow more than 40 important jihadi on Twitter

Frequent followers of important Jihadi with the greatest followers

These are users with the greatest number of followers from the group who follow 40 or more important Jihadi.

Followers



The mean (801) and Median (200) number of followers is lower amongst this group of users than for the 66 important jihadi accounts. This indicates this group of users are individual users or those with lower appeal, than the 66 important jihadi.

Year frequent followers of important Jihadi created accounts

While 2012 was a key year for the creation of accounts by the media mujahid and the majority of the frequent follower group were also created in 2012, nearly a quarter have been created more recently.



Infographic drawn by Ali Fisher, including analysis by Nico Prucha

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Humans are creatures of habit. We like the clock to show the correct time, whether it's where we actually are or based on a location with which we mentally associate ourselves. For example, following the 2009 presidential election in Iran, there was a brief campaign for Twitter users to show support for the protesters by changing their phones' location to Tehran, perhaps only to confuse Iranian authorities. This strategy had more than a few problems, however, as writer/researcher Evgeny Morozov pointed out at the time.¹⁸ One of the more notable problems was the failure of the less-savvy Twitter users to change the time zone as well as the location. Another problem was the tendency of slacktivists¹⁹ to use different tags, such as #helpiranelection, from those used by the protesters or "digital insiders" (e.g., #GR88, #Neda, #Sohrab). As a result, particularly engaged users could be identified by authorities because their interactions on Twitter were predominantly characterized by a series of locally resonant hashtags.²⁰

Casablanca, Morocco, was the most common location that account holders on 'Abdallah's list used to signify their time zone. While it does not mean they were physically in that or any other specific city, it does indicate the area of the world they were likely to be in, particularly given that over 40 percent of the account holders used just three of the more than 250 possible locations available on Twitter profiles (see figure 2).²¹ This suggests that users are most likely to be in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, which is consistent with much of the content of the accounts.

When Twitter users look up the 66 accounts, one of the first elements they tend to examine is the number of followers an account has. While this is not a direct measure of influence, it does indicate that users have heard of the account, and that they may be interested in seeing more of its specific content.

Of the 66 important jihadist accounts identified by 'Abdallah, @mujtahidd is exceptional, with over one million followers as of 20 August 2013 (see figure 3). The next most followed were @IsraeliAffairs, with around 180,000 followers, and @1400year, with around 30,000 followers at that time. Six months later, in February 2014, @mujtahidd had over 1.3 million followers and @IsraeliAffairs had over 200,000, while the number of followers for @1400year jumped to over 100,000. This data shows that some of these accounts are able to reach and engage a relatively large Twitter community. These three most significant users are discussed in greater detail in the following section.

The Three Most-Followed of the Recommended 66 Users of Influence

1. @Mujtahidd

Mujtahid is an Islamic term of jurisprudence, a "legist formulating independent decisions in legal or theological matters, based on the interpretation and application of the four *usul*," as defined in Hans Wehr's Arabic-English Dictionary.²² According to Wehr, *mujtahid* can also simply mean "industrious, diligent." The @Mujtahidd account holder's bio on Twitter consists merely of two Arabic names, Harith and Hummam ("Lion" and "Cultivator," respectively), and his e-mail address, mujtahidmail@gmail.com. These two names also serve as a code related to a saying of the Prophet Muhammad, who declared that these two names were the most dear ones to God and to himself, second only to the names 'Abdallah ("Servant of God") and 'Abd al-Rahman ("Servant of the Merciful"). For his location, the account holder simply entered "the world." Jihadist

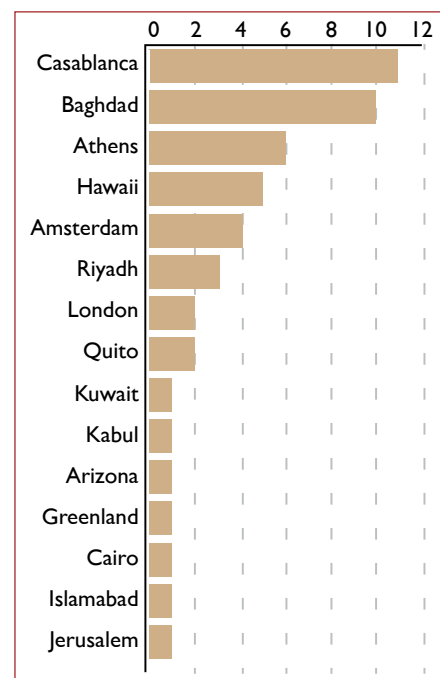


Figure 2: Time Zone Location

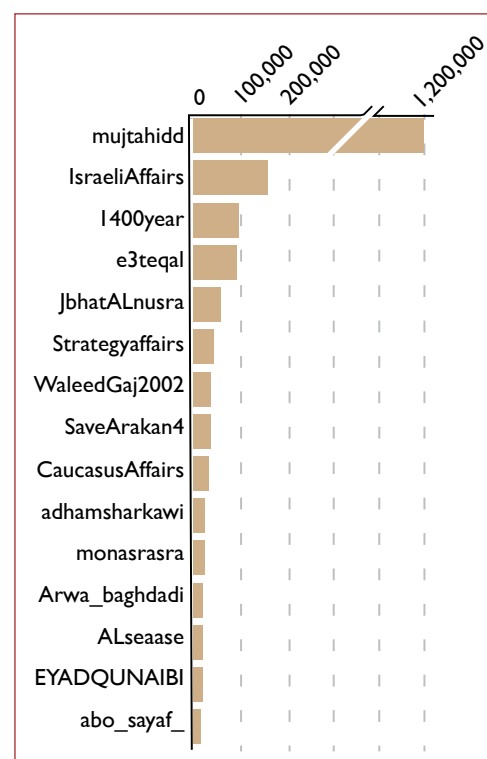


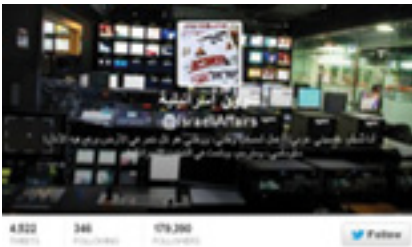
Figure 3: Number of Followers of the 66



Twitter users claim that the account holder behind @mujtahidd is a “known whistleblower inside the #Saudi government,” according to Al Battar Media, a media outlet that merged with the SSI media front and became the forum’s official media arm on 8 January 2014.²³ The “whistleblower” designation serves to enhance the account holder’s cachet as an insider working against an apostate regime on behalf of God and the jihadists’ cause.

2. @IsraeliAffairs

@IsraeliAffairs had about 180,000 followers as of 20 August 2013. The account holder writes in his online bio, “I am Muslim, my citizenship is Arab, I work on behalf of my country which is every span of hand on earth; raising on it the *adhan* [the call to prayer]! [I am a] diplomat, translator, researcher in Israeli affairs.”



3. @1400year

@1400year, the third most-influential account, has about 85,000 followers. The Arabic name of this account is *gharib fi wadanibi*—“the stranger in his own country.” The sentiment of *gharib* is a reference to a frame of mind: the “true believer” considers himself to be something of a foreigner in this world and associates himself with the earliest Muslims, who had also been perceived as strangers in their own historical time and milieu. The eagle next to the ISIS flag on the account’s Twitter page is a clear allusion to this idea of jihadists as “strangers” (*ghuraba*). “Stranger” or “estranged” is used here in the context of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, which is considered to be the “first catastrophe” (*nakba*) in a series of dramatic events that have affected Islamic countries or territories since the mid-twentieth century. Jihadists are convinced that there is a global “conspiracy against Islam,” hence the British grab of Palestinian land followed by the declaration of the state of Israel (1948), and subsequent epochal conflicts including the occupations of Afghanistan (1979/2001), the U.S. invasion of Iraq (2003), and the Arab Spring conflicts after 2011, have entrenched this notion in jihadist communities both on- and offline.

When the data for @1400year was captured in August 2013, the bio for the account holder stated, “The man in the picture is Rachid Nekkaz, a French millionaire of Algerian origin, who opposes France’s ban of the *niqab*. He said to the Muslimat of France to wear the *niqab* and I will pay the fine, I am honored by placing his picture [on my account].”²⁴ The account holder’s updated bio, however, states, “The demise of Israel may be preceded by the demise of [Arab] regimes that made a living on the expense of their own people, laughing at them, destroying the societies.”²⁵

@1400year also has a YouTube account linked to it with 1,830 subscribers and 437,243 views. Having such links across platforms allows users to more effectively create their zeitgeist. This is similar to the way jihadist groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra are using Twitter to disseminate links to Syrian battlefield videos posted on YouTube.²⁶

Of the remaining accounts, 31 of the 66 accounts listed have between 5,000 and 100,000 followers, as shown in figure 4.

Links across platforms allow users to more effectively create their zeitgeist.

The mean number of followers for this group of accounts is 28,220, but this is heavily influenced by the three accounts with the greatest number of followers. The median number of followers is much lower, at 5,377. This gives an indication that important jihadist accounts, or at least those thought important in ‘Abdallah’s Twitter guide, have the potential to reach a relatively large number of users, especially when compared, for example, to the U.S. State Department’s Digital Outreach Team and its Arabic Twitter account, @DSDOTAR, which had a little under 900 followers as of early 2014.

Do These Accounts All Speak to the Same Followers?

This overview of the 66 “important jihadist accounts” can give the appearance that collectively, the accounts are reaching over 1.8 million users. However, as noted earlier, @mujtahidd alone is followed by over 1.1 million users, and is such an outlier that we have excluded it from the subsequent analysis. Even so, the real number following all of the remaining 65 accounts is much less than 700,000, because a number of users follow more than one account. By building a network representation of the users who follow the important jihadist accounts, we found that the network following one or more of these accounts (excluding @mujtahidd) was a little over 370,000 users, which gives a more accurate picture of the reach these groups collectively achieve.

To break it down further, many users follow one or two accounts, as we might expect from an online social environment, while a very few follow several of the listed accounts. Figure 5 illustrates a close approximation of a statistical power law curve.²⁷

Of those users who follow only one of the 65 (minus @mujtahidd) important jihadist accounts, 34 percent follow more than one. Of the users who follow more than one of these accounts, however, 45 percent follow only two accounts. These can be thought of as casual followers. At the other end of the scale, there are 504 users who follow 40 or more of the listed accounts and 109 users who follow 50 or more. These followers clearly are more engaged than most.

The fact that a user is particularly engaged in following the accounts deemed important in ‘Abdallah’s Twitter guide does not necessarily indicate any political affiliation—not least because of the number of CT scholars and professionals who actively follow such accounts. It is, however, instructive to consider the aggregated traits of this “highly engaged” group of 504 users who follow 40 or more important jihadist accounts.

Unsurprisingly, given the dominant languages used by the 66 listed accounts, Arabic, English, and French are the languages that appear most frequently in the Twitter profiles of these highly engaged followers (as shown in figure 6). In addition, there is a small number of users who post to Twitter in other languages, such as Indonesian, Spanish, Dutch, and German. These users are likely to be multilingual, given that the content

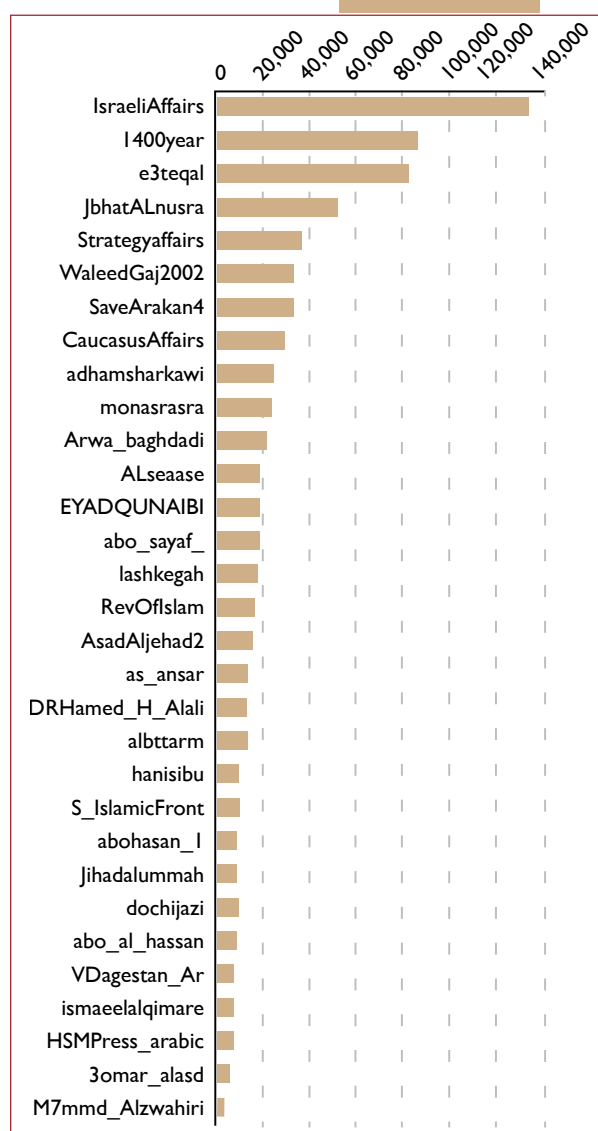


Figure 4: The Next 31 Most Followed Accounts

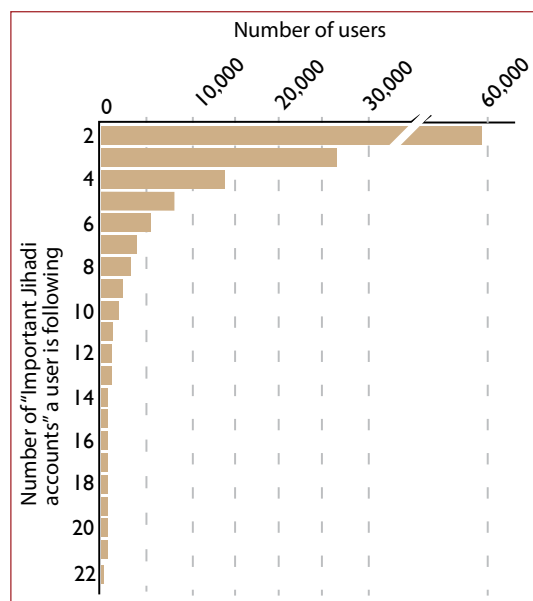


Figure 5: Frequency of Users Following Important Accounts

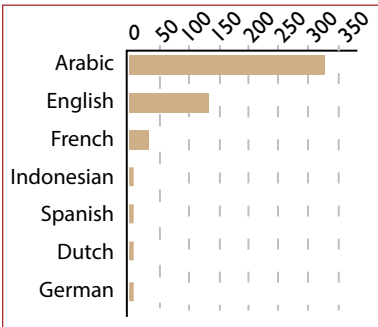


Figure 6: Languages Used by Highly Engaged Followers

they disseminate is in Arabic, and they may act as bridges by connecting the core content in Arabic to wider communities that do not speak Arabic.

From the aggregated profile data, a similar question can be asked about where in the world these highly engaged users appear to be.

The findings from the location data (see figure 7) highlight the cultural importance of appearing (at least) to be located in or near the Arabian Peninsula: almost 20 percent of highly engaged followers use Baghdad to set their time zone. Collectively, the followers' data shows a focus on the Middle East and Europe similar to the 66 important jihadist accounts.

This section has shown that the 66 accounts listed by 'Abdallah, as we might expect, tend to tweet in Arabic. They are collectively followed by a network of around 370,000 people (if @mujtahidd is excluded), but most of these are casual observers who follow only one or two of the accounts. There are, however, 500

to 1,000 more-engaged followers. These active followers tend to be Arabic speaking, have relatively few followers themselves, and appear to have a greater tendency than less-engaged users to identify with the Arabian Peninsula region, and Baghdad in particular.

Relational Dynamics between the 66 Important Jihadist Accounts

An analysis of the relational dynamics between the 66 accounts on Ahmad 'Abdallah's list provides insight into the way these accounts relate to each other, and the relative importance of each account to the others on the list. These relationships are important because they influence the way individuals search for information, what they find, and the behaviors they adopt.²⁸

When we reconstructed the network of follower-following relationships, we found that @JbhatALnusra, @WaleedGaj2002, and @AsadAljihad2 are most frequently followed by the other accounts on the list. Conversely, @SaveArakan4, @Mhaajrr, @housse_100, and @alassra2012 appear on the list but few of

the other accounts follow them. The ranking for each account (see table 1) is based on how frequently each account is followed by the others. This ranking is also comparable to the ranking produced by the eigenvector calculations for the network (see figure 8).

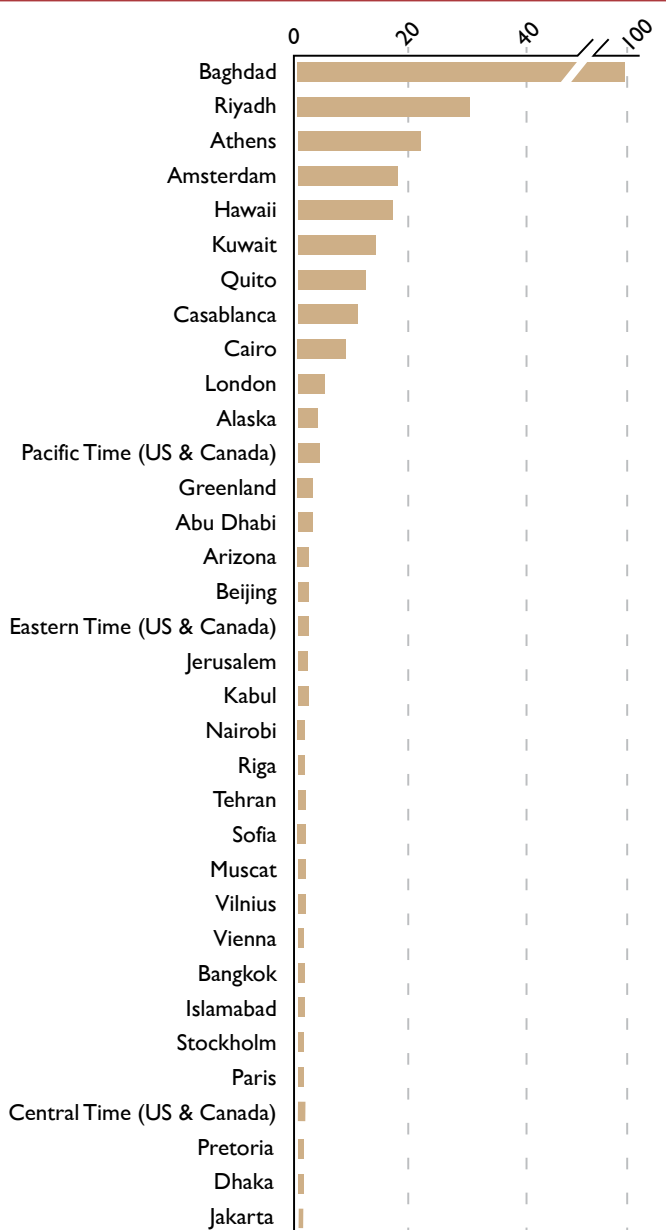


Figure 7: Time Zone Location of Highly Engaged Followers

Screen name	No. of 66 important jihadi following users
JbhatALnusra	36
WaleedGaj2002	30
AsadAljihad2	28
StrategyAffairs	26
EADQUNAIBI	26
as_ansar	25
albttarm	24
RevOfIslam	23
abo_alenaa	22
Al_nukhba	22

Table 1: Table of Rankings

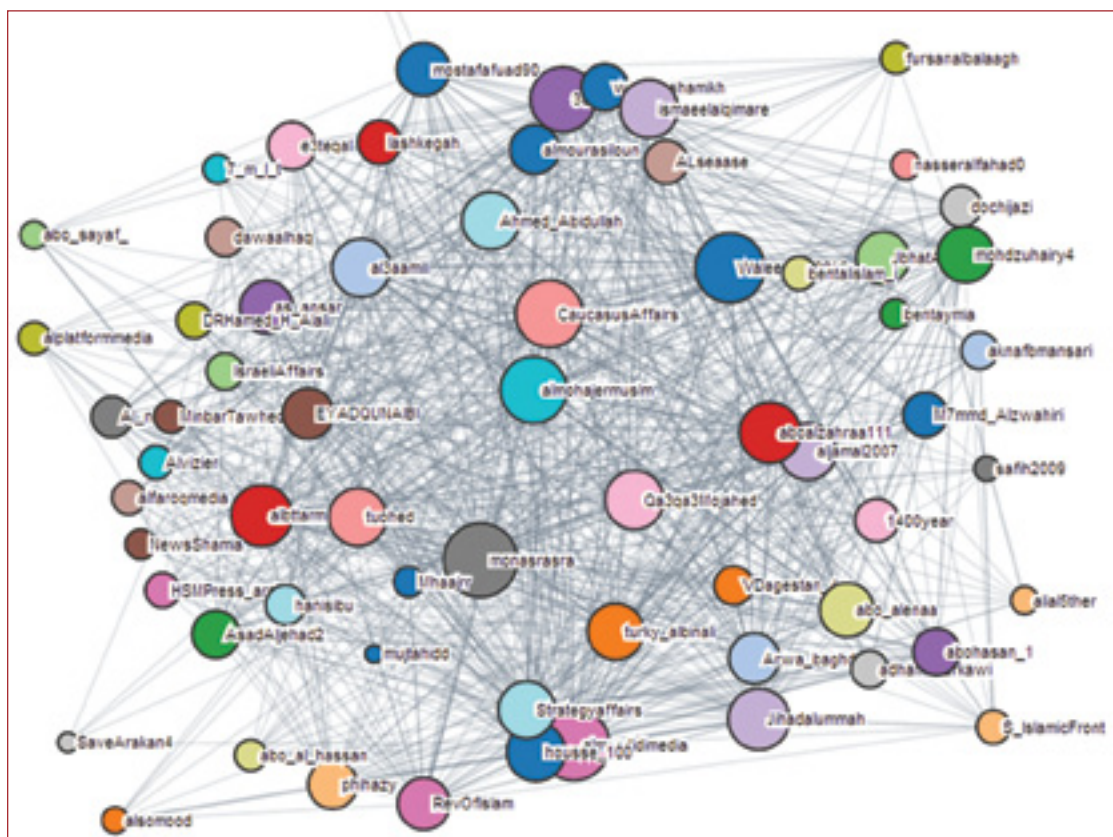


Figure 8: Eigenvector Calculations

The network as a whole represents 958 relationships among the 66 important accounts, with a network diameter of 5 (the distance between the furthest two nodes calculated on the directed graph). The network density is 0.2 on the directed graph, meaning around 20 percent of the connections that could exist actually do exist. (A score of 1 would represent a complete graph, where all connections would exist.)

Key Nodes in the Network

We found, perhaps not surprisingly, that the majority of the connected accounts are hardcore jihadist media activists, of which the most frequently followed is Jabhat al-Nusra. In this section, we look at some of the high-profile accounts whose owners are clearly advocating the full extent of violent jihadist ideology on a global level.

@WaleedGaj2002

This account has over 45,000 followers, while following 387. It apparently belongs to Walid (Muhammad) al-Hajj, a “former Guantanamo detainee and eyewitness of the Qila-e-Jangji massacre in Afghanistan,”²⁹ who is from Sudan. According to the WikiLeaks Gitmo Project, as reported by the *New York Times*, he was released from the Guantánamo Bay prison in 2008.³⁰ Al-Hajj’s tweets indicate that he still supports the mainstream al Qaeda jihadists: he praises Osama bin Laden while being cherished by other Twitter users for having known the *shaykh* personally, and he is also active within the mainstream media.³¹





@Strategyaffairs

The account holder behind @Strategyaffairs is a prolific and quite industrious jihadist media activist, with over 100,000 followers and just over 4,000 tweets as of August 2013. He is also active in most classical jihadist forums as ‘Abdallah bin Muhammad. Occasionally he has tweeted statements by the Yemeni group al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) prior to the “official” broadcast within the forums, and provided context for as well as posted AQAP’s statements, both within the forums and on Twitter. Other SSI members, for instance, used his Twitter input to further the AQAP statements within the forum, thus raising the status of @Strategyaffairs in general.



@EYADQUNAIBI

Dr. Iyad Qunaybi is something of a rising star within the radical on- and offline scenes. He is active on all social media outlets, and his videotaped speeches are also transcribed and published within the jihadist forums by media outlets such as the previously mentioned @fursanbalagh. His sermons are presented in Arabic and sometimes subtitled in English. Qunaybi rose to fame within this subculture in 2011–2012, during the uprisings in Egypt, but his focus has been on Syria since the outbreak and spread of violence there. His standing was boosted when his posts began to be included on Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi’s database, under the name Iyad al-Qunaybi.³² His input is valued, retweeted, and disseminated within the jihadist forums and on Facebook, and is further published on sites such as JustPaste.it, where content is easily shared and almost impossible to track.



@as_ansar

This is the official Twitter account of the bilingual Shabakat al-Ansar al-Mujahideen, a tier-one jihadist online forum. The main forum is in Arabic, with a sister forum in English. Both forums are sometimes taken down, but they usually resume working after some time. The instability of the main forum is a good example of why Twitter has become a tangible alternative for the media-driven jihadists—the Twitter accounts remain alive and very active with their over 26,000 followers, untouched by any disruptions to the online forums. The YouTube link shown in the @as_ansar screenshot at left is an “invitation to Muslims to visit the forum” and instructs visitors on the use of the Tor Project privacy app to conceal their identity online.³³



@Al_nukhba

This is one of the pioneer jihadist Twitter accounts, advertising its founders’ passion for social media from as early as 2009. The name *nukhbat al-I’lami al-jihadi*, the “Jihadist Media Elite,” may stem from Abu Mus’ab al-Suri’s July 2005 “Message to the British and European Peoples and Governments regarding the Explosions in London,” in which he described the internet as the most important medium through which to propagate and spread the jihadists’ demands, and ideology in general.³⁴ He called on “the jihadist elite” residing in Europe to partake in this venture.

The @Al_nukhba account could be described as a jihadist media hub. Its members, active on the forums for years, are highly committed and regularly provide transcriptions of jihadist media productions. This is naturally very helpful for any analyst, but it is also quite a service for the jihadist audience. The speeches of main leaders and ideologues, as well as major video productions of such outlets as Sahab and al-Malahem, are transcribed and can be conveniently downloaded

as a PDF or Microsoft Word document. On the group's main website, Nokbah.com, data collections and videos can be downloaded and also searched. It is a well-built and -maintained data warehouse for extremist content, which is uploaded and disseminated primarily via the classical forums. @Al_nukhba has about 6,000 followers, had tweeted over 500 times by early 2014, and was following no one.

The “betweenness” calculation (see table 2) highlights those users through which the shortest paths across the network most frequently pass. These users are often found near the center of the network image. From the perspective of betweenness, in addition to some of the users mentioned previously, these accounts also appear to play an important role as bridges between different elements of the network. To have a high betweenness score, users have to both follow and be followed by other users.

@Caucasusaffairs

@Caucasusaffairs has a significantly higher betweenness ranking compared to some of the more-followed accounts: @Caucasusaffairs is both widely followed and an active follower. As the name of this account implies, @Caucasusaffairs covers everything related to the Caucasus region and the organization called the Caucasus Emirate, with a focus on Chechnya. The tweets published on the account are mainly in Arabic, but some are also in Russian. @Caucasusaffairs has over 44,000 followers while following over 400 users itself, and has posted about 8,000 tweets. Such volume makes this account a valuable asset in addition to the main forums and their relevant subsections. It mainly retweets the Arabic-language media outlet Echo of Caucasus (through @RevOfIslam), which has been one of the main media hubs in Arabic for many years. The image of a four-fingered black hand on a yellow background (see figure 9), which is widely used on Muslim Brotherhood sites, is a symbol of the massacre that took place at Egypt's Rabaa al-Adawiya mosque on 14 August 2013, when Egyptian security forces destroyed an encampment of supporters of ousted President Mohammed Morsi. This symbol “has emerged in the Middle East, online and offline, to remember the crackdown of the Rabaa al-Adawiya protest camp whereby many pro-Mursi citizens were killed.”³⁵

The use of the Rabaa al-Adawiya icon in the Chechen context is yet another attempt by the media-savvy jihadists to globalize their agenda, and serves among them as proof for the repeated claim that there is a “war against Islam.” This icon has been further “jihadized” by adding the movement's black banner, as shown in figure 9.³⁶

This analysis of the relational dynamics between Ahmad ‘Abdallah’s 66 “important jihadist” accounts through their following–follower relationships shows that the accounts form a relatively dense network, which has two results. First, it creates mutually reinforcing clusters of information, which can crowd out other perspectives,³⁷ and thus contributes to the development of a zeitgeist, or a new electronic propaganda frontier, as was discussed in relation to the activity of Jabhat al-Nusra.³⁸

Second, the density of the network tends to protect it against basic disruption strategies such as the removal or suspension of individual accounts. As Paul Baran's work *On Distributed Communications* demonstrated, only a small level of redundancy is required to build a communication system that can withstand

Screen name	Betweenness Centrality
WaleedGaj2002	320.2
CaucasusAffairs	260.0
albtarm	190.3
monasrasra	188.2
mohdzuhaury4	120.1
Strategyaffairs	108.7

Table 2: “Betweenness” centrality



Figure 9: Rabaa al-Adawiya Protest Symbol

heavy enemy attacks.³⁹ Although Baran's work was done in the pre-internet context of the 1960s, and focused particularly on media problems faced in the 1970s, the insight provided by the study also relates to online activity and the need for more complex strategies to disrupt dense communication networks.

Information Flow

This final section assesses the flow of information in a network that includes the 66 important jihadist accounts. Tracking the spread of this information provides a useful insight into the way relationships can both influence the spread of information and allow the identification of key actors or influential users within the jihadist Twitter phenomenon. For example, a previous article by the authors on the Syrian jihadist group Jabhat al-Nusra demonstrated how jihadist groups are using Twitter to post links to video content shot in Syria.⁴⁰

Some of the data from the first sections of this article was posted on the blog

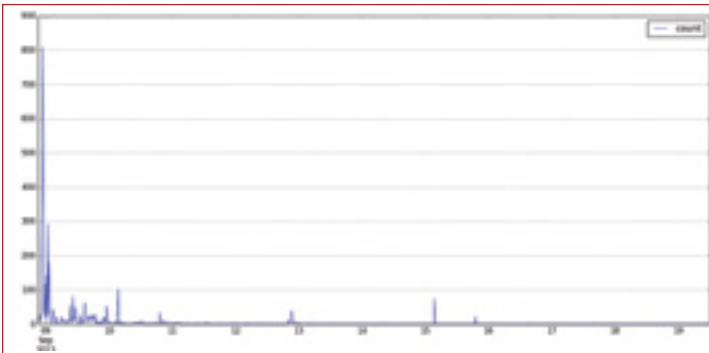


Figure 10: Arabic Speakers' Response to Jihadica Article 8-10 September 2013

Jihadica in August 2013, along with a brief analysis of the 66 important jihadist accounts.⁴¹ In this article, we are making use of data about how Twitter users communicating in Arabic responded to the information we posted on the blog. Following the post, which is in English, requests appeared on Twitter for a translation to be posted in Arabic. This translation subsequently appeared on JustPaste.it,⁴² and news spread rapidly on Twitter using the hashtag *#قَسَارِد_66_رَطَخ_أَيُّكِيَرْم_قَسَارِد*.

The majority of the tweets containing *#قَسَارِد_66_رَطَخ_أَيُّكِيَرْم_قَسَارِد* appeared between 8 and 10 September 2013, after which there was little further activity. At its peak, the hashtag was used over 800 times in 15 minutes, equivalent to 53 tweets a minute (see figure 10).

The graph in figure 10 shows the volume of tweets containing the hashtag for each 15-minute period. This indicates that the news traveled fast, reaching most of the users it would ever reach within the first day, and highlights the speed of information dissemination within this network. A few users were particularly important in spreading the news. Figure 11 shows the users most frequently retweeted within our data.

In addition to the volume of retweets, time is also a factor, because users were retweeted or mentioned at different times. Known as an engagement profile, the graph in figure 12 shows the time period in which users were particularly important.

Figure 12 also highlights that prominent users are retweeted rapidly; if this observation held up in numerous other contexts, this would indicate that information is traveling across such networks faster than current case-by-case counterstrategies can respond. Among the 66 jihadist accounts in this study, @Tuohed and @almohajermuslm had the greatest levels of retweets and mentions early on 9 September 2013. Twelve hours later, @xxggxx2 became prominent, and nearly 12 hours after that, retweets of @albttarm peaked. This hints at the features of the network

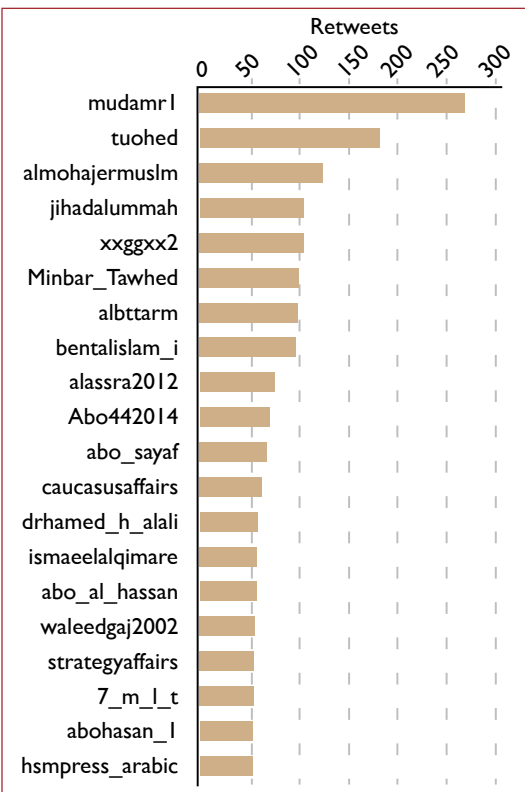


Figure 11: Most Retweeted Users

that give it greater resilience. Information can be shared rapidly, as shown by the initial spike in retweets. The engagement profiles also show, however, that different users are able to continue the conversation, which highlights the fact that prominent users fulfill different roles in the network.

To gain greater insight into the way information travels and the role of prominent users in the network, key actor analysis (see figure 13) can differentiate those users who are important for reaching specific communities from those users who are at the core of the network. If there are a number of users who operate within the core, or vanguard, and others who act as conduits for content to a wider audience, this further enhances the network's resilience by allowing it to withstand disruptions caused by the occasional suspension of accounts that apparently breach Twitter's terms of service.

The position of key actors on the scatter plot in figure 13 is based on two network metrics: betweenness centrality and PageRank. Betweenness centrality refers to how often a node lies on the shortest path between any two nodes in the network.⁴³ A node with high betweenness centrality has the potential to influence the spread of information, by facilitating, hindering, or even altering the communication between others. PageRank is an objective measure of the importance of a node in a network—a specific citation graph. As Google cofounders Sergey Brin and Larry Page describe this method, the result “corresponds well with people’s subjective idea of importance”:⁴⁴

- Users in the bottom left of the graph tend to have no particular role and can be thought of as general users, although they may have high value to a very specific, often very small, group.
- Those in the top left of the graph tend to be in the core (or one of the cores) of the network. This indicates they are often the ones most invested in the network and have access to privileged information, but they rely on others to disseminate the original content they tweet to a wider audience.
- Those in the bottom right of the graph fulfill the role of bridging between the core content producers and a specific community. The value of this role often comes from tailoring information to a specific audience, which makes these users more valuable to that group but less important to everyone else.
- Users in the top right are rare. They serve a dual function: they have the same trusted status as those in the top left of the graph, and they also fulfill the same “bridge” role as users in the bottom right of the graph, reaching areas of the network that others do not serve.

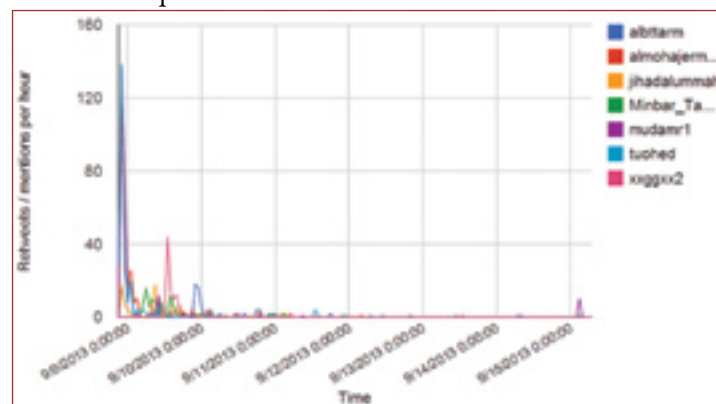


Figure 12: Response to the 66

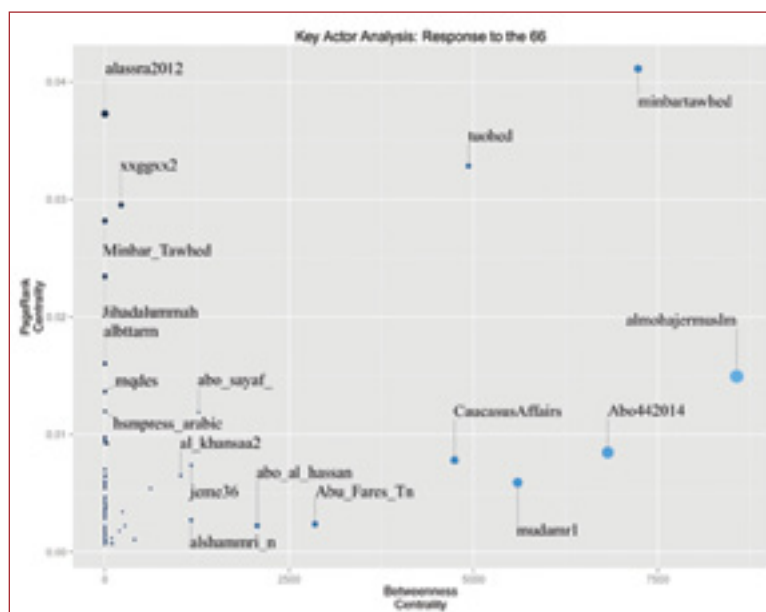


Figure 13: Key Actor Analysis



Figure 14: Network Map

The network map (see figure 14) can show which users communicated with each other, which reached the same communities, and which were a bridge to specific communities.⁴⁵

The colors indicate the different interconnected communities; note, in particular, the green cluster of interconnected users in the middle of the network. This highlights the likely resilience of the core of the community on Twitter, in addition to the resilience created by the multiplatform zeitgeist identified in our earlier study of Jabhat al-Nusra.⁴⁶ There are significant levels of redundancy in the connections at the core of the network, which allow communication to continue even when some accounts are suspended.

Conclusion

This analysis demonstrates that jihadist groups have used the opportunity created by the proliferation of social media platforms to develop a network of Twitter accounts that gives them a persistent as well as

ideologically cohesive presence for jihadist propaganda online. The case studies presented here indicate that the level of interconnection between core members of the network has achieved a high degree of resilience against disruption from the suspension of individual accounts. If this finding can be repeated across a number of other examples, it will have wide-ranging consequences for counter-strategies, which will need to shift from countering individuals to disrupting cohesion across a network if they are to be effective. ❖

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Ali Fisher is an advisor, strategist, and author who specializes in methods of achieving influence across a range of disciplines.

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NOTES

- 1 *Mujahid* is the singular form of *mujahideen*.
- 2 Mu'assasat al-Furqan and Markaz al-Yaqin, *Al-Manhajiyya fi tahsil al-khibra al-i'lamiyya*, part 1, May 2011. Two jihadist media departments from Iraq published this Arabic-language handbook as part of a series. Jihadist activity is sanctioned through the existing core *fatwa* (authoritative religious ruling or decrees) based on historical scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328), the famous Hanbali scholar, and enriched by the senior leadership of al Qaeda. Thus, any local, jihadist, al Qaeda-affiliated action can fall under this umbrella approbation, thereby increasing its appeal. See Prem Mahadevan, "The Glocalisation of Al Qaedaism," Center for Security Studies, 22 March 2013: <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Special-Feature/Detail/?id=161729&contextid774=161729&contextid775=161659&t=abid=1454211886>
- 3 Nico Prucha and Ali Fisher, "Tweeting for the Caliphate: Twitter as the New Frontier for Jihadist Propaganda," *CTC Sentinel* 6, no. 6 (June 2013): 19–23: <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/CTCSentinel.Vol6Iss62.pdf>
- 4 Discussed in Ali Fisher and Nico Prucha, "Jihadi Twitter Activism: Introduction," *Jihadica* (blog), 27 April 2013: <http://www.jihadica.com/jihadi-twitter-activism-introduction/>; Nico Prucha, "Online Territories of Terror—Utilizing the Internet for Jihadist Endeavors," *Orient* IV (2011): 43–47: http://www.academia.edu/4960525/Online_Territories_of_Terror_-_Utilizing_the_Internet_for_Jihadist_Endeavors_I._Jihad_and_the_Internet_-_An_Introduction_to_ji_hadism_oline. Members of the Ansar al-Mujahidin and Shumukh al-Islam (SSI) forums have posted advice encouraging fellow users to develop social media profiles to disseminate their message to a wider group of users. See, for example, "The Twitter Guide: The Most Important Jihadi Users and Support Accounts for Jihad and the Mujahideen on Twitter" (in Arabic): www.shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=192509
- 5 "The Twitter Guide."
- 6 Ibid. It is not the intention of this article to discuss whether the 66 users should be considered jihadists but rather to analyze the accounts recommended in Ahmad 'Abdallah's guide to using Twitter in the jihadist context, as stated in the forum thread.
- 7 A translation of the verse reads, "Prepare against them whatever forces you [believers] can muster, including warhorses, to frighten off [these] enemies of God and of yours, and warn others unknown to you but known to God. Whatever you give in God's cause will be repaid to you in full, and you will not be wronged." Translation by Muhammad A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 8:60.
- 8 "The Twitter Guide."
- 9 Hani al-Siba'i is a prolific cleric whose writings are hosted on Tawhed.ws. According to *Militant Ideology Atlas*, published by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, al-Siba'i was an "alleged member of the 14-person shura council of Egyptian Islamic Jihad, which is allied with bin Ladin. Siba'i was convicted in absentia in Cairo on terrorism charges and is resident in London after Britain granted him political asylum." William McCants, ed., *Militant Ideology Atlas—Research Compendium* (West Point, N.Y.: Combating Terrorism Center, November 2006), 312: <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Atlas-ResearchCompendium1.pdf>
- 10 After his release from prison following the ousting of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, Muhammad al-Zawahiri, the younger brother of al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, appeared within the jihadist media landscape but has been silent since his re-arrest in August 2013. The arrest came in the wake of the Egyptian military's intervention to curb elected president Mohammad Morsi and the public manifestation of Islamists throughout the country. See Maggie Michael, "Mohammed Al-Zawahiri Arrested: Brother of Al-Qaeda Chief Ayman Al-Zawahiri Reportedly Detained in Egypt," *Huffington Post*, 17 August 2013: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/17/mohammed-al-zawahiri-arrested_n_3772315.html
- 11 He is a frequent writer for the SSI forum and publishes for its media outlet.
- 12 The work and input by this Twitter user are reflected on the user's Facebook page, available at <https://www.facebook.com/alsarra>, accessed 11 February 2014. The Facebook page is linked and interlinked to groups and pages such as "the support of Islamist (*al-Islamiyyun*) prisoners in Lebanon," reflecting the transnational agenda of the free prisoners campaign. The @alsarra2012 Twitter account accommodated a mere 681 followers as of February 2014.
- 13 The slogan of Ansar al-Sham is "*al-Sham, al-Sham, ya ummat al-Islam*." The coalition advertises a telephone number on its Twitter profile; the number (0096550758039) is of Kuwaiti origin and is also used in combination with the Skype handle *h_m_l_t_1* to reach out. Apparently, this strategy is successful with pro-Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) Twitter users thanking Ansar al-Sham for their deeds—for example, Mu'ab al-Muhajir (@al_dolgy) showing the avatar of a *shahid* (Muslim martyr) covered by the ISIS flag, 11 February 2014: https://twitter.com/al_dolgy/status/433156019494326272. A hashtag has been initiated for this kind of thank-you tweet, reading (in Arabic) "#Thank_you_Ansar_dawlat_al-Islam," clearly attributing the Ansar al-Sham campaign to the overall effort of ISIS with all the intentional state-building elements within. Ansar al-Sham's Twitter and Skype handles both use the Latin coding for the Arabic word for "campaign" (*hamlat*).
- 14 "The Twitter Guide."
- 15 API stands for "application programming interface"—an app developer's tool.
- 16 The language of an account was that listed in the Twitter profile data for that account. This is set by users when they create their account and determines the language in which the Twitter user interface appears to that user. It is worth noting that English is the default setting and so may be overrepresented here if any user did not bother changing the settings to their preferred language.
- 17 *Geotagging* refers to embedded metadata that adds geographical location data to electronic media such as photographs or websites. Tagged tweets identify the sender's location when the tweet was sent.
- 18 Evgeny Morozov, "Foreign Policy: Twitter and Protests in Tehran," NPR, 17 June 2009: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=105506664>
- 19 *Slacktivism* refers to "the public proclaiming of one's political beliefs through activities that require little effort or commitment." *Collins English Dictionary Online* (Dictionary.com), s.v. "slacktivist": <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/slacktivist>
- 20 For a detailed analysis of Twitter users during the protest following the 2009 Iranian presidential election, see Ali Fisher, "Bullets with Butterfly Wings; Tweets, Protest Networks and the Iranian Election," in *Media, Power, and Politics in the Digital Age: The 2009 Presidential Election Uprising in Iran*, ed. Yahya R. Kamalipour (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 105–18.

- 21 Time zone settings on Twitter are discussed by DataSift (one of Twitter's data partners) here: <http://dev.datasift.com/docs/targets/Twitter/Twitter-user-timezone>
- 22 *Usul* are principles of Islamic jurisprudence. See Hans Wehr, *Arabic-English Dictionary: The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 4th ed., ed. J Milton Cowan (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 1979), 169: <http://ia601201.us.archive.org/23/items/Arabic-English-dictionary/Arabic-english-Dictionary-complete.pdf>
- 23 Al Battar Media is part of the SSI forum. The information on this group was retrieved from the forum, available at <https://shamikh1.info/vb/showthread.php?t=218024>. Al Battar Media is active in editing and uploading jihadist videos, with a renewed focus on the troubled Iraqi province of al-Anbar. Despite the blackout of SSI, Al Battar Media has continued its work via Twitter (@Al_Bttaar) and JustPaste.it as the official media arm—for example, <http://justpaste.it/ed63>, accessed 12 February 2014. Jihadist forums such as al-Platformmedia host Al Battar Media material, and thus promote SSI, as for instance is the case with the video “The Place [of Worship] for God Remains”: <http://alplatformmedia.com/vb/showthread.php?p=141888>. In videos such as this, the unity of the *ummah* is called for despite the recent rift between al Qaeda central and ISIS.
- 24 See the @1400year Twitter account (in Arabic): <https://twitter.com/1400year>
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Prucha and Fisher, “Tweeting for the Caliphate.”
- 27 This discussion hints at why power law/logarithmically normal distribution might be a useful way to approximate user ranking. See “Power Law Curve Fitting for Social Network Queries,” StackOverflow.com, 5 January 2011: <http://stackoverflow.com/questions/4610132/power-law-curve-fitting-for-social-network-queries>
- 28 Brynn M. Evans and Ed H. Chi, “Towards a Model of Understanding Social Search,” in *Proceedings of Computer-supported Cooperative Work (CSCW)* (San Diego, Calif.: ACM Press, 2008): 485–94: <http://brynn-evans.com/writing-speaking>; Peter Sheridan Dodds, Roby Muhamad, and Duncan J. Watts, “An Experimental Study of Search in Global Social Networks,” *Science* 301, no. 5634 (8 August 2003), 827–9: <http://www.distcomp.ethz.ch/lectures/fs10/seminar/paper/michael-6.pdf>; Tom R. Tyler, *Why People Obey the Law* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006).
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THE CTAP INTERVIEW

Kirk Meyer, Former Director of the Afghan Threat Finance Cell

THIS INTERVIEW IS TAKEN FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE COMBATING Terrorism Archive Project (CTAP).¹ On 2 April 2014, Global ECCO director Michael Freeman and CTAP coordinator Amina Kator-Mubarez sat down with former U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency official Kirk Meyer to talk about his work to identify and dismantle terrorist financing networks in Afghanistan between 2006 and 2011. During that time, Meyer founded the first Afghan Threat Finance Cell and served as its director until his departure from Afghanistan in 2011.²

*Interviewed by Michael Freeman
and Amina Kator-Mubarez, U.S.
Naval Postgraduate School*

MICHAEL FREEMAN: Thank you, Kirk, for doing this interview. You were the director of the Afghan Threat Finance Cell (ATFC) for three years, from 2008 through 2011, but you are a Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) special agent by training and by trade. How did you come to be in Afghanistan in charge of threat finance?

KIRK MEYER: It was kind of a fluke, actually. From 2006 to 2008, I was in Afghanistan as the assistant attaché for the DEA. I came back to the United States and reported to my headquarters on 4 August 2008. When I arrived to check in, the chief of operations told me to come with him downstairs, where we got into a van. Then he told me we were going to the White House. At the White House, there was a meeting led by Juan Zarate, who I believe was, at the time, the deputy national security advisor and an advisor to President George W. Bush.³ The discussion was about establishing an ATFC similar to the Iraq Threat Finance Cell (ITFC), and who was going to lead it. In Iraq, they had co-directors: one from the Treasury Department and the other from the Department of Defense (DoD). At our meeting, the Defense representative said DoD didn't want any more leadership roles but would be happy to provide a deputy. At the end of the meeting, Zarate said, "Well, we will have DEA run it," with the understanding that if DEA didn't perform well, they would revisit the leadership issue. I believe that they chose DEA on the assumption that the majority of the funding to the insurgency was drug-related.

When I arrived to check in, the chief of operations told me to come with him downstairs, where we got into a van. Then he told me we were going to the White House.

FREEMAN: How did you set up this cell? How did you organize it? What was your mission when you established this ATFC?

MEYER: The next thing was to work with my two deputies, one from Treasury and one from CENTCOM (U.S. Central Command), to create a plan and identify resources. Six or eight weeks after the 4 August meeting, I was called back to the White House, where I met with John D. Duncan Jr., who was also affiliated with the Bush administration. The Barack Obama administration was about to come into office, and the Bush people wanted us on the ground prior to the transition. At the meeting were myself and two other DEA personnel, two people from Treasury, and a person from the Pentagon's Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Counternarcotics and Global Threats (DASD). The

The Pentagon person told us that they had already talked to someone at Bagram Air Base and that everything we required was in place. All we had to do was show up.

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The first facility for the ATFC was a trailer that had several leaks in the roof, plumbing that backed up, and the entire electrical system strung out in back of the trailer on a broken tree branch.

Pentagon person told us that they had already talked to someone at Bagram Air Base and that everything we required was in place. All we had to do was show up. So Duncan said, “Well, why don’t you guys get there in the next few weeks?”

It was agreed that we would go, starting with the leadership, with the understanding that it would be a developing project. No one expected the ATFC to be up and running right away. There was some fear, expressed by Duncan, that the Obama administration might stop the idea, so they wanted to get us started. I tried to contact the woman who was at the meeting to get the contact number for the person in Bagram who was going to help us. After about a week, she e-mailed me and told me that there was a mistake and that there was nothing available for us at Bagram. I decided to go forward anyway because I had already been to Afghanistan, and I figured I would get a better understanding of what was happening if I was on the ground. Plus, this was a big deal for DEA.

DEA has a lot of experience working internationally. It has the largest presence overseas of any U.S. federal law enforcement agency, with over 90 offices. We have a tremendous amount of experience working interagency, but this new ATFC was different for DEA. We had never led anything like this. I was a little concerned that if we didn’t show up as John Duncan had requested, the blame would be on DEA and not necessarily on the fact that the resources weren’t available. So I arrived back in Afghanistan in late October 2008. When I arrived, I found that the embassy and U.S. Forces–Afghanistan really didn’t know why I was there and what we were going to do, and neither was in a position to assist us with resources. I knew that there was an old, dilapidated trailer at Bagram Air Base that the military had given DEA several years before, and DEA wasn’t really using it anymore. Consequently, I convinced the DEA regional director to transfer it to the ATFC. So the first facility for the ATFC was a trailer that had several leaks in the roof, plumbing that backed up, and the entire electrical system strung out in back of the trailer on a broken tree branch. That was our start.

FREEMAN: What was your mission? Who gave you your marching orders?

MEYER: Well, a white paper was supposed to be the initial marching orders to establish the ATFC, but all the agencies hadn’t signed off on it yet. So we actually arrived in Afghanistan prior to the white paper being concurred to by the different federal agencies and the military. Our goal, though, was to identify and help disrupt the material and financial funding streams that were supporting the Taliban and other terrorist organizations.

FREEMAN: And the presumption was that that was mostly coming from drugs?

MEYER: The presumption was that a lot of it was coming from drugs, right.

FREEMAN: So you got there, and there were the three of you. How did you grow that organization?

MEYER: Initially, I borrowed two laptops and a stand-alone computer from DEA, which we had configured for military use. My Treasury deputy had served in the ITFC, so he had an idea of how we needed to progress. He started working on producing the requirements that we would need on the intel (intelligence) side, while the military deputy and I basically became salesmen or marketers. We produced a PowerPoint presentation, and we met with any military officer

who would talk to us, from McKiernan (General David McKiernan, then-commander of the International Security Assistance Force [ISAF]) on down, to see whom we could solicit help from. One problem was that because the white paper hadn't been produced, there had never been a FRAGO (fragmentary order—a form of military notification) produced either. From the military's perspective, we didn't exist, so we couldn't have access to any services or any type of resources, even things like toilet paper or bottled water. Through networking with other organizations on Bagram, though, we managed to obtain necessities—those guys helped hold us together, actually.

The first person to really help us was Brigadier Robert Carr, who was the senior intel officer in the country. I briefed him, and then that night at about 11:00 p.m., I got a call from his aide, who said, "Okay, General Carr has ordered the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) to clear out their conference room in Bagram. How many computers do you need? We are going to drop them." In about 24 to 48 hours, he had built us our first SCIF (sensitive compartmented information facility). It was a temporary SCIF that was based inside of a DIA compound. So there were a lot of people willing to help us, but there were a lot of struggles going on at the same time.

FREEMAN: You mentioned that you had to sort of "sell" your organization and your mission to other people. How much of a priority did people place on counter-threat or counterterrorist financing? How did other people—from DoD, from other organizations in Afghanistan—see this threat finance issue?

MEYER: It really varied a lot. For example, we were almost immediately given a seat at the table with Regional Command East at Bagram. We started attending the daily stand-up (briefing) for the military commander at the time and his commanders who followed after him. Other people didn't really want to talk to us. There were some people on the military intelligence side who were, I think, a little threatened by us. There was some hesitancy because we were bringing in civilian agencies, we had different authorities, and the military didn't understand a lot of those authorities. For example, the HUMINT (human intelligence) collection teams didn't understand the fact that I, as a DEA special agent, could recruit and run informant networks, which we did at the ATFC and for DEA. Even though we were not military interrogators, we could go into the detention facility and interview detainees because there was an exemption in the system that allowed special agents, 1811s, to act as interrogators. So we were doing interrogations of detainees in the Bagram facility. We were creating informant networks. And we were starting pretty quickly to produce IIRs: intelligence information reports; we produced the first ones within a couple of months. In my understanding, the Iraq Threat Finance Cell, which was much better resourced than we were, didn't produce its first IIR until almost a year after it opened. We were doing it within a few months.

FREEMAN: What was your level of resourcing?

MEYER: I convinced DEA that if they were going to lead this, then we needed resources and DEA was going to have to use money to do it. There had been an assumption that the military was going to pay for everything. The military had a group at CENTCOM in Tampa at that time called, I think, the Interagency Action Group, and then it became the Interagency Task Force.⁴ A little bit of

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a struggle went on between them and me because everyone assumed they were going to provide resources, but they were unable to provide anything. After the Pentagon said that the resources were available and they weren't, the civilians felt that the military was balking at the fact that civilians were going to lead the organization. But in retrospect, I am not sure that was really the case. I think a lot of the problem was that everybody, including the agencies that were involved in producing the white paper, were reviewing everything through the lens of Iraq, and Iraq was very different. For one thing, the United States had a lot more control in Iraq. In Afghanistan, we rushed to give control to the Afghan government. In Iraq, everything was highly resourced. Alumni of the Iraq Threat Finance Cell talked about how they were inside a palace. When they arrived at the ITFC headquarters, they had all these new computers—anything they required was on the ground and available.

They thought this was an abandoned building and they were making bunk assignments.

Well, I had spent two years in Afghanistan before the surge, and nobody had anything extra. Everybody was sharing things, everybody was doing favors for each other, but it took networking to do even the minor things. There was no surplus anywhere, whether it be computers or vehicles or space. When we moved into the dilapidated trailer before my deputies arrived, for example, I woke up one morning and there was a major with a clipboard and three guys following him, because they thought this was an abandoned building and they were making bunk assignments. They were actually assigning people to where they were going to sleep in a building that the military didn't even own—they were going to take it over. That was the kind of environment that was there.

Another problem was that the various civilian agencies assumed they were going to use money out of the DASD office to fund the ATFC and that there wouldn't be individual agency costs associated with the ATFC. I guess the best way to describe it is that prior to this period, the definition of what constituted a counternarcotics project was pretty broadly interpreted. I think there was an inspector general's report or some kind of evaluation of how the military had spent counternarcotics funds, and suddenly, at the time that the ATFC was standing up, there was a clampdown on how they could use that money. So when the civilian agencies were assuming that the DASD was going to fund things like the ATFC, they were making assumptions based on how things had previously operated, not realizing that the military was under this new, more-restrictive environment. It created a tremendous amount of friction between the Tampa-based military interagency group that was designated to support the ATFC and me in Afghanistan. In addition, because the same group had difficulty getting the U.S. Forces–Afghanistan and the embassy to approve their initial attempts at writing a FRAGO, they were even more restricted in what support they could provide.

FREEMAN: Let me move from the organizational dynamics to the substance of what you were doing. I want to talk about a few issues that we can address one at a time. How did you see and evaluate and work against the drug issue? I have the same kind of question for corruption, for the banking sector, and for the U.S. money coming in, and trying to control that money from going to the Taliban. So maybe you can go through each of those: drugs, corruption, contracting, money.

MEYER: The first way to look at it is to talk about a couple of things we did. First, besides slowly building out the Afghan Threat Finance Cell, we immediately engaged with some Afghan units. In 2007–2008, I helped create what we called the Sensitive Investigative Unit (SIU), which was a vetted Afghan police unit. By “vetted,” I mean that we got the best background checks we could do in Afghanistan, which realistically wasn’t much, but we routinely polygraphed the participants in this unit. In addition, during the same time period, I helped initiate the process to establish a legal wire intercept system managed by a second vetted Afghan unit called the Technical Investigative Unit, or TIU. The TIU was developed to support the SIU. The ATFC was allowed access to that system through our engagement with the SIU. The SIU provided the ATFC with an Afghan action arm that would work with us, and partnered with the ATFC on investigations that included operations like the execution of search warrants on criminal hawalas.⁵ We worked with FinTRACA, the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Center of Afghanistan. FinTRACA was Afghanistan’s financial intelligence unit and part of Da Afghanistan Bank, Afghanistan’s central bank. We were pulling bank data; we were pulling hawala information and building a network of contacts within the hawala system. I spent hundreds of hours interviewing hawala agents, visiting their shops, and eating in their homes. So we were starting to gather a lot of unclassified information, which we fed into the ATFC. The ATFC intelligence analysts took the information developed through unclassified law enforcement means and linked it to develop a more holistic intelligence view.

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What we learned pretty quickly was that this view led us to a specific paradigm: in Afghanistan, you couldn’t just look at the Taliban, you couldn’t just look at corrupt officials, you couldn’t just look at the drug traffickers. Even though on the surface, these groups were at odds, in reality, everybody was in the money game to some degree. You had corrupt Afghan officials; you had bad actors in the Afghan business and financial sector, the Taliban and drug traffickers, all of whom were frequently acting in tandem. So you could look at one thing, say a hawala, or a bank, or a drug trafficker, and the connections would spider out and connect to other illicit areas in operations in Afghanistan. We started collecting this information and getting a very holistic view of what was going on, and we saw that it dealt with issues broader than just threat finance. We then got customers—people actually requested this type of holistic information.

FREEMAN: So how bad was the drug trade?

MEYER: The drug trade was really bad, but I personally never believed it was as big a funding source for the insurgency as a lot of people thought. It was a funding source, I am not denying that, but you used to hear these numbers all the time—a billion dollars and the like. Unfortunately, I have to say that one of the things we discovered was that we were one of the biggest funding sources for the insurgency. “We” being the U.S. government and ISAF, through development projects. This was mostly because of a particular dynamic: in the beginning, the only metric anybody was using to measure development was how fast they could spend money, not what impact that spending had on the insurgency. So there were a lot of projects being done in areas where we didn’t control the terrain. Either the Taliban controlled it or these were areas where the terrain was contested and the Taliban played a major role. In those cases, about 25 percent of every development project’s funding was going to the insurgency. So we were

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frequently funding the insurgency through this lack of oversight and lack of thoughtfulness about where we were doing development projects.

The problem was abetted by other things, too. For example, an ancillary issue of that first one was that a lot of these projects never occurred. We paid for things that weren't built, or they were built shoddily, and a big part of the reason for that was that the contracts were often given to big American or European firms, and those firms would subcontract the work while keeping a slice of the money. That subcontractor would be an Afghan company, which would subcontract the work again, and it would be subcontracted again and again, until some guy at the very end got a little pot of money to build the project—say a piece of road. But now he didn't have enough money to build the road, plus pay the Taliban, plus pay the corrupt officials who usually took about 20 percent of every development project. So basically, the contractors didn't build the projects or they built them shoddily, and because the projects were in contested areas, nobody verified whether they were built. In Afghanistan, you frequently heard this saying: "The Russians built roads that lasted 30 years, and the Americans build roads that last 30 days." It was a very common refrain. We had one instance where there was an article in the newspaper about a school—I want to say it was built in Helmand province—and the article identified the school's principal. We actually called the principal to talk to him, and it turned out he was based at a school outside of Kabul. He didn't even know he was assigned as the principal in Helmand. It was a total charade: the school had never been built, and then individuals in the government were stealing—basically using ghost employees and stealing the teachers' salaries.

FREEMAN: Did the Afghan Threat Finance Cell, then, help reveal this environment?

MEYER: We did. Although we didn't go to look for corruption, we started reporting on it because nobody else was really doing in-depth reporting on the problem. We started getting requests for the reporting, some of which came from high-level officials in Washington, some from the U.S. embassy, and some from ISAF. There were a lot of military people who were interested in the corruption problem, so we did an assessment from the information we had and the information we could gather. People were shocked by how bad this situation was and who was involved in it. At one point, we were asked to work with the Afghan police to identify a high-level Afghan government official whom we could target, so that the Afghans could bring him into their court system for arrest and prosecution. The U.S. government was then going to press this issue with Afghan president Hamid Karzai. We were involved in a couple of those operations, and in each instance, it caused significant tension between the White House, the U.S. embassy, and President Karzai.

FREEMAN: So it got swamped by the political... ?

MEYER: These efforts were repeatedly derailed because of political concerns. Probably the biggest thing that happened was learning about Kabul Bank. While we were looking at a hawala based in Dubai, we gained the cooperation of the founder of Kabul Bank. Kabul Bank was the largest private bank in the country, and it was being used by the United States and ISAF to transfer money for all the military and police salaries. The bank was actually a giant Ponzi scheme,⁶ and we found out about it when we went to interview Sherkhan Farnood, the person

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who founded the bank, about his hawala and its dealings with somebody in the Karzai family. Suddenly, Farnood just started confessing that the bank was a Ponzi scheme. We interviewed him for hours and looked at thousands of pages of records, and we realized that about 80 percent of the bank's deposits were gone and that the money we sent through the bank for the security forces was often being used as a "float" to hide the Ponzi scheme.

For example, one scheme in particular involved the Afghan vice president's brother, Haji Haseen Fahim, who was a Kabul Bank shareholder and a British citizen, and the Afghan president's brother, Mahmud Karzai, who was also a Kabul Bank shareholder, and an American citizen. Fahim would take one of the bank security guards to an Afghan bureau called AISA, the Afghanistan Investment Support Agency, which was one of the places that issued business licenses. Fahim would purport that the security guard was the CEO of a new company, and AISA would issue the security guard a business license in his company's name. Of course, these companies were fictitious. Fahim would then take the genuine business license issued for the fictitious company to the bank and meet with bank employees who were co-conspirators in the Ponzi scheme to take out a loan in the name of the non-existent company. He, Karzai, and other Kabul Bank shareholders created numerous fictitious companies using various individuals like the security guards as proxies to obtain the genuine business licenses from AISA. Every loan was supposedly paid off, but no money was ever paid; it was an accounting trick. They would just open other fictitious companies to make it look as though the money were loaned out again.

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Eventually, Sherkhan Farnood, who illegally removed money from the bank in a similar manner, ran into financial difficulties because he was heavily invested in Dubai real estate when the real estate market in Dubai crashed around 2008–2009. This caused friction between the different partners within the bank because Farnood expected the other shareholders to share in his losses, claiming he had made the investments on behalf of the group and not for his sole benefit. Basically, Farnood, along with a few minor shareholders, was in one camp, while the opposing faction, including Fahim and Karzai, was led by the bank's CEO, Khalil Fruzi.

FREEMAN: And it imploded?

MEYER: It imploded as they fought about the bank. It was a strange situation because we were regularly meeting with both factions and reviewing numerous records from Kabul Bank and Shaheen Exchange, Sherkhan's Dubai-based hawala. Each faction was feeding us information to discredit the other, and we were verifying the truth through financial records, legal wire intercepts conducted by the SIU, and other means.

Each faction was feeding us information to discredit the other, and we were verifying the truth through financial records, legal wire intercepts conducted by the SIU, and other means.

FREEMAN: Who was giving the money to the Kabul Bank for them to then loan out? Was that the United States?

MEYER: No, it was small depositors.

FREEMAN: Afghans?

MEYER: Afghan depositors, NGOs, and just about anybody who was using a bank in the country had an account at Kabul Bank. It was the largest private

Kabul Bank was the largest private bank with the largest number of branches, and about \$1.2 or \$1.3 billion in deposits. The amount stolen has been estimated to be between \$800 and \$950 million.

bank with the largest number of branches, and about \$1.2 or \$1.3 billion in deposits. The amount stolen has been estimated to be between \$800 and \$950 million. Basically, the majority of the money was gone. There was an instance, for example, at the U.S. embassy in which an Afghan employee and her husband wanted to buy a house. It took them an entire day to get their \$1,200, and the bank vice president met with them and tried to talk them out of withdrawing their savings. Since much of the money was gone, it was difficult for the bank to meet the expectations of customers who wanted to withdraw funds.

The situation was so dire that the bank executives used the U.S. and ISAF funds intended for the salaries of the military and the police whenever the bank had inadequate reserves and somebody, like the embassy employee, wanted their money. So the bank was using the salary payments as a float. Say you were an Afghan policeman or an Afghan soldier, and you lived in a province and expected to get paid on Monday. Instead, you might not get paid until a week or 10 or 15 days later. Sometimes the money would be as much as 30 days late because the bank was holding that money until it could get enough new deposits to release the U.S./ISAF funds for those salaries. It was a common complaint among the soldiers and police that their pay wasn't routine but would come in randomly.

FREEMAN: What happened to these guys? Bernie Madoff is in jail.⁷

MEYER: The authorities eventually put 21 people on trial and convicted all of them. Unfortunately, some of the people they convicted were people like the head of FinTRACA, who, in my opinion, was charged because he had assisted us in our investigations into this case and others. Luckily, he only had to pay a fine, the equivalent of about \$450, but other people got jail time. The Afghan vice president's brother and the Afghan president's brother were excluded from the prosecution even though they had significant involvement in the fraud.

FREEMAN: Can you describe what your best success was, and then on the flip side, what your most frustrating experience was?

MEYER: I would say our best success was two hawalas that we managed to dismantle. The first was the New Ansari Money Exchange. New Ansari was the largest hawala in Afghanistan, and the most powerful. It set the daily exchange rate for the U.S. dollar in Afghanistan. Not the central bank, not the government, not the market—New Ansari set the exchange rate. New Ansari was a global hawala that transformed itself into a corporation that was the sole distributor of Thuraya satellite telephones; it also controlled Afghan United Bank, an internet company, cellular telephone shops, construction companies, a fuel importation company, and a trading company located in Dubai. It was a global hawala with two branches in Dubai and locations in several Asian and European countries, as well as in California. The organization was born from the narcotics trade, was heavily involved in the laundering of drug proceeds, had links to the Taliban, and supported numerous corrupt government officials.

The New Ansari hawala really grew after 2001. That year, the Taliban stopped opium cultivation, and everybody—the United Nations, everybody—cheered the Taliban for taking action. But the backstory to that decision was that Mullah Omar met with his friend Haji Abdullah Barakzai Ansari, an opium broker with a small hawala business, in 2000 or 2001. According to several sources, Mullah Omar told Ansari to stockpile as much opium as he could because the Taliban

government was going to stop cultivation to increase the price of opium. So Ansari did that, and when the Taliban stopped opium cultivation and the opium price went up five times, they sold the stockpile and split the proceeds. Ansari then used that money to build the New Ansari Money Exchange. He had some younger guys—and by “younger guys,” I mean guys in their 30s and 40s—whom he then basically trained to manage and grow the business. They were the ones who took the profits from the hawala and invested in numerous businesses. This group had a long-term goal of relocating to the United States and even sent their families to Dubai and enrolled their kids in English-language schools. They planned to purchase U.S. businesses as a means to emigrate to the United States. In addition, they had started to infiltrate the U.S. financial system by having Afghan United Bank establish correspondent banking relationships with Deutsche Bank and Habib Bank of New York.

According to several sources, Mullah Omar told Ansari to stockpile as much opium as he could because the Taliban government was going to stop cultivation to increase the price of opium.

The younger managers expanded the business through political connections and corruption. They were major contributors to President Karzai’s election campaign and raised money for cabinet members to purchase their positions. They kept numerous government officials on retainer, too.

The way I often explained New Ansari’s operations to people was to use *The Godfather* movies as an analogy.⁸ The first generation was Vito Corleone, and the Afghan Vito Corleone was Abdullah Ansari. He created the empire and started making payments—bribes—to government officials. Then the story moved to Vito’s son Michael Corleone, who acted much like the younger New Ansari managers. They expanded the business and the system of bribes, purchasing the services of the National Directorate of Security, police, Ministry of Interior Affairs personnel, and numerous other government employees. Many officials were on retainer, while others were paid for episodic events. In one instance, the Ansari group even paid a large sum of money to a family after they convinced the patriarch to confess to a crime he did not commit in order to protect a valued New Ansari member—who did commit the crime—from incarceration.

The younger managers expanded the business through political connections and corruption.

These younger New Ansari managers were involved in everything. They were involved in extortion, in major drug trafficking, in money laundering. In addition, they were annually transporting the equivalent of \$2.5 billion in different currencies to Dubai through Kabul International Airport. Because of New Ansari’s political connections, it was impossible to take any real action against the organization in Afghanistan, so we focused on getting them designated as a criminal enterprise through the U.S. Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). This really hurt them because they had invested so heavily in all these other businesses that relied on U.S. contracts, and it kept them out of the U.S. financial system because Habib Bank of New York terminated their correspondent banking system, and many others ended any financial relationship with them. For example, they had a fuel importation business and were selling fuel to the U.S. military. Once New Ansari was on the sanctions list, all those businesses dried up. We disrupted their businesses, which eliminated their ability to launder drug money and support the Taliban.

Another Taliban financier we managed to get on the OFAC list was a hawala business based in the south called Haji Khairullah Haji Sattar, after its owners. This was a major mover of money for the Taliban around Afghanistan.

FREEMAN: What was your worst frustration?

We had a lot of really smart young people, a lot of whom were military analysts who never really got to think outside the box. We unleashed them.

When the Karzai government eradicated opium or tried to substitute crops, it often worked against the individual farmers who owed debt in opium, and possibly made them into Taliban supporters.

MEYER: Because I was there with DEA previously, I think it probably was the drug issue. Like the corruption issue, we frequently debated how we should deal with it. One thing that I loved about the Afghan Threat Finance Cell was that we had a lot of really smart young people, a lot of whom were military analysts who never really got to think outside the box. We unleashed them. Frank Caestino, my Treasury deputy, was really good at unleashing people's thinking. So these young analysts came up with innovative ideas that had not previously been considered. For example—I don't know that the military ever acted on this, but I think it was the right way to go—the Taliban were collecting taxes on opium in the south. They were going to *mirabs*, who were the local officials who managed the water supplies in the villages. The mirabs knew which farmers were growing opium, and could estimate the size of their operations by the amount of water they used. The Taliban would have the mirabs calculate the amount of tax owed to the Taliban by individual opium farmers, and then also use the mirabs to collect the tax, which was paid in opium.

I went to a lot of meetings about crop substitution and eradication, but the problem with that approach is in the way the opium system works in Afghanistan. The opium farmers are given credit by opium brokers at the beginning of the growing season. This debt can be repaid only with opium. These opium brokers act like the company stores in the old coal-mining towns in the United States, where miners always had debt so they could never get out. Until they got their wages, they were always being paid in goods, and they could never leave because they owed rent on the house and money for groceries. Well, that was what would happen with the opium farmers. The opium brokers would loan the farmers money at the beginning of the season, and the only way the farmers were permitted to pay it back was in opium. Let's say a farmer won the lottery or had some other financial windfall; he couldn't go and give the opium broker money for his debt. The debt had to be paid in opium. So when the Karzai government eradicated opium or tried to substitute crops, it often worked against the individual farmers who owed debt in opium, and possibly made them into Taliban supporters.

I remember one farmer I interviewed who told me that when the government came and eradicated his crop, he couldn't pay the opium broker, and so his father gave the farmer's four-year-old daughter to the opium broker, who was some 72-year-old man, to try and settle the claim. Anyway, these young ATFC analysts came up with the idea that the military should focus on the mirabs and their relationship with the Taliban. We should wait until the mirabs gathered the opium owed to the Taliban for taxes, and at that point, conduct military and/or law enforcement operations, because then the farmers would be out of the equation. I believe that was the innovative thinking we should have been using to deal with Taliban funding through the drug trade.

FREEMAN: What would you have needed to be able to do that? What resources or what authorities or... ?

MEYER: You would have to monitor, either through legal wiretaps or other means, the phones of the mirabs, or recruit the mirabs as informants. By doing that, you should also be able to identify the Taliban members involved in the tax collection. This way, you could intercept the Taliban when they came to pick up the stockpiled opium from the mirabs. The thing that made threat finance difficult in Afghanistan was that many people in the United States had this

image of a big Arab donor who was going to fly into the Kabul airport with a bag of money for the insurgents. Maybe that happened more with al Qaeda, but the local Taliban commanders were required to find their own funding sources. So these people used the funding sources that were available to them. In some areas it was kidnapping, and in other areas it was chromite or cedar smuggling. In other areas it was drug trafficking. The local commanders had to find their own funding, so they were constantly doing a variety of things to bring in cash, and frankly they didn't need a lot of money to operate.

Some young analysts—one was Treasury, one was a Navy lieutenant, and a third was a military contractor—did really detailed work, where they looked at the district-level expenses of Taliban commanders, with the understanding that these commanders had to raise their money locally. Prior to this, nobody else had done this district-level analysis. The analysts reviewed things like the troops in contact reports, the number of rounds fired, the types of IEDs used in the district, and other Taliban operational costs. The analysts would sit with the military experts on IEDs and have them explain the different components for each type of IED and each component's cost. Then they would look at the intelligence on what salaries the Taliban commanders were paying their soldiers, because there was always this argument—and I am assuming it was true—that the majority of Taliban soldiers were not ideologues but were there for financial reasons. Then these analysts explained to the military commanders that they didn't have to completely eradicate a local Taliban commander's funding stream. Instead, all they had to do was interdict enough of the funding so that the commander had to make a decision between paying and feeding his troops and launching attacks. I thought that was brilliant thinking, and that was the right way to go, but I am just not sure how many people embraced it.

FREEMAN: What sort of personal lessons did you learn? What is your takeaway from your time as the director of the Afghan Threat Finance Cell? What did it mean to you?

MEYER: I got to work with a lot of great people. I got a view of the U.S. government that somebody at my level normally wouldn't have had. I made several trips to the White House. I briefed (then-Secretary of State) Hillary Clinton in the same room where she met with heads of state, and numerous other high-ranking American and foreign officials. All the ATFC staff, at one time or another, briefed senior leaders like General David Petraeus, General Stanley McChrystal, and Ambassador Karl Eikenberry.⁹ We had a lot of interaction with the upper management of the war effort in both Afghanistan and the United States.

The biggest thing that stands out for me is that there was no plan when the United States arrived in Afghanistan. Similar to Iraq, I think that if we are going to go into these kinds of actions, we need to do a little bit more up-front work and understand what we are getting into. There are a lot of variables that aren't easily understood on the surface, but that come out later. For example, I interacted with a lot of Afghans who said that when the United States first went into Afghanistan, we had a small window of opportunity because not only were the Taliban in hiding, but the warlords also were afraid of us. But when they saw how we were plodding around and that they could do what they wanted, that fear went away. We lost the momentum. I am glad I stayed in Afghanistan for five years. I made many Afghan friends, but I am not sure I see a great future for the country, unfortunately.

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I don't think you can understand Afghanistan unless you understand Dubai.

If the Taliban start to really turn the war in their favor, then these elites have already feathered their nests for the escape and are going to leave the regular Afghan people to survive what comes.

AMINA KATOR-MUBAREZ: Is that because of the Afghan leadership? If there was a change in leadership, do you think it could make a difference?

MEYER: A lot of the people who should be the leaders have been and still are moving their resources out of the country. I don't think you can understand Afghanistan unless you understand Dubai. Afghanistan had a huge diaspora that ended up in Dubai. A lot of the economic decisions for Afghanistan are made in Dubai—they are not made in Afghanistan. A lot of the political decisions are made in Dubai, not in Afghanistan. These decisions are made among elite Afghan businessmen who have been based in Dubai since the Russian occupation. I think that if the Taliban start to really turn the war in their favor, then these elites have already feathered their nests for the escape and are going to leave the regular Afghan people to survive what comes.

We saw that a lot when we looked at the corruption. You have all these Afghan government officials who have houses in Dubai on places like the Palm Jumeirah, which is a group of manmade islands that were built to resemble a giant palm tree. Well, we know a lot of Afghan officials make only a few hundred dollars a month. Where did they get all that extra money? I met with some Emirati officials once, who told me that the former vice president of Afghanistan, Ahmad Zia Massoud, had brought \$53 million in cash through the airport in Dubai. He was a soldier most of his life, and then served for a couple of years as vice president. Where did he get that money? All that money is gone, and it is not being invested in Afghanistan. I hope it works out. I just think it is going to be a hard road for a long time. ❖

INTERVIEWEE

Kirk Meyer was a U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency officer for 23 years, and served in Afghanistan from 2006 to 2011.

INTERVIEWERS

Dr. Michael Freeman is a professor in the Defense Analysis department of the Naval Postgraduate School, and the director of the Global ECCO project.

Amina Kator-Mubarez is a CTAP coordinator and a research assistant with the Global ECCO project.

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NOTES

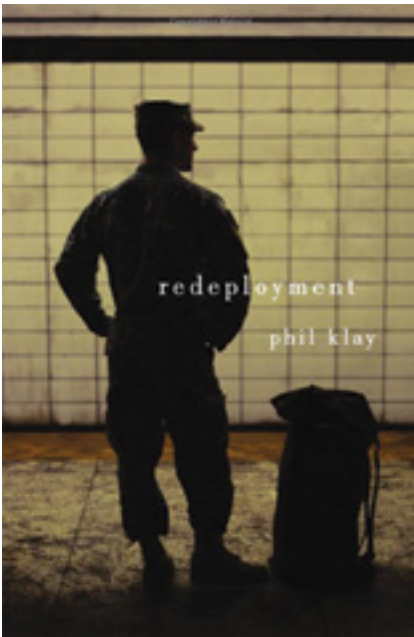
- 1 The Combating Terrorism Archive Project aims to collect and archive knowledge on strategy, operations, and tactics used by military and other security personnel from around the world in the twenty-first-century fight against global terrorism. Collectively, the individual interviews that CTAP conducts will create an oral history archive of knowledge and experience in counterterrorism for the benefit of the CT community now and in the future.
- 2 This interview was edited for length and clarity. Every effort was made to ensure that the meaning and intention of the participants were not altered in any way. The ideas and opinions of all participants are theirs alone and do not represent the official positions of the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, the U.S. Department of Defense, the U.S. government, or any other official entity.
- 3 “[Juan] Zarate served as deputy assistant to the president and deputy national security adviser for combating terrorism from 2005 to 2009 and was responsible for developing and implementing the U.S. government’s counterterrorism strategy and policies related to transnational security threats. He was the first ever assistant secretary of the treasury for terrorist financing and financial crimes, where he led domestic and international efforts to attack terrorist financing.” See Zarate’s extended vita at the Center for Strategic and International Studies website: <http://csis.org/expert/juan-carlos-zarate>
- 4 The Interagency Task Force is now part of USSOCOM. Both commands are stationed at McDill Air Base in Tampa, Florida.
- 5 A hawala is an informal worldwide money transfer system that is indigenous to many Muslim cultures.
- 6 A Ponzi scheme, also called a pyramid scheme, is a form of investment fraud in which investors are paid unusually good returns from the capital coming into the operation through newer investors, rather than from earned profits. The scheme requires a constant flow of new investors to maintain itself, so disruptions in financial markets can quickly cause it to collapse.
- 7 American investment manager Bernie Madoff is famous for running the most massive Ponzi scheme in U.S. history (see note 6). Once uncovered by the financial crisis of 2008, investigators estimated it to involve \$64.8 billion.
- 8 *The Godfather* is an iconic Hollywood film made in 1972 by Francis Ford Coppola, starring Marlon Brando as Sicilian Mafia boss Vito Corleone. Two sequels star Al Pacino as Michael Corleone, Vito’s son and successor as head of the crime family. For more, see the IMDb website: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0068646/>. The original film is ranked as the second greatest film in U.S. cinema history by the American Film Institute (see “100 Greatest American Films of All Time,” 10th anniversary edition, AFI.com, n.d.: <http://www.afi.com/100years/movies.aspx>).
- 9 General David Petraeus succeeded General Stanley McChrystal as commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan in 2010.

THE WRITTEN WORD

Redeployment

Ryan Stuart

Phil Klay
 New York: Penguin Press, 2014
 ISBN: 978-1-59420-499-9
 Hardcover: U.S. \$26.95
 291 pages



In any war story, but especially a true one, it's difficult to separate what happened from what seemed to happen. What seems to happen becomes its own happening and has to be told that way.

— Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*¹

People aren't supposed to look back. I'm certainly not going to do it any more. I've finished my war book now. ... This one is a failure, and had to be, since it was written by a pillar of salt.

— Kurt Vonnegut, introduction to *Slaughterhouse-Five*²

A lot of veterans are disinclined to tell war stories. They rightly say, "You wouldn't understand. You weren't there." Tim O'Brien, author of *The Things They Carried*, seems pretty convinced that you can't tell a true war story. Kurt Vonnegut was equally convinced: it took him years and many, many drafts to write *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and you can see his estimation of the book in the preceding quote. Yet they both told war stories (about Vietnam and World War II, respectively), as have thousands of others in history.

So why tell war stories? Why read them? And who has the right to hear them?

Phil Klay has taken a stab at this difficult subject in *Redeployment*. It's a lot easier to say what this book isn't rather than what it is: It's not a Marlboro-Man, swash-buckling, heroic tale of manly courage. It's neither a play-by-play nor the dissection of a battle. It's not a bitterly satiric takedown of war. It's not even *The Things They Carried*, which was a more earnest book than this one. This book is dry as a desert, but it has an emotional subtlety and range that is unusual in published war fiction. Klay does his best to tell all the truth, but he tells it very slant, which may be the only way to get at the reality of such unfathomable circumstances.

The short stories that Klay tells cover many types of people not generally found in a war book until now: the guy who spends his entire tour behind a desk in Baghdad's Green Zone; the mortuary man; the chaplain; the soldier who got out of the Army, went to college, and can't decide whether he misses Iraq or not. The perspectives and points of view vary, too, from men who've been on the business end of a rifle or the targets of IEDs, to others who were never in the military at all. Klay wrote about his book: "People sometimes talk about the civilian-military divide, but there are also radical differences in the experiences of different Marines in different jobs who were in different places in Iraq at different times. The veteran experience is not a unified experience."³ Except for the complete absence of women's viewpoints, *Redeployment* offers a kaleidoscopic illustration of the U.S. experience in Iraq within this specific slice of time, following the 2003 invasion.

In the title story, "Redeployment," a Marine ponders shooting dogs. Sent home from Iraq to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, all he can think about on the flight is (the unofficial) Operation Scooby, during which his unit shot a lot

of Iraqi dogs. He finds it difficult to reconcile his Iraq reality of danger and stress and intense alertness with his homecoming reality of air conditioning and shopping. What is more, his own dog, he discovers, has become covered with tumors since he left home.

Following this story of two realities, Klay takes us into Iraq. The piece called “FRAGO,” for example, is a second-by-second narrative of an operation to clear a building of suspected IED makers. “After Action Report” is a surreal tale in which one soldier takes responsibility for another’s kill. “Bodies” tells the story of a Marine who works in Mortuary Affairs and is trying desperately to come to grips with what the flesh means—his own, his ex-girlfriend’s, the bodies of the dead.

“OIF” is, I think, a story about words, and what flimsy vehicles they are for telling war stories. None of the flood of acronyms in this piece gets explained—if you don’t know what one means, you can’t understand the events. If you’re not in the military, every seventh or eighth or tenth word is fundamentally in a foreign language.

“Money as a Weapons System” is told from the point of view of a Foreign Service officer, not a soldier. This story reads like satire—*Catch-22*⁴ updated—but the reader gets a queasy feeling that the absurd events it relates (having to do with a water treatment plant, a women’s health clinic, and a senator’s push for baseball) might in fact have happened.

“In Vietnam They Had Whores” is a deeply disturbing rumination at the nexus of eros and thanatos. “Prayer in the Furnace” is about a chaplain trying very hard to do right, but ultimately unable even to do good, and his helplessness in a cyclone of suffering. “Psychological Operations” brings us a returned vet who is trying to get at the truth of his experience while talking with a fellow college student. Like the combat soldier in the title story who was unable to overcome his survival reactions in a stateside shopping mall, this speaker can’t stop manipulating his listener long enough to simply tell his truth.

“War Stories,” which centers on a disabled vet burned to disfigurement after an IED attack, is about trying to speak—and trying to listen. “Unless It’s a Sucking Chest Wound” describes a vet who has graduated from law school and is about to go out and make a lot of money, but who finds himself continuously returning to his memories of Iraq, unable to feel in his current life the sense of shared purpose he had there. The final story, “Ten Kliks South,” is a war story at a remove—an artilleryman’s first kill, which he is

unable to witness because it’s so far away. This story closes with a deeply moving homage to the fallen.

I think there must be a lot of truth in these stories because they are told with such raw clarity and a deep—what’s the word I’m looking for: ambivalence? frustration?—as if the author were scratching hard at the paper, trying to make the thing come out *right*. Klay takes no position on the moral rightness or wrongness of the war, only on the effects of the deeds done in the context of a war, which, I think, might be the only honest way to approach the experience. Klay said of writing the book: “Not trading in unexamined clichés turns out to be devilishly hard,” but I believe that he succeeded. Ultimately, the book is a deeply felt and beautifully written interpretation of a chaotic, fragmented, sometimes surreal, sometimes appalling, and very human war experience and its sequela.

So why tell war stories? Why read them? And who has the right to listen?

The latter two questions are easier to answer than the first. People read war stories for the same reason they read any story: to understand some aspect of human experience. Klay said:

“What we think about war says a lot about what we think about America, about American politics, about citizenship, about violence, and about masculinity. It says a lot about what we think about people in other countries and our responsibilities to them as human beings. It says a lot about what we think of death, and sacrifice, and patriotism, and cruelty. It says a lot about our limits as humans, our ability to endure and our ability to break. It says a lot about the stories we tell ourselves so we don’t have to examine what we think about war too closely.”⁵

Whether any given war, or any act within it, is “good” or “bad,” people will continue to start and fight wars, and end them, and send the soldiers home. Those of us who don’t participate can’t understand any of these aspects of the human tapestry if we don’t read the stories. And we can’t come to any meaningful moral conclusions about warfare if those who have experienced war don’t write about their experiences.

Again, why write war stories? Most veterans don’t do so out of some abstract duty to readers, or for setting records straight, or to record history. Serious writers write because

So why *not* write? What have you got to lose?

they are trying to *make sense of their own experience*. Writing is a way of getting one's arms around an experience—maybe to hold it close, or maybe to strangle it—in order to let it go. I think this is particularly true of people who write war stories: there is an urgent need to master the experience. As Klay put it: “What I wanted to say, what I felt the need to write, it was important for me to say it now.”⁶ It's certainly not the only way to come to terms with deep emotion, but for centuries, writing has been a very effective way of leashing the demons that are born from extreme experience.

So why *not* write? You—yes, I'm talking to you, reader: Why not put your experience on paper? What have you got to lose? It's only a little time, a little ink. Your work may be a small, private journal, or it may be a huge bestseller; that's up to the time you want to put into it and the gods of commerce. But you will, like *readers* of war stories, come to better understand this particularly fraught and difficult aspect of your own, very human experience. As Tim O'Brien said: “All you can do is tell it one more time, patiently, adding and subtracting, making up a few things to get at the real truth.”⁷ ❖

Resources

Veteran's Writing Project: <http://veteranswriting.org/>

Writers Guild Foundation's Veterans Writing Project: <https://www.wgfoundation.org/programs/military-veterans-writing-workshop/>

Veterans Writing Workshop: <http://www.veteranswritingworkshop.org/>

O-Dark-Thirty: <http://o-dark-thirty.org/>

ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Ryan Stuart is the layout and design director for *CTX* and one of Goodreads.com's Top 100 Reviewers.

NOTES

- 1 Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1990), as excerpted in “Tim O'Brien Tells a True War Story,” *Lapham's Quarterly* online, n.d.: <http://www.laphamsquarterly.org/voices-in-time/tim-obrien-tells-a-true-war-story.php>
- 2 Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five, or the Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1969).
- 3 Phil Klay, interview by The Short Form, n.d.: <http://www.theshortform.com/interview/phil-klay>
- 4 *Catch-22* is a classic anti-war novel set at a Mediterranean air base during World War II. The term “Catch-22” has entered the American lexicon as an ironic reference to an unsolvable logic conundrum. See Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961).
- 5 Klay, interview by The Short Form.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*.

PUBLICATION ANNOUNCEMENTS

Militant Groups in South Asia

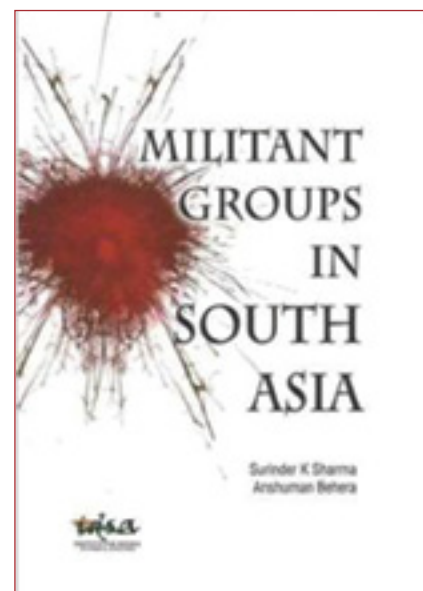
Surinder K. Sharma and Anshuman Behera

New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2014

ISBN: 978-8274-754-8 Hardcover

290 pp.

Excerpt from the Foreword: South Asia has been witnessing the proliferation of militant groups of all kinds for the last several decades. These militant groups defy national frontiers and often indulge in acts of violence, which have both regional and international ramifications. While some of these groups operate within the territorial limits of one particular country, many of them have international linkages and are transnational in character. They can be divided into different categories on the basis of their ideological orientation as well as their socio-political and economic objectives. This study, initiated by the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, aims at collating information about important militant groups operating in the region. The book updates information on several of these groups and also widens the scope of the study to cover important militant groups operating in the entire region. The authors gather detailed information on the groups' genesis, ideology, objectives, cadre strength, training, alliance, areas of operation, leadership, funding sources, weapons they use, links with other militant groups, and their current status.



Opposing Perspectives on the Drone Debate

Bradley Jay Strawser, ed.

Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, June 2014

Print ISBNs: 9781137432612 HB 9781137432629

Ebook ISBNs: 9781137432636 PDF 9781137432629 EPUB

220 pp.

Does the lethal use of drones pose any new or difficult moral problems? Or is the controversy over these weapons merely a distraction from deeper questions regarding the justice of war and the United States's bellicose foreign policy? *Opposing Perspectives on the Drone Debate* pulls no punches in answering these questions as five scholars square off in a lively debate over the ethics of drones and their contentious use in a point-counterpoint debate. The contributing authors are some of the foremost thinkers in international affairs today, spanning the disciplines of philosophy, sociology, political science, and law. They debate topics ranging from the United States's contested policy of so-called "targeted killing" in Pakistan's tribal regions to fears over the damaging effects such weaponry has on our democratic institutions, to the more abstract moral questions raised by killing via remote control, such as the duty to capture over kill.



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Strategic Culture Partners or Competitors? The Evolution of the Department of Defense/Central Intelligence Agency Relationship since Desert Storm and Its Prospects for the Future

David P. Oakley

Issue Date: May 2014

To understand the historical and contemporary context of the CIA/DoD relationship, MAJ David Oakley drew on secondary sources for his initial academic research, which he supplemented with personal interviews, government documents, and written first-person accounts. His interviewees include two former chairmen of the United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and previous and current DoD and CIA leaders. Although the CIA and DoD relationship expanded significantly following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, its foundation was laid 10 years earlier in the aftermath of Operation Desert Storm and the twilight glow of the Cold War. During this period, congressional policy decisions and organizational changes within both institutions increased the communication and liaison partnerships between the CIA and DoD, which enabled greater interoperability after 1992. These changes established conditions that have promoted the blossoming of the relationship since 2001.

Persistent Engagement in Colombia

Mark Moyer, Hector Pagan, and Wil R. Griego

Issue Date: June 2014

In this monograph, Dr. Mark Moyer, Brigadier General (retired) Hector Pagan, and Lieutenant Colonel (retired) Wil R. Griego analyze U.S. Special Operations Forces' (SOF) assistance to Colombia in the context of decades of counterinsurgency and counternarcotics operations. While the case of Colombia is often cited as an exemplar of global SOF foreign engagement, the details of the engagement and the reasons for its success have not previously been addressed in a scholarly publication. This study represents the first comprehensive analysis of the persistent SOF engagement in Colombia. It draws on the collective wisdom of numerous U.S. and Colombian government personnel, and the authors' own decades of experience in Colombia and other countries where the United States has undertaken prolonged partnership. This monograph provides insights that should be valuable to any special operators involved in capacity-building endeavors. It also demonstrates once more the value of SOF in advancing U.S. security objectives through a global SOF network.

U.S. Military Deployments to Africa: Lessons from the Hunt for Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army

James J.F. Forest

Issue Date: July 2014

Dr. James Forest's monograph explores lessons and observations from the recent U.S. SOF effort to help Ugandan and other African regional forces locate and apprehend Joseph Kony and members of the violent insurgent group, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Dr. Forest examines the context behind the decision to deploy U.S. military advisors to the region and the significant public pressure placed on the Barack Obama administration to help stop the LRA's depredations. The author identifies four themes as important for the success or failure of future U.S. military deployments to sub-Saharan Africa: (1) preparations and logistics, (2) perceptions and expectations management, (3) partnerships and relationship management, and (4) policy and politics. He argues that in the case of Uganda it is critical that any successes derived from collaborative operations must be owned by the Ugandans. Dr. Forest's concluding chapter offers some thoughts about further research and implications for policy and SOF education. This report makes a meaningful contribution to the effectiveness of future U.S. SOF teams deploying to sub-Saharan Africa.

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