

The Need for Smart Power in Afghanistan: How Al Qaeda & the Taliban are “Outsmarting” the U.S.

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Abstract

Nearly ten years have ensued since the Bush administration declared a Global War on Terror spearheaded by Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. In 2010, the nine year military campaign in the Af/Pak region has yet to capture bin Laden or achieve the objectives of degrading the insurgent capacity of the Taliban. Fighting an asymmetrical enemy on their terrain has proven to be costly and at times fruitless in light of the alliance between Taliban and al Qaeda leaders. Under the Obama administration, a new strategy based on the successes in Iraq sent an additional 30,000 troops as part of COIN efforts to diminish the growing Taliban control over Afghanistan territory. It remains uncertain whether the surge in Afghanistan will produce results able to bring about an enduring stability. Yet, there is a startling deficiency in smart power directed at the core elements of al Qaeda ideology and the center of gravity for the Taliban / al Qaeda alliance. The inclusion of precision tactical operations based in smart power directed at the locus of the alliance will shift the 20th century conventional approach that has brought the war to a near stalemate. Success depends on introducing smart power in to the battlefield of ideology.

Key words: Afghanistan, al Qaeda, Taliban, Counterterrorism, Counterinsurgency, U.S. National Security

Introduction

The waves of violence that have repeatedly marred the state of Afghanistan during the past 32 years have also revealed the assiduity of non-state actors to play a part in the future of global events. Terrorist groups led by the central leadership of the Taliban and Al Qaeda (AQ) have proven to be an adaptable and enduring threat for both U.S. forces and overall global security. Yet, in order to fight against this type of an enemy, careful study of the operational practices of its forces is an imperative. Failure to rationally assess the intrinsic elements of the now aligned terrorist groups in Afghanistan has consequences for years to come. This paper will address the need for U.S. foreign policy makers and military strategists to adopt a more realistic, smarter strategy incorporated with pinpoint precision for the Afghanistan/ Pakistan (AfPak)¹ region.

Since October 2, 2001, a month after the terrorist attacks in New York, aircraft bombing raids of training bases and strongholds of AQ and the Taliban across Afghanistan began. What

¹ The neologism AfPak in this paper refers to the Afghanistan and Pakistan states/territories/region. Credit is customarily given to Richard Holbrooke for this conflation to refer to the two states as a strategic unit.

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was conceived as a, "swift campaign with a single objective: defeat the Taliban and destroy Al Qaeda by capturing or killing bin Laden and other key leaders" (Kerry, 2009) has been drawn out into a nine year war of unclear objectives. At this time in 2010, the U.S. engagement in Afghanistan is at a crossroads.

In the United States, the War in Afghanistan is being fought as media pundits oversimplify the causes and conditions of the military engagement on the furthest eastern reaches of the Middle East. Just as unproductive has been the polarized pandering of congressional representatives who play to the media with sound-bites that ultimately reduce the complexity of fighting in Afghanistan to a war of singular outcomes: leave or stay. Trend lines for a slow and lengthy U.S. economic recovery exacerbate the rhetoric as figures of 1 million dollars per year, per soldier, highlight the expense of fighting in Afghanistan. The political discussion for the Afghanistan war is compounded by the growing number of war dead and the calls to end operations in the AfPak region. Richard Haas voiced his concerns on July 18, 2010 in the much heralded Newsweek article, "We're Not Winning. It's Not Worth It". Haas addressed the futility of the present course recommending a shift away from conventional military strategy, "reorienting U.S. Afghan policy toward decentralization" providing greater support for local leaders and establishing a new approach to the Taliban. The war the United States is now fighting in Afghanistan is not succeeding and is not worth waging in this way (Haas, 2010). Furthermore, the reoccurring news story of corruption within the Karzai government aggravates necessary policy review. Stories of misuse of funds siphoned away from building projects or social aid programs erode confidence in policy objectives.

The remark made by CIA Director Leon Panetta in an interview with ABC reporter Jake Tapper who asked about AQ in Afghanistan introduced additional confusion, "I think the estimate on the number of Al Qaeda is actually relatively small. At most, we're looking at 50 to 100, maybe less. It's in that vicinity," (Tapper, 2010). Pundits seized on the quote as an opportunity to argue that the U.S. no longer needs to be in Afghanistan revealing further evidence of a war lacking clearly articulated cause. Pushing AQ in greater numbers in to the Pakistani safe havens is not a resolution to the threat in Afghanistan. But nine long years and two administrations later, the narrative of the initial strategy of going in to Afghanistan to capture those responsible for the attacks on 9/11 has been lost in the numbers of war dead and the absence of sustainable progress.

Messages from President Obama also contribute to the uncertainty of the mission for sending U.S. military men and women to Afghanistan. On the one hand, the approval for a surge of 30,000 troops as part of a counterinsurgency strategy was consistent with the stated objectives to "to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future" (Haas, 2010). Many experts had considered the Afghan effort to under resourced and unable to achieve tactical objectives. However, U.S. forces are also scheduled to start coming home in the summer of 2011. Additionally, the president said, "We must reverse the Taliban's momentum and deny it the ability to overthrow the government. And we must strengthen the capacity of Afghanistan's security forces and government so that they can take lead responsibility for Afghanistan's future" (Haas, 2010). The mission for sending military forces in to Afghanistan has not been clearly put forth, feeding the media criticism. In the absence of a coherent policy articulated for public consumption, the war in Afghanistan has been increasingly characterized as an expensive miscalculation; expensive in terms of financial output, in terms of international prestige, and without question, in human casualties.

What does this indicate? The calculus in Afghanistan has been wrong and therefore the narrative for the American public has been reflective of the uncertainty within foreign policy maker circles as well as in the minds of military strategists. While the recent surge is said to engage a new COIN campaign, it remains to be seen as to whether or not U.S. military forces can be as adaptable as the enemy. What is missing is a more coherent use of smart power exerted with a sophisticated series of attacks and counterinsurgency measures designed to unsettle the enemy from its center of gravity-*its ideology*.

Afghanistan

War is always messy, an endeavor of unintended and unforeseen consequences. In Afghanistan the U.S. has taken on the dual tasks of unseating the power of the obstreperous Taliban along with the overwhelming task of state building within a nationalist population configured around a tribal system that belies central authority. The practicality of state building in the manner that the U.S. has been approaching this goal has confounded experts and strategists alike. The approach has been based on assumptions that do not translate to the Afghan culture or its historical heritage. Jones in a recent issue of *Foreign Affairs* wrote, "This is harmful, because state building and counterinsurgency tend to be context-specific; history, culture and social structure matter" (Jones, 2010). The geographic terrain of Afghanistan alone presents a daunting challenge as a historical minefield of failure when foreign powers invaded. The human terrain is no less a minefield, in particular when cultural intelligence is lacking due to the intricacy of tribal relations, affiliations, and the historical character of the state. These realities make for an unfamiliar environment to the Western mind. Again, Jones succinctly states the problem in *It Takes the Villages*, "Many Western countries are characterized by strong state institutions, in which power emanates from a central authority" Top-down reconstruction strategies may have been appropriate for [some] countries "[b]ut they do not work as well in countries such as Afghanistan, where power is diffuse" (Jones, 2010). In the case of the U.S. it entered the minefield of Afghanistan supported with two flawed mindsets. The first was conditioned by the shock of 9/11 which fueled what became the Bush Doctrine as the basis for the operational strategy of the enabling campaign; which was at that time a strategy to set the conditions for a terminal campaign in the Global War on Terror (GWOT). The initial objectives in Afghanistan were to defeat the Taliban and destroy Al Qaeda by capturing or killing bin Laden and other key leaders (Kerry, 2009). Central Command executed Operation Enduring Freedom through a "unique combination of airpower, Central Intelligence Agency and special operations forces teams and indigenous allies" (Kerry, 2009) designed to keep American casualties to a minimum. The flaw was in an over confidence in the effectiveness of sheer power and relying on a strategy that was over weighted in conventional tactics. Under U.S. General Tommy Franks, firepower was unleashed to decimate the terrorist training camps, "Tomahawk cruise missiles and the 15,000-pound daisy cutter bombs, coupled with AC-130 gunships, made the "terrorist universities" evaporate" (Rotberg, 2006). Franks stated that nine lines of operation were being used to achieve the theater strategic objectives dictated to him by Bush (Clement, 2003). While the destructive force of firepower was effective in the short term, it did not achieve its objectives of capturing or killing bin Laden, nor did it sufficiently degrade either the Taliban or AQ. The terrorist locus of operation was merely shifted in to Pakistani zones where bin Laden was welcomed and given protection. U.S. intelligence agencies were aware of the relationship that bin Laden had forged with the Taliban in the war against the Soviets. Evidence of this

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relationship was provided after bin Laden was forced out of Sudan in 1996 during the Clinton years. He returned to Afghanistan where an existing network of Taliban tribes provided him with haven. It was also known that Mullah Omar welcomed bin Laden and began to ally his forces with the goals of AQ. The initial alliance has since evolved into a marriage of mutual benefit between the parochial Taliban and the puritanical AQ, (Byman, 2005). However, the protection AQ found in Af/Pak is reflective of the Afghan culture and provides support to my assertion that in the post-9/11 world, that there should have been a sharper tactical element to calculate the significance of brother-ties between militant groups. The relationship between AQ leadership and Taliban leadership, forged during the Afghan/Soviet War, is well documented and as such U.S. operations planners underestimated the effect of providing these brothers-in-arms a new enemy in their midst. Fighting against the U.S. gave impetus to meld differing religious positions and goals, resulting in a more powerful AQ throughout South Asia. From its haven in the Af/Pak region, AQ began to extend its reach, [t]his transnational campaign envisaged as a long struggle that emphasizes violent attacks carried out by Al Qaeda's own agents and various regional affiliates and local mavericks, (O'Neil, 2005). For the militant groups in the SEA countries, the financial lures of bin Laden certainly added to his charisma as a pan-jihadist leader.

Out of the haven in Afghanistan, AQ spent time training their Asian counterparts in the early 90s. A few thousand Muslims from the entire Asian region were trained in Afghanistan or Al Qaeda-associate camps (Gunaratna, 2002). The Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia were locations for AQ camps. In the 80s the Muslims expected Islam to be restored in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and were supported by AQ, Osama's protégé Khattab and others fought in the ensuing Tajik civil war, and after the conflict ended in a negotiated settlement AQ's front companies began trading with Tajikistan (Gunaratna, 2002). Cross border operations were conducted by Talibani and AQ fighters who were then able to retreat across the border into Pakistan. It is reported that it was the Haqqani network that allowed safe passage from Tora Bora for UBL in the months following 9/11. This bears analysis in the overall strategic pattern of the current 2010 war in Afghanistan because the presence of bin Laden and Zawahiri altered the mindset of the Taliban.

Rotberg in, "Building a New Afghanistan" spoke to how the deepening relationship with AQ changed the Taliban from a nationalist group of fighters into a more extremist group,

"The Taliban provided security and a sanctuary for al Qaeda where they trained thousands of recruits, established a state-of-the-art network, and planned various operations, including September 11. Al Qaeda's support came in several forms: they provided much needed financial resources, trained Taliban fighters in their conflict with the opposition in the north, and mobilized the well-trained 055 Brigade (a group of 500 to 1,000 Arab fighters) for key battles. Most importantly, al Qaeda ideologically influenced the Taliban leadership, which in many ways resulted in their extreme vision, (Rotberg, 2006).

Operation Enduring Freedom, officially begun on October 7, 2001 as the enabling campaign in the GWOT assumed that the disruption wrought by the bombing of the rugged Afghan territories would be so intimidating so as to unweave bin Laden from his hosts. However satisfying such an outcome might have been for the psyche of the United States, it did not fully meet the criteria from the Department of the Army Field Manual 3-0, *Operations to*

to accomplish strategic objectives within theaters or areas of operations (AO) that focused on the link between the tactical and strategic levels of war of design, organization, integration, and conduct of theater strategies, campaigns, major operations, and battles (Clement, 2003). The presumption of how the Afghans in power would react to the conventional warfare conducted by the U.S. evidenced a fatal lack of understanding in the Afghan culture and the strength of the ties between Islamist fighters. The insurgency had maintained a stronghold even as the campaign ensued, demonstrating what Jones referred to as the *Pashtunwali* or the Pashtun code of behavior where the expectations are for obligations of honor, hospitality, revenge, and providing sanctuary (Jones, 2010). The long-term consequences of this strategic miscalculation are presented in Chairman John Kerry's remarks in the Report to Members of the Committee on Foreign Relations in the United States Senate on November 29, 2009 some eight years after the GWOT began. Senator Kerry stated the following,

This report by the Committee majority staff is part of our continuing examination of the conflict in Afghanistan. When we went to war less than a month after the attacks of September 11, the objective was to destroy Al Qaeda and kill or capture its leader, Osama bin Laden, and other senior figures in the terrorist group and the Taliban, which had hosted them. Today, more than eight years later, we find ourselves fighting an increasingly lethal insurgency in Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan that is led by many of those same extremists. Our inability to finish the job in late 2001 has contributed to a conflict today that endangers not just our troops and those of our allies, but the stability of a volatile and vital region (Kerry, 2009)

Since the 2001 beginning of U.S. military operations in Afghanistan, attempts at COIN operations have proven to be insufficient to the task of dislodging the grip of the Taliban. Given the success in Iraq, versions of *clear-hold-build* have been inserted in to a region long after the period of time when an insurgency is beginning to take hold. *Clear-Hold-Build* is an effective operational tactic approach given that the threat can be neutralized. Pakistan does not believe the U.S. strategy will be successful and is navigating the turbulence so as to protect its future interests in the region. The flawed lens through which Westernized politicians and strategists interpret the present state of the war has led to a sense of inertia. David Kilcullen in, *Decoding the New Taliban* wrote that the *segmentary kinship system* (Kilcullen, 2009) is the structure of the state of Afghanistan, yet our efforts continue to focus on establishing a central government authority. COIN in the theatre of operations in Afghanistan where a field of insurgent forces skilled in asymmetric warfare enforce an ideology of a strict interpretation of Shari'a law and glorify martyrdom in their fighters is not effective. COIN must include the elders and tribal leaders. When the U.S courts the Karzai government, mistrusted by the elders, this is counterproductive, not counterinsurgency. COIN against an Islamist jihad based enemy within on its own terrain cannot be structured through a central authority but instead only through the painstaking effort of weaving together a strong coalition of tribal leaders. Henry Crumpton, former Ambassador at Large, Coordinator for Counterterrorism, while speaking at the Aspen Institute Security Forum specified the conditions of COIN as three key strategies, *first to nullify enemy leadership; second to deny safe haven, and third to address local conditions that the enemy often exploits* (Crumpton, 2010). In the past nine years, the strategy against AQ and the Taliban in Afghanistan has not implemented a deep and comprehensive utilization of these

fundamental elements of COIN. The existential threat of the terrorists on their home turf remained/s a dynamic force as networks engage the U.S. forces on all fronts. The ideological basis for the continuing strength of the movement was also supported by the Haqqani network (Haqqani Network, 2007-2010) and the Tariqa Taliban, which further widened the scope of the field of operations.

The second flaw in the U.S. strategy against the threat emanating out of Afghanistan was to undervalue the long trajectory of an ideologically based enemy. Without pinpointed attacks to undermine the motivational capability of the enemy to regenerate, the conventional tactics also served to drive the combined forces of the Taliban and AQ to re-strategize and adapt to conditions. Failing to understand the enemy is a miscalculation with enormous consequences. Sheer force cannot break a tribal code nor defeat an ideology.

Al Qaeda

In his book *Inside Al Qaeda*, Rohan Gunaratna addressed the conditions that made the Af/Pak region welcoming to Al Qaeda, although there is no evidence that the Pakistani intelligence establishment directly supported Al Qaeda, they did help its associate Pakistani and Kashmiri groups for the specific purpose of using them as proxy military forces to undermine Indian control of Kashmir, (Gunaratna, 2002). Al Qaeda was not the terrorist group to be used for short-term political gain and as such, exerted its own power through financial rewards and a highly potent Islamic ideology. The lure of bin Laden and the Al Qaeda rhetoric against the West meant that interacting with him and his lieutenants resulted in falling under the influence of the AQ network. It was only a matter of time therefore before the Taliban began to succumb to Al Qaeda's broader strategic plan (Gunaratna, 2002). It was exciting for the Taliban to hear OBL and the AQ rhetoric of defeating the West and the evil colonizers. AQ was granted safe haven in Afghanistan and now in Pakistan.

Al Qaeda under the shared leadership of bin Laden and al-Zawahiri have continued a marketing campaign to solicit their constituency in financial and political support of their ideology. Through the use of the internet and taped speeches aired on Arab television, the intentions of AQ have been clearly articulated. While religion has been the justification for AQ, it operates as a standard terrorist group. In Kepel's book, *Al Qaeda in its Own Words* there is section on the rules of engagement for martyrdom operations. It is too lengthy for this paper, but it begins with the following:

1. Be sure to inflict maximum casualties on the enemy, kill the greatest number of people, for this is the language understood by the West, no matter how much time and effort such operations take;
2. Concentrate on martyrdom operations as the most successful way of inflicting damage on the opponents and the least costly to the mujhedeen in terms of casualties [and least costly in terms of financial resources];
3. Choose our targets and weapons to reach the vulnerable spots of the enemy and thus dissuade it from its brutal ways, arrogance, and violations of every sacred custom and restore it to its normal place. (Kepel, *Al Qaeda In Its Own Words*, 2008).

Al Qaeda merely practices *Terrorism* 101, but with a shield of religious language and justification. Hoffman devoted an entire chapter to the subject of suicide terrorism tactics where he wrote that it provides, "unique tactical advantages compared to those of more conventional terrorist operations" [it] moreover is guaranteed to provide media coverage given its irresistible combination of savagery and bloodshed (Hoffman, 2006). The use of martyrs within AQ has not wavered since the attacks on 9/11 however, the operational strategies have adapted. AQ has proven to be adept at studying the tactics used by U.S. and coalition forces. In a report titled, "al-Qaeda's Advice for Mujahideen in Iraq: Lessons Learned in Afghanistan" the author Saif al-Adel, a former Egyptian soldier who accepted the ideology of AQ and joined the Afghan jihad provides analysis of U.S. operational tactics for the purposes of altering the battle field and increasing the number of U.S. war casualties (Venzke, 2003). This type of interaction between terrorist nodes complies with the presentation in Sageman's evaluation of how networks are changing the dynamics in the 21st century. AQ is a decentralized enemy which will not be subject to conventional warfare. Sageman notes, "Osama bin Laden's most brilliant stroke may well have been to allow the global Salafi jihad network to evolve spontaneously and naturally, and not interfere too much with its evolution, except to guide it through incentives because of his control of resources" (Sageman, 2004). As he retreated to Afghanistan, the global Salafi jihadists were able to expand through this natural process without hindrance from the war in Afghanistan. The attacks on 9/11 were a provocation to expand the movement as well as establish AQ's leadership over and above all other Muslim authorities in the campaign against Western interference. The U.S. reacted with a military response that did not fully incorporate the realities of fighting this enemy on its own terrain.

Brian Jenkins in 2002 provided a prescient view of how AQ would adapt to the pressures the U.S. exerted around the world and in particular in Afghanistan, "[h]owever, it is possible that al Qaeda will adapt to the more difficult post-September 11 operational environment by morphing into an even looser network, devolving more initiative and resources to local operatives" (Jenkins, 2002). AQ is a sophisticated adversary. It crafted the numerous conflicts in various parts of the Middle East and South Asian regions into a single struggle, a struggle against a single enemy- the West led by the United States. This casting of purposefulness exhorted the fighters with a galvanizing ideology. In raising the restoration of the Islamic Caliphate as the vision for Muslim fighters, a unified sense of war occurred. State boundaries are thus disregarded in the shadow of the vision of an empire. AQ's strike against the powerful U.S. on 9/11 established bin Laden as a figure of mythical proportions. And the failure to capture bin Laden has provided him with the mystique of a religious leader able to evade the powerful U.S. military. Strategists in the U.S. must retreat from a tactical approach weighted on hard power and re-examine the strategy of the enemy through the lens of smart power. The tools of smart power require careful study of the vulnerabilities within AQ's operational strategy. Smart power must ask and answer, "How does one take down a myth?" Thus far, the U.S. has been reacting and fighting AQ on its terms, defensively. New tactics suitable for a more sophisticated asymmetric war must be incorporated into the overall strategy for military force, and with expediency. Patrick Porter discussed the realities of this new asymmetric war against AQ,

"Today's terrorists, with their violent jihadi extremism, far-flung networks, unlimited aims and deadly weapons, are not our parents' terrorists. Containment may have been appropriate against visible, territorially defined and predictable enemies. But what good

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is it against stateless nowhere men inspired by apocalyptic religion who inflict megadeath without a return address? (Porter, 2009).

But for all of its ability to remain stateless, a terrorist group needs a sanctuary and material assistance. This is the vulnerability of AQ or any other terrorist group. A miscalculation on the part of the U.S. has been to allow bin Laden and AQ to remain a figure of mystique in the region. Implementation of smart power would include a concerted effort to attack the inconsistencies in religious ideology, along with the hypocrisy of hiding out while fighters on the ground are killed, and additionally with the challenge to require adherence to only AQ interpretation of Islam and the Koran. Such an effort should include a disinformation campaign using the internet and intelligence photos of AQ and Taliban leaders in compromising situations. Bin Laden has no authority to issue a Fatwa, what are his religious credentials? The effort needs to be unrelenting as it attacks at the level of ideology, which is where the center of gravity for this terrorist movement exists. As Porter strongly states, “[a]l-Qaeda may be distinctive in its scope, structure and methods, but it should not be endowed with too much mystique” (Porter, 2009).

The student and the base

An interesting relationship has evolved between the Taliban (Pashto for student) and al Qaeda (Arabic for the base) since the mid to late 1990s. Sageman in his examination of terror networks noted that there exists a very real social component to the life of a terrorist. In the case of the collaboration between the Taliban and AQ a shared enemy provided the foundational element for the alliance. However, the experiences of transnational warfare, an idealized and strict interpretation of the Koran, and a vision to transform existing authoritarian structures would have made for a strong bond. Sageman studied the phenomenon of terrorist identity, “[t]his intense collective identification furthers both commitment to the clique and integrity and cohesion of the jihad. This cohesion also leads to group conformity in terms of behavior, attitudes, and appearance” (Sageman, 2004). He reports signs of this conformity in the growing of beards and common dress in Afghanistan and Pakistan regardless of origin or affiliation. He further notes that any lack of conformity is typically met with punitive actions.

The Taliban that represents the militarized force throughout Afghanistan has a proper name, *Pushto Da Afghanistano da Talibano Islami Tahrik*, or the Islamic Movement of Taliban and according to Maley is, “one of the strangest to be witnessed in the modern world, perhaps because it was so determinedly anti-modernist” (Maley, 2002). However it has become increasingly amenable to the use of modern technology when it suits their purposes. The Taliban’s use of media is further evidence of AQ’s influence. When they were in power during the late 90s the Taliban had banned music, television, and even photography. There are accounts of individuals who were beaten and jailed for no less than taking pictures or possessing a camera, (Rotberg, 2006). Today the Taliban are known to utilize both television and videos to propagandize their cause. A Taliban video entitled “War of the Oppressed,” makes reference to the various places where Muslims are suffering and under duress, “Look at our Muslim brothers that are suffering in Iraq, Palestine, Kashmir, and Chechnya from the hands of the infidels,” (Rotberg, 2006). The Taliban has embraced modern technology, when it suits their purposes. Again, smart power would enlist a propaganda campaign using just such a contradiction in the role of the Taliban to maintain leadership over a Muslim population. Questions should be posed

as to the legitimacy of a non-Afghan terrorist group to influence the affairs of Pushtuns who have a heritage and a culture that deserves respect. An implement of smart power would be to increasingly highlight the specter of AQ's interference in Afghanistan.

Although the origins of the Taliban are multi-faceted, it is without question that officials throughout the Pakistani apparatus are culpable. The depths of Pakistani support for the Taliban between the years of 1994- 2001 are reflective of both a fear of Afghanistan total collapse and its need to maintain territorial options should war break out with its archenemy, India. As such, the existence of a pro-Pakistan faction to counter, even eliminate other power holders in Afghanistan was viewed as advantageous, "[f]or some Pakistani officials, assisting insurgents in Afghanistan was a way to balance against Indian influence in Afghanistan, maximize Pakistan's influence in the border regions, and prevent the Pashtuns on both sides of the border from developing a unified front and pushing for integration into Afghanistan" (Jones, 2008). The extent of this policy was part of the landscape of foreign affairs between Pakistan and Afghanistan in the late 1990s so much so that then Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto stated in a BBC interview on October 4, 1996, "We have striven for an Afghanistan that should be free of factions" (Maley, 2002). The Taliban was given the tacit support of the government to operate as an unofficial militant group with cross border procedures. The alliance of Taliban fighters did not give consideration to state borders, but rather identified with their *cause de guerre*. The increase in Afghan members along with a growing power base in Afghanistan was what Maley referred to as "creeping invasion" which "occurs when a middle power uses force against the territorial integrity or political independence of another state, but covertly and through surrogates" (Maley, 2002). The nature of Pakistan's military backing for the Taliban has also been well documented through its [Pakistan's] bankrolling operations, "diplomatic support as the Taliban's virtual emissaries abroad", arranging training, the planning and directing of offensives, shipments of ammunition and fuel (Maley, 2002) and according to a July 2001 report by Human Rights Watch, "on several occasions apparently directly providing combat support" (Maley, 2002). On October 12, 1999, General Pervez Musharraf claimed during a BBC interview, "our national security compulsion as far as Afghanistan is concerned is that the Pakhtoons of Afghanistan have to be on Pakistan's side" (Maley, 2002) thus giving official support for a transnational force to be a legitimate state interest.

Given its origins as a fighting force to secure the interests of Pakistan in the region, it is therefore an interesting development that the Taliban's alliance with AQ has strengthened, at times over and against the Pakistani wishes. Of course this may be in part due to the change in government leadership after the assassination of Bhutto, but it is also due to the pressures from the U.S. in addition to the economic aid that has persuaded President Zardari to cooperate with U.S. forces. Another significant alteration in the war in Afghanistan since its inception during Operation Enduring Freedom has been the shift in the Taliban forces to attack Pakistan interests. The Taliban traditionally have been focused on the matters within Afghanistan. However, under the tutelage of bin Laden and AQ, they have acquired an additional concept; that of a global jihad. Whereas prior to their interaction with AQ global concerns were not on their radar. The interaction between the Talibani leaders and AQ central resulted in a more sophisticated organization. Rotberg again,

"The Taliban's reemergence as a more sophisticated group rests on several factors: the reestablishment of their logistics and support from the outside, the return of foreign fighters, and financial support through the lucrative narcotics

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trade. The Taliban operates as a number of scattered, decentralized terrorist groups or cells that number between five and twenty-five men, each regularly crossing the border from their sanctuaries to attack their targets. The new outlook has allowed the Taliban to operate in a mobile manner and at times even capture small districts, illustrating their organizational abilities, (Rotberg, 2006).

During Operation Freedom, the collaboration between AQ and the Taliban took a different operational form in AQ sending two of its most able commanders to the Afghanistan southeastern and southwestern provinces. AQ was in Afghanistan to win. Khalid Habib and Abd al Hadi were instrumental in equipping the Taliban with the tactics that would defeat the U.S. campaign, "The Taliban have divided up into groups" and in each unit there is a member of al Qaeda from Pakistan or an Arab, who teaches them tactics developed in Iraq (Rotberg, 2006). AQ evolved its procedures in the battleground of Iraq and understood many of the tactics of the U.S. forces. This experience has proven to be invaluable to the success of the Taliban. There has even been conjecture that Taliban fighters went to Iraq to learn first-hand how to attack the western force with a more effective strategy. The Afghan message is now a copy of the AQ message, "The Taliban are preaching a message similar to that of Osama bin Laden: Islam is under attack and it is the duty of all Muslims to defend the lands of Islam" (Rotberg, 2006). Rotberg wrote, "[a]s a result of these factors, the Taliban and al Qaeda initiated an offensive posture by attacking U.S. bases and ambushing American convoys and patrols as well as Afghan national forces that were working with the Coalition. The transfer of knowledge from Iraq and resources and training from the outside provided new levels of sophistication to their operation and planning capability" (Rotberg, 2006). A further transfer of knowledge from AQ to the Taliban has been the use of the suicide bomber which was effectively unknown in Afghanistan prior to 9/11. For most Afghans, this method of warfare is anathema to the Islamic faith and this is another point that should be widely exploited through the strategy of smart power. Seeds of doubt and dissension should be planted through billboards in Qandahar and throughout the roads in Afghanistan, with the question, "*Who brought this to our land?*" accompanied with the image of a woman strapped to an explosive device. Conventional warfare cannot shift the mindset of the people who are able to coalesce however meagerly- or powerfully in their own interests. The use of smart power must be as adaptable and crafty as the enemy. Where the enemy is insidious, there must be the implementation of counter measures to destabilize the tactics of death and violence. According to Antel, "The Taliban strategy is to resist as long as it takes to re-conquer Afghanistan", (Antel, 2010). However, the Taliban and al Qaeda are joined in a marriage of convenience and mutual benefit and a result has been the widening view of its role in terms of the pan-Islamist war against the West. Al-Zawahiri developed his treatise against any formation of a state that was not under the rule of Islam and inculcated the Taliban with this thinking, "Zawahiri drew up his treatise against Muslim leaders of forsaking Islam's fundamental principles by abandoning jihad against tyranny (*al taghut*) and allowing Muslims states to be drawn in to the "democratic political game, implicitly meaning that they recognized the regime on the one hand and popular sovereignty on the other" (Kepel, 2008). This ideology has undermined the Taliban's interest in protecting their territory in Afghanistan unless it is under Shari'a law. However, another use of smart power would be to attempt to drive a wedge between the Taliban and AQ by insinuating that through adopting AQ's ideology, the Taliban are no longer legitimate Pashtun Taliban. Their ways have betrayed their heritage and AQ is a foreigner that has overstayed its welcome. Wedges crafted out of smart

power to create distrust and tension between the two largest terrorist groups in the AF/Pak region will compliment the full range of U.S. power and perhaps purchase some time to reassess current strategic operations. For those in direct responsibility for the success of COIN operations ÷changing up÷ the strategy will force the enemy to adapt to a new initiative. COIN operations must exploit the opportunity to confront the enemy with innovative tactics targeted at removing the home-field advantage afforded to the Taliban /AQ alliance.

The use of smart power must also be turned directly at the U.S., the source of billions of dollars that are funding the insurgents. This allowance of obfuscation of COIN financial support has made the war in Afghanistan a highly profitable endeavor for many who operate within the wide latitude that the U.S. has permitted. The consequence has been one of enabling support for the corrupt environment. This is a laughable policy and one that makes a mockery of U.S. efforts,

÷Everyone knows this is going on,÷ said one U.S. Embassy official, speaking privately. It is almost impossible to determine how much the insurgents are spending, making it difficult to pinpoint the sources of the funds. Mullah Abdul Salaam Zaef, former Taliban minister to Pakistan, was perhaps more than a bit disingenuous when he told GlobalPost that the militants were operating mostly on air. ÷The Taliban does not have many expenses,÷ he said, smiling slightly. ÷They are barefoot and hungry, with no roof over their heads and a stone for their pillow.÷ As for weapons, he just shrugged. ÷Afghanistan is full of guns,÷ he said. ÷We have enough guns for years,÷ (MacKenzie, 2009).

Not only is money supporting the insurgents, but is also flowing out of the country in rivers of U.S. dollars. This practice is undermining COIN efforts and has made the war highly profitable for individuals who recognized the absence of controls and accountability for aid money to the Afghan government. The Wall Street Journal has reported, ÷Afghan and U.S. officials estimate that as much as \$3.65 billion a year÷ equal to a tenth of Afghanistan's gross domestic product÷ is being loaded onto commercial flights in Kabul and flown out of the country, (Abi-Habib, 2010).

The financial waste in Afghanistan is rampant. Buildings and complexes are being constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, yet the structures have no practical use for the Afghans, ÷A federal watchdog criticized U.S. agencies on Thursday for squandering taxpayer money on facilities in Afghanistan that are too complex and costly for the Afghan government to maintain÷ [and] complained in a report that the buildings constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the Afghan national police represent an "outrageous waste of taxpayer money." He said the problems are representative of a ÷regular negative pattern÷ in overly complex construction in the country (Richter, 2010). The buildings are completely out of touch with Afghan society and technology.

Whether or not the smart power efforts are able to contribute to the overall efforts in the war in Afghanistan, it is important to recognize the imperative to start thinking about operations in new ways. Whereas the conventional center of gravity in U.S. military ops directs the overall strategy, in this war the center of gravity is spread out and the fulcrum is based in an ideology. This is a new type of warfare and the U.S. has run out of time for adapting strategies that will eventuate in a defeat of the enemy. An ideologically based war through the perspective of AQ has allowed bin Laden and associates to co-opt much of the Taliban leadership in such a way as

to seduce them in to the war against the West. It is instructive for the U.S. commanders to recognize that the leadership, the brain- team of AQ in Afghanistan has the ability to incur short-term set- backs as a learning exercise only to integrate the knowledge for the greater goal of defeating the enemy in their midst, the U.S. enemy. AQ utilizes every opportunity to study U.S. operational responses in the furtherance of its long-term goals.

Conclusion

As AQ and the Taliban interacted and deepened their alliance, a trans-terrorist identity was formed to the extent that the soldiers identified with the battle as one battle. Just as the Afghan and Pakistan Taliban fighters considered their battle to be one jihad, so the alliance between the Afghan-based AQ fighters and the Taliban resulted in a synchronicity of objectives. The leaders may have retained a more clear sense of the operational strategies conducted to benefit the interests of the one or the other; however the sense is that of a shared battle. The assertion that AQ central maintains a form of manipulative power over the Taliban, much in the same style of a very subtle client-proxy relationship, is highly probable. The franchise theory for AQ remains logical and therefore, reshaping the political relationship through a disruption is a critical piece. The use of smart power will instruct COIN efforts to exploit the subtle client-proxy relationship so as to foster dissension and disruption.

When the GWOT brought the far-enemy to the Afghanistan theatre, this solidified the prestige and rhetoric of Zawahiri and bin Laden. It is intrinsic to the Afghan culture that the more powerful entity is able to draw its enemy to its territory. U.S. operations in Afghanistan served to intensify the bond between AQ and the Taliban, but there are differences that bear exploitation.

The U.S. must exercise smart power in order to win hearts and minds. In order to be successful in the war in Afghanistan, a more rational assessment of AQ in Afghanistan must be incorporated in to the overall strategy. Smart power is about gaining the tactical advantage. Daniel Byman in his review, *Al-Qaeda as an Adversary: Do We Understand Our Enemy?* writes,

The bleak outlook, however, ignores several positive signs. Infighting among Islamists remains rampant, a perennial problem that al-Qaeda has managed to reduce but not eliminate. Islamist regimes such as the Taliban's Afghanistan have been overthrown, while revolutionary regimes in Sudan and Iran are now far less fervent. Nor have violent movements gained mass support in the Muslim world, as their bloody tactics alienate more Muslims than they attract, (Byman, 2003).

As previously stated, direct attacks against the enemy center of gravity is the quickest route to victory. What the U.S. must come to contention with is that the center of gravity for AQ is held primarily in its ideology. It has a radiating force and therefore must be limited in its expansion. This can be done with tactics that attack the brand of AQ through the use of smart power. It can be done through driving wedges where ever possible between the allied Taliban groups and the Afghan AQ. It can be done through discrediting AQ's interpretation of Islam, the Qur'an, and Shari'a law. Captured prisoners may be used in a public disinformation campaign to dislodge the religious power of the Taliban from the Qur'an. While this approach is

unconventional for U.S. and Western military strategists, it is nonetheless necessary. Such measures demonstrate the locus of strategic direct attack.

Conventional Army doctrine maintains a battleground interpretation of where the center of gravity is located. However, in the event that the center of gravity is too well defended or unassailable due to its complex nature, an indirect operational approach is used. Therefore operations must be geared to orient tactical measures at the element ideology. Failing to make this shift is precisely why the U.S. is losing the campaign against radical Islamists. I suspect many strategists see this as interfering with religion but this is where AQ is dictating the battlefield. As I stated earlier, AQ practices *Terrorism 101*, through the guise of religion. It is akin to the story of the Wizard of Oz; the frightening and all powerful Oz must be revealed.

Gilles Kepel published his seminal book, *Revenge of God* in the early 90s; a decade before the attacks on 9/11. Kepel presented ample evidence of the growing extremist movement within the Islamic religion that was sprouting in the Middle East and parts of Europe and labeled it at the time as the *Islamic break*. He described the practices of this ideology as a radical withdrawal,

ways of breaking with one's society. These ways are very precisely codified, they govern the process of withdrawal by the faithful from the godless environment down to the smallest detail. Their ultimate goal is to re-Islamize society as a whole, but in the meantime they allow networks of communities to be formed which already live according to the *shar'ia* in its strictest interpretation, (Kepel, 1994).

What the COIN and CT strategists must grasp is that the current conditions are ideal to the overall religious ideology of this aberrant form of Islam. Oftentimes, COIN and CT operations play right in to the game plan of AQ. The U.S. must demonstrate superiority against its ideology or the remainder of the hydra will follow in suit. It has been bin Laden's inspiration that has led to the world-wide growth of the Islamist movement. His prestige as the man who attacked the U.S. on its own territory has granted him a cachet for time to come. The U.S. must get on the ball and fight the war with a smarter strategy, as an equal accompaniment to the use of hard and soft power. Waiting for another attack to learn the realities of this type of threat will only lead to more deeply entrenched enemy lines throughout the world. For U.S. strategists, it is not the interpretation of winning through improved conventional operations and tactics directed at the ground forces of the Taliban or al Qaeda that will shift the momentum. But instead, it is the recognition that new tactics based in smart power directed at addressing the false use of a religion will shift the momentum. The center of gravity remains the radical use of religion for the purposes of terrorism. It is imperative that the conflict in Afghanistan swing in the direction of the U.S. or the Islamist threat will widen through the growing number of freelancers as we have witnessed in Yemen, where yet another self-declared cleric and authority in Shari'a law has risen to create havoc in the world.

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