

5.4 The Hybrid Threat Capability of the Afghan Taliban Movement, 2001-2014

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When the Afghan Taliban leaders withdrew into Pakistan in late 2001, they had no intention of surrendering the struggle against the U.S.-led international coalition which had forced them out of Afghanistan. Yet, with a substantial international military presence firmly entrenched in Afghanistan, there was no way that the Taliban could regain power by conventional military means. Even with Pakistani military support, the Afghan Taliban movement could not have repeated the 1994 invasion of Afghanistan in the face of such military opposition.

For this reason, soon after its forced withdrawal into Pakistan, the Afghan Taliban began to employ the means and methods of hybrid warfare and hybrid threats, in this work defined as “*a threat to a state or an alliance that emanates from the capability and intention of an actor to use its potential in a focused manner, that is coordinated in time as well as multi-dimensional (political, economic, military, social, media, etc.) in order to enforce its interests.*”⁶⁶⁶ This was a result of strategy debates within the Taliban top leadership, likely with the support of political agents and military advisors from the Pakistani Inter-services Intelligence agency (ISI). Pakistan had long considered influence in Afghanistan a vital component of national security policy and was reluctant to surrender its influence. The policy is generally regarded as having originated from two perceived strategic needs: (1) to allow Pakistan the use of Afghanistan’s territory for strategic depth in a conventional war against India; and (2) to ensure friendly Pashtun hegemony in Afghanistan so that ethnic Pashtuns on either side of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border would drop any

⁶⁶⁶ As defined by the National Defence Academy (Landesverteidigungsakademie), Vienna: “Eine hybride Bedrohung ist die Gefährdung eines Staates oder Staatenbündnisses durch das Vermögen und die Absicht eines Akteurs, sein Potential zielgerichtet, mehrdimensional (politisch, wirtschaftlich, militärisch, gesellschaftlich, medial etc.) und in einem zeitlich abgestimmten Zusammenhang zur Durchsetzung seiner Interessen einzusetzen.”

plans to unite in a single Pashtun nation, and thereby compromise Pakistani territorial integrity.⁶⁶⁷ Pakistani specialists were certainly dispatched into Afghanistan when the Taliban movement aimed to establish a new front, or when combat conditions were particularly difficult. It is likely but not conclusively proven that Pakistan modelled its support to the Taliban on that provided to favoured Afghan insurgent leaders within the mujahidin front in the 1979-1989 Soviet war in Afghanistan.⁶⁶⁸ Even so, there is little doubt that it was the Afghan Taliban leaders, not their Pakistani advisors, who formulated policy, including hybrid warfare and hybrid threats.

The hybrid threat capability developed by the Afghan Taliban (here defined as the Afghan Taliban movement with affiliates, excluding allied but independent international terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida and foreign terrorist groups such as the Pakistani Taliban) included various tactics and strategies to be employed at home and abroad. From 2002 onwards, the Afghan Taliban movement developed a considerable capability for hybrid threat projection. Being at war, in Afghanistan the Taliban movement, unsurprisingly, engaged in hybrid warfare. Abroad, the movement utilized its capacity for hybrid threats. For this reason, the domestic threat in Afghanistan deriving from the Taliban and the international threat of the movement were quite different in character.

While the Afghan Taliban movement had no expressed policy on the concept of hybrid warfare or hybrid threats as such, the movement was obviously aware of the means and potential of the concept. So were, for instance, the entire first two sections of the Taliban *Code of Conduct for the Mujahidin of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan* primarily focused on the effect that the means of intimidation would have to compel the population into joining the Taliban, and how ordinary people and collaborators should then be

⁶⁶⁷ See, e.g. Fredholm, Michael: Afghanistan and Central Asian Security. Asian Cultures and Modernity Research Report 1, Stockholm University March 2002, p. 16.

⁶⁶⁸ Giustozzi, Antonio: Military Adaptation by the Taliban 2002-2011. In: Farrell, Theo/Osinga, Frans and Russell, James (eds.): Military Adaptation in Afghanistan. Stanford 2013, p. 242ff, on p. 246, 256 and 259.

treated.⁶⁶⁹ In addition, the *Code of Conduct* emphasized that all who worked for the Taliban Islamic Emirate must strive to force those who supported the infidels to acknowledge and surrender to the Taliban.⁶⁷⁰ It was clear from the *Code* that this encompassed threats and propaganda as well as fighting. The *Code* stressed the need to win the hearts and minds of the population. Article 78 translates as “The mujahidin are duty-bound to show good character and Islamic behaviour to the nation. They should win the hearts of Muslims at large.”⁶⁷¹ The Taliban *Code* mirrored the counterinsurgency strategies adopted by Western countries in these respects, in their emphasis on winning the hearts and minds of the contested population.⁶⁷² In this regard, there was no great difference between Western and Taliban views on warfare. Nor was there such a difference in the view on new tactics and technologies. The Taliban movement, in similarity to other military organizations, displayed a learning curve, in which new methods, tactics, and technologies were adopted to stay abreast of developments.⁶⁷³

In fact, the hybrid threat capability of the Afghan Taliban movement soon grew to encompass several distinct types of powers, in both domestic and international dimensions. Many of these powers were exercised from Af-

⁶⁶⁹ Sections 1 and 2, Code of Conduct for the Mujahidin of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2nd edn of 29 May 2010 (Taliban Voice of Jihad Online in Pashto, 09.08.2010). The second edition included 14 sections and 85 articles. The first edition, which used very similar language, was published in the first half of 2009 and included 13 sections and 67 articles. The first edition in turn replaced the *Book of Rules for the Mujahidin*, first published in the holy month of Ramadan 2006.

⁶⁷⁰ Article 77, Code of Conduct for the Mujahidin of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2nd edn of 29 May 2010.

⁶⁷¹ Article 78, Code of Conduct for the Mujahidin of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, 2nd edn of 29 May 2010. This article was also in the 2009 edition. However, it was not in the original 2006 Book of Rules.

⁶⁷² See, e.g. the emphasis on statements such as “The decisive terrain is the human terrain” and “The people are the center of gravity”. In: Petraeus, David H.: Counterinsurgency Guidance. 01.08.2010, COMISAF/CDR USFOR-A.

⁶⁷³ Giustozzi, Antonio: Military Adaptation by the Taliban 2002-2011. In: Farrell, Theo/Osinga, Frans and Russell, James (eds.): *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*. Stanford 2013, p. 242ff, passim. The learning curve was also evident in the aforementioned updated and improved editions of the *Book of Rules* and *Code of Conduct*.

ghanistan, but particularly those with an international dimension more often geographically originated in Pakistan, where the Taliban leadership enjoyed safe havens. The full hybrid warfare and hybrid threat capability of the Taliban is summarized in Table 8.

Domestic Threat						
Type of Threat	Target	Means and Method	Purpose	Geographic Origin	Effect	Defensive Actors
Military Power	ISAF/ ANSF	Guerrilla attacks, IEDs	Defeat or intimidate enemy	Afghanistan/ Pakistan	High	Armed forces, police, intelligence
Terror Power	ISAF/ ANSF	E.g. suicide bombers	Intimidate enemy	Afghanistan/ Pakistan	High	Armed forces, police, intelligence
Terror Power	Population	E.g. killings, mutilations	Intimidate population	Afghanistan/ Pakistan	High	Armed forces, police, intelligence
Media Power	Population	E.g. night letters, proclamations, videos	Propaganda	Afghanistan/ Pakistan	High	Armed forces, police, intelligence
Organized Crime Power	ISAF/ ANSF	Support to bandit gangs	Cause disruption	Afghanistan/ Pakistan	Medium	Armed forces, police, intelligence

International Threat						
Type of Threat	Target	Means and Method	Purpose	Geo-graphic Origin	Effect	Defensive Actors
Diplomatic Power	ISAF member states	Negotiations	Negotiate withdrawal	Pakistan	Medium	Foreign Ministry, International organizations
Diplomatic Power	Worldwide Muslim community	Negotiations	Appear as responsible party	Pakistan	Medium	Foreign Ministry, International organizations
Media Power	ISAF member states, worldwide Muslim community	<i>Afghanistan In Fight</i> , Internet, Twitter	Propaganda	Pakistan	Low/medium	Media houses, government institutions, think tanks, NGOs
Terror Power	ISAF soldiers' family members	Threats by telephone or SMS	Intimidate individual to resign	Afghanistan, ISAF member state	Low/medium	Security service, Intelligence service, police
Terror Power	Attacks	Not used	Intimidate enemy to withdraw	Pakistan	None	Security service, Intelligence service, police

Table 8: Afghan Taliban Movement Hybrid Threat
Michael Fredholm

5.4.1 Background

The Taliban Movement in the 1990s

To assess the Afghan Taliban movement's capability for hybrid warfare and hybrid threats, it helps to first explain the origins of the movement. The Afghan Taliban movement emerged as a military force in 1994, when it was created, in all essentials, by and for Pakistani interests even though few, if any, Taliban leaders subsequently were much concerned about following Pakistani orders.⁶⁷⁴ The movement's leaders at the time regarded themselves as the world's perhaps only true Islamic government, on the lines of the righteous caliphate of the early years of Islam.⁶⁷⁵ The Taliban government accordingly styled itself the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.⁶⁷⁶

The Taliban were reinforced by large numbers of Pakistanis, religious volunteers as well as regular Pakistani military units. Indeed, the very first Taliban incursion into Afghanistan in 1994 was reportedly supported by Pakistani army artillery fire and motor transportation from the Pakistani side of the border.⁶⁷⁷ The volunteers, who were first reported by the Pakistani press in mid-June 1997,⁶⁷⁸ were initially mostly Pashtuns of Afghan or Pakistani origin but from 1999, Pakistani Punjabis arrived in increasing numbers and eventually formed the majority of the Pakistani volunteers.⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷⁴ Rashid, Ahmed: *Taliban. Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia*. London 2000, p. 26ff and 125; Maley, William (ed.): *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban*. New York 1998, p. 71 and 82.

⁶⁷⁵ Gohari, M. J.: *The Taliban. Ascent to Power*. Oxford 1999, p. 118.

⁶⁷⁶ Taliban web sites: <www.taleban.com>; <www.afghan-ie.com> (both now defunct).

⁶⁷⁷ Maley, William (ed.): *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban*. New York 1998, p. 45f and 49f.

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 12 and 25.

⁶⁷⁹ Jane's Information Group: *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment: Afghanistan*. 30.08.2000; Rashid, Ahmed: *The Taliban: Exporting Extremism*. In: *Foreign Affairs* November/December 1999, p. 22ff, in particular on 100; Davis, Anthony: *Struggle for Recognition*. In: *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 04.10.2000, p. 21; Davis, Anthony: *Foreign Fighters Step Up Activity in Afghan Civil War*. In: *Jane's Intelligence Review* 13: 8 (August 2001), p. 14ff.

The Pakistani military played a considerable role in the military success of the Taliban. Senior Pakistani intelligence and army officers were involved in strategic planning. Regular Pakistani soldiers served as units in combat roles, or were detached from their units for the provision of special skills such as those of tank drivers and aircraft pilots, in technical and rear support, maintenance, and administrative functions. Pakistani aircraft assisted with troop rotations for Taliban forces during combat operations in late 2000. Pakistani military officers from the ISI as well as commandos from Pakistan's Special Services Group (SSG, a special forces regiment based near Peshawar) also appeared to take considerable responsibility for the planning and execution of major operations. This was shown by the impressive use of mobility, speed, logistics support, as well as efficient contemporary command, control, communications, and intelligence procedures displayed by the Taliban, on a level hitherto never seen among Afghan troops and certainly not to be expected from such a comparatively new military formation, even considering the fact that the Taliban also recruited numerous officers and men of the pre-1992 Afghan army, many from the hard-line, Pashtun nationalist Khalq ("Masses" or "People") wing of the Communist Party.⁶⁸⁰ Pakistan-based Western diplomats knew that the ISI was instrumental in forming and supporting the Afghan Taliban movement.⁶⁸¹ However, following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, this was seldom mentioned so as not to embarrass Pakistan and cause further tensions in an already dangerous domestic political environment.

⁶⁸⁰ Davis, Anthony: *How the Taliban Became a Military Force*. In: Maley, William (ed.): *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban*. New York 1998, in particular on 68ff; Saikal, Amin: *The Rabbani Government. 1992-1996*; In: Maley, William (ed.): *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban*. New York 1998, p. 29ff, on 39; Jane's Information Group: *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment: Afghanistan*, 30.08.2000; Davis, Anthony: *Struggle for Recognition*. In: *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 04.10.2000, p. 21; Davis, Anthony: *Foreign Fighters Step Up Activity in Afghan Civil War*. In: *Jane's Intelligence Review* 13: 8 (August 2001), p. 14ff; Rashid, Ahmed: *The Taliban: Exporting Extremism*. In: *Foreign Affairs* November/December 1999, p. 49; Rashid, Ahmed: *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*. New Haven 2002, p. 174; Human Rights Watch (HRW): *Fueling Afghanistan's War*. HRW Press Backgrounder, 2001.

⁶⁸¹ Maley, William (ed.): *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban*. New York 1998, p. 45f, 49 and 91.

Weapons being abundant in Afghanistan, the Taliban did not really have a supply problem with regard to personal weapons. Fuel, heavy weapons, and ammunition were another matter. The Taliban depended on Pakistan for delivery of ammunition, particularly for tanks and artillery, some small arms, pick-up trucks, and petroleum (both motor and aviation fuel), oil, and lubricants. They also received financial payments. A significant share of the Taliban procurement of arms, munitions, and spare parts was handled by Pakistani private companies, often run by retired military officers. They bought considerable quantities from Chinese manufacturers through dealers in Hong Kong and Dubai (United Arab Emirates). The supplies were usually shipped in sealed containers to the Pakistani port of Karachi, whence they were trucked to Afghanistan without normal customs inspection, since this was not required by the two countries' trade agreement, the Afghan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA).⁶⁸² Some were probably paid for through financial assistance to the Taliban from private or state supporters in the Arabian Peninsula through the use of Islamic charities such as the Al-Rashid Trust, which has since been accused of smuggling weapons and supplies, disguised as humanitarian aid, to the Taliban.⁶⁸³ The Taliban were funded partly from contributions from supporters abroad, typically on the Arabian Peninsula, partly from taxes, in particular deriving from narcotics production in Afghanistan.⁶⁸⁴ It was not unknown for Taliban leaders to

⁶⁸² Support from Pakistan: Human Rights Watch (HRW): Fueling Afghanistan's War. HRW Press Backgrounder, 2001; Jane's Information Group: Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment: Afghanistan, 28.05.1999; 30.08.2000; 17.10.2000; Rashid, Ahmed: The Taliban: Exporting Extremism. In: Foreign Affairs November/December 1999, p. 44f, 72 and 183f; Rashid, Ahmed: Heart of Darkness. In: Far Eastern Economic Review, 05.08.1999, p.8ff; Magnus, Ralph H./Naby, Eden: Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx, and Mujahid. Boulder, Colorado 1998, p. 190; Maley, William (ed.): Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban. New York 1998, p. 69.

⁶⁸³ The New York Times (USA), 25.09.2001.

⁶⁸⁴ Rashid, Ahmed: The Taliban: Exporting Extremism. In: Foreign Affairs November/December 1999, p. 35, 120 and 123f; Rashid, Ahmed: Heart of Darkness. In: Far Eastern Economic Review, 05.08.1999, p. 8ff. The Taliban in mid-2000 banned the cultivation of opium poppy. Some Western drug law enforcement officials claimed that this was merely a public-relations exercise, and that drugs were instead stockpiled in order to push up the price. Because of the 2001 downfall of the Taliban, we may never know their ultimate intentions. The Taliban certainly made substantial profits from the

maintain foreign bank accounts. For instance, Taliban supreme leader Mullah Muhammad Omar had accounts in the Laskari Bank in Islamabad and the National Westminster Bank in Britain. Both were allegedly opened for him by the ISI.⁶⁸⁵ Many Pakistanis too profited from business connections with the Taliban. Taliban leaders soon developed relations with a number of Pakistani businessmen close to Asif Ali Zardari, the husband of Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan's prime minister 1993-1996, who in turn were given highly lucrative permits for fuel deliveries from Pakistan to the Taliban. Pakistan also assisted in the development of necessary infrastructure in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. Pakistan Telecom, for example, set up a microwave telephone network in Kandahar. This became part of the Pakistani telephone grid. Kandahar received the same prefix (081) as that for Quetta, so Kandahar could be called from Pakistan as a local call.⁶⁸⁶

In the early years of the movement, the Taliban received considerable material and financial support also from Saudi Arabia. By then, every major Taliban offensive seemed to be preceded by a visit from Prince Turki ibn Faisal al-Saud, head of the Saudi General Intelligence Agency (*al-Istakbbarah al-Amah*; or simply *Istakbbarat*), and his staff. Earlier, Prince Turki also

narcotics trade *before* they outlawed it. See, for instance, Far Eastern Economic Review (Hongkong), 28.12.2001. They also reportedly sold large quantities of the stockpiled drugs after the 11.09.2001 terrorist attacks on the United States in order to finance the expected war. Jacquard, Roland: Les archives secrètes d'Al-Qaida. Révélations sur les héritiers de Ben Laden. Paris 2002, p. 62 n.4. According to Vladimir Fenopetov, Chief, Europe and West/Central Asia, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the Taliban ban of opium production, which came into force in 2001, was merely a ruse to (1) make full use of an existing overproduction, and (2) increase the price of opium. Trafficking out of Afghanistan, according to United Nations statistics, in fact remained constant. Vladimir Fenopetov, "Eurasia's Narcotics Situation", conference on 'New' Security Threats in Eurasia: Implications for the Euro-Atlantic Space. Central Asia-Caucasus Institute/Silk Road Studies Program, Stockholm, 20.05.2005.

⁶⁸⁵ Jacquard, Roland: Les archives secrètes d'Al-Qaida. Révélations sur les héritiers de Ben Laden. Paris 2002, p. 24.

⁶⁸⁶ Rashid, Ahmed: Pakistan and the Taliban. In: Maley, William (ed.): Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban. New York 1998, p. 72ff, on 84f.

played a major role in organizing the mujahidin front against the Soviets during the 1979-1989 war.⁶⁸⁷

The Taliban military chain of command was vague and ill-defined at the time. The top decision-making body was the Rahbari Shura (Leadership Council, often referred to as the Supreme Shura) in Kandahar, headed by Mullah Omar. There were also other, lower shuras that reported to the Kandahar Leadership Council, such as the Kabul Shura and the Military Shura or Military Commission. The Kabul Shura was fundamentally a cabinet of acting ministers in Kabul. They primarily dealt with day-to-day problems and local military and political activities, since all important decisions were taken in Kandahar. The Military Commission, another loose body of senior Taliban officials, was technically in authority of military affairs. However, Mullah Omar remained head of the Taliban armed forces, and the Military Commission accordingly seemed to limit itself to planning strategy and in some cases the implementation of tactical decisions. It had no strategic decision-making powers, and all decisions on military strategy, appointments of key commanders, and the allocation of funds were taken by Mullah Omar. Under Mullah Omar, there was a chief of the general staff and chiefs of staff for the army and air force, supposedly in command of ground operations and air operations, respectively.⁶⁸⁸ Military operations were supposed to be directed by the minister of defence or the military chief of staff. However, it seems that ground operations remained in the hands of various local task force commanders, several of whom were also

⁶⁸⁷ On 19.09.1998, the uncompromising Taliban leader Mullah Omar insulted Prince Turki and the Saudi royal family. Saudi Arabia then ceased its support for the Taliban, although the diplomatic recognition pushed through by Pakistan in May 1997 was not withdrawn. Perhaps significantly, from October 1998 the Taliban, who previously had generally been able to seize the initiative in any military offensive, began to lose ground to a Northern Alliance offensive that managed to maintain its momentum until the summer of 1999. Rashid, Ahmed: *The Taliban: Exporting Extremism*. In: *Foreign Affairs* November/December 1999, p. 48, 72, 131, 138f, 201f, 227ff and 264 n.16.

⁶⁸⁸ Rashid, Ahmed: *The Taliban: Exporting Extremism*. In: *Foreign Affairs* November/December 1999, p. 95ff and 220f.

members of the Taliban government.⁶⁸⁹ The Taliban ran an intelligence service, the *Istakhbarat* (named after, and no doubt at first assisted by, Saudi intelligence).⁶⁹⁰

Due to its foreign support, the early Taliban movement operated more as a conventional although semi-irregular military force than as an actor in hybrid warfare. For all its harsh policies, the Taliban movement never engaged in terrorist activities against neighbouring states.⁶⁹¹ However, at times during its offensives, the movement did indulge in what can only be called terrorist activities aimed at its Afghan enemies. Examples include the torture, castration, and killing of former President Sayyid Muhammad Najibullah in 1996, followed by the public display of his corpse, and the massacres of an estimated six to eight thousand civilians in Mazar-e Sharif, Maimana, and Shiberghan in 1998. These acts of terrorism were ordered by the Taliban leadership, and can be interpreted as an active strategy of intimidation directed against the Afghan population.⁶⁹²

The Taliban forces varied widely in training and experience. Some had considerable military experience, and many men had received military training in Pakistan, around Kabul, or in other quiet areas of Afghanistan. Others, however, especially some of the recent recruits from Pakistan, had received virtually no training and were frequently trucked straight to the front to take part in combat operations.⁶⁹³ Most Taliban soldiers received regular salaries. Among those who did were the professional soldiers from the former communist armed forces, serving in the capacity of gunners, tank drivers, mechanics, and aircraft pilots. Although the majority of the

⁶⁸⁹ Jane's Information Group: Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment: Afghanistan, 30.08.2000.

⁶⁹⁰ Burke, Jason: Lies, Payoffs, Traps Are Allies' Weapons. Observer (UK), as included in Japan Times, 10.11.2001.

⁶⁹¹ Afghanistan was not on the United States list of states sponsoring terrorism, since the United States did not recognize the Taliban government.

⁶⁹² Rashid, Ahmed: The Taliban: Exporting Extremism. In: Foreign Affairs November/December 1999, p. 49f and 73f.

⁶⁹³ Jane's Information Group: Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment: Afghanistan, 30.08.2000.

professionals were Pashtuns, they were seldom as religiously motivated as other Taliban soldiers, particularly the volunteers from Pakistan.⁶⁹⁴

This description of the first years of the Afghan Taliban movement shows that far from being a tribal army, the early Taliban leaders and in particular their Pakistani supporters were often reasonably sophisticated fighting men, aware of the practicalities of both conventional and irregular warfare. While their military capabilities in the 1990s should not be exaggerated, the Taliban understanding of tactics and strategy was not much inferior to that of their neighbours, something which is easily forgotten in light of the speed in which their state collapsed in the face of the Afghan Northern Alliance campaign on the ground supported by American-led air support in late 2001.⁶⁹⁵

The Post-2001 Taliban Movement

With the invasion of U.S.-led forces in October 2001, the Taliban movement retreated into Pakistan. Following the withdrawal, it took some time before the Taliban movement fully reorganized and reconstituted itself as a military force. Due to the large and resilient support system the Taliban had acquired during its rule prior to 2001, the Taliban remained the largest threat to stability in Afghanistan.⁶⁹⁶ This was facilitated by the fact that until 2005, the Taliban were not under serious military pressure.⁶⁹⁷ In Pakistan, the Taliban movement continued to receive substantial support from Pakistani sources.⁶⁹⁸

⁶⁹⁴ Rashid, Ahmed: *The Taliban: Exporting Extremism*. In: *Foreign Affairs* November/December 1999, p. 100.

⁶⁹⁵ Hammer, Carl: *Tide of Terror. America, Islamic Extremism, and the War on Terror*. Boulder, Colorado 2003, p. 223ff.

⁶⁹⁶ National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC): *Afghan Taliban*. NCTC web site, <www.nctc.gov>, 2013.

⁶⁹⁷ Giustozzi, Antonio: *Military Adaptation by the Taliban 2002-2011*. In: Farrell, Theo/Osinga, Frans and Russell, James (eds.): *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*. Stanford 2013, p. 244.

⁶⁹⁸ See, e.g. Fredholm, Michael: *The Need for New Policies in Afghanistan: A European's Perspective*. *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies* 15: 1-2 (2011), p. 54ff, on 67. In

From the viewpoint of the international coalition, the conflict in Afghanistan can be summarized as having consisted of four phases. In 2001-2005, the international forces followed the Light Footprint approach, which resulted in modest and insufficient foreign military and financial aid to the government of Afghanistan. The U.S.-led coalition was from 2003 onwards also distracted by the Iraq War. In the years 2005-2009, a Taliban resurgence took place, largely as a result of the Light Footprint of previous years and the existence of Taliban sanctuaries in Pakistan. By then, foreign aid was increasingly used as a tool for short-term stabilization in response to Taliban activity, instead of for much-needed long-term developments. The years 2009-2011 saw a U.S. military and civilian surge, accompanied by a substantial increase in aid. Unfortunately, the surge did not succeed in uprooting the Taliban insurgency. The years 2011-2014, finally, were characterized by the concept of transition intended to accomplish Afghan assumption of full sovereignty. Paradoxically, transition and full sovereignty were accompanied by almost complete foreign aid dependency, since insufficient long-term developments had taken place to ensure Afghanistan's economic future.

It follows from this that the Taliban movement was granted several quiet years in which to grow in strength, without being under serious military pressure anywhere. Yet the movement was an exile organization, without the benefits of being in control anywhere outside its Pakistani sanctuaries. Consequently, the Taliban movement came to fragment into several semi-autonomous organizations, nominally united under Mullah Omar and what became known as his Quetta Shura, so named since it was for many years based in the Pakistani city of Quetta.

time, the Taliban also began to receive some support from Iran. In 2010, at least three meetings between Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC, *Pasdaran-e Enghelab-e Islami*) officers and Taliban leaders took place. The Iranians reportedly had considerable success in offering patronage to individual Taliban commander Giustozzi, Antonio: Military Adaptation by the Taliban 2002-2011. In: Farrell, Theo/Osinga, Frans and Russell, James (eds.): *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*. Stanford 2013, p. 247, 257.

The Taliban was never a homogeneous movement, not even in the 1990s, and the divisions remained and to some extent deepened in exile. Mullah Omar and the Quetta Shura had one agenda, which the affiliated and allied groups only shared in part, since they had agendas of their own. In addition, even the Quetta Shura was a decentralized organization and in most cases consisted of loose units independent of each other, even though they all claimed allegiance to Mullah Omar. In fact, the Quetta Shura itself fragmented. In 2012, a power struggle emerged within the Shura, and internal rivalries sharpened in 2013.⁶⁹⁹ By mid-2013, Mullah Omar remained the nominal head of the movement, although its members sometimes believed that he was held captive in Pakistan, or even that he was dead (he was not, as it turned out).⁷⁰⁰ The Taliban movement was then widely regarded by its own members as having become divided into several largely autonomous alliances. These were the original Leadership Council in Quetta,⁷⁰¹ Abdul Qayyum Zakir's alliance within the Quetta Shura,⁷⁰² Akhtar Mansur's alliance within the Quetta Shura,⁷⁰³ the Peshawar Shura,⁷⁰⁴ and the Miram

⁶⁹⁹ Giustozzi, Antonio: Turmoil within the Taliban: A Crisis of Growth? Central Asia Policy Brief 7, Central Asia Program, George Washington University 2013; Giustozzi, Antonio: The Taliban and the 2014 Elections in Afghanistan. Washington, DC 2014, p. 6.

⁷⁰⁰ Giustozzi, Antonio: Turmoil within the Taliban: A Crisis of Growth? Central Asia Policy Brief 7, Central Asia Program, George Washington University 2013; Ron Moreau: Taliban Forces Desperate to Hear from Their Absent Leader, Mullah Omar. Daily Beast, 01.05.2013. < <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/05/01/taliban-forces-desperate-to-hear-from-their-absent-leader-mullah-omar.html>>.

⁷⁰¹ The Leadership Council (Rahbari Shura) in Quetta was the main decision-making body of the Taliban and accordingly included several old Taliban leaders. Although of diminishing importance because of a decline in revenue and power, as a collective force the Rahbari Shura still enjoyed a certain amount of prestige within the movement.

⁷⁰² Abdul Qayyum Zakir's alliance within the Quetta Shura was based on Zakir's personal network but also included those of several other Taliban leaders. Zakir, a former Guantanamo detainee transferred to Afghan custody who following his 2007 release by Hamid Karzai's government returned to the insurgency and in 2009 was appointed head of the Quetta Military Commission, was supported by both the Pakistani government and the Peshawar Shura, thus enjoying his own sources of revenue. See, e.g. Giustozzi, Antonio: The Taliban and the 2014 Elections in Afghanistan. Washington, DC 2014, p. 17.

⁷⁰³ Akhtar Mansur's alliance within the Quetta Shura was based on Mansur's personal network, funded from sources inside Afghanistan and among the Afghan Diaspora,

Shah Shura, also known as the Haqqani Network.⁷⁰⁵ However, by April 2014 some of the tensions and divisions were resolved with the removal of Abdul Qayyum Zakir from the Military Commission, ostensibly owing to illness.⁷⁰⁶

Nominally, the organization known among Western analysts as the Haqqani Network but in Afghanistan more often referred to as the Miram Shah Shura formed a part of the Peshawar Shura. However, being the most formidable of the various alliances within the Taliban movement, this was a fundamentally autonomous wing of the Afghan Taliban movement based in Miram Shah in Pakistan and named after its leader, Jalaluddin Haqqani.⁷⁰⁷ The Haqqani Network was a distinct military and political organization created by Jalaluddin Haqqani during the 1980s which, after the war against the Soviet Union, remained a source of power in the borderlands shared by Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Haqqani leaders were experienced; having survived three decades of warfare, educated in theology,

and also included the powerful Baradar and Dadullah networks (the latter revived in 2010-2011 after a period of disorder due to the death of its founder; Giustozzi, Antonio: *Turmoil within the Taliban: A Crisis of Growth?* Central Asia Policy Brief 7, Central Asia Program, George Washington University 2013, p. 3) in common opposition to Abdul Qayyum Zakir. As head of the Quetta Political Commission, Mansur had considerable political influence.

⁷⁰⁴ The Peshawar Shura, which itself consisted of several smaller networks, some of which were of Pakistani jihadist origin, was reportedly more state- and university-educated than clerical as well as directly supported, and thus under a certain level of control, by the Pakistani government. See, e.g. Giustozzi, Antonio: *Turmoil within the Taliban: A Crisis of Growth?* Central Asia Policy Brief 7, Central Asia Program, George Washington University 2013, p. 2; Giustozzi, Antonio: *The Taliban and the 2014 Elections in Afghanistan*. Washington, DC 2014, p. 17.

⁷⁰⁵ Ressler, Don/Brown, Vahid: *The Haqqani Nexus and the Evolution of Al-Qaida*. Harmony Program, Combating Terrorism Center, West Point 2011.

⁷⁰⁶ *Voice of Jihad*: Statement dated 25.04.2014.

⁷⁰⁷ Gopal, Anand/Mahsud, Mansur Khan and Fishman, Brian: *The Battle for Pakistan. Militancy and Conflict in North Waziristan*. Washington, DC 2010; Peters, Gretchen: *Crime and Insurgency in the Tribal Areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan*. Harmony Program, Combating Terrorism Center, West Point 2010; Ressler, Don/Brown, Vahid: *The Haqqani Nexus and the Evolution of Al-Qaida*. Harmony Program, Combating Terrorism Center, West Point 2011.

and with a sophisticated understanding of international trade and politics. Their patriarch, Jalaluddin Haqqani, had earned the name Haqqani as an honorific title as a result of his studies at the prestigious Dar ul-Ulum Haqqaniyyah *madrasah*. He spoke excellent Arabic, as did his son Sirajuddin, and both had first-rate connections in the Arab world. The Haqqanis could discuss the intricacies of Islamic theology in the language of the Prophet, and kept a low profile by avoiding Western journalists, thereby also avoiding the taint of international terrorism for decades, despite close links to Al-Qaida.⁷⁰⁸

Affiliated to the Taliban movement but even older than the Haqqani Network was the Hezb-e Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (HIG), popularly named for its leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a former Afghan warlord and prime minister and one time ally of the United States. Originally a political party in the 1980s involved in the war against the Soviet Union, the HIG had political allies in the Afghan parliament, may have supported its own candidate in the 2014 presidential election (possibly Qutbuddin Hilal who once served under Hekmatyar⁷⁰⁹), and was perhaps the most politically sophisticated and well-established Afghan insurgent group. Most Hezb-e Islami members were then detribalized Pashtuns from the state-educated state intelligentsia. The leaders were primarily intellectual Islamists from an urban background, so the party lacked a firm tribal base. This was in fact an advantage, as the party tended to recruit where tribal structures had broken down, which made it highly popular in Pakistani refugee camps. The party, radical Islamist in world view, was regarded as the best organized and most disciplined party within the anti-Soviet resistance. However, Hekmatyar's organisation collapsed as Pakistani funds from 1994 were diverted from it to the newly created Taliban movement. Reportedly with thousands of sympathisers and fighters, HIG had strong relations with Al-Qaida and was closely linked with the Afghan Taliban. Hekmatyar and his followers were

⁷⁰⁸ Ressler, Don/Brown, Vahid: *The Haqqani Nexus and the Evolution of Al-Qaida*. Harmony Program, Combating Terrorism Center, West Point 2011.

⁷⁰⁹ Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 27.03.2014.

believed to have remained operating chiefly in Kunar Province, Afghanistan.⁷¹⁰

Then there were several similarly autonomous groups of foreign fighters, including the remnants of the Al-Qaida core as well as groups such as the Uzbek-led Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Pakistani, ethnically Pashtun terrorist group, the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP, “Movement of Pakistani Taliban”). All these groups enjoyed bases and sanctuaries in Pakistan.

It was never known how many insurgents operated in Afghanistan. Besides, many were, at any given moment, based on the Pakistani side of the border. A common estimate was up to 25,000 Quetta Shura Taliban fighters, in addition to about 3,000 Haqqani fighters and 1,000 HIG fighters. As for Al-Qaida and other foreign fighters, their total number in Afghanistan was unlikely to have exceeded a thousand and was likely far fewer, probably only numbering a few hundred.⁷¹¹ Since the foreign fighters played a strictly supporting role in Afghanistan, their means and motivations will not be further covered here.⁷¹²

The post-2001 Taliban movement was, as a military force, less conventional in outlook than the old 1990s Taliban, but no less sophisticated and not lacking connections in a large number of countries. Moreover, the existence of sanctuaries in Pakistan enabled the movement to develop strategies based on hybrid warfare and hybrid threats.

Hybrid Warfare and Hybrid Threats

As noted, the hybrid warfare and hybrid threat capability developed by the Afghan Taliban included different tactics and strategies to be employed at

⁷¹⁰ GlobalSecurity: Hizb-i-Islami. 15.08.2012.

⁷¹¹ Katzman, Kenneth: Afghanistan. Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy, Washington, DC 2012, p. 48.

⁷¹² On that topic, see, e.g. Fredholm, Michael: Afghanistan Beyond 2014. Stockholm 2013.

home and abroad. From both an analytical and practical perspective, these two theatres of war are best described as distinct from one another.

Being at war, the Taliban movement engaged in hybrid warfare in Afghanistan. Abroad, the movement instead utilized its capacity for hybrid threats. The domestic threat in Afghanistan deriving from the Taliban and the international threat of the movement were, consequently, quite different in character.

5.4.2 *The Domestic Theatre: Hybrid Warfare*

Military Power Projection against the ISAF and ANSF

In Afghanistan, the Taliban soon began to carry out a hybrid warfare campaign against the international coalition (Operation Enduring Freedom and the International Security Assistance Force, ISAF) and the fledgling Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). The purpose of the campaign was to defeat or at least intimidate the coalition. Some Taliban leaders conceived that inflicting casualties on the foreign military forces would demoralize public opinion in their country of origin, causing panic among politicians, and thereby force a withdrawal.⁷¹³

The hybrid warfare campaign consisted of two mutually supporting activities. First, the Taliban employed military power, early on by what in effect were guerrilla-style attacks but soon thereafter they increasingly made use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) placed at convenient locations, in particular along roads, in vehicles, or used in suicide attacks. The IED campaigns had the dual objective of limiting the freedom of movement of the international military forces and at the same time intimidating the foreign soldiers, if they could not be defeated outright.⁷¹⁴

⁷¹³ See, e.g. Giustozzi, Antonio: Military Adaptation by the Taliban 2002-2011. In: Farrell, Theo/Osinga, Frans and Russell, James (eds.): *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*. Stanford 2013, p. 255.

⁷¹⁴ For an example of the Taliban IED campaigns, see Forsberg, Carl: *The Taliban's Campaign for Kandahar*. Institute for the Study of War, Washington, DC 2009, p. 29.

Pakistani military support, whether official or non-official, was particularly conspicuous in the IED campaign. As late as 2011, IED specialists in southern Afghanistan were still often of Punjabi origin. Locals believed that they were Pakistani Army specialists. When killed, the IED specialist would have to be replaced, so a replacement IED specialist was sent from the Taliban leadership. As a result, there was a degree of central control over the IED effort, which again suggests Pakistani involvement.⁷¹⁵ The Taliban had an IED development centre in Pakistan. The Taliban confirmed that Iraqi insurgents assisted them with IEDs, but ISAF assessed that both Iranian and Pakistani support played a major role.⁷¹⁶

Since the Taliban knew that ISAF's rules of engagements did not permit the killing of minors, the Taliban developed a strategy of employing children as emplacements of IEDs.⁷¹⁷ In effect, this was yet another form of hybrid warfare tactics, since any killings of children by ISAF could be used for propaganda purposes.

Terror Power Projection against the ISAF and ANSF

At the same time, the Taliban employed what can best be termed terror power, through the use of suicide bombers against international and Afghan military targets. Sometimes they were particularly effective, such as when on 15 January 2006 the director of the Canadian Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), senior diplomat Glynn Berry, was killed in Kandahar City.⁷¹⁸ Tactics developed in which one or more suicide bombers were used to spearhead an assault which then was followed up with guerilla-style forces (a tactic incidentally first developed in Chechnya⁷¹⁹). Re-

⁷¹⁵ Giustozzi, Antonio: Military Adaptation by the Taliban 2002-2011. In: Farrell, Theo/Osinga, Frans and Russell, James (eds.): *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*. Stanford 2013, p. 250ff.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid., p. 252.

⁷¹⁷ Ibid., p. 251.

⁷¹⁸ Forsberg, Carl: *The Taliban's Campaign for Kandahar*. Institute for the Study of War, Washington, DC 2009, p. 25.

⁷¹⁹ Fredholm, Michael: *The New Face of Chechen Terrorism*. Central Asia - Caucasus Analyst, September 2003, Johns Hopkins University, Georgetown.

sults could be spectacular, such as when the Taliban attacked Sarpoza Prison on the outskirts of Kandahar City on 13 June 2008 with a vehicle borne IED (VBIED), a suicide bomber, and a rapid full scale attack by Taliban fighters on motorcycles. Some 400 imprisoned Taliban fighters were released, then removed in buses which the Taliban had waiting outside.⁷²⁰

The purpose of the terror campaign was to intimidate the ISAF coalition into withdrawing its forces. A further objective was to create success stories which could be used for propaganda purposes (see below).

Terror Power Projection against the Afghan Population

The Taliban also engaged in terror campaigns directed specifically against the Afghan population. This can be seen as a continuation of the policies used by the Taliban in the 1990s (see above). Terror power was used to intimidate the population into defecting from the government supported by international forces and the ANSF. Shadow government structures (often far better organized than the governing structures used when the Taliban in fact ruled major parts of Afghanistan pre-2001) were set up to exert control over the population. Examples of the use of terror power include the killings of collaborators (government workers and ordinary Afghans who reported the location of Taliban units or IEDs to the international military forces) and what the Taliban in religious terms labelled apostates, that is, Muslims who did not subscribe to the extreme version of Islam adopted by the Taliban. The Taliban would then execute, often by beheading, a number of locals for cooperating with foreign troops, displaying the corpses in public as a warning to others.⁷²¹ These methods had a major impact on the Afghan rural population. Cases were noted when Afghan National Police (ANP) units failed to engage the Taliban, since they knew that they or their families would then face the prospect of Taliban reprisals.⁷²²

⁷²⁰ For this and other examples, see, e.g. Forsberg, Carl: *The Taliban's Campaign for Kandahar*. Institute for the Study of War, Washington, DC 2009, p. 40 and 46.

⁷²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 25 and 42.

⁷²² *Ibid.*, p. 30.

In a similar manner, the Taliban regularly attempted to dissuade people from voting in the national elections. A common method to influence voters not to participate was to cut off the index finger of those who went to the polls, who were easily recognizable since dipping the finger in black ink was part of the election process.⁷²³ The campaign served a dual purpose. First, it terrorized the population into adopting the extreme version of Islam which served as the Taliban movement's ideology, since the Taliban considered democratic elections an affront to Islam. Second, the mutilations eroded trust in the Afghan government.

Another example of how the Taliban imposed their will by terrorist power was the strategy to force telecom operators to close cellular telephone networks at night. The Taliban believed that the international military forces used cellular phone signals to track and launch attacks against them. This was probably a correct assessment since cell phones periodically send signals to the network even when they are not in use making calls and such signals can be monitored by signals intelligence, satellites, and other means. But the Taliban also feared that ordinary Afghans on the side of the government might observe them and wished to prevent such collaborators from privately calling in to report Taliban movements. ISAF set up a call centre for this very purpose in 2007. Since most Taliban movements took place at night for reasons of security, this was the time to shut down the telephone networks. For this reason, the Taliban began to blow up telecommunications towers following threats to telephone operators warning them to shut down the towers at night or face attack. When telephone service providers responded by following the Taliban movement's orders, the Taliban not only ensured their own security, they also made a huge impact on the Afghan population, eroding their will to resist Taliban control by showing them by example that it was the Taliban movement, not the government forces, which set the agenda.⁷²⁴ This successful intimidation

⁷²³ See, e.g. BBC News, 15.06.2014.

⁷²⁴ See, e.g. the Textually.org web site <www.textually.org/textually/archives/2008/03/019260.htm>; citing AP, 01.03.2008; Forsberg, Carl: *The Taliban's Campaign for Kandahar*. Institute for the Study of War, Washington, DC 2009, p. 33.

campaign enabled the Taliban to impose a strategic, delegitimising blow to the authority of the government.

A similar delegitimizing effect was achieved by the widespread assassinations of government leaders, high-ranking members of the clergy on the side of the government, and women in public service and girls' schools. While government leaders and women in public service were primarily targeted for political reasons and to intimidate the population, the assassination of pro-government clergy had the added effect of reducing their influence with the population. Those who were not killed had to remain in Afghan National Army (ANA) compounds from which they primarily preached by radio, not in person, which severely limited their impact and cleared the field for Taliban clergy to win the battle for souls.⁷²⁵

Media Power Projection against the Afghan Population

In the battle for souls, the Taliban also exercised its media power. This showed itself as proclamations and videos distributed online and by other means. The Taliban also used night letters, which were leaflets distributed at night, thus serving as a tangible reminder that the Taliban had a presence seemingly everywhere.⁷²⁶ Due to the widespread illiteracy in Afghanistan, the night letters were often read out aloud by a mullah or an elder, which in itself increased the impact of the message. Media power fundamentally consisted of the dissemination of threats to collaborators and propaganda, which not only resulted in the winning of hearts and minds but also in the intimidation of the general public, who realized then, if not before, that when the foreigners eventually withdrew, the Taliban would remain.

Examples of intimidating propaganda included the video recording of public execution by stoning in August 2010 of a couple in Kunduz who in

⁷²⁵ See, e.g. Forsberg, Carl: *The Taliban's Campaign for Kandahar*. Institute for the Study of War, Washington, DC 2009, p. 44ff.

⁷²⁶ Johnson, Thomas H.: *The Taliban Insurgency and an Analysis of Shabnamah (Night Letters)*. In: *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 18: 3 (September 2007), p. 317ff.

the eyes of the Taliban had committed adultery, the recording of which was subsequently distributed through the Internet.⁷²⁷

Power Projection through Organized Crime

The Taliban also enlisted, in a manner, the help of organized crime.⁷²⁸ The Taliban often encouraged the activities of local bandit gangs in areas where the Taliban movement had not yet established, but was working to gain, a presence. Not only did this facilitate Taliban activities by causing confusion and presenting additional targets to the international military forces and ANSF, the activities of bandit gangs also legitimized the subsequent imposition of Taliban justice and its harsh methods. In effect, the Taliban first encouraged the growth of crime, then stepped in to suppress it. Many bandit gangs would indeed find the arguments to join the Taliban movement persuasive at this time, especially if they had already used the Taliban name to discourage police and local communities from resisting.⁷²⁹

5.4.3 The International Theatre: Hybrid Threats

Diplomatic Power Projection against the ISAF Member States

Internationally, the Taliban primarily focused on diplomatic power projection. A major aim was to negotiate the withdrawal of the international coalition, with threats if necessary, so that the Taliban could return to power. For this task, the Taliban relied on diplomatic power, with negotiations

⁷²⁷ Reuters, 16.08.2010; The Telegraph (UK), 27.01.2011 (<www.telegraph.co.uk>, with video).

⁷²⁸ Here we will disregard the question of the extent to which the Taliban movement funded its activities through Afghanistan's abundant opium production. The opium trade was fundamentally a means for funding, thus providing the means to fight, and not intended as a means for hybrid threat projection as such, even though one could argue that in the long term, drugs from Afghanistan would play its role in destabilizing some of the states which provided troops to ISAF.

⁷²⁹ Giustozzi, Antonio: Military Adaptation by the Taliban 2002-2011. In: Farrell, Theo/Osinga, Frans and Russell, James (eds.): *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*. Stanford 2013, p. 245.

conducted through friendly Muslim countries such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. These countries were not chosen at random; only Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, in this order, had recognized the Taliban Emirate of Afghanistan in May 1997.⁷³⁰

The diplomatic process against ISAF member states can be said to have begun in September 2009 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. At the request of the Taliban, German intelligence then held a first meeting with a Taliban delegation. A further eight meetings had to take place before the Germans brought in American representatives so that real negotiations could get underway. This first U.S.-Taliban meeting took place outside Munich in Germany on 28 November 2010, with the participation of a Qatari representative whom the Taliban representatives trusted. A second meeting consequently took place in Qatar's capital Doha on 15 February 2011. The third meeting took place in Munich on 7-8 May 2011. Through this series of meetings, the Taliban aimed to persuade the United States to lift sanctions, release high-level Taliban prisoners, and to allow the opening of a Taliban representative office in a Muslim country.⁷³¹

These meetings all took place in secret, and at the time there was little chance for the Taliban to gain a negotiated American withdrawal. However, the Taliban diplomatic campaign eventually paid off in the form of a more public, international diplomatic presence, aimed more at the worldwide Muslim community than at the West.

⁷³⁰ AFP, 25.05.1997 (Pakistan, on 25.05.1997); The News International, 27.05.1997 (Saudi Arabia, on 26.05.1997); AFP, 28.05.1997 (UAE, last of the three). Incidentally, the Taliban government in turn recognized the separatist government in the Russian republic of Chechnya in January 2000, an act which caused the lasting enmity of Russia. *Jane's Sentinel: Afghanistan*, 01.06.2000.

⁷³¹ Rashid, Ahmed: *The Truth behind America's Taliban Talks*. In: *Financial Times*, 29.06.2011.

Towards the worldwide Muslim community, it was important for the Taliban leadership to appear as a responsible and religiously legitimate party. The Taliban did not mind meeting with the Kabul government, as long as they met as equals. This was accomplished when Saudi King Abdullah hosted talks with the Taliban in the holy city of Mecca from 24 to 27 September 2008.⁷³²

However, it took some time before suitable conditions for further meetings could be agreed, not least because of difficulties for outside observers to ascertain whether the alleged Taliban representatives who turned up from time to time really represented Mullah Omar. In June 2013, formal peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban were finally announced, to take place in Doha. However, the Qatari leaders were somewhat too hospitable to their Taliban guests, allowing them to open a formal representative office, and the talks were cancelled in a row over the Taliban displaying their flag and presenting themselves as the legitimate rulers of the Islamic Emirate, that is, the state of Afghanistan. The Doha office was closed within 24 hours of its opening, amid speculations that negotiations would reopen in Turkey or Saudi Arabia.⁷³³

Nonetheless, the Taliban had achieved their aim of appearing as a responsible and legitimate party. Besides, U.S. President Barack Obama had by then announced the planned drawdown of American military forces in Afghanistan, so for the Taliban leadership, it was only a question of time before they could make a move for real power. When in early 2014, Taliban leaders met representatives of the Afghan government in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, they refused to negotiate a peace agreement.⁷³⁴ This led to discussions on whether the Taliban representatives had been genuine emissaries of Mullah Omar or frauds; however, there was at this time no reason for the Taliban movement to negotia-

⁷³² CNN, 05.10.2008.

⁷³³ Reuters, 14.08.2013.

⁷³⁴ The New York Times (USA), 04.02.2014.

te further, since they had already achieved their key diplomatic aim of being seen as a legitimate party.

Media Power Projection against the ISAF Member States and the Worldwide Muslim Community

In conjunction with the application of diplomatic power, the Taliban movement also made good use of media power projection. The media campaign was aimed simultaneously at the ISAF member states and the worldwide Muslim community. Its purpose was to show the might of the Taliban, the hopelessness of continued war against them, and their legitimacy vis-à-vis the worldwide Muslim community.

Already in the 1990s, the Taliban had operated a series of web sites, and this practice continued from the sanctuaries in Pakistan. Taliban web sites primarily published statements of the Leadership Council of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, that is, the Taliban government, but they also published articles, weekly analyses, interviews, and reports, as well as a continuing list of news from the front. For an example of the latter, see Table 9. The emphasis was on enemies killed, in particular foreigners, ANA troops, and Arbakis (self-defence militias on the side of the government), and installations attacked.

11/05 : Enemy vehicle blown up in Kunduz
11/05 : Enemy base struck with missile strikes in Logar
11/05 : Arbakis come under attack in Kunduz
11/05 : Base in Logar comes under artillery rounds
11/05 : 46 killed, many injured in Ghazni operation
11/05 : 6 killed in gunfight in Nangarhar
11/05 : 6 Arbakis killed in Wardak
11/05 : Commander along with 2 police captured in Kabul
10/05 : 5 enemy soldiers killed, 4 injured in Ghazni
10/05 : Enemy security post destroyed in Laghman

10/05 : Army installations attacked in Kabul

10/05 : Enemy check point attacked

10/05 : Mortar shells hit post; Arbaki killed

10/05 : Clash occurs as enemy attacked in Paktika

10/05 : Arbaki commander, 2 gunmen killed in Paktika

10/05 : Arbaki militias suffer deadly losses in Kunduz

10/05 : 6 killed, two armored tanks destroyed in Kunduz

10/05 : 14 killed, 22 vehicles destroyed as convoy ambushed

10/05 : Double martyrdom attack causes U.S.-nato invaders heavy losses

10/05 : 5 puppets⁷³⁵ killed and wounded, vehicle and equipment seized

10/05 : Check post attacked, 3 police killed in Marjah

10/05 : 3 police and ANA trooper killed in clash

10/05 : 5 ANA and 3 Arbakis killed in Gerishk, equipment seized

10/05 : Roadside bomb rips through police truck, kills and wounds 4

10/05 : Chora firefight leaves 2 puppets wounded

Table 9: Sample text from Taliban web site <<http://shahamat-english.com/>>, 11.05.2014.

⁷³⁵ Afghans who supported the international forces.

The Taliban movement also published a glossy, professionally produced electronic news magazine in English, with news from the front, lists of destroyed enemy aircraft, statistics of attacks, articles, interviews, and the like. This was *Islamic Emirate Afghanistan In Fight*, a publication with many colour photographs, including photos of killed and wounded enemy soldiers and destroyed enemy vehicles. The magazine was most likely published and distributed from Pakistan.

The Taliban also discovered, and made good use of, Twitter. As a tool for the dissemination of brief propaganda nuggets in English, Twitter eventually began to rival the Taliban web sites. The Taliban tweets focused on news from the front, with the customary emphasis on enemies killed and installations attacked. For a few examples of Taliban tweets, see Table 10.

Abdulqahar Balkhi @ABalkhi

A martyrdom seeker detonated car bomb on dismounted foreign troops in front of Maiwand district HQ building (#Kandahar) 3:30pm today...

Abdulqahar Balkhi @ABalkhi

cont: as other troops gathered to evacuate the casualties around destroyed tank, another martyrdom seeker approached & detonated motorbike.

Abdulqahar Balkhi @ABalkhi

cont: blasts killed more than 15 invaders & wounded many on final day of #KbWaleed operations, area cordoned off from public #Afghanistan

Abdulqahar Balkhi @ABalkhi

A US terrorist along with Arbaki lapdog were killed, 3 US invaders wounded in missile strike on Shilgar district HQ (#Ghazni) 10am Wed.

Table 10: Sample Taliban tweets <<https://twitter.com/ABalkhi>>, 07.05.2014

Terror Power Projection against ISAF Soldiers' Family Members

While the Taliban media campaign did have the objective of influencing the population in the ISAF member states, the Taliban no doubt realized that few ordinary Westerners would read their magazines, announcements, or tweets. Something more tangible was therefore needed to influence public opinion in the ISAF member states. For this purpose, apparent Taliban agents issued threats by telephone or Short Message Service (SMS) text messages to the family members of ISAF soldiers serving in Afghanistan on a number of occasions. Some were threats that family members would be murdered if the soldier did not leave Afghanistan, while others assured family members that it was the ISAF soldier who would be killed, if his or her family did not get their offspring back home. There was little doubt that the threats were meant to intimidate the individual into resigning from service in Afghanistan. Some calls emanated from the area of operations in Afghanistan, while others originated within the ISAF member state, likely within the Afghan refugee Diaspora. This showed the apparent worldwide reach of the Taliban movement. Less obvious but possibly equally serious, was that the telephone and SMS threats were directed to the private telephones of family members, which could only have been identified by somebody taking note of the private calls from ISAF garrisons to the place of origin of the troops. This showed that the Taliban had been able to infiltrate at least some of the Afghan telecom companies providing roaming services.⁷³⁶

Among the various types of international hybrid threat projection employed by the Taliban, this was the only one which was not exclusively directed and executed from Pakistan. Threatening telephone calls and text messages also emanated from within the ISAF member states, proving that the Taliban had supporters within the Afghan Diaspora and among other groups overseas.

⁷³⁶ Radio Sweden news program *Ekot*, 01.07.2010; Försvarmakten (Armed Forces), Årsrapport Säkerhetstjänst 2011: Militära underrättelse- och säkerhetstjänsten, MUST (Försvarmakten 2012), p. 18.

Terror Power Projection in the Form of Attacks Abroad

As far as is known, none of the telephone threats resulted in an actual attack. Indeed, a conspicuous characteristic of the terror power projection abroad of the Afghan Taliban movement was that the Taliban neither planned, nor carried out through opportunistic means, terrorist attacks *outside* Afghanistan. This did not happen during the 1990s, nor after the Taliban withdrawal into Pakistan. International terrorism would seem to have been a certain means to intimidate a foreign population into forcing a withdrawal of its military forces from Afghanistan. Yet no such attacks were carried out by the Afghan Taliban movement (although they certainly were carried out by the Taliban movement's allies among the Al-Qaida and other international terrorist groups for reasons of their own).

The reason for this curious absence of international terror power projection can presumably be seen in two characteristics of the Afghan war. First, the Afghan Taliban movement had no history of engaging in terrorism abroad and many of its leaders had little interest in events elsewhere. Second, from 18 June 2004, when the first known American drone attacks was carried out,⁷³⁷ a balance of terror emerged between the United States and the Taliban movement. As long as the Afghan Taliban movement did not sponsor international terrorism, the United States did not direct any drone attacks against the senior Afghan Taliban leaders in Pakistan. Whether this was a deliberate agreement with the Americans, if so it was no doubt negotiated with the help of Pakistani mediators, or merely an assumption on the part of the Taliban leadership remains unknown. Implicit in the understanding must have been the American realization that one eventually would need to have somebody to negotiate with in the Taliban leadership. Whether this conclusion is correct remains unknown to outside observers. Yet the fact remains that the Taliban leadership did not sponsor international terrorism, and no American drone attacks were aimed against the senior Taliban leaders in their well-known and easily recognizable compounds in a suburb of the Pakistani city of Quetta.

⁷³⁷ The New York Times (USA), 19.06.2004.

5.4.4 *Concluding Remarks*

The Taliban leadership had a *long-term strategy* to gain political power and impose a strict form of Islam in Afghanistan. When faced with the inability to defeat the coalition by regular military means, the long-term strategy hardened into an *intention* to fight with whatever tactics and strategies that were available. Although not conclusively proven, it seems likely that a *master plan* on how to oppose the coalition and the government of Afghanistan through a combination of military power and terror power was worked out with the assistance of former or serving ISI officers. The actual details – the *operations plan* – grew out of developments in Afghanistan and elsewhere, such as the limited number of foreign troops that were sent to Afghanistan. The Light Footprint policy, that is, the lack of boots on the ground, enabled the Taliban movement to reassert power in parts of the country. The *execution* phase of the operations plan began with full force only from 2005, since, despite incursions into Afghanistan, the Taliban were, as noted, earlier not under serious military pressure there or elsewhere.

This operations plan certainly included aspects of hybrid warfare and hybrid threats. Whether the Taliban actually used such terms is a moot point; events show that they knew about and understood the concepts of hybrid warfare and threats very well. The Afghan Taliban leaders consequently developed a hybrid threat capability, which they subsequently used as part of the tactics and strategies of the movement.

There is no denying that the Afghan Taliban movement enjoyed a certain level of success in its hybrid warfare campaigns. Most successes derived from the movement's capability to create and sustain a domestic hybrid capability. While the Taliban hybrid warfare capability was not in itself sufficient to defeat the international coalition, it certainly helped to create a sense of defeatism which ultimately led to President Obama's 22 June 2011 decision to end the American-led military presence in Afghanistan by 2014.⁷³⁸ But this defeatism was not the result of the Taliban movement's

⁷³⁸ The New York Times (USA), 22.06.2011.

attempts to intimidate the foreign militaries or their constituencies abroad. Instead, it derived directly from the Taliban ability to intimidate the Afghan population into turning away from the foreign military presence and the government of Afghanistan, an effect much facilitated by the general ineptitude and widespread corruption of the latter during these crucial years.

Then why did the Afghan Taliban movement neither plan, nor carry out through opportunistic means, terrorist attacks outside Afghanistan? International terrorism would seem to have been a certain means to intimidate an enemy population into forcing a withdrawal of its military forces from Afghanistan, yet no such attacks were carried out by the Afghan Taliban movement—and the behaviour of the Taliban toward the Afghan population shows that it was not a reluctance to engage in violence that decided the issue. The reasons for this lack of foreign terrorism were no doubt two-fold. First, the Afghan Taliban had no history of engaging in terrorism abroad. Second, a balance of terror emerged between the Taliban and the U.S.-led coalition. As long as the Afghan Taliban movement did not sponsor international terrorism, no drone attacks targeted senior Afghan Taliban leaders in Pakistan.

This balance of terror also illustrates the phenomenon that successful insurgencies tend to share two common features: access to sanctuaries in a neighbouring country and access to material support and financing from outside the conflict zone, either in the neighbouring country or from a Diaspora population abroad. In 1964, the experienced French counterinsurgency and counterterrorism practitioner Roger Trinquier concluded that the best strategy to confront such an insurgency was a secret war against the neighbouring country, through the creation of a clandestine guerrilla force on its territory to strike the insurgent sanctuaries and serve as leverage until the material support ceases.⁷³⁹ The armed drone program, which

⁷³⁹ Trinquier, Roger: *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency*. Westport, Connecticut 2006 (first published in 1964), p. 83. Trinquier describes the enemy in both counterinsurgency and counterterrorism as an armed clandestine organization, engaged in clandestine warfare. The clandestine organization operates in one or both of two modes, that of partisan/guerrilla and terrorist, respectively. These two categories function in different ways since they operate in different types of terrain. In the

was led by the civilian Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and utilized a combination of military and terror power, was in effect a high-tech version of such a clandestine force, which in the context of the present paper easily qualifies as a hybrid threat response to a hybrid threat.

There could be no purely military solution to the problem of Taliban and foreign fighters as long as they retained sanctuaries in Pakistan.⁷⁴⁰ History is rife with cases in which guerrilla groups could not be defeated as long as they were granted sanctuaries in neighbouring countries. A military solution could certainly have been found—if the coalition had been prepared to follow the enemy into their sanctuaries in Pakistan. However, the countries that constituted ISAF were unwilling to do so without Pakistani cooperation, and such was never likely to be forthcoming since Pakistan was sensitive about its territorial inviolability and integrity. The problem of the inviolability of the Pakistani sanctuaries of the Taliban became evident when U.S. conventional troops launched the only major ground offensive in the 2001-2002 war against the Taliban. This was Operation Anaconda, commanded by Major General Franklin Hagenbeck and commenced on 1 March 2002 against what was reported to be a concentration of several hundred Taliban and Al-Qaida troops south of Gardez in Paktia province.⁷⁴¹ This was the first time U.S. and coalition conventional forces were at the forefront of ground combat. Operation Anaconda was declared over on 18 March 2002. As before, the Taliban and Al-Qaida fighters simply

partisan/guerrilla mode, an armed clandestine group will choose targets to establish a presence and gain territorial control through a display of power. The post-2001 Taliban movement operated in this mode in Afghanistan, and the same went on among jihadist insurgents in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Mali, Syria, and fundamentally in any other place where armed clandestine groups operated. Having established a degree of territorial control (cf. Al-Qaida in Afghanistan prior to 2001), the group was, simultaneously with conducting local operations, free to engage, or not, in international terrorism as well. *Ibid.*, p. 16. Yet the importance of a local base is often forgotten in terrorism studies. Trinquier's experiences could have been particularly useful in post-2001 Afghanistan but were largely forgotten when operations were initiated.

⁷⁴⁰ Fredholm, Michael: *The Need for New Policies in Afghanistan: A European's Perspective*. *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies* 15: 1-2 (2011).

⁷⁴¹ John Pike: *Operation Anaconda*. 05.07.2011. <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/oef-anaconda.htm>>.

dispersed and withdrew, many of them into Pakistan, when the battle turned against them. After the operation, Major General Hagenbeck indicated the need to engage in hot pursuits into Pakistan, but on 25 March he was overruled by then Secretary of Defence Donald H. Rumsfeld.⁷⁴² As a direct result of Rumsfeld's decision, the Taliban and allied non-Afghan terrorist groups established bases in Pakistan, the Taliban set up in and around Quetta and the Al-Qaida and other foreign fighters went, primarily, to Waziristan.

How could the coalition reach and neutralize these bases? By military means, it could not, since no coalition soldiers were permitted to engage in hot pursuit into Pakistani territory. Drone warfare became the solution, and the CIA's clandestine Predator and Reaper armed drone program inflicted significant losses on terrorists and insurgents in Waziristan.⁷⁴³

The drone campaign had a strategic effect that went far beyond the killing of insurgent leaders and the disruption of insurgent networks and activities. First, data-driven as opposed to anecdotal research shows that drone strikes were associated with decreases in the incidence and lethality of terrorist attacks. They were also associated with decreases in particularly lethal terrorist tactics, including suicide and IED attacks.⁷⁴⁴ A primary reason for this was the disruption mechanism of drone strikes. Strikes disrupted and reduced the ability of terrorists in the safe havens to operate in a cohesive and effective manner. The havens were simply not safe anymore, and the terrorists found it increasingly difficult to exercise sovereign control over their sanctuaries. In addition, the drone strikes resulted in the deaths of many terrorist leaders. This too reduced the ability of the terrorists to engage in violence elsewhere, since the decapitation of the terrorist leadership reduced its ability to plan and carry out acts of terrorism. In effect, drone

⁷⁴² Hammer, Carl: *Tide of Terror: America, Islamic Extremism, and the War on Terror*. Boulder, Colorado 2003, p. 281.

⁷⁴³ Roggio, Bill/Mayer, Alexander: *Charting the Data for US Airstrikes in Pakistan, 2004-2014*. <www.longwarjournal.org>.

⁷⁴⁴ Johnston, Patrick B./Sarbah, Anoop K.: *The Impact of U.S. Drone Strikes on Terrorism in Pakistan and Afghanistan*. Paper, RAND Corporation and Stanford University 11 February 2014.

attacks terrorized the terrorists, forcing them to change their activities so as not to expose themselves needlessly to strikes. Moreover, data indicate that drone strikes seemed to reduce terrorist activity not only in their safe havens but in their immediate neighbourhoods as well.⁷⁴⁵ It was thus hardly surprising that Pakistan's military leadership tacitly agreed to the drone campaign in Waziristan early on, a territory which by then was beyond the control of the Pakistani military, even though it resulted in political frictions.⁷⁴⁶

There is thus little doubt that drone strikes aimed at the Taliban Leadership Shura in Quetta would have made an impact on the Taliban movement, had such strikes taken place. However, this particular method of hybrid warfare was not used by the United States against the Taliban leaders, nor did the latter respond with terrorist attacks overseas. A hybrid threat, drone warfare, was accordingly successfully used to counter another hybrid threat, that of international terrorism

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 25.

⁷⁴⁶ See, e.g. Reuters, 20.05.2011, based on a U.S. diplomatic cable from 11.02.2008 exposed by WikiLeaks detailing discussions between Pakistan's chief of army staff General Ashfaq Kayani and Admiral William J. Fallon, then commander of U.S. Central Command.

