

Strategic Culture and Violent Non-State Actors: Weapons of Mass Destruction and Asymmetrical Operations Concepts and Cases

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FOREWORD

We are pleased to publish this sixty-fourth volume in the *Occasional Paper* series of the United States Air Force Institute for National Security Studies (INSS). Across 2006 INSS focused research effort at investigating broad, contextual and cultural influences and their shaping influence on national security perceptions, decisions, and actions of both states and non-state actors. One such effort was INSS involvement in a Defense Threat Reduction Agency Advanced Systems and Concepts Office project examining how strategic culture of states shapes their acquisition and use of weapons of mass destruction. The INSS contribution was to extend the analysis into the non-state realm, and the contributions to this Occasional Paper by Jim Smith and Mark Long are the results of that extension. At the same time, and unrelated to the DTRA strategic culture project, Tom Johnson was applying his detailed expertise on tribal culture in Afghanistan to explain an operational campaign within the insurgency there. This Occasional Paper, then, combines three separate threads of analysis on culture and violent non-state actors as a launching pad to spur further research into this critical arena of culture and security.

In this Occasional Paper, Jim Smith lays out a conceptual basis and a series of templates for guiding analysis of culture and violent non-state actors. These templates focus on analysis of WMD acquisition and use, and on culturally driven operational campaigns. While the two follow-on case studies did not specifically apply those templates, they proceeded from the same conceptual foundation, and they are certainly compatible with the intent of Smith's guidelines. Mark Long applies cultural analysis of radical Islam and al-Qaida in discussing the many factors and influences involved in the core al-Qaida group's WMD decisions. His work graphically demonstrates the complexity of such decisions for that core group, and suggests that what many may find as counter-intuitive caution plays a major role here. And Tom Johnson, in examining a tribal insurgent psychological campaign in Afghanistan, demonstrates that traditional beliefs, myths and stories, and behavioral influences can be manipulated for significant effect in countering our efforts to gain stability and legitimacy for the Afghan government. Together these papers underscore the central role of culture in analyzing and understanding non-state adversaries.

About the Institute

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INSS coordinates and focuses outside thinking in various disciplines and across the military services to develop new ideas for defense policy making. To that end, the Institute develops topics, selects researchers from within the military academic community, and administers sponsored research. It reaches out to and partners with education and research organizations across and beyond the military academic community to bring broad focus to issues of national security interest. And it hosts workshops and facilitates the dissemination of information to a wide range of private and government organizations. In these ways, INSS facilitates valuable, cost-effective research to meet the needs of our sponsors. We appreciate your continued interest in INSS and our research products.

JAMES M. SMITH
Director

Strategic Culture and Violent Non-State Actors: Concepts and Templates for Analysis

James M. Smith

The policy application of strategic culture originated in the Cold War experience of dealing with the Soviet Union on a range of strategic security issues—particularly negotiation on nuclear arms control, design of nuclear strategy, and strategic crisis management experiences. It was clear to those involved in these activities that there were significant differences between the sides on values, perceptions, decision criteria, and decision structures and processes. There evolved a firm realization of this distinctive “them” and “us” division, and with survival stakes at risk there was strong incentive to seek to understand these differences and factor them carefully into strategic plans, decisions, and actions.

Thus the study of strategic culture flowed from a policy community “pull” and an academic community response. This US-Soviet Union imperative should have been further reinforced by United States experiences in Korea and Vietnam (and it was within some sectors of government; e.g. creation of the US Army Foreign Area Officer Program for one example), but in fact it languished as the Cold War stabilized and eventually waned. It took the shocks of the attacks on the US homeland in September 2001 and the drawn-out stabilization actions in Afghanistan and Iraq across subsequent years to bring the concept back toward center stage. Today there is renewed emphasis on language and cultural training, cultural and human intelligence, and there is growing acceptance of cultural analysis and understanding as an essential level of analysis in both academic study and government strategic considerations.

However, because cultural focus resided for so long secluded to academe—international and comparative politics, developmental economics, language study, history, geography, psychology, anthropology, sociology—its development for strategic application within government is

today incomplete, and the demonstration of its full relevance as an analytical and predictive suite of policy tools is sporadic and inconclusive. As one small example of where it is now being addressed within the military academic setting, this author has adapted a hybrid systems construct of state security strategy, military doctrine, and force structure that incorporates and is informed by many of the generally accepted determinants of strategic culture. Further, that construct has been applied to comparative analysis of sub-state military services—linking strategic culture to organizational culture—as well as to state-level military structures in employing the analysis. Applications such as this illustrate promise and potential, but much more development remains necessary.

This brief concept paper is just one attempt to add to strategic culture development by more deliberately specifying its structure and extending its application from its original state focus into the non-state arena, and doing so with specific focus on violent non-state actor (VNSA) decisions and actions relative to the acquisition and use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and to planning and conducting asymmetrical operations. One final preliminary point that must be made is that in the absence of a proven predictive model for strategic culture analysis, and particularly of its resultant WMD and asymmetrical operations decisions and actions, the ideal would be to examine multiple cases to deduce and validate such a model. In the case of VNSA and WMD, the number of cases of actual use, let alone acquisition, is relatively small. And while there are more cases of VNSA asymmetrical operations, few have been analyzed through a distinctly cultural lens. Thus, this paper proposes a general set of descriptive factors to provide a prospective framework of probable strategic and operational decisions and actions as a foundation for further case development. This inductive approach should at least indicate key questions to ask and areas to examine in gaining a better understanding of

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a VNSA and its WMD/asymmetrical intentions and operations. Then two illustrative cases—one addressing al-Qaida metanarrative and perspectives on WMD, the other Taliban narrative and the operational use of “night letters”—are presented to further illustrate the power of cultural-based analyses of violent non-state actors today.

STRATEGIC CULTURE

There is no consensus definition of strategic culture. However, a Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA)/Advanced Systems and Concepts Office (ASCO)-sponsored “Comparative Strategic Culture” study has adopted a working definition as follows:

Shared beliefs, assumptions, and modes of behavior, derived from common experiences and common narratives that shape collective identity and relationships to other groups, and which determine appropriate ends and means for achieving security objectives.¹

While we can quibble with a word choice or two, this definition highlights several key elements of the construct. First, there is an identifiable chain of influence between determinants and cultural identity and resultant culturally derived behaviors. At base, this determines the strategic “us,” the strategically adversarial “them,” and the depth and contours of that adversarial relationship. It also, within the “us,” determines the basis of that entity’s strategic rationality. This is key for non-state actors, and particularly for VNSA such as terrorists that are often characterized as “non-rational” or even “irrational.” In fact, at the strategic level these groups are most often entirely rational—but that “rationality” is *their* rationality, not ours. Strategic culture provides a window into identifying and understanding this perspective. A second key element of this definition is that strategic culture shapes strategic behaviors, particularly decision making and planning at the strategic and operational levels, with spillover effects onto tactical actions. That is the critical point for incorporating cultural analysis into intelligence and operational planning:

there are distinct behavioral consequences from cultural inputs. This point will be further addressed in the following section on the policy relevance of the construct. Third, these strategic behaviors determine the flow of the strategic-to-operational security process, which for VNSA means that strategic culture shapes the forms, directions, audiences, and targets of political violence, including WMD acquisition and use and also the design and execution of asymmetrical campaigns and operations. This aspect of strategic culture’s impact will be addressed in more detail in the section addressing VNSA applications below.

Finally, the definition posits a common set of determinates of strategic culture derived from the study of states. A representative listing of widely accepted state strategic culture determinates is depicted at Figure 1. The influences of these factors vary from state to state, both on their own merits and in combination, but distinct inputs result in distinct cultural influences. Thus, states vary from a little to a lot in their strategic foundations, leading to distinct strategic decision processes and outcomes.

Figure 1: Strategic Culture Determinants

Political Tradition(s)	Classical Texts/Stories	
History/Experience	Defense Concept	
Beliefs/Values	Economic Resources	
Climate/Resources	Technological Base	
Geography	<i>Strategic Culture</i>	Generational/Temporal

For non-state actors, these determinates must be adjusted to the specific circumstances of the actor. For example, for a sub-state group or a distinctly national non-state actor, factors such as geography and climate that are often very significant for states may still apply much as they do with states. However, for transnational or non-national non-state actors, these factors may have to be adapted to a regional or other broader focus,

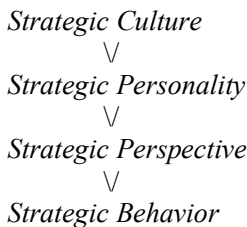
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or some may even become minor or irrelevant. Further, for transnational or internationally networked VNSA, there may be widely separated “national” nodes with very different influences, and as a result multiple cultural variants. In these cases, there will likely be both similar and varied determinates and outcomes. So while there is no single priority or weighting of these factors, individually and together they exercise strong and sometimes complex shaping forces on both states and non-state actors, resulting in distinct strategic decisions and actions.

POLICY RELEVANCE

The central strategic culture dimension of interest to the policy community is strategic decision making. Strategic culture shapes who decides, how they decide, the “what” and “how” of information search and analysis, the boundaries around and ranking criteria among acceptable options, and the learning process that influences each subsequent round of decision and action. In sum, strategic culture determines the structure and process of strategic decisions. Figure 2 depicts a sequence view of that influence.

Figure 2: Strategic Culture Policy Dynamics



Organizational culture is often compared to individual human personality. In the same light, strategic culture has been applied to the analysis of the “strategic personality” from individual leaders to the characterization of a human-like personality of the state as an entity.² Whether or not those approaches are acceptable to a given observer, here

the term “personality” is used to represent general focus on the decision structure and its dynamics. These are strongly influenced by culture, and they are central elements of the process and product of strategic decision making. Within all aspects of strategic policy decisions, the worldview of the decision set—its strategic perspective—gives focus, direction, and priority to the decision process. The interests of the entity, whether state or non-state, are defined and prioritized within and against this perspective. And the behaviors that result from the strategic decision process are directly shaped by these elements of strategic culture.

When addressing the cultures and behaviors of VNSA, care must be taken to ensure individualized analysis of the decision sets, processes, and behaviors. VNSA range from proto-states to separatists, from transnational terrorists to international criminals, from core decision sets to nodes, and each can be expected to display a distinct, perhaps unique, decision and action style. There can be no “one-size-fits-all” characterization. The particular organizational entity—its strategic decision process, perspective, and behaviors—all must be carefully delineated and examined in detail for effective analysis. And since these strategic decisions for VNSA result in political violence that we are seeking to moderate and defeat, clear understanding is essential.

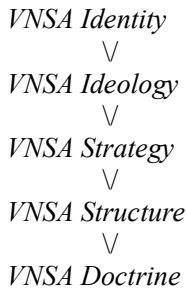
VIOLENT NON-STATE ACTOR APPLICATION

The strategic culture framework components addressed to this point are state-centered components that can and must be adapted for VNSA applications. And indeed, a more tailored VNSA analytical framework can be specified. It focuses the analysis on those factors that target and define the political violence that the VNSA employs toward its strategic interests and objectives. And a central defining characteristic of VNSA, regardless of the public cloak that they seek to display, is that they have a distinct political structure or substructure, as well as a specific operational element.

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These strategic-to-operational processes and structures, shaped by strategic culture, are depicted at Figure 3.

Figure 3: VNSA Strategic Analysis Template



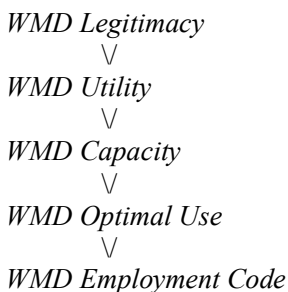
Identity and ideology define the “strategic us” of the VNSA and also provide the departure point for comparative designation of the “strategic them” of its adversary. This is critically important to understand. For example, if the true goal of a terrorist group is more politically nuanced than “killing as many Americans as possible,” then this analysis will provide a much better understanding of who they want to influence and why, and following to strategy, what they might likely attack and toward what desired effects. Identity and ideology are also key to understanding recruitment dynamics, the critical transformation to violence, support motivations, and other essential infrastructure dimensions of the group. The clear bottom line is that combating a VNSA cannot be effectively planned without understanding its identity and ideology. The VNSA strategy provides its “theory of victory,” strategic objectives, and broad operational guidance. Again, it flows directly from the identity and ideology, and it is driven by the objectives derived there from. The chain then flows directly to its operational structure and the operational capabilities needed to carry out the strategy and achieve the objectives. Full analysis and understanding at each step provides a window into analyzing and understanding the next link. Finally, this culturally shaped

strategic-to-operational chain also provides the doctrine, or operational code, for applied political violence by the group. Tactical details flow from, and are not fully decipherable without the context of, strategic- and operational-level factors and their driving influence. This set of linked factors is further linked in turn to potential VNSA operations, including those potentially involving WMD.

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION APPLICATION

This framework delineates five key factors that define and allow analysis of the VNSA decisions and actions associated with WMD acquisition and use. These factors imply questions that must be asked and answered before concluding whether and how a particular VNSA might seek and use WMD. The position taken here is that VNSA do not universally covet WMD, and that acquisition does not automatically equal use. Individual group analysis is needed to understand WMD decisions and actions. This VNSA WMD analytical template, also shaped by strategic culture, is represented by the strategic-to-operational chain depicted at Figure 4.

Figure 4: WMD Strategic Analysis Template



The VNSA identity and ideology will determine the legitimacy, and thus the desirability, of WMD to the group. WMD may or may not, in fact, be deemed as legitimate to a particular segment of the core or active

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support populations of a VNSA, or be seen as justifiable within its base ideology, whether religious or secular. Similarly, the VNSA strategy indicates the group conception of WMD utility in obtaining strategic objectives. Depending on those objectives, WMD could possibly be seen as overkill or counterproductive; or it could fully mesh with the strategic outcomes sought. The VNSA structure (operational, technical, economic) determines the capacity of the group to absorb, manufacture, otherwise acquire, maintain, deploy, and/or employ WMD. Even if a VNSA sees WMD as positive, that group may not be capable of WMD use. If the group is capable, its doctrine shapes how the group envisions WMD optimal use (including target selection) and the group's operational code (including employment characteristics). Again, detailed analysis of these key factors is essential to a full understanding of whether and how a VNSA might seek and use WMD. Nothing short of this analysis can effectively answer those questions.

ASYMMETRICAL OPERATIONS APPLICATION

The framework finally lays out five key factors that describe and focus analysis on asymmetrical operations decisions and actions. This template is informed by the logic expressed by Mao Tse-tung:

The laws of war are a problem which anyone directing a war must study and solve.

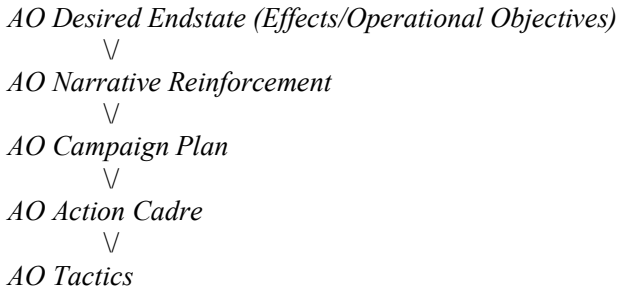
The laws of revolutionary war are a problem which anyone directing a revolutionary war must study and solve.

The laws of China's revolutionary war are a problem which anyone directing China's revolutionary war must study and solve.³

The specific nature and characteristics of the conflict at hand—place, time, adversaries, circumstances, every aspect—are key to crafting success in a campaign of asymmetrical violence, and this same full slate of tailored factors holds the key to understanding and combating, defeating, such a campaign. Again, there is no single one-size-fits-all set of answers, so we

need a roadmap of questions to ask, factors to consider, in deciphering and defeating asymmetrical warfare undertaken against us. One template for such analysis, based in this cultural perspective and focusing on the operational as a bridge from strategic to tactical, is depicted at Figure 5.

Figure 5: Asymmetrical Operations Analysis Template



Just as the VNSA identity and ideology determine the group’s concept of legitimacy for WMD, these same defining strategic factors directly determine the desired endstate that defines the focus, scope, and character of an operational campaign. Here the strategic rationale and objectives of the VNSA are translated into the objectives and instrumental effects sought by violence within the specific realities of the local environment; “China’s revolutionary war.” Equally important, that strategic group definition provided by its identity and ideology is also translated into its operationally relevant narrative, the “story” that captures the context of the campaign of violence, legitimizes that use of force against its specifically defined victims and targets, and motivates and transforms the applications of specific violence. Similarly, the overall strategy is recast into an operational campaign plan to achieve the desired effects consistent with the rationale of the narrative. An operational cadre is designated for the specific composition, training, equipping to implement the plan of action, and appropriate, tailored tactics are designated—almost certainly asymmetrical—to achieve the operational objectives against a capable foe.

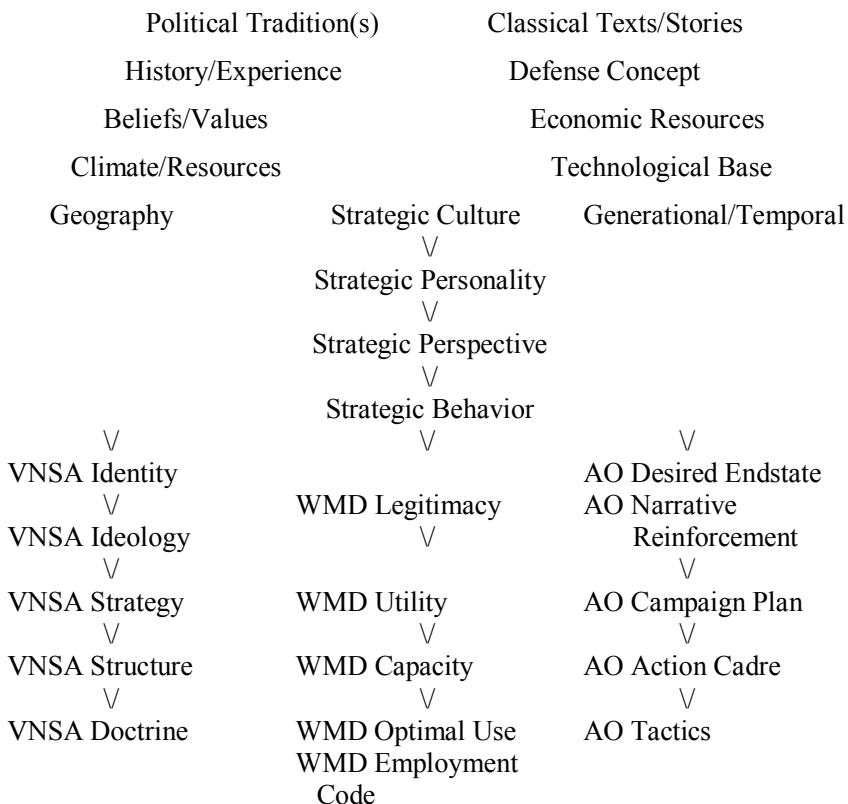
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Each group, campaign, and action tailors itself to the “objective realities” of its operational environment, and the entire strategic-to-operational-to-tactical chain of influence is needed to fully understand, prevent or limit, and ultimately defeat the VNSA action. Focusing simply on the tactical action can only allow reaction as it misses all of the context that is central to a strategy to combat and defeat the VNSA.

CONCLUSIONS

The complete framework at Figure 6 depicts all of these pieces together: cultural determinants, decision and action consequences, VNSA applications, and WMD and asymmetrical operations applications. And

Figure 6: Strategic Culture, VNSAs, and Effects Analysis Framework



strategic culture influences all VNSA decisions and actions leading to political violence, including the employment of WMD or the mounting of an asymmetrical campaign.

This framework applies directly to describing, understanding, and countering VNSA strategic decisions and actions. It explains how the group defines itself and what it hopes to achieve. It further explains the VNSA decision structure and process, with specific information on group information searches and processing, organizational learning, and the framing and prioritization of strategic options. It also informs us about the VNSA process of specifying, organizing, and carrying out political violence. Importantly, it includes a specific focus that allows analysis and understanding of how WMD fits—or does not fit—into the strategy, structure, and operations of the group. And it also extends the analysis to decoding VNSA asymmetrical operational campaigns and the direct application of their tactical violence that so often is viewed in isolation from its strategic context. It provides a vital culturally based lens into the inner thinking and actions of a range of VNSA.

CASES OVERVIEW

Predictive applications of the framework await multiple descriptive applications and fully developed cases. Only such repeated analyses can flesh out and sharpen, or amend, this template in the hope to create a record of consistency that would begin to provide a basis for confidence in prospective analysis. That series of applications remains to be completed. At this point, however, we do present two cases, neither directly and deliberately employing this specific framework, but each is undertaken from a distinctly cultural perspective of a contemporary VNSA. One is an analysis at the strategic level and based in the metanarrative that defines core al-Qaida's identity and ideology behind that group's decision calculus toward the acquisition and use of WMD. The other is an analysis that

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translates Taliban narratives to the operational level and details one application within an operational campaign. These cases are worthy studies completely on their own merits, but they also underscore the power of cultural analysis that this strategic culture framework seeks to also underscore and facilitate. We commend them to your attention.

NOTES

¹ SAIC Summary Report, “Comparative Strategic Culture: Phase II Kickoff Workshop,” 13 February 2006, 6.

² See, for example, Caroline F. Ziemke, Philippe Loustaunau, and Amy Alrich, *Strategic Personality and the Effectiveness of Nuclear Deterrence* (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, November 2000) for one state “personality” analysis; and Barry R. Schneider and Jerrold M. Post, editors, *Know Thy Enemy: Profiles of Adversary Leaders and Their Strategic Cultures*, Second Edition (Maxwell AFB, AL, USAF Counterproliferation Center, July 2003), for examples of leader “personality” profiles.

³ Mao Tse-tung, “Problems of Strategy in China’s Revolutionary War” (December 1936), in *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1968), 77.

*Strategic Culture, Al-Qaida, and Weapons of Mass Destruction*¹

Jerry Mark Long

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

An analyst writing for a prominent counterterrorism think tank recently offered a “primer” on the world’s most feared terrorist network and the potential employment of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Saying that an al-Qaida attack using these weapons is “inevitable,” the analyst held that such employment “would serve all the traditional purposes of terrorism: symbolism, propaganda, and psychological impact, irrespective of the failure or success of the mission.” Then, in a sweeping conclusion, the analyst averred, “What matters is to cause mass casualties.... In this context discussions about motives to deploy WMD are irrelevant. No matter how complex the deep principles or incentives behind WMD terrorism, the *only reliable motive is an unflinching desire to slay blindly.*”² (emphasis added)

“Irrespective of success or failure.” “Slay blindly.” Unfortunately, the analyst’s views seem to be as common as they are categorical and reductionistic. Al-Qaida’s true aim, despite the spectacular assault on the World Trade Center, has never been simply indiscriminate slaughter. Indeed, its long-term goals have been articulated in a multitude of venues and with remarkable consistency. Although its ideologues have vigorously debated methods of achieving them, blind slaying has not numbered among them, whether as means or end. In studying al-Qaida documents, something else emerges: a view of the world and a strategic code more richly textured, nuanced, calculating, even deadly. Al-Qaida may indeed someday use WMD, but it will do so having calibrated its aims and—despite our author’s assertion—success *will* count.

But the account given above falls short in another way, and it is this: we can no longer speak of a single al-Qaida, a vertical organization with a

shura council rigorously controlling a top-down structure. It is better viewed as an ideology metastasizing through multiple “al-Qaidas,” franchises that import the original message of the proto-al-Qaida and adapt it to local and national exigencies. Increasingly, “al-Qaida” must be taken as a political metonymy, an expression to indicate an array of global Islamic organizations, operating with varying levels of autonomy, but generally subscribed to a salafist religious narrative that stipulates a political order which will be achieved through the use of controlled violence. The original al-Qaida remains, but it is no longer simply the hierarchical structure developed in the 1990s following the mujahideen triumph in Afghanistan. “Al-Qaida” is now an idea spread throughout the blogosphere, and that is where the greater threat lies.

The question of jihadist use of WMD must therefore be put in a double context. First, one must examine al-Qaida as a violent non-state, *non-national* actor whose ideology posits a nexus of strategic principles and suggests an operational code. Then, one must examine particular “al-Qaidas,” violent non-state *national* actors, which may import that ideology, tailor it to local exigencies, and develop specific national operational codes. In taking this two-tiered approach, we are not discounting that Osama and the original al-Qaida may attempt to acquire and use WMD, but we are asserting that multiple jihadist groups are now deliberating possible use in their respective national settings. Thus, the question western analysts face is considerably more complex than simply, “What is the likelihood al-Qaida will employ WMD?”

This paper will take only an initial step in the complex task of trying to determine whether and under what circumstances al-Qaida and its affiliates may use WMD. It will confine itself to examining the ideology, approached as narrative, of the *original* al-Qaida, not particular franchises. It will ask what its views are with respect to the acquisition and

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employment of WMD, and it will do so by using strategic culture as an analytic concept. What emerges is a contested ideology, but also one of substantial nuance, and—as we shall see—something considerably advanced beyond a simple desire to employ WMD to slay blindly.

Al-Qaida and strategic culture as analytic tool

As an analytic concept, strategic culture studies developed in the 1970s, following the earlier idea of a political culture among elites, a “culture” amenable to critical analysis. Once the culture was understood, analysts could then make predictions about political behavior. As the idea developed, analysts applied the idea of strategic culture to the Soviet Union. In its usual formulation, the Soviets were seen as developing specific operational codes based on a long-developing culture that stemmed from centuries of Russian history and the wars that swept across Eastern Europe to the Russian heartland. Thus, analysts ascribed operational doctrines like “defense in depth” and “correlation of forces” to facets of a deeper strategic culture, a set of factors that made for a kind of historically-imposed inertia on present actions.³

Analysts of violent non state actors have recently revived the concept, looking for a more insightful way of describing (and, where possible, predicting) strategic behaviors than simply positing them to a given actor’s forward-looking calculation of maximum utility. That is especially important when looking at al-Qaida, for game theory is unable to take adequate account of suicide bombing. In such a case, of course, the actor does nothing to maximize his utility, but quite the opposite. And yet the rationality of the bombers seems intact, from a psychological point of view,⁴ and when examined within a religious and historical context—the very thing strategic culture analysis compels us to do—the sacrifice the bombers make is both explicable and consistent. To use Hedrick Smith’s apt phrase from another context (that of Soviet political behavior), what

one confronts in the Middle East today is the weight of the salafist past upon the Islamist present. Strategic culture helps us read al-Qaida's past and offers an interpretation of present actions.

At the outset, one must acknowledge a special consideration in seeking to use strategic culture as a tool to examine al-Qaida. Heretofore, it has been used with respect to *state* actors. Al-Qaida, despite its dreams of a renewed caliphate, is not a state. Moreover, in the parlance of international relations, it isn't even a nation. It is transnational. But the ostensible weakness of strategic culture as a tool may be its very strength, if prudently applied. "Nation" is a protean concept. One way of approaching it is to see a nation as a group of people who strongly identify with an overarching, shared cultural narrative, a key focus in strategic culture analysis. Indeed a state has effective political cohesion to the degree it is coterminous with that nation and its narrative.

Thus, in many ways the nation is the unit more susceptible of strategic culture analysis, an analysis appropriate to the state only to that degree the state comprises those who share a national narrative. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the Tamil Tigers, the Basque separatists, the Chechen rebels, and Hamas would be amenable to this analysis, for while they are violent non-state actors, they are yet national actors within a state setting. The same could be said for particular "al-Qaidas" within a local setting, whether in Bali, Morocco, or "Londonistan." This conceptualization would seem especially pertinent to national groups in Iraq. Rather than attempt to analyze violence in the Iraqi state as a whole, a more fruitful approach would see Iraq as an artificial state that comprises three nations. With respect to its creation after World War I, Sir Anthony Parsons, long a British diplomat in the Middle East, observed, "Woodrow Wilson had disappeared by then, and there wasn't much rubbish about self-determination. We, the British, cobbled Iraq together. It was always an

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artificial state; it had nothing to do with the people who lived there.”⁵ Strategic culture takes account of that crucial historical dimension. It would approach the Iraqi Sunni and Shia militants, not merely as combatants in a *state’s* civil war, but as two *nations* who battle each other. Each side has its own deep cultural narrative, and each side has its account about The Other and the threat the other poses to its own values and very existence. Strategic culture, in approaching the state of Iraq, must analyze multiple narratives—just as it must for any non-homogenous state. And to the degree that a state is markedly pluralistic (i.e., differing national groups vying for advantage within a given government structure), strategic culture loses focus as an analytic tool, unless it allows for multiple narratives.

Which brings us to the question of whether al-Qaida, transnational as it is, would be amenable to such analysis. The answer is a qualified “yes.” Religion can serve as a powerful ethnic marker,⁶ a critical element constitutive of identity. In the case of Islam, the appeal that salafi jihadists make is that the bond of religion trumps state identification. This replicates the pattern of early Islam, wherein the forefathers claimed that loyalty to the *ummah*, the Islamic community, was to supersede *asabiyya*, loyalty to the kinship group. In support, jihadists frequently cite Q 2:143, “Thus we have made of you/an Ummat justly balanced/that ye might be witnesses/over the nations [al-nas, lit., “the people” or “the multitudes”].” For al-Qaida, the organization is simply a tangible expression of this larger *ummah*.⁷ And the *ummah* is not so much transnational as it is the nation which is trans-global. In contradistinction, say, to the Tamil Tigers who see themselves as a nation operating within the state context of Sri Lanka, al-Qaida members view their imagined *ummah* as that nation which is larger than any state. From the western perspective, those from other countries who travel to Iraq as suicide bombers represent *different*

nationalities that have converged on a failed state. From the Islamist perspective, these are members of the *one nation* who have traveled to the region to defend their religion *bi amwal wa anfusihim*, with their possessions and their lives. The brilliance of Osama and others is in the crafting of a religious narrative that gives a thick account of this nation, the *ummah*, and thus makes it a cultural reality for which men and women are willing to die. It is that nation and its narrative that we analyze here using the tools of strategic culture.

In this approach, we will take “strategic culture”⁸ to indicate an ideational milieu, one that makes important assumptions about the fundamental values of the community, the nature of the enemy that threatens those values, and the role of war in defending the same. These fundamental values coalesce in what we will term a meta-narrative, the overarching story that situates individuals in a distinct community, provides a cognitive roadmap by which they are to live, and that motivates members to protect the community against its enemies, even in the face of death. Within this larger narrative, elites rank order strategic options about how best to defend and promote the community through warfare.

Strategic Culture

(Ideational milieu;
Assumptions about war)

Metanarrative

(Community story
about culture)

Strategic Preferences

(Rank-ordered options about
appropriate defense measures)

Behavior

(Operationalized defensive measures
constrained by culture and exigency)

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Then, in the messy details of contingent circumstances, decision makers act to achieve those valued ends. We may diagram as depicted above. The remainder of this paper will focus especially on the second step of this diagram, the meta-narrative of al-Qaida and its concomitant preferences. Following that, it will then suggest what behaviors may arise within that “national” and trans-global entity.

THE CLASSICAL NARRATIVE

The classical view in Islam about the world and the role of jihad arose during the Abbasid caliphate. This doctrine developed following a series of stunning and quite rapid victories over rival tribes in the Arabian peninsula, and the larger but effete empires of the Byzantines and Persians.⁹ The story was retrospective, providing a justification for warfare, an explanation for its victories, and a justification for the ethical dimension of Islam’s actions. This narration rendered the world thus:

<i>dar al-Islam</i> (house of Islam)	<i>ahl al-kitab</i> (people of the book)	<i>dar al-harb</i> (house of war)
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In this formulation, there was a categorical divide between the believers and the unbelievers, yet it provided an intermediate space for *ahl al-kitab*, people of the book, generally Christians, Jews, and other monotheists. Between the two houses there is perennial war. There may be occasional periods of *sulh*, a cessation of hostilities, or a *hudna*, a truce, but not *salaam*, true peace. Eventually, Islam will triumph, despite whatever setbacks it may suffer in the meantime. And that is a key point, for this inevitable victory requires faith, calculation, and long-term patience.

Despite representations in modern art, as Islam spread geographically, the aim was not forced conversions, but insuring that conquered peoples recognized the supremacy of Islam. Moreover, Islamist jurists formulated

rules of warfare that parallel the West's ideas about *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*; e.g., what constitutes a threat against Islam, who should be considered combatants, the permissibility of collateral damage, and what intentional damage might be inflicted on an enemy's territory.¹⁰ It is important to note that this was not a monolithic formulation; there was a great deal of debate among Muslim scholars about how these questions ought to be answered.¹¹ It was also true of the principle of *da'wa*, the appeal that Muslims were to make to non-Muslims to embrace Islam. Scholars debated ways in which *da'wa* ought to be promulgated. They also debated who could live in tributary status: no one at all, monotheists only, or polytheists as well.

REFASHIONING THE NARRATIVE

Al-Qaida's formulation draws from this classical doctrine, as well as from a number of medieval and modern thinkers and movements (Ibn-Taymiyya, wahhabism, Maududi, Qutb, Abdullah Azzam, and many others). In this reformulation, Osama functions as a kind of lay mujtahid, one who gives independent interpretation to Islamic texts. But it is critical to understand that Osama is not free to give just any interpretation, or else he would have no legitimacy. Rather he functions within an historical and religious tradition that has set the parameters within which he must move. Moreover, he is clearly influenced by his mentors and by those other ideologues in al-Qaida with whom he interacts. In this regard, it is better to see Osama as a kind of Homer who does not invent his story but must refashion what has come to him in his cultural context. And it is equally important to see that al-Qaida is not monolithic. Osama is iconic and even something of a *batil*, an Islamic hero, but he is not *imperator* whose ideas alone carry weight. Within al-Qaida, as is true of Islam more generally, there is sharp contestation, and those who read the primary materials will see the degree to which that is true. And a critical corollary merges here.

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A single fatwa does not constitute the definitive al-Qaida position on an issue, nor is al-Qaida's doctrine frozen in ahistorical time. It is dynamic.¹²

Yet one may describe al-Qaida thinking in *broad* terms with relative accuracy. It begins with the dichotomy of the house of war and the house of Islam. Osama and others have appealed to this division on countless occasions. Osama's statement several weeks after 9/11 is typical. "These events have divided the whole world into two camps, the camp of the faithful and the camp of the infidels. May God shield us and you [i.e., other Muslims] from them."¹³ But al-Qaida's use significantly attenuates the intermediate space for people of the book, and Jews are almost never offered any consideration for this category. On the other hand, the category *dar al-harb*, pretty much an undifferentiated mass in classical thinking, is particularized in contemporary thinking. It posits a trifecta of enemies: The West; The Jews; and Traitorous Arab leaders.

Each of those may be further differentiated, using either secular or religious terms. For instance, the West may become either the "crusaders" or the "imperialists." Often it is simply "America." A particularly important term in their lexicon for the west is *kafirun*, unbelievers, and President Bush is designated "head of the unbelievers." The Jews generally are "Zionists" or the "Zionist entity." And the traitors among Arab leaders (usually heads of state in the Gulf Cooperation Council and virtually all senior members of the Saudi royal family) are "agents," intermediaries who do the bidding of the West and who fail to implement Islamic law, the *shari'a*.¹⁴ More significantly, al-Qaida terms them *murtadun*, apostates. That is significant, for classical Islam stipulated harsher treatment for those who had left the faith than for simple unbelievers. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is a "layman" who "bartered away the true religion." And among non-Arab, Muslim leaders lumped in that category is President Musharraf of Pakistan, the "traitor" of

Islam. Moreover, these categories sometimes get blended. Israel, for instance, is frequently accused of having formed a “Crusader-Zionist alliance” with the West. Great Britain and the United States have formed “armies of unbelief” and “the Crusader West.”¹⁵ The interim prime minister of Iraq, Ibrahim al-Ja’fari, is the “servant of the cross” who has declared war on his Muslim co-religionists. And so on, in seemingly endless permutations.

Key dates

Al-Qaida’s contemporary doctrinal reformulation has, of course, taken place within a specific historical context, and several dates are critical to the Islamists. Apart from the obvious deeper history that al-Qaida often cites (the loss of the Iberian peninsula, the crusades, etc), several more recent events of the last century stand out, and al-Qaida ideologues frequently reference them. Here are five of those key dates.

1916 Sykes-Picot

Radicals (and indeed most Arabs) view this as the date of the great betrayal, when Britain secretly pursued its imperialist aims in the region, at the expense of the Arabs.¹⁶ It is a strongly evocative date and seen as contributing to the end of the caliphate (1923) and the implementation of an “imperialist” mandate system. Immediately after 9/11, Osama released an audio tape in which he claimed that the attack on the WTC was retaliation for a series of Western assaults on the region, beginning with the critical era in World War I.

1948 Establishment of Israel

May, 1948, is read as part of a western plot to establish a beachhead on Muslim lands, and most Muslims and Arabs generally call this *al-nakba*, the disaster. Al-Qaida is more specific. This “loss of Palestine” is not merely loss of territory. It represents the loss of Jerusalem, the third holiest site in Islam and the first *qibla* (direction

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of prayer). Even Saddam, in his Machiavellian way, sought to leverage the religious aspect of Jerusalem as legitimation for his invasion of Kuwait. Many al-Qaida pronouncements, as with the 1998 fatwa, list the recovery of Palestine and the first *qibla* as a key war aim.

1967 The June War

Often referred to in the region as another *nakba*, Islamists highlight it as the failure of secular Arab nationalism and, indeed, the judgment of God. From this point, Islamists propounded their own alternative, what they have termed *al-Hal al-islami*, the Islamic solution. That has proved a paradigm, of sorts. Hezbollah, Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood, and al-Qaida have seized on any sort of disaster as an opportunity to show—by rhetoric and practice—the superiority of the Islamic solution, mobilizing the aid that feckless Arab governments cannot, then exploiting the public relations moment.¹⁷

1973 The Ramadan/Yom Kippur War

Arabs view this as the war that restored the nation's honor (after the debacle of 1967) and demonstrated the vulnerability of the Zionist enemy.¹⁸ Indeed, it made possible—at least in Sadat's view—a trip to Jerusalem to address the Knesset and participate in the Camp David talks. But it is important with respect to the history of al-Qaida. Osama has pointed to this as the beginning of his return to Islam. Because of the massive U.S. airlift to reinforce Israel after its initial setbacks in the Sinai, the war indicated to Osama the unalterable commitment of the West to support the Zionist entity, a formative event in the development of al-Qaida's view of the real nature and structure of the house of war. Not incidentally, this was underscored again in July 2006 when the United States resupplied Israel in its war with Hezbollah.

1990 The Gulf War

It is difficult to overstate the importance of this period. Osama, flush from victory in Afghanistan, offered to employ his *mujahideen* to repel Saddam. The Saudis turned instead to the West. But more important than United States *intervention* was the continued U.S. *presence* in the peninsula, a “defilement” that radicals compared to that of a woman ritually unclean during her monthly cycle.¹⁹ This was the final validation, to Osama and others, of the West’s intent to overrun the house of Islam, and provocation (*jus ad bellum*) to launch a “defensive” war, on their view.²⁰

DOCTRINES OF WAR AND WMD

It is this meta-narrative, selectively derived from classical doctrine and reshaped through historical contingency, that forms the basis for al-Qaida’s strategic preferences and operational code. Al-Qaida, in fact, has made no secret of its strategic views, even if it practices reasonably good OPSEC with respect to operational employment. It is possible to “read al-Qaida’s playbook,” as a recent publication of the Combating Terrorism Center at the United States Military Academy puts it.²¹ And to read it, is to be immediately struck by how thorough al-Qaida ideologues have been in deliberating warfighting doctrine in light of the larger worldview of radical, salafist Islam. The reductionistic approach of reading al-Qaida as simply an undifferentiated group of terrorists seeking spectacular effects by indiscriminately killing massive numbers of Americans is a serious misreading indeed. Here, then, are three key points of doctrine.

- The war al-Qaida fights will be a **long war**, requiring patience and careful calculation. The authoritative source here is the writing of Sayyid Qutb, and he merits quoting at length on this critical point.

[T]he growing bankruptcy of western civilization makes it necessary to revive Islam. The distance between the revival of

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Islam and the attainment of world leadership *may be vast*...but the first step must be taken.... The Muslim community [i.e., the umma] today is neither capable of nor is required to present before mankind great genius in material inventions, such as would make the world bow its head before its supremacy and thus re-establish once more its world leadership. Europe's creative mind is far ahead in this area, and *for a few centuries* to come we cannot expect to compete with Europe.... How to initiate the revival of Islam? A vanguard must set out with this determination and then keep going, marching through the vast ocean of *jahiliyyah* [ignorance of the true faith] which encompasses the entire world.... The Muslims in this vanguard must know the landmarks and the milestones on the road to this goal so that they would know the starting point as well as the nature, the responsibilities, and the ultimate purpose of *this long journey*.²²

In his statement the month after the attack on the WTC, Osama used precisely this term—"vanguard"—which Qutb had used, claiming that it was they who had struck a blow against America. He finished his statement claiming, "The wind of change is blowing to remove evil from the peninsula of Muhammad."²³ In the ideological trajectory of his doctrinal mentor, Osama was stating the vanguard had set out on its long journey with this major blow against the *dar al harb*, and that winds of change had begun to stir, *not* that the task was completed nor even near completion. And al-Qaida understands that the fight is lengthy precisely because its fight is asymmetric, despite the dramatic success on 9/11. In fact, in a moment of candor after his "period of solitude," al-Qaida ideologue Abu Mus'ab al-Suri declared, "It is inconceivable to imagine the defeat and destruction of America, with all the military and economic power that it has reached, except through natural disasters."²⁴ Hence the comment of al-Qaida on its al-Nidaa web site about the necessity of unconventional warfare in 2003: "We expected that the method of defense of regular or semi-regular [Iraqi forces] would collapse.... [Thus] we have focused on the modus operandi of guerilla warfare. This is the most

powerful method Muslims have...[for] there is no chance that in the years to come we will be allowed to possess the elements of strength.”²⁵

This is not to indicate despair on the part of the Islamists but the realization that theirs is a long battle to gain the supremacy of Islam. In fact, the al-Nidaa statement emphasizes that guerilla warfare proved successful against the Americans in Vietnam and the Russians in Afghanistan. While it will occasionally be able to launch major operations, increasingly much of its focus must be on what Abu Bakr Naji calls “vexation and exhaustion operations” in his *Management of Savagery*.²⁶ Similarly, al-Qaida understands it must constantly evaluate and recalibrate its plans, based on careful study of jihads, past and present, and their relative success. Al-Suri is especially pertinent here as an al-Qaida intellectual who has produced a critical study on earlier experiences of jihads that failed, especially in Syria and the Hama Uprising in 1982.²⁷

- The war al-Qaida fights will generally be couched as a **defensive war**, and therefore morally legitimate. That was clearly the case after 9/11 when al-Qaida pronouncements repeatedly described the attack as a justified retaliation for western aggression against Muslims. The point is important, for it shows al-Qaida sensitivity to international condemnations. Describing it as defensive has an additional benefit with respect to Islamic jurisprudence. Classical thinking differentiated jihad as *fard kifayah* or *fard ayn*, a collective obligation or an individual obligation. In the former case, the community was responsible for mustering a contingent who could conduct an offensive jihad. But the latter obtained when the Islamic community came under attack, and every individual must come to its defense.

Osama’s (et al) famous February 1998 fatwa uses exactly this approach. The Arabian peninsula, with its sanctities, had come under attack. All Muslims, therefore, must come to its defense. Some months

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later, Osama gave an interview with al-Jazeera in which he commented on the jihadists who had carried out attacks against Riyadh (1995), Khobar (1996), and the US embassies in Africa (1998). “I look at these men with much admiration and respect, for they have removed the shame from the forehead of our umma.”²⁸ Osama’s comment reflects both Arab culture, as well as Islamist conviction. In his view, Arab honor had been besmirched by the colonialist West, and a reprisal attack, after the pattern of *ghazw*, was necessary to restore the honor and remove the shame. But Osama also cast this in Islamic terms: shame had come to the Islamic nation, and God had given authorization to defend the community:

To those against whom
War is made, permission
is given to fight,
because they are wronged—and verily,
God is most powerful
For their aid. Q 22:39

This same pairing of culture and religion may be found in *Military Studies in the Jihad against the Tyrants*, captured by British authorities in Manchester, England, in May 2000. Note that the title itself implies that this is defensive; this is preparation to turn back tyranny. The book opens with a “pledge” to “the sister believer whose clothes have been stripped off...whose hair the oppressors have shaved...whose body has been abused by the human dogs.”²⁹ The imagery is striking, for it depicts violation of a woman’s *‘irdh*, honor. The humiliation that takes place (stripping, shaving) is indicative of violating a major cultural taboo, and the reference to dogs, generally seen as unclean in Arab culture, compounds the sense of previous violation. This violation mandates a response. For the Islamists, therefore, jihad is morally warranted, both culturally and religiously.

Abu Bakr Naji gives a much more nuanced analysis. In *The Management of Savagery*, Naji presents jihad as necessary to reverse moral entropy. On his view, jihad is a merciful gift from heaven:

Before God sent down the law of jihad, He wanted to show humanity what would happen without jihad so that they would see the complete wisdom of the Lawgiver, praised and exalted be He. The result was terrible: stupid, stubborn opposition from most of the people and the followers of Satan.... [T]he generations become corrupt upon the earth and spread unbelief and corruption among humans. They even work to create a fitna [chaos, dissension] for the believing few, either by direct pressure or by the fitna of exalting unbelief and its people in the eyes of the weak few among the believers.... [In the gift of jihad, God shows the] completeness of [his] mercy to humanity, for this restores justice and averts eternal punishment for those who believe.³⁰

This idea of jihad as a moral reprisal because of infidel attacks has been publicly articulated on numerous occasions. Abu Gheith, for instance, used it to describe 9/11. “Why were millions of people astounded by what happened to America on September 11?” Gheith asked. “America is the reason for all oppression, injustice, licentiousness, or suppression that is the Muslims’ lot.” It was therefore appropriate to “punish a Harbi infidel in the same way he treated a Muslim.”³¹ Similarly, Islamists depicted the London bombings in July 2005 as reprisal for earlier attacks against Muslims. On the first anniversary of the bombings, Al-Qaida released a martyr video of Shehzad Tanweer, one of the London bombers. The British govt had “declared war on Islam,” he said, attacking without cause “mothers, children, brothers and sisters... in Palestine, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Chechnya.” Non-Muslim British were guilty, by extension, for they had voted in the government which was responsible for those depredations. Zawahiri added a voiceover, saying these men were motivated by love of God and of his prophet.³² And later in the month, Zawahiri released another tape after Israel invaded Lebanon. In this, Zawahiri justified Hezbollah, calling for retaliation against the “Zionist-

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Crusader war [that] is without conscience” and which had torn “Muslim bodies in Gaza and Lebanon,” as well as in Chechnya, Kashmir, Afghanistan, and Iraq.³³ The pattern is consistent: Al-Qaida’s view of war is one in which it is taking morally defensible action against western assaults against Muslims worldwide.

- The war al-Qaida fights will be an **intelligent war**, predicated on their own strategic culture analysis. This has two components. The first is that al-Qaida has and will continue to study western history, institutions, management principles, military doctrine, and so on. Moreover, it has also studied western open-source counter-terrorism doctrine. Captured al-Qaida documents, as well as al-Qaida pronouncements, have show a remarkable knowledge of everything from the American political process and economic concerns, to the U.S. military’s pre-positioning of supplies in the lower Persian Gulf and its disposition of forces. The second component is al-Qaida’s ability to show flexibility with respect to its own methods, doing a fairly rigorous analysis of its failures and adapting new approaches. One such is al-Suri’s *Observations Concerning the Jihadi Experience in Syria*. Another is *The Story of the Arab Afghans From the Entry to Afghanistan until the Final Departure with the Taliban*, serialized in *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* in December 2004. Among other observations, (putative author) Abu Walid al-Masri recalls Osama’s false assumption that the United States could withstand only two or three decisive blows and that 9/11 should prove decisive.³⁴

Of particular interest is al-Qaida ideologue Abu Bakr Naji, especially in light of his clear commitment to a strategic culture analysis of the West. He merits quoting at length.

We urge that most of the leaders of the Islamic movement be military leaders or have the ability to fight in the ranks, at the very least. Likewise, we also urge that those leaders work to master political science just as they would work to master military science.... Political action is very important and dangerous, such

that one of them said: ‘A single political mistake (leads to) a result that is worse than one hundred military mistakes.’ Despite the hyperbole in this statement, it is true to the extent that it clarifies the seriousness of a political mistake.... *The interest in understanding the rules of the political game and the political reality of the enemies and their fellow travelers* and then mastering disciplined political action through sharia politics and opposing this reality is not less than the importance of military action, especially if we consider that the moment of gathering the fruit—a moment which is considered the recompense for the sacrifices offered by the mujahids during long decades—is a moment resulting from a political strike and a decisive political decision. Thus, the most important of their political principles is the principle of (self) interest. Their principle absolutely does not submit to any moral value; rather, all the other principles are subordinate to it—friendship or enmity, peace or war—and are all determined according to (self) interest.

The politicians of the West summarize that in a slogan which says, ‘There is no eternal enmity in politics and no eternal friendship; rather, there are eternal interests.’³⁵

Naji’s closing paraphrase of Lord Palmerston’s dictum from the middle Nineteenth Century should come as no surprise. Al-Qaida, it seems, is determined to follow Sun Tzu’s non-negotiable principle of victory through knowledge, and it has done its homework rather thoroughly, to include reading primers of international relations.

On some level, al-Qaida has sought to formalize strategic analysis, as the *Encyclopedia of Jihad* makes clear. “The mission of [al-Qaida’s strategic intelligence unit] is gathering, organizing, and distributing military information on the strategic level of the [target] country. Its goal is to know the country’s military, political, economical and social capabilities and to predict its intentions, in order to work confronting all possibilities.”³⁶ In application, the knowledge so gained can have implementation at the strategic or tactical level, and may be used in lethal or non-lethal ways. One example that reflects multiple applications of strategic intelligence is al-Qaida’s tracking of the Bush administration’s

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awarding of Iraqi reconstruction contracts, announced in December 2003.³⁷

Within a day, one publication, *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, editorialized

When we warned that US aggression against Iraq was aimed at achieving two important goals, to loot Iraq's economy and wealth and to serve Israeli interests and remove any real Arab threats to the racist Jewish state, there were those who accused us of exaggeration.... Yesterday the US president, George Bush, announced that bids for contracts in Iraqi reconstruction will first be given to US companies, then other companies affiliated to allied countries which sent their forces to Iraq, risked the lives of their people, and served in the US project.... The US decision will...increase the world's hatred for the current arrogant US administration.³⁸

Osama noted how the issue of the contracts awards could be exploited, and he responded to the wedge moment with non-lethal propaganda: “This war makes millions of dollars for big corporations, either weapons manufacturers or those working in the reconstruction [of Iraq], such as Halliburton and its sister companies.... It is crystal clear who benefits from igniting the fire of this war and this bloodshed: They are the merchants of war, the bloodsuckers who run the policy of the world from behind the scenes.”³⁹ And an al-Qaida unit in Saudi Arabia, the al-Quds Brigade, formed quite lethal plans. It spent some months reconnoitering a western housing compound where Halliburton employees lived, then attacked it in May 2004 with a small team, killing 22 persons. The next month, the leader of the mission, Fawwaz al-Nashami, described the “Battle of Khobar” in an interview with *Sawt al-Jihad* [Voice of Jihad]. The battle was, Fawwaz said, part of the larger plan to purge the Arabian peninsula of ritual impurities by attacking western contractors. It also provided the occasion to appeal to Muslims working in the compound to embrace a salafist vision of Islam.⁴⁰

As part of this intelligent war, al-Qaida understands its words and actions have multiple audiences. Its methods in war will be guided, to some degree, by an appreciation for and an adherence to classical Islamic

strictures about *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. As we note above, al-Qaida routinely positions itself as fighting a defensive war. But even if one considers all such elaborations as tendentious, al-Qaida is keenly aware of its public image. In an undated letter to Mullah Omar, Osama averred that gaining the upper hand in the “information war” (al-Harb al-ilmiah) represents 90% of the preparation for battle.⁴¹ And Abu Mus‘ab al-Suri has underscored the importance of propagandists to articulate the movement’s objectives and legitimate use of violence.⁴²

Much of al-Qaida literature is, therefore, quite taken with examining the reactions of various Muslim publics. For instance, al-Qaida attacks in Saudi Arabia that caused extensive casualties among Muslims (the Battle of Khobar did not) proved counter-productive, and after a year of harrowing attacks, they suddenly ceased. Al-Qaida clearly noted the negative public reaction, one which the Saudi royal family was quick to exploit, and it curtailed its attacks. Another example is the November 2005 hotel attacks that killed over 50, to include members of a wedding party. Zarqawi offered an extensive apology, saying that the hotels were a den of crusaders and Zionists, and that members of the wedding party were emphatically not the target. He then added,

The obscenity and corruption spread [by the Jordanian government] have turned Jordan into a quagmire of utter profanity and debauchery, and anyone who has seen the hotels, the houses of entertainment, the dance parties, the wine bars, and the tourist resorts in Aqaba, in the Dead Sea [region], and in other places is wrenched with sorrow over what this family [i.e. the Jordanian royal family]—both its men and its women—has done to this country, whose people are good.⁴³

In part, the concern about the violence is doctrinally driven. Naji has written, “One should note that violence and coarseness must not transgress the limits of the Sharia and that one must pay heed to the benefit and harm (that results from) it, which the Sharia considers to be, in the rules of jihad, as one of the most important subjects for the guidance of creation, if not

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the most important subject.⁴⁴ But al-Qaida is also intelligent and pragmatic. It wants to avoid what Jarret Brachman and William McCants term the “Shayma effect” after the botched assassination attempt on Egyptian Prime Minister, Atif Sidqi. In the event, a young school girl (Shayma) was killed, and—as Zawahiri later noted—caused a propaganda debacle for Egyptian Islamists. In brief, al-Qaida is not blinded by zeal. It will formulate plans carefully calibrated to exploit perceived weaknesses of the enemy *and* which will play well with Islamic audiences.

APPLYING TO WMD

When we turn to al-Qaida’s doctrine of WMD, the most salient factor is that there is none. This is not to say there are not *references* to acquisition and use. There certainly are a number of adversions. Typical are comments like these from Suleiman abu Gheith, al-Qaida spokesman, in June 2002: “It is our right to fight them [the Americans] with chemical and biological weapons, so as to afflict them with the fatal maladies that have afflicted the Muslims because of [their] chemical and biological weapons.”⁴⁵ Or this from Abu ‘Abdullah Al-Kuwaiti: “If the American people are ready to die as we are ready to die, then our combat groups along with our military, nuclear, and biological equipment will kill hundreds of thousands of people we don’t wish to fight.”⁴⁶ But measured against the very large output of al-Qaida pronouncements, references are comparatively infrequent, as Reuven Paz points out, and when they do occur, it is most often to chemical munitions.⁴⁷ Significantly, manuals like *Military Studies in the Jihad against the Tyrants* fail to mention them at all.

There has also been vigorous *deliberation* within the al-Qaida shura about the utility of WMD. Perhaps the most important source is Abu Walid al-Masri, putative author of “The Story of the Arab Afghans from the Time of Arrival in Afghanistan until their Departure with the

Taliban.”⁴⁸ By his account, hawks within al-Qaida’s shura have pushed for authorization. Most prominent among them was Abu Hafs al-Masri, until he was killed in a U.S. airstrike in November 2001. Abu Hafs had served as the organization’s minister of defense and potential successor to Osama. He and others in Al-Qaida argued they should try to obtain whatever they could of WMD for defense in a kind of Islamic MAD doctrine.⁴⁹ But others were deeply concerned about what they termed the “genii in the bottle,” and they urged against acquisition. They feared pulling heaven down upon their heads in a retaliatory strike by the West. And thus what followed was extensive debate about ROE, targets, and jurisprudential questions concerning collateral damage. Also notable is that even the hawks described use in terms of deterrence, not first strike. Moreover, according to Abu Walid, the majority agreed that use of WMD is a sensitive and very dangerous issue. And in any event, he reported, al-Qaida could likely obtain only quite primitive weapons.⁵⁰

Osama’s own position seems ambiguous. On the one hand, Abu Walid reported that the al-Qaida leader had wanted to obtain dirty bombs from the Russian arsenal. Yet he also describes Osama as having blocked Abu Hafs from pursuing a WMD program.⁵¹ When asked directly about chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons in an al-Jazeera interview in December 1998, Osama temporized, saying Israel and Christians had nuclear weapons capability. He then added, “America knows today that Muslims [i.e., Pakistan] are in possession of such a weapon.”⁵² Osama responded similarly in an interview that *Time* published the following month. Asked about chemical and nuclear weapons, he replied, “Acquiring weapons for the defense of Muslims is a religious duty. If I have indeed acquired these weapons, then I thank God for enabling me to do so. And if I seek to acquire these weapons, I am carrying out a duty. It

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would be a sin for Muslims not to try to possess the weapons that would prevent the infidels from inflicting harm on Muslims.”⁵³

Clearly, Osama did make some attempt to acquire such weapons. One especially notable testimony about Osama and al-Qaida’s interest in nuclear (or radiologic) weapons in particular is that of Jamal Ahmad al-Fadl, the Sudanese national who defected from the organization in 1996 and now lives under protective custody in the United States. Al-Fadl had served as the money man in al-Qaida’s 1993 attempt to purchase uranium in Sudan. In the end, however, this deal, like others, proved unsuccessful.⁵⁴ It is also important to note that in February 2002, after swift defeat of Taliban, U.S. officials searched military camps that Osama and al-Qaida had used. They found no WMD.⁵⁵

What should be apparent is that, despite its deliberations and even its attempts to obtain weapons materiel, al-Qaida has not elaborated a consistent *doctrine* with respect to the use of WMD and nuclear weapons in particular. Instead, where western analysts do find discussions about WMD, they discover contestation on the issues of acquisition and employment, a contestation that is carried on within the parameters of a salafist Islamic narrative. Moreover, al-Qaida discussions also proceed within a framework of certain perceptions about the character and operational code of the West. None of this argues that al-Qaida will not again seek to acquire and employ WMD. Unlike Fahd’s 2003 fatwa authorizing use, there has been no counter fatwa among al-Qaida leaders or clerics proscribing use. *Use is clearly permissible*. But indiscriminate employment, merely for spectacular effect, is highly unlikely. Al-Qaida’s aim is not operational effect. It is to secure victory, and a victory with a legitimacy understood in religious terms. Because it is fighting an intelligent war, al-Qaida does consider the attitude continuum among fellow Muslims. Indiscriminate slaughter would multiply the “Shayma

effect” among their co-religionists. That is true even when the victims are non-Muslim, for jurists have long argued against the deliberate targeting of non-combatants. And there is scant evidence that al-Qaida’s argument that non-combatants are responsible for state actions, simply on the basis of having voted, has found traction among Islamic publics.

Additionally, al-Qaida has shown a pragmatic side. On the one hand, Al-Qaida has authorized suicide attacks, for it can justify them as “martyrdom operations.” But it realizes that indiscriminate use of WMD would likely bring devastating retaliation, and Afghanistan is a case in point. On the other hand, U.S. successes in physically attacking the Taliban and al-Qaida bases and in information warfare assaults on al-Qaida communications networks, as well as freezing al-Qaida financial assets—all have limited the panoply of weapons the organization can acquire or develop. Thus, al-Qaida is existentially limited in what it can acquire or develop, and jurisprudentially limited in what it would use and in what manner, if acquired. A jihadist attack, like politics, is the art of the possible. Based, then, on al-Qaida’s history and strategic doctrine, and in view of pragmatic limits on what may be acquired and/or weaponized, the following summary of al-Qaida’s WMD use seems warranted.

Limited employment of radiologic or chemical weapons, outside Muslim countries, is clearly possible and, if acquired, may even be probable. Employment within Muslim countries is much less likely. Use of weapons that could be characterized as causing indiscriminate mass slaughter seems implausible, both for pragmatic and jurisprudential reasons.

But the debate about al-Qaida and WMD cannot end there. What “al-Qaida prime” may do and what al-Qaida franchises may do are separate questions. The threat from the former, in many ways, is decreasing; threats from the latter, increasing. In the future, we should expect al-

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Qaida's function to move more toward providing ideology, encouragement, and a kind of perverse legitimacy to field units which are operating with increasing autonomy. We ought, then, to be speaking of the WMD threat from al-Qaidas. It is they, far away from the destruction of the mountainous hideaways of Afghanistan, who will be importing both a salafist ideology and new weapons to confront their enemies. Yet that was the original vision inspired by Shaykh Abdullah Azzam, in any event. Al-Qaida would be only a base. He never intended that the jihadists remain there. Today, his vision is being fulfilled. Al-Qaida is no longer the chief threat. Al-Qaidas are. It is they, in their local contexts, that could more easily threaten the West with WMD, and it is their own adapted narratives the West must more rigorously study.

NOTES

¹ The author would like to thank Dr. James Smith, Director of the Institute for National Security Studies, for making possible participation in the "Violent Non-State Actors, Strategic Culture, and WMD: The al-Qaida Case" conference, held in McLean, VA, 26-27 June 2006. Many of the ideas presented here reflect the vigorous and open dialogue of the conferees. More especially, the author is grateful to the Institute and its host organization, the United States Air Force Academy, for providing a home during sabbatic leave from Baylor University, fall 2005. Additionally, the author gladly acknowledges the close reading and numerous critical suggestions of Ms. Amanda Mitchell, a very perceptive student of international relations and Middle East politics at Baylor University. As generally happens with academic papers, any merits this study possesses must be attributed, at least in part, to the suggestions, encouragement, and critique of others; any flaws, to the author himself.

² Tiina Tarvainen, "Al-Qaeda and WMD: A Primer," *Terrorism Monitor*, 2 June, 2005.

³ An earlier and useful overview of this analytic approach may be found in Colin Gray, "Comparative Strategic Culture," *Parameters* (Winter 1984): 26-33. A recent attempt to assess the current status of the field of strategic studies is found in "Comparative Strategic Culture: Conference Report" issued by the Center for Contemporary Conflict and available at <http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/events/recent/ComparativeStrategicCultureSep05>

_rpt.asp. An exceptionally vigorous critique of the approach is that of Alastair Johnston, “Thinking About Strategic Culture,” *International Security* (Spring 1995): 33-64. While not discounting the concept as an analytic tool, Johnston does look to specify the term and to suggest ways of making its methodology more rigorous and its hypotheses falsifiable. My approach here is indebted to his discussion, as will be readily apparent.

⁴ The intact psychology of al-Qaida members is a key conclusion of the work of Marc Sageman. See particularly his *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2004).

⁵ A number of sources may be cited for this background on Iraq’s creation. To cite only two, Glenn Frankel gives a concise account in his “Lines in the Sand” in Micah Sifry and Christopher Cerf, eds., *The Gulf War Reader* (New York: Random House, 1991), 16-20. David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace* (New York: Holt, 1989) gives a superb review, focusing especially on Churchill, *passim*, but particularly 191-92. On the orchestration of Feisal’s “popular” selection and reception, see Fromkin, 506-08. The Parsons quote is in Frankel, 18.

⁶ On the concept of ethnic markers, see Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People, and the State* (New York: Tauris, 1993).

⁷ An important self-description that salafists use is “vanguard,” a term made popular by Sayyid Qutb in his major work, *Milestones*. The idea here is that Islam has fallen into moral decay, and a committed group of true believers (the vanguard, *tali‘a*) will restore it to its early purity.

⁸ Again I note my debt, especially in terminology, to Johnston, cited *supra*. The idea of narrative as cognitive roadmap, I develop more fully in “From Gilgamesh to Fatwas,” *War, Literature, and the Arts* (forthcoming in 2007). At the same time, I acknowledge an implicit debt to Harvard researcher Steven Pinker, especially in his *The Blank Slate*, and the idea that cultures are epiphenomena and that what is truly universal is the psychological unity of the race.

⁹ An older but still useful exposition of the classical doctrine is Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1955), *passim*. For a discussion of the origins and nuances of jihad, see Jerry M. Long, “Jihad,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religious Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

¹⁰ For a good overview of the topic, see John Kelsay, *Islam and War* (Louisville: Westminster, 1993). Also valuable is Ann Elizabeth Mayer, “War and Peace in the Islamic Tradition and International Law” in *Just War and Jihad*, eds. John Kelsay and James T. Johnson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991): 195-226.

¹¹ For an indication of the scope of that discussion among Islamic scholars, see the primary documents collected in Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam* (Princeton: Marcus Wiener, 1993).

¹² This is especially important to note in connection with the fatwa issued by Nasir al-Fahd in May 2003 on the permissibility of WMD. The lengthy and carefully constructed fatwa follows the traditional pattern of posing and answering objections, drawing on the Quran, the hadith, and the writings of other scholars. But the claims of some western analysts notwithstanding (to include the writer quoted at the start of this article), Fahd's pronouncement does not settle all. On an issue of this magnitude, several prominent and respected scholars would have to concur if the community were to have consensus. But that hasn't happened, and there is a curious lack of reference among other leading Islamists to Fahd on this point. To see the degree of contestation there may be on critical issues, see Yvonne Haddad, "Operation Desert Storm and the War of the Fatwas" in *Islamic Legal Interpretations: Muftis and their Fatwas*, ed. Muhammad Khalid Masud, et. al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996): 297-309.

¹³ The full text is in "The Sword Fell," *New York Times*, 8 Oct 01.

¹⁴ Zawahiri forwarded this theme again in late July 2006. After discussing the "Zionist-Crusader War" against Lebanon and Hezbollah, he concluded, "My Muslim nation, without a doubt it is clear to you now that the governments of the Arabic and Islamic countries are inefficient and conniving.... You are all alone in the field." Cited in "In Zawahiri's Words: 'We Will Unite,'" *New York Times*, 28 July 2006. Several weeks later, on the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, Zawahiri continued the theme, accusing Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan of supporting Israeli hostility against Lebanon. Cairo, he said, had made a "graveyard" of the Arab's joint defense pact. *Al-Jazeera* on-line (Arabic), 12 September 2006.

¹⁵ Notably, on the first anniversary of the London train bombing, al-Qaida released a new tape with commentary and voiceover, which included the martyr statement of Shehzad Tanweer recorded prior to the attack. In his voiceover, Zawahiri pointed out, "The names of the station [sic] that were targeted have significance, both symbolically and in terms of morale, for the Crusader West," apparently referring to the bombing of the King's Cross—Tavistock line. The statement is in MEMRI, 11 July 2006.

¹⁶ An obvious example is the 1996 "Ladenese Epistle," in which the assault of the West on Islam is made the foundation of the argument that follows for defensive war. It is even more explicit in Osama's declaration in October 2001 in which he argued that 9/11 was simply retaliation for "80 years of humiliation" (see "The Sword Fell," cited supra). Zawahiri and others share that analysis. What lacks, however, is the sort of capacity for critical self-reflection that one finds in the writings of, say, Qutb and Mawdudi, who offer

Muslim jeremiads. Self-reflection seems to have returned in Abu Mus'ab al-Suri, however, whose "Observations Concerning the Jihadi Experience in Syria" is remarkable on this account. See the summary available in Brachman and McCants, *Stealing al-Qaida's Playbook*, <http://www.etc.usma.edu/Stealing%20Al-Qai%27da%27s%20Playbook%20--%20CTC.pdf>.

¹⁷ Zawahiri writes of the impact of the 1967 defeat in his *Knights Under the Banner of the Prophet*. "The jihad movement realized that the woodworm had begun to eat the idol [Nasser, as leader of secular Arab nationalism] until he became weak because of the effects of the setback and he fell to the ground amid the bewilderment of his priests and the horror of his worshippers.... The death of [Nasser] was not the death of one person but also the death of his principles, which proved their failure on the ground of reality, and the death of a popular myth that was broken on the sands of Sinai." *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, 4 December 2001. Thereafter, Zawahiri writes, an invigorated militant Islam developed in the void.

¹⁸ It is significant, in this context, that the Egyptian military's successful plan to breach the Bar Lev defensive barrier and cross into the Sinai was code-named Operation Badr, explicitly referencing an early Muslim victory over the Makkans in 624 C.E.

¹⁹ See, for instance, the striking use of this imagery in the al-Qaida attack on western compounds in Saudi Arabia in May 2004, dubbed the "Khobar Operation." The text describing the assault is available at <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=subjects&Area=jihad&ID=SP73104>.

²⁰ This post war period, we will argue, is the single most important precursor to Osama's attack on 9/11. His reading was that the house of war had overrun the house of peace. His fatwa in 1998 can only be understood against this backdrop. For more background on Osama's appeal to the Saudi royal family, see Yossef Bodansky, *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America* (New York: Random House, 2001): 28-31; and reporting in *The Jordan Times*, 8 November 2001. For a coolly-reasoned and powerfully stated Arab view on the U.S. presence and how provocative it might be, see Mohamed Heikal, *Illusions of Triumph: An Arab View of the Gulf War* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), 333-34.

²¹ I am indebted here and in much of the discussion that follows to Brachman and McCants' *Stealing al-Qa'ida's Playbook*, and to the collection of primary materials in the "Harmony" database on the Combating Terrorism Center's website, <http://www.etc.usma.edu/>.

²² *Milestones*, 7, 8, 9. Emphasis added.

²³ "The Sword Fell."

²⁴ *Al-sharq al-Awsat*, 23 January 2005.

²⁵ Cited in MEMRI, 11 April 2003.

²⁶ Available on the Combating Terrorism Center's website, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/>.

²⁷ His *Observations Concerning the Jihadi Experience in Syria* is excerpted in CTC's *Stealing al-Qaida's Playbook*, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/>.

²⁸ Cited in *Messages to the World*, ed. Bruce Lawrence (New York: Verso, 2005), 74.

²⁹ Ed. Jerrold Post (Maxwell AFB, AL: USAF Counterproliferation Center, n.d.), 15. The *Encyclopedia of Jihad* is even more direct: "Islam permits the killing and assassination of those who have wronged Allah, his Prophet, or Muslims, from among his worst enemies, without dispute." 514. Unfortunately, the *Encyclopedia* is no longer available on the CTC website.

³⁰ *Management*, 242-43.

³¹ MEMRI, 12 June 2002.

³² MEMRI, 11 July 2006.

³³ "We Will Unite to Fight," *New York Times*, 28 July 2006.

³⁴ *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, 8 December 2006.

³⁵ Naji, *Management of Barbarism*, 85-88, passim. Emphasis added.

³⁶ *Jihad*, 120.

³⁷ The Bush administration's decision to award contracts to key members of the "coalition of the willing" is described in "Bush Defends Barring Nations from Iraq Deals," *New York Times*, 12 December 2003.

³⁸ Cited in the BBC on-line, 12 December 2003.

³⁹ MEMRI, 15 April 2004.

⁴⁰ The story is reported in MEMRI, 15 June 2004.

⁴¹ The Arabic original is at <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/aq/AFGP-2002-600321-Orig.pdf>. Interestingly, the anonymous author of *The Story of the Arab Afghans* considered Osama to be "maniacally obsessed with the international media," a disaster for the Taliban. *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, 10 December 2004.

⁴² *Stealing al-Qaida's Playbook*, 17.

⁴³ MEMRI, 8 December 2005.

⁴⁴ *Management*, 76.

⁴⁵ MEMRI, 12 June 2002.

⁴⁶ <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/aq/AFGP-2002-001120-Trans.pdf>. The Center for Nonproliferation Studies has done a commendable yeoman's task in compiling an extensive list of references to WMD, the preponderance being to CBW. It is available at http://cns.miis.edu/pubs/other/sjm_chn.htm. The difficulty, of course, is verifying the reliability of the sources and many prove simply chimerical—as with the allegation in al-Majalla in 2002 that Osama had purchased 48 “suitcase nukes” from the Russian mafia. After the successful U.S. attack on al-Qaida strongholds in Afghanistan, the number of reported attempts to obtain nuclear or radiologic materials for a dirty bomb dropped precipitously. See the chart referenced just above.

⁴⁷ See Reuven Paz, “Global Jihad and WMD,” in *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Vol. 2 (September 2005), pub. by The Hudson Institute in Washington D.C., eds. Hillel Fradkin, Husain Haqqani, and Eric Brown.

⁴⁸ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* serialized “The Story” beginning 8 December 2004. Authorship is not certain, but I will refer to the author as “Abu Walid,” with that caveat. For an important examination of conflict within al-Qaida leadership more generally, see Montasser al-Zayyat, *The Road to al-Qaida*, trans. Ahmed Fekry and ed. Sara Nimis (London: Pluto Press, 2004).

⁴⁹ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 8 December 2004. In his 2003 fatwa authorizing use of WMD, al-Fahd makes something of the same point: “If the infidels can be repelled from the Muslims only by using such weapons, their use is permissible, even if you kill them without exception and destroy their tillage and stock.” More recently, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri has averred that WMD would offer “strategic symmetry.” Cited in Paz, “Global Jihad and WMD,” 83. The author wishes to express gratitude to Dr. Jarrett Brachman and the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point for supplying a copy of the full fatwa of al-Fahd.

⁵⁰ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 9 December 2004

⁵¹ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 8 December 2004

⁵² The interview is available in *Messages to the World*, 65-94. This comment is @ 72.

⁵³ 11 January 1999. Accessed on-line.

⁵⁴ A useful catalog of several attempts is found at <http://cns.miis.edu/pubs/reports/binladen.htm>.

⁵⁵ “U.S. Analysts Find no Sign bin Laden Had Nuclear Arms,” *NYT*, 26 February 2002.

*The Taliban Insurgency and its Tribal Dynamics: An Analysis of Shabnamah (Night Letters)*¹

Thomas H. Johnson

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

This year (2006) has witnessed some of the fiercest and most sustained fighting in Afghanistan since the Taliban regime was toppled in November 2001. Some analysts are now contending that the conflict situation in Afghanistan is a “stalemate” between Taliban insurgent forces and the United States and their NATO allies.² There is no doubt the Taliban has staged a significant resurgence and is now a major threat to any semblance of a stable and democratic Afghanistan. The lack of state building and reconstruction in Afghanistan is clearly making the Taliban a viable alternative to what is perceived as a failed Kabul regime. British Capt. Leo Docherty, *aide-de-camp* to the commander of the British task force in southern Afghanistan, recently resigned his position describing the failed campaign against the Taliban a “textbook case of how to screw up a counterinsurgency ... having a big old fight is pointless and just making things worse.”³

Afghanistan is on the verge of capsizing in a perfect storm of insurgency that mimics operations and tactics witnessed in Iraq.⁴ The danger of this eventuality is evidenced by recent statements by Mullah Dadullah, a primary spokesman for the current insurgency in Afghanistan and one of the most combative commanders of the Taliban. Dadullah claims that the Taliban have registered 500 Afghans ready to be used as suicide bombers against “the intruders who have occupied our Islamic country” and that Taliban from outlying districts had entered cities to launch attacks. “Now we are going to change our tactics, using a new weapon we did not have in the past, to target U.S. and allied forces.... We will create a big problem for them.”⁵

Why have the Taliban reemerged after being on the brink of falling into the dustbin of historical misfits? What characteristics of this movement have allowed them to survive in a regional as well as international environment where powerful actors are determined to act towards their demise? How can they garner the support of the Afghan population, the key center-of-gravity, for their agenda when the world's remaining "superpower" is committed to their destruction?

Popular perceptions of the Taliban have been driven largely by images of bearded illiterates wearing *shalmar kameez*⁶, toting Korans and guns and instituting draconian social policies while harboring global *ihadists*. This perception of the Taliban, held both in academia and in policy circles, centers on the belief that the Taliban are primarily an obtuse, radical Islamist organization. While there is salience to this argument, the Islamist element of the Taliban is simply that, an element of a complex historical, tribal, and cultural phenomenon of the Pashtuns. The fact that the Taliban consist primarily of Pashtuns from the *Ghilzai* (or *Ghalji*) nation,⁷ would suggest that in order to truly understand the Taliban and their motivations we need to come to grips with the anthropology and sociology of the *Ghilzai* tribal nation, foundations that most studies concerning the Taliban virtually ignore.

The research reported here will attempt to make sense of one dimension of the Taliban "culture" or world view and its implications for the insurgency that is gripping Afghanistan. Specifically this paper will assess Taliban *shabnamah*, commonly referred to as "night letters." Particular attention will be devoted to an examination of narratives portrayed in these *shabnamah*; before doing this, however, it is first necessary to frame the Taliban contextually.

The Taliban's Ghilzai Connections

The roots of the Taliban are found in the mujahideen efforts against the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. From the hundreds of resistance groups which emerged to challenge the Soviet invasion and occupation, the Pakistani Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)—who played a central role in the arming and training of Afghan resistance groups—recognized seven Sunni parties and established offices for them through which to channel covert support. Although most of these resistance groups had a strong religious ethos, the groups were organized primarily along ethno-linguistic and tribal lines. Significantly, while three parties were explicitly led by a Ghilzai, all the “leaders” of the Peshawar parties except for one had Ghilzai connections. Hekmatyar, Sayyaf, and Nabi are Ghilzais; Khalis is from a neighboring eastern Pushtun tribe (the Khugiani); Gailani and Mujaddidi are from immigrant Sufi families whose religious and political links are largely with Ghilzais. Only Rabbani has no intimate connection with Ghilzais. None of the Peshawar parties were led by the *Durranis*, who were deliberately marginalized by the ISI.⁸ The importance of these ethno-linguistic roots of the Taliban in the mujahideen movement should not be underestimated. These ethno-linguistic and tribal pedigrees continue to play a significant role today.

The Taliban primarily consists of rural Pashtuns from the Ghilzai nation⁹ with some support from the Kakar tribe of the Ghurghusht nation. An examination of senior Taliban leadership illustrates that most come from the Hotaki tribe of the Ghilzai.¹⁰

The Ghilzai, who are descendants of the great nomad clans (*powindah*) of Sulaiman Khel, and the Aka Khel are the largest Afghan tribal confederation that includes the tribes of *Sulaiman Khel*, *Ali Khel*, *Aka Khel*, *Taraki*, *Nasirs*, *Tokhis*, *Hotaks*, and *Khototi*.¹¹ The Ghilzais are concentrated in an area spanning Ghazni and Kalat-i-Ghilzai eastward into

western Pakistan, but are predominantly a nomadic, segmentary group unlike the Durrani who can be found in permanent settlements. *Wikipedia* characterizes a segmentary lineage society by suggesting that

the close family is the smallest and closest segment, and will generally stand with each other. That family is also a part of a larger segment of more distant cousins, who will stand with each other when attacked by outsiders. They are then part of larger segments with the same characteristics. Basically, brothers will fight against cousins, unless outsiders come, and then they will join together. An old Arab saying expresses this idea: “Me against my brothers, me and my brothers against my cousins, me and my cousins against the world.”¹²

To understand the Ghilzai, it is important to first understand their tribal code known as *Pashtunwali*, which translates as “the way of the Pashtun.” As we will see below, *Pashtunwali* plays a critical role in Taliban night letter narratives.

First and foremost, *Pashtunwali* is about honor (*nang*). The Pashtun’s concept of honor is not derived from a western society’s modern definition of honor which is based on morality or justice, but rather from a close, unquestionable observance of *Pashtunwali*. In the past, this difference has created a great deal of tension between Pashtuns, and particularly the Ghilzai, and those states attempting to establish their own rule of law. The same type of dynamic is arguably in place with the Taliban. This is reflected by their complete abhorrence for the Karzai Regime’s attempts to institute Kabul’s interpretation of law and order.

The concept of justice is wrapped up in a Pashtun’s maintenance of his honor. Action which must be taken to preserve this honor; if such actions contradict or break the laws of a state this is would seem perfectly acceptable to a Pashtun. In fact, his honor would demand it.¹³

“[*Pashtunwali* is] an uncompromising social code so profoundly at odds with Western mores that its application constantly brings one up with a

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jolt.”¹⁴ A Pashtun must maintain the code to maintain his honor and to maintain his identity as a Pashtun.¹⁵

Though there are many elements that comprise this tribal code, the main tenets of Pashtunwali include *badal*, *nanawatai*, and *melmastia*. *Badal*, often considered the strongest pillar of Pashtunwali, demands that a Pashtun seek revenge or retaliation for any slight against his stature, most often regarding his gold, woman and land (*zar*, *zan*, and *zamin*). “This is a stringent code, a tough code for tough men, who of necessity live tough lives,” according to Louis Dupree. “Honor and hospitality, hostility and ambush, are paired in the [Pashtun] mind. The values of [Pashtunwali] and of the Muslim religion, modified by local custom, permeate in varying degrees all [Pashtun] groups.”¹⁶ Dupree’s statement neatly sums up the relationship between a Pashtun and Pashtunwali. It establishes the importance of the code by explaining how the values it creates within Pashtun society are encompassed in nearly every aspect of an individual Pashtun’s life and how its observance gives the individual his identity. Pashtunwali defines both action and reaction to most circumstances of social interaction. Tribesmen share the burden for revenging a wronged tribal member and Ghilzais have a tendency to stereotype themselves and each other in terms of customs, dress, appearance, and language.

Much of the Ghilzai traditional tribal area is near the Durand Line which is a largely ungoverned space of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border area—an area where Pashtun and Baluchi societies (as well as some others) with deeply entrenched tribal customs live outside or resist both Afghanistan’s and Pakistan’s rule of law. This ungoverned tribal space has traditionally witnessed challenges to both state’s authority and their exclusive, legitimate right to violence. Presently the Ghilzai are widespread across Afghanistan occupying the high plateaus north of Qandahar (*Qalat-e-Ghilzai*) and extending eastwards towards the Suleiman

Mountains, westwards towards the Gul Koh range, and to the North of the Kabul River. Most Ghilzai are Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi School and are usually devout to their faith.

As suggested above, much of the original Taliban leadership, including Mullah Mohammed Omar, comes from the Hotaki tribe. The Ghilzais Hotaki under Mir Wais Ghilzai achieved historical fame as the liberators of Qandahar from Safavid control in 1709. In 1722 the Hotaki served as the leading tribe in the invasion of Persia and destruction of the Persian Empire.¹⁷ The importance, remembrance and implications of such proud history in tribal Afghanistan are dynamics that stupefy many western analysts.

It is important to remember that the Ghilzai held power in Afghanistan in the 18th Century and for a time even possessed the throne of Isfahan (Persia). The Ghilzai regime was ended by Nadir Shah in 1737. After the assassination of Nadir Shah in 1747, the first “modern” government was established in Qandahar by the Afghans as they elected Ahmed Shah Durrani as their ruler. The Ghilzai have traditionally held a strong animosity towards the Durrani Pashtuns, who took power from the Ghilzai and have held it almost continuously for the last 300 years.¹⁸ The Durranis have provided ALL of Afghanistan’s modern kings, a fact not lost to the Ghilzai. Only twice in Afghan history have the Ghilzai seized national power from the Durranis: in 1978 after a *coup d’etat* against Mohammed Daoud by Marxist military officers who immediately handed over power to the Marxist Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) leader Nur Mohammed Taraki¹⁹ and again in 1996, when *Mullah* Omar came to power. For the Ghilzai the Durranis, the tribe of Hamid Karzai, have been their hated archrivals since the demise of Mir Wais Ghilzai and his empire.

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The divisions between Durrani and Ghilzai Afghans have been at the root of centuries of conflict and intrigue in Afghanistan. Such issues were intimately involved in the demographics of Peshawar politics during the anti-jihad. In fact, a case can be made that the politics of the Afghan war was a virtual Ghilzai affair. Khalq's Ghilzai leaders, Hafizullah Amin and Muhammad Taraki, began the process with the 1978 coup. The Afghan military forces were dominated by Khalqi officers, many of whom were Ghilzai. Babrak Karmal (with Durrani connections) was replaced by Najibullah, one of the few Parchamis with Ghilzai roots. Except for Babrak Karmal, the great Durrani Pushtun confederation had little representation on either side of the conflict. Khalqi members of Peoples' Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) were committed to break the established tradition of Durrani rule.²⁰ Some spoke of the Marxist usurpation and the war as Ghilzai revenge against Durrani dominance. On the resistance side, as suggested above, nearly all of the key mujhadeen parties were led or had strong ties to the Ghilzai. Ethnic rivalry, perhaps more than Islamic ideology, was even responsible for the refusal of the Peshawar parties to accept Zahir Shah into mujahideen politics.²¹

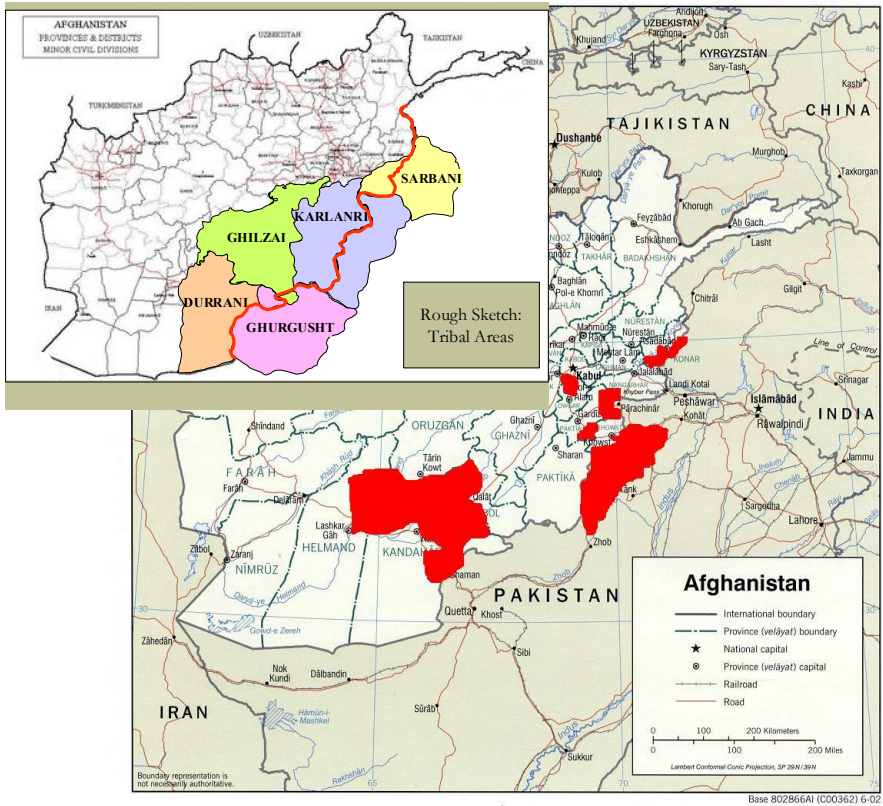
The Taliban insurgency of today is just the most recent manifestation of Ghilzai-Durrani rivalry—with the majority of the Durrani supporting the Hamed Karzai regime and the majority of the Ghilzais supporting the Taliban.²²

The Ghilzai have the well-earned reputation of being cruel, fearless fighters. They were central Afghan belligerents against the British in all three of Anglo-Afghan Wars. They were especially prominent participants in the military disasters that confronted the British concluding the first (1839-1842) and second (1878-1881) wars where the British military suffered colossal disasters. The Ghilzai have also revolted repeatedly against Muhammadzai Durrani regimes in 1801, 1883, 1886, and 1937.

Each time the Ghilzai were eventually suppressed by the Durranis but only with great difficulty.

The importance of the Ghilzai to the Taliban insurgency is illustrated by Figure 1. The shaded sections of the map of Afghanistan in Figure 1 represent those areas politically controlled by the Taliban as of August 2006 (with many other areas significantly contested). These areas include the northern districts of Qandahar Province, the northeastern districts of Helmand Province, most of Oruzgan and Zabol Provinces, and districts in Paktika, Ghazni, Wardak and Logar Provinces. The inset map in Figure 1

Figure 1: Pashtun Tribal Areas and Key Insurgent Strongholds, 2006



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represents a rough sketch of the tribal areas of Pashtun confederations. If one compares the inset of the tribal areas in Afghanistan with the large swath of Taliban political control, it is evident that the most intense area of the insurgency action today is the area dominated by the various Ghilzai tribes.²³

The Taliban's Islamic Component

The Taliban initially represented a rise to power of the mullahs, at the expense of both tribal leaders and mujahideen commanders. Many mujahideen commanders, especially those from *Hisb-e-Islami* (Khalis) and *Harakat-i-Inqilab-i-Islami* (Nabi Muhammadi) were later absorbed by the Taliban.²⁴ The Taliban were significantly influenced by the teachings of Deobandi Islam in Pakistani seminars and *madrassas*, especially the Jaamia Haqqania at Chaman and Akora Khattack.²⁵ The Pakistani version of the Deobandi schools in Afghan refugee camps were for the most part run by in-experienced and semi-literate mullahs associated with Pakistan's *Jamiat-i-Ulema Islami* (JUI) party.

The Taliban's religious orientation is a radical interpretation of Deobandi Islam.²⁶ Deobandi Islam, a conservative Islamic orthodoxy, follows a *Salafist* egalitarian model that seeks to emulate the Islamic tradition of the days of the Prophet Mohammed. The Deobandi philosophy can be traced back to its founding at *Dar ul-Ulum* in Deoband, India, in 1867. This Sunni Islamic movement was originally established in response to British colonial rule in India. While not officially supported or sanctioned until President Zia ul Haq assumed control of the Pakistani government in 1977, Deobandi *madrassas* have flourished across South Asia for over a century. The Deobandi interpretation of Islamic teachings is presently widely practiced in Pakistan with the JUI being its primary political proponent. Saudi funds in combination with a lack of appreciation on the part of the mullahs brought a radical Deobandi agenda

to madrassas and their curricula.²⁷ Deobandi militants share the Taliban's restrictive view of women, and regard the Shia as non-Muslim. While in power the Taliban had a deliberate anti-Shia program against Afghanistan's ethnic Hazara population, who are predominantly Shia, and led numerous massacres against them resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of Hazaras.²⁸

In summary, the Taliban are largely a Ghilzai movement that was created from Pakistani refugee camps and Deobandi *madrassas* with considerable help of the Pakistani government as well as Pakistan's Jamiati-Ulema Islami. Many of the Taliban's leaders and most of the Taliban foot soldiers were educated in these refugee camps where they had fled with millions of other Afghans after the Soviet invasion. The Taliban imposed an extremely repressive, sectarian Islamist regime on the Afghan people, barring women from work. In 1996 the Taliban, under the leadership of Mullah Muhammad Omar, seized control of Kabul and implemented a strict interpretation of Islamic law. The Taliban later changed the name of Afghanistan to the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan²⁹, with Mullah Omar, who had previously assumed the religious title of Emir of the Faithful (*Amir-ul Momineen*), as head of state. There was a six-member ruling council in Kabul—Afghanistan's political capital—but ultimate authority for Taliban rule rested in the Taliban's inner Shura (Council), located in the southern city of Qandahar—Afghanistan's spiritual capital—and in Mullah Omar.³⁰

TALIBAN NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Having introduced the tribal and Islamic foundations of Taliban, albeit briefly, the next sections of this paper attempt to answer the question as to what the Taliban represent, at least as exemplified by the messages of their night letters.

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Specifically, although much less ambitious or thorough, this analysis represents research in the spirit of David Edwards' *Heroes of the Age: Moral Fault Lines on the Afghan Border*. Using oral narratives and other documentation, Edwards examined the lives of a variety of important Afghan figures to include Sultan Muhammad Khan (a tribal chief), Amir Abdur Khan (The "Iron Amir" of Afghanistan), Najmuddin Akhundzada (the Mullah of Hadda) as well as the "the mad Fakir of Swat."³¹ His sophisticated and fascinating use of narratives and stories to uncover cultural artifacts and the underlying structure of the "moral systems" of these Afghan characters has served as the impetus and guide for the research presented below.

The following sections will assess Taliban "night letters" in an effort to unravel *what* the Taliban represent. Night letters have been a traditional and common instrument of Afghan religious figures, jihadists, and rebels to encourage people, especially (but not exclusively) rural populations, to oppose both state authority and regulations. Dupree in his seminal work on Afghanistan suggests that such "framing" instruments, often in the form of folklore, performed a variety of significant functions to include "social control" where individuals are told by illustration what they should or should not do and what rewards or penalties they will incur for those not following these norms.³² As will be demonstrated below, Taliban *shabnamah* serve the same purpose.

Some Semantic and Theoretical Nuances of Culture and Narratives

A popular impression of culture is to refer to social practices that are peculiar to a region or people.³³ For example such an impression might guide attempts to understand Pashtun culture by assessing social mores such as "only serve, touch or eat food with right hand" or "never inquire about wives or daughters unless you are close friends." While interesting and important such social traditions are not the focus of this paper.³⁴ For

the purposes of this paper, culture is best defined by Franz Boas, an early twentieth century German cultural anthropologist, who suggested that culture is “the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning.”³⁵ This definition highlights several important concepts that will be central for our assessment of the Taliban. First, culture is something that is shared between a self-identified group of people such as the Taliban. Second, culture has a psychological component as well as material manifestations (such as produced artifacts); and third, culture is essentially adaptive and is transmitted through some process to others. Moreover, this operationalization suggests the importance of those artifacts that are used to transmit Taliban world views, or to borrow Edward’s terminology, the underlying structure of the Taliban’s “moral systems” as portrayed by narratives.³⁶ By a narrative I mean a mechanism, either written or oral, by which the Taliban transmit their basic beliefs and concepts to others and represent their basic attitudes towards their environment.

A narrative often represents a “story” and reflects foundational beliefs that articulate a group’s views toward the world. As Mark Turner notes, “Story is a basic principle of mind. Most of our experience, our knowledge, and our thinking are organized as stories.”³⁷ There is ample evidence that such artifacts have an effect on our capacity to recall events, motivate action, modulate our emotional reactions to events, cue certain heuristics and biases, structure our problem-solving capabilities, and ultimately influence our very identity.³⁸ The framing of narratives will have critical importance as to how Taliban messages *resonate* to greater or lesser degrees with target audiences.³⁹

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Traditionally, story telling and narratives, especially oral history, have been extremely important to the peoples of Afghanistan as well as to the tribes in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border area. Unique and pervasive themes are found throughout Afghan poetry and literature that resonate with Afghans. In many respects Afghanistan's literature, arts, and music have been critical dynamics for Afghan perseverance and adaptation. Narratives have also served an important role in Afghan social mobilization, be it peaceful or violent. This has been especially true when tribal collective actions have happened to intersect with political opportunities.⁴⁰ During the British colonialism period, for example, anti-colonial literature encouraged rebellion against the British and their patrons. Night letters and oral narratives were also important instruments used by the mujahideen against the Soviet occupation.⁴¹ Resistance literature called for total opposition against the Soviets and their "puppet" Afghan leaders and support for the jihad to establish an Islamic order. While a variety of means were used to deliver such messages to the Afghan public a particularly powerful media, especially in the rural areas, were poems and music.

Below is an example of a widely circulated Pashtun folk poem that was used to transmit a narrative characterizing Soviet-installed Babrak Karmal as a traitor:

O Babrak! Son of Lenin
You do not care for the religion and the faith
You may face your doom and
May you receive a calamity, o! son of a traitor.
O! son of Lenin.⁴²

Narratives were also used by some mujahideen against King Zahir Shah and the royal family, as illustrated by a popular mujahideen folk song presented below. This narrative contrasts the sacrifices made by the anti-Soviet mujahideen with the exiled life of the Afghan King and how he had forsaken his legacy and ultimate rewards:

You have none of your family fighting in Afghanistan,
Only the brave are here, you are
Enjoying life in Italy.
Wind of the morning, go tell Zahir Shah
There is no *halwa* (sweetmeat) for you in Afghanistan
The graves of your ancestors are here,
But there will be no grave for you in Afghanistan.⁴³

Night letters were a particularly useful mujahideen influence and intimidation technique. In Nelofer Pazira's biographical story called, *A Bed of Red Flowers*, she describes night letters used to coordinate shop closings or other activities designed to create solidarity among the anti-Soviet Afghan population. One activity coordinated by the nocturnal campaign was a concert of "Allahu Akbars" (God is Great) shouted from the rooftops of village houses. This created a *levee en masse* effect towards the Soviet invaders and reminded the secular communists of the unifying power of Islam.

The next day we are tired but, as if concealing our night's secret from the light of day, we don't talk about *Allahu Akbars*, until Uncle Wahid arrives with the news. In a silent rejection, all Kabul shopkeepers decided to keep their stores closed yesterday, February 22, 1980; they designated the night as the time to voice that day's protest. An anonymous nightly letter had been spread all over Kabul, asking people to cry *Allahu Akbar* after dark, says Uncle Wahid. For the following two days, Kabul shops remain shut, and for the third night in a row we are standing on the roof, joining in this religious symphony. Until dawn we chant, "God is great." We are all so caught up in this rotation of rhythm and order that no one complains about the lack of sleep...this is our welcome, Afghan-style, to the Soviet Invasion.⁴⁴

Taliban Night Letters⁴⁵

The Taliban have adopted shabnamah as a well-tested, cost-effective method of instruction and intimidation. The Taliban regularly post such letters or leaflets at night warning of the "wrath" villages will face if they cooperate with US forces (the "Christian invaders") or the Karzai regime ("a US puppet").⁴⁶ The Taliban rely on the educated populace to transmit

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the shabnamah to illiterate villagers. Often these “letters” are pasted to the walls of mosques and government buildings and promising death to anyone who defies their threats or instructions. They are typically aimed at symbols of authority and supporters of the Karzai Government and often read as the following: “Once this government falls, we will be in power. We will have your documents, your résumés, your names and your addresses. We will come and punish you.”

The Taliban have thus far been true to their word in sowing doubt and fear among Afghans.⁴⁷ As reported by *Time Magazine*,

Night letters left across southern Afghanistan, the Taliban's stronghold, have slowed government services and brought reconstruction projects to a halt. In Qandahar province, many police officers have quit, and after letters appeared threatening employees, two medical clinics were shut down. In the past two months, insurgents have burned down 11 schools in the region. Some of the attacks were presaged by night letters warning parents to keep their children home.⁴⁸

The Taliban night letters represent a strategic and effective instrument crafting poetic diatribes which appeal to the moral reasoning of Afghan villagers. While many of the night letters represent overt intimidation, they also present important insights into who and what the Taliban represent. The quality and use of these letters have impressed professional US Information and Psychological Operations (PYSOP) Officers who consider them “eloquent and impressive” and subsequently more effective than the vast majority of US Information Operation artifacts.⁴⁹

Figure 2a presents a Taliban night letter distributed in Qandahar in 2003 entitled “Message to the ‘Mujahed’ Afghan Nation!” and is a good example of the Taliban’s literal eloquence and poetic approach to persuasion that originated in historical intercultural communications found throughout Afghanistan and Iran.⁵⁰ This shabnamah references Afghanistan’s grand history and the threat that Americans and their cronies

Figure 2a: Qandahar 2003 Taliban Night Letter 1

د افغانستان جاهد اولسه تاسوپ تاريخي داسلام لپاره في مثال خدمت كړيدى - اود نړى
 كاره رسته هوبه و اروا شكت وركړيدى - اوستاسونيكه كاذوكه احمد شاه ابدالى ، محمد
 غزوى ، شهاب الدين غورى ، اوفوروقه ومانا نو د كهاروسره په جهاد كولو كينى د مړينه تاريخ كينى
 دى - خو افسوس نن ورځ پخود امريكايي غلامان دروښان فكرانوپه نامه د افغانستان
 د غيرت وكد تاريخ له خاروسره خاورو كړخون بيا هم ستاسو وچيان عالمه طلباء اودينداره خلك
 په دغه شرايط كينى خپلى ويني داسلام د خدمت لپاره د كهاروپه مقابل كينى ښى دى
 نو بيا يد تاسو چه فوره پخو ونيكي خپل د زره محبت د جهاد وچيانوسره وساتى - اود نړى د
 كفارو د غلطو ودر و غچون تيليغاتوپ كته سره د جهاد و خلاف تيليغاتو كولو با زدى
 دخپلو پښو خاورى و نه كازى خدا نكره به د زرد اخيرت به پر نوم مليون دوسانو سره
 د جهاد شهيدان اود اسلامى امارت بولك شهيدان امون به تاسى ختخابه نيسو د زره
 دنوع لاهنده اوندوه هيله لود چه تاسى نمون دانندوبه كوي هېكله طالبان د افغانانو قتلدار
 نغزاري خوله بده مړغې د امريكايي نښ په نامه افغانستان د هغه محافظين كڼ زېدى دى
 اكناره اغزلي چه افغانان به افغانانو قتل كوي اوتاسى كوي چه امريكايان د افغانستان د دولت غټه
 كوي صلاح سوي اغزاري چه افغانان د اسلامي سلطانان په شابهې وسره كړي اوتاسى كوي
 چه د افغانستان ټولې مدعي چه اسلامى نغبات بگنى كيدل نن هغو كينى جيانوسره د عيان
 د مع وركل كېرى - بول بيا نمون د لخواست دى چه د كاهوله همكارى لاس واخلي دونه
 مستقيم به مېه د نيا او اخيرت كينى به قاره وى د لاسلام - ښاد هون اوسى -
 زه د اسلام په غم اخته ورتا خدا كوي
 زما پر مالى دى كافر نم مسر همكاره
 زه بېرته خوله وختاته افغان د لاس

روته هوبه و اروا شكت وركړيدى - اوستاسونيكه كاذوكه احمد شاه ابدالى ، محمد
 زى ، شهاب الدين غورى ، اوفوروقه ومانا نو د كهاروسره په جهاد كولو كينى د مړينه تاريخ كينى
 دى - خو افسوس نن ورځ پخود امريكايي غلامان دروښان فكرانوپه نامه د افغانستان
 د غيرت وكد تاريخ له خاروسره خاورو كړخون بيا هم ستاسو وچيان عالمه طلباء اودينداره خلك
 په دغه شرايط كينى خپلى ويني داسلام د خدمت لپاره د كهاروپه مقابل كينى ښى دى
 نو بيا يد تاسو چه فوره پخو ونيكي خپل د زره محبت د جهاد وچيانوسره وساتى - اود نړى د
 كفارو د غلطو ودر و غچون تيليغاتوپ كته سره د جهاد و خلاف تيليغاتو كولو با زدى
 دخپلو پښو خاورى و نه كازى خدا نكره به د زرد اخيرت به پر نوم مليون دوسانو سره
 د جهاد شهيدان اود اسلامى امارت بولك شهيدان امون به تاسى ختخابه نيسو د زره
 دنوع لاهنده اوندوه هيله لود چه تاسى نمون دانندوبه كوي هېكله طالبان د افغانانو قتلدار
 نغزاري خوله بده مړغې د امريكايي نښ په نامه افغانستان د هغه محافظين كڼ زېدى دى
 اكناره اغزلي چه افغانان به افغانانو قتل كوي اوتاسى كوي چه امريكايان د افغانستان د دولت غټه
 كوي صلاح سوي اغزاري چه افغانان د اسلامي سلطانان په شابهې وسره كړي اوتاسى كوي
 چه د افغانستان ټولې مدعي چه اسلامى نغبات بگنى كيدل نن هغو كينى جيانوسره د عيان
 د مع وركل كېرى - بول بيا نمون د لخواست دى چه د كاهوله همكارى لاس واخلي دونه
 مستقيم به مېه د نيا او اخيرت كينى به قاره وى د لاسلام - ښاد هون اوسى -
 زه د اسلام په غم اخته ورتا خدا كوي
 زما پر مالى دى كافر نم مسر همكاره
 زه بېرته خوله وختاته افغان د لاس

Figure 2b: Translation of Taliban Night Letter 1⁵¹

Message to the “Mujahed” (freedom fighter) Afghan Nation!

You have served Islam a great deal throughout history and have defeated the non-Moslems of the world. Your ancestors such as Ahmad Shah Abdaali, Mahmood Ghaznawi, Shahaabuddin Ghorri and other heroes have recorded a great history in fight against non-Moslems, but it is a pity that today some of America-trained servants under the name of bright-minded have destroyed the honored history of Afghanistan. Today once again your sons, clerics and Taliban and the faithful people, in these circumstances are fighting against non-Moslems and are serving Islam. If you don't do any thing else, at least support your Mujahed sons and do not be impressed by the false propaganda of non-Moslem enemies. God forbid one and half millions of martyrs of Jihad (religious Islamic fight) against Russians and one hundred thousand of martyrs of Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan (martyr Taliban) will ask you for the cost of their martyrdom, so we hope that you meet our expectations. They're stopping the Islamic education and instead are teaching Christianity

to your children. Taliban never want to kill common civilians, but unfortunately some so-called Afghanis have become the supporters of our enemies. Non-Moslems want to kill and pit Afghan against Afghan and in the name of Talib they are attacking everybody and they are killing Afghans and destroying your houses and they are destroying Islamic madrassahs in Afghanistan. They burn their Afghan arms and ammunitions. They want to make Afghanistan as helpless as Palestine. You have seen that in all “Madrassas” (Islamic schools) nowadays they teach Christianity to your children. Once again, we request you not to support non-Moslems, otherwise you will have the whole responsibility here and hereafter.

Be happy

Poem

I was so sad you laughed
I was caring for Islam and you betrayed
How do you call yourself an Afghan
Instead of me you supported a non-Moslem

pose to a historically great Islamic Afghan Government. The proclamation is addressed to the “Mujahid People” of Afghanistan intimating the notion that the country itself is engaged in a jihad or lawful war against infidels and an apostate government. The label “Mujahid,” as used in this narrative, does not apply solely to the Taliban but rather to the Afghan population as a whole. The message suggests that *all* Afghans have a role in this campaign against a *common* enemy of Islam and Afghans have an obligation to join the fight against the infidels.

The posting is a well-prepared, narrative reflecting on the “illustrious” history of rule of three particular Afghan leaders who harnessed the power of Islam. The first “ancestor and hero” mentioned is Ahmad Shah Durrani (Abdali) the founder of the Sadozai dynasty of the Abdali who would establish the Durrani Afghan Empire in Qandahar in 1747. He is considered by many as the “father” of modern Afghanistan. While Ghilzai members of the Taliban, as suggested above, have long disdained the Durrani, Ahmad Shah is revered by all Afghans. Sykes in his *History of Afghanistan* calls Ahmad Shah:

a monarch whose high descent and warlike qualities made him peculiarly acceptable to his aristocratic and virile Chiefs, as well as to his warlike subjects in general. In short, he possessed all the qualities that enabled him successfully to found the Kingdom of Afghanistan.⁵²

The second “ancestor and hero” referenced is Sultan Mahmud Ghaznawi, a young Turkic (non-Afghan) king who ascended the throne around the year 1000 and embarked on Ghaznavid empire building that represented “one of the great renaissances of the Early Islamic period.”⁵³ Mahmud was considered a great general who conducted at least seventeen successful campaigns against India. According to Dupree:

He added northwest India and the Punjab to his empire, and enriched his treasury by looting wealthy Hindu temples. Probably more important, Mahmud’s mullahs converted many Hindus to Islam.⁵⁴

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Some historians, such as Caroe, trace the origin of the Ghilzais to the Turkish tribes of the Ghaznavid Empire. Turkish tribes such as the Khalaj Turks who once occupied the districts bordering the upper course of the Syr Darya (Jaxartes) were brought into Afghanistan by the Turk Emperor Sultan Subaktagin in the 10th Century.⁵⁵ While speculative, could the reference to Mahmud be alluding to the glorious genealogy of the Ghilzai? It is worth noting that none of the Afghan ancestors who are referenced as “heroic in the fight against non-Muslims” by this narrative are recognized members of Ghilzai tribe. Assuming that the Taliban are primarily a Ghilzai tribal movement that is partly driven by their desire for leadership in the country, the use of non-Ghilzai tribal leaders to highlight, by example, the required and dutiful fight against the infidels is somewhat counterintuitive. Why doesn’t the letter, at least refer to Mir Wais?⁵⁶ Even though they represent Afghanistan’s largest tribe, there is no doubt that the Ghilzais have been marginalized over time by Durrani royalty. While unlikely, it is also possible that the reference to non-Afghan leaders is symbolically used by the narrative to justify the role of non-Afghan jihadists such as al Qaeda (Pakistanis, Arabs, Chechens, Uzbeks, etc.) in the Taliban insurgency.

The final “ancestor and hero” reference is to Shahab al-Din Ghuri, of the Ghurid Dynasty who ruled from 1173-1206 and controlled the entire eastern caliphate encompassing much of Afghanistan, eastern Iran, and modern Pakistan.⁵⁷ His numerous invasions of India and his powerful rule helped construct a widespread and long-lasting historical memory framed by heroism and sacrifice through Afghan generations. Although Ghaznawi and Ghuri were not Afghan by birth, history granted them an Afghan pedigree, and the two kings are still honored as heroes. Hence, the Taliban night letter uses the collective historical memory of Afghans handed down through generations to frame their intellectual argument against popular

support of the Karzai regime and American forces. The shabnamah's narrative glorifies those who have fought and converted infidels to the righteous path—the goal of the Taliban.

This shabnamah represents a clear challenge to the Karzai regime and it expatriate members and proffers that “it is a pity that today some American-trained servants ... have destroyed the honored history of Afghanistan.” The letter also follows the time-honored Afghan practice of attacking foreign influence—a xenophobic message that has historically resonated with the Afghan people—which the Karzai Government and the Americans represent.

A clear distinction is made between “Moslems” and “non-Muslims” as the Taliban appeal to the true Islamic believers and decry the “false propaganda of non-Muslim enemies.” The letter appeals to the population's gratitude and appreciation for the “martyrs” of the Soviet occupation and the Taliban's battles during OEF, even citing casualty statistics. The letter states that the Taliban are against killing common citizens, but at times it can not be avoided. On the other hand, the shabnamah argues that supporters of the Karzai regime and the Americans are not “Afghans” and open targets.

It is interesting to note that this night letter made its appearance during the height of the Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reorganization (DDR) campaign aimed at ridding the country of weapons and to convince reluctant and recalcitrant regional and warlord militia members to support the Karzai regime. The letter states that “Non-Moslems want to kill Afghans by Afghans while they *burn their arms and ammunitions.*” The author of the letter obviously believes that disarmament is ludicrous while Afghanistan's enemies are “killing” Afghans. During the 1990s there were more personal weapons in Afghanistan than in India and Pakistan combined. “By some estimates more such weapons had been shipped into

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Afghanistan during the previous decade than to any other country in the world.”⁵⁸ Afghans and especially the Pashtuns revel in a “gun culture.” One of the first sounds an Afghan male infant hears after he is born, immediately after praise to Allah, is the firing of guns celebrating his birth. An appeal against DDR is not only a clear indication that the Taliban track aspects of the Bonn Process, especially those that have the potential to impact their insurgent actions, it is also, more importantly, a recognition that the Taliban understand that taking away a Pashtun’s gun is equivalent to taking away his manhood. While, the Taliban undoubtedly do not want Afghans, especially their supporters, to give up their weapons and become “helpless,” the narrative is appealing to a deeper characteristic that resonates with nearly every Pashtun. Indeed guns intimately related to the Pashtun tribal code of Pashtunwali and “as a result . . . most [Pashtun] males become acquainted with weapons in their early childhood and develop a keen sense of marksmanship.”⁵⁹ The Pashtun’s affinity for weapons has traditionally plagued every state’s attempt to enforce its own rule of law over top of Pashtunwali.

The document does not communicate any direct threat against the US military, but it does insinuate that Americans destroyed mosques and *madrasahs* in order to reeducate Afghan children about Christianity. Such a narrative is presented to create mistrust and apprehension among the Afghan population. Afghanistan is 99 percent Muslim and religion is and always has been a central driving characteristic of the Afghan people.

The letter warns that the enemies “want to make Afghanistan as helpless as Palestine.” An emphasis on the plight of the Palestinians has been a central focal and rallying point for Islamists for decades. In the past it has not, however, been an explicit mantra of the Afghan resistance. The mujahideen, for example, had a more mundane and limited goal of liberating Afghanistan from the Soviets and fighting the puppet

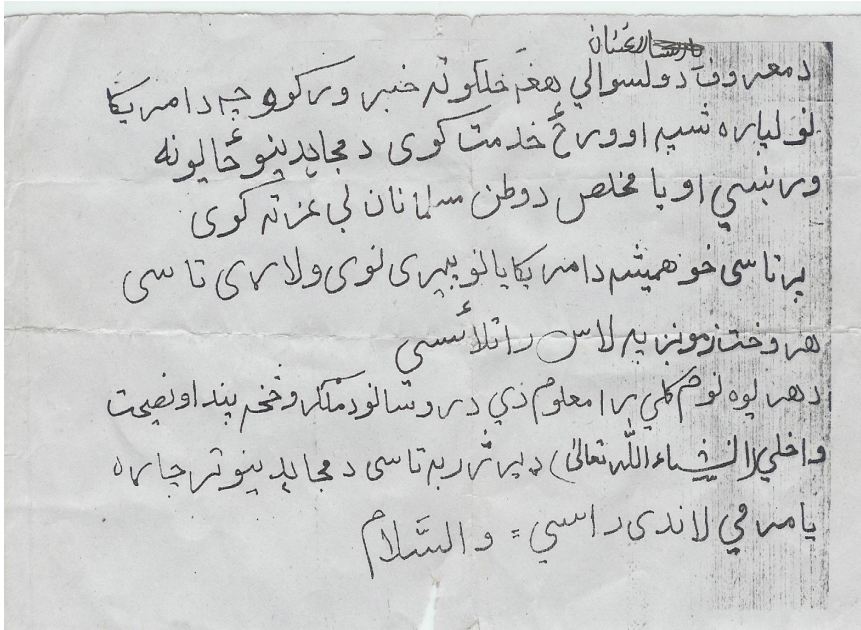
government they installed in Kabul. “They had no intention or desire to turn their country into a theater or camp from which to wage global jihad against either other Muslim governments or Western states.”⁶⁰ It is interesting that the Taliban who in the past have never represented a transnational jihadist organization would focus on this cause, even indirectly in their shabnamahs.

The letter concludes with a poem which is aimed at invoking respect and striking a chord in the receivers’ historical memory. Through repetition, poetry provides a way to remember facts or messages and enhances the delivery method with emotion anchored in cultural traditions. It is likely this proclamation was read aloud by an educated village elder to illiterate members of the local populace emphasizing the poem at the end of the letter, possibly even reading it twice to allow the audience to experience the power of the poem.

Figure 3 presents a shabnamah that is an example of a warning letter targeted at the populace of the Qandahar province towns of Ma’ruf and Arghistan.⁶¹ Unlike the night letter examined above, this letter appears quickly constructed and warns the Afghan population against supporting the Americans.

The letter was written in Pashtu and warns the residents of Ma’ruf and Arghistan against cooperating with the Americans. It explicitly suggests that the Taliban will kill all those that cooperate with the Americans once the Americans leave. The point is emphasized by asserting, “the Americans will not always be there” to protect those who chose to cooperate. This is a typical message delivered by Taliban *mullahs* speaking to rural village elders. They are fond of saying, “the Americans have the wristwatches, but we have the time.” The simple message they deliver in person or by night letter such as one presented in Figure 3 is one of intimidation: “The Americans may stay for five years, they may stay for

Figure 3: Taliban Night Letter 2: Warning letter to the people of Ma'ruf and Arghistan, two towns within Qandahar province.



ten, but eventually they will leave, and when they do, we will come back to this village and kill every family that has collaborated with the Americans or the Karzai government.” Such a message is devastatingly effective in these areas where transgenerational feuds and revenge are a fabric of the society. It is also an effective message to keep NGOs and reconstruction activities out of areas the Taliban control.

If one assumes that the center of gravity for both the insurgency and counter-insurgency is popular support and that for the Karzai Government to succeed they must deliver reconstruction, infrastructure, and services to the hinterlands (areas which have thus far received virtually nothing) then the Taliban’s strategy has proven a very effective. The three fundamental problems in Afghanistan that have allowed the Taliban’s reemergence are

- the inability of the national government since 2001 to establish a politically significant presence throughout the country,
- the failure of the international community to create a secure rural environment in the south conducive to development and reconstruction, and
- the virtually complete lack of meaningful improvement in the lives of the great majority of the people in the southern half of the country.⁶²

The insurgency and counterinsurgency presently engulfing Afghanistan will not be won kinetically. Ultimately, the winners will be those that have the support of the population; this support will not be realized by the Karzai Government if it does not deliver a better life and stability to the countryside as well as to the urban areas. The hinterlands of the east and south remain impoverished wastelands with few schools and roads and little prospect of a better life for the vast majority of the populous. A poll conducted in 2005 showed that six out of ten Afghans still have no electricity and only three percent have it consistently.⁶³ The Taliban are well aware of this and will continue to put up obstacles to inhibit Kabul or the international community to better the lives of the average Afghan villager. Whole districts in provinces such Helmand, Oruzgan, Zabol, Paktika, Ghazni, Wardak and Logar are essentially war zones with virtually no chance of rehabilitating fractured infrastructures—*a prerequisite for the counterinsurgency*.

Figures 4a and 4a present a recent Taliban night letter and its translation from the Wardak Province and authored by “the Mujahedin of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.” This shabnamah is significantly different than the others night letters examined here. This narrative uses language that mimics that regularly used by transnational jihadist organizations and intimates that the ultimate goal of the Afghan insurgency has a global dimension. This message is in stark contrast with the shabnamah presented in Figures 2a and 2b written in 2004. The significant

Figure 4b: Translation of Wardak Night Letter⁶⁵

The Prophet of God Mohammed (peace be upon Him) says: One who lends a hand to infidels to transgress [against Muslims] is one of them.
--By the Islamic Devoted Mujahedin In the name of Allah, the most merciful and most compassionate

Statement

Pious Afghans, Brave and Courageous People! Accept our greetings; Dear Muslim and devout brother! As you all know some countries in the Islamic world and specifically our dear country-Afghanistan-are spending day and night under the grip of the crusaders in the last few years. During this time the cruel crusaders' army and their domestic servants have committed grave atrocities, barbarity and savagery against our innocent brothers and sisters. Their cruelties have not ceased. You have watched and heard of their ongoing savagery in Afghanistan and Iraq, the two best examples that have been exposed by the international media. Therefore, the Afghan Muslim Mujahids have initiated their sacred Jihad to gain the independent of our beloved country from the crusader powers. The Jihad will continue till the end- till defeat of the crusaders' army, and till the establishment of a pure Islamic State. (Inshallah)

Therefore, the Afghan Muslim Mujahedin state the following related guidelines to ensure obtaining our goals, and ask earnestly all Afghans to respect them seriously:

1. All those who work and are at the service of the crusader army, cooperate military or logistically with them, and carry oil, food and similar things for them, are warned strongly to stop cooperating with them promptly; otherwise, they will face serious consequences.
2. All those who do business with the crusaders are asked to avoid doing business with them, so as not to suffer during the exalted strike of the mujahedin on the crusaders.
3. We seriously ask all persons not to expose the holy names of the mujahedin to the crusaders army and to their Afghan slaves during the exalted strike of mujahedin on them, and likewise, we ask those Afghans who spy for Americans and for their Afghan slaves to stop doing this evil act, otherwise, they will be punished at the hands of the holy mujahedin according to Sharia.
4. We ask all Muslims to cooperate whole-heartedly with their mujahedin brothers and to join their ranks and to support jihads, so as to perform their religious duty properly.
5. We ask all those who spread false allegation against mujahedin to stop their evil acts.

The mujaheds' power is not based on any foreign support, it is founded on Allah's blessing and the will of the Afghan Muslim people.
(God grand success to the mujahed everywhere and always).
The Mujahedin of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan
Religious Scholars say: Cooperation with infidels, under any circumstance and any reason and excuse, in any form, is an open blasphemy that needs no deliberation.
Afghanistan's Devoted Mujahedin

differences in these two letters suggest that the Afghan insurgency might very well be morphing into a campaign with more transnational concerns.

One theme of the letter is do not associate or help the Karzai regime and coalition forces or you will be judged as one of them (“One who lends a hand to infidels to transgress [against Muslims] is one of them”). This message of intimidation, as we have seen before, is clearly a cornerstone of Taliban night letter narratives.

This letter, like many other Taliban shabnamah, has considerably more Islamic references than the narratives assessed above (or below). Juergensmeyer suggests that religious tropes are more likely to play a narrative role if the confrontation between two groups can be characterized as a “cosmic struggle or battle.” This is most likely in the following circumstances:

1. If the struggle is perceived as a defense of basic identity and dignity.
2. If losing the struggle would be unthinkable.
3. If the struggle is “blocked” and cannot be won in real time or in real terms.⁶⁶

The first two circumstances are valid for the case of the Taliban; as was probably the third circumstance until recently. The Taliban view this insurgency, as evidenced in their shabnamah, as a struggle over basic questions of identity and culture. It must be won, losing is not an option.

The shabnamah invokes the name of Allah via a standard greeting and begins by rallying the population against the “crusaders” and “their domestic servants.” The use of the term “crusaders” is significant. This terminology is used by Osama bin Laden when he refers to the conflict in Afghanistan as a battle between “a crusader army” and Islam.⁶⁷ The use of this terminology suggests that the United States and its allies are waging a crusade against Islam and this “aggression” is not an isolated conflict, but rather the latest episode in a long chain of conflicts that have been targeted at Muslims. While there is no evidence suggesting that this letter was written by al Qaeda or an Afghan-Arab, the language used is very similar to the regular terminology used by al Qaeda. It proclaims a clash of civilizations.

The declaration accuses the “crusaders and their domestic servants” of unceasing “atrocities, barbarity and savagery against our innocent brothers and sisters” in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Both of these conflicts represent, in the eyes of the Taliban, defensive jihads against a Christian onslaught that will continue until the “defeat of the crusaders’ army,” and “the establishment of a pure Islamic State.” This jihad, according to the narrative is a collective responsibility of *all* Muslims and the shabnamah instructs Afghans to

- offer no assistance or cooperation to US or Afghan National Armed Forces or “face serious consequences,”
- not divulge the identity (“holy names”) of the insurgents,
- end the “evil act” of spying for the enemy or “be punished at the hands of the holy *mujahedin* according to *Sharia*,” and
- cooperate and join the Taliban “so as to perform ... religious duty properly.”

The letter concludes by suggesting that those that ignore the advice and instructions of the shabnamah will be dealt with swiftly without

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deliberation. Such a response, claims the night letter, has been sanctified by “religious scholars”—a powerful message to Afghans.

The Islamic underpinnings reflected in this shabnamah have long been a component of the Afghan resistance. For example, Hazarat Shaib or Mullah Shor Bazar (a member of the Mujadidi family) was an important Afghan religious figure whose Ghilzai tribal army or *lashkar*⁶⁸ inflicted heavy losses on the British during the Third Anglo-Afghan war of 1919. Hazarat Shaib would later defeat the Afghan reform-minded King Amanullah Khan and assist Nadir Kahn to overthrow Bacha Saqqao in 1929.⁶⁹ Other religious leaders such as Mirwais Khan Hotaki and Mullah Mushki Alam also organized *lashkars* that fought against the British occupation of Afghanistan. And of course during the anti-Soviet jihad, *talibs* (or religious students) regularly fought alongside the *mujahideen* mainly under the leadership of Mohammad Nabi and his *Harakat-i-Inqilab-i-Islami* and *Hizb-i-Islami* (Khalis). But none of these movements had explicit global goals aimed at the Islamic *ummah*.

For much of its existence the Taliban was explicitly against extending their mission outside of the borders of Afghanistan. Mullah Omar, the Taliban’s primary “identity entrepreneur,” chastised bin Laden for pursuing global jihadist goals as evidenced during a *Shariat* radio broadcast in March, 1997 when Omar, warned bin Laden not to target Saudi Arabia from Afghanistan.⁷⁰ Again in August of 1998 Omar

expressed displeasure over a statement by Saudi dissident Osama Bin Laden in which he threatened to avenge the US attack on his bases in Khost in Southern Afghanistan. ‘There cannot be two different and parallel emirates (or governments) in Afghanistan. We have a central Taleban-led authority ruling the country and it ought to be obeyed,’ he contended.... The supreme Taleban leader said he was sending an emissary to Osama Bin Laden to tell him to show restraint and leave it to the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan to take the required measures to defend itself and give an appropriate answer to the US attack on its soil. Earlier, he had asked the Saudi millionaire not to pursue his political agenda

from Afghanistan's soil. He had told Bin Laden that he can stay in Afghanistan as a guest only. The Taleban were in particular upset when Bin Laden held a press conference in his base in Khost in May this year and announced the launching of the International Islamic Front for Jihad against America and Israel. The Taleban leadership first expressed ignorance about the news conference and Bin Laden's warnings to the US and later informed him that he was overstepping their hospitality.⁷¹

The role of the Taliban in the larger global Islamist jihad has been a question that has baffled researchers. Most would agree with Fawaz Gerges when he suggests that Afghan resistance has never been focused outside the Afghan border.⁷² The message portrayed in the shabnamah (Figure 4a and 4b), however, indicates that this position may be changing as the Taliban garner strength and other international events turn against the West (e.g., Iraq, Lebanon). There is ample evidence to suggest that Mullah Omar appeals to the global *Ummah*⁷³ but he, as well as the Taliban, has traditionally not pursued actions directly and explicitly aimed at this audience.

Figures 5 and 6 present night letters that represent messages of intimidation against schools and teachers involved in female education. The Taliban's strict views against female education are related primarily to its views concerning the "protection" of a woman's honor that emanate from the code of Pashtunwali where women are forbidden to participate in most events and processes outside of their kin group. The authority of the kin is a male prerogative. Gulick describes such kin relations as an expression of the "peril and refuge mentality." He observes that the kin who provide a person with social, emotional, and, if necessary, armed support are also competitors for the same resources. In the case of women, the same brothers and father with whom they are so close and who are their protectors are also their executioners, should the males doubt the daughter's or sister's chastity. These are also the relatives who know the person best and to whom he or she is consequently most vulnerable."⁷⁴

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The Taliban have recently accelerated their campaign against female education by burning schools and attacking teachers. The Afghan Ministry of Education has reported that 267 schools have been forced to stop classes—a third of them in the south—because of Taliban intimidation.⁷⁵ The draconian writs against female education during the reign of the Taliban are well documented and portend to continue into the future.

Figure 5 presents a letter from 2005 found in Kapisa posted to a tree three days before a boys' school in the area was set on fire. The letter was apparently posted by the "Taliban Islamic Movement Representative of Parwan and Kapisa Provinces" and represents a "warning" against female education. According to Human Rights Watch other shabnamahs were also found in the school. The shabnamah warns both *ulema* and teachers alike not to attempt to educate girls. It suggests that the Taliban knows who is presently violating this edict and that they will be appropriately dealt with.

This is to inform all those who have enrolled at boys' schools to stop going to schools. An explosion might occur inside the school compounds. In case of getting hurt, it is they who bear all the responsibilities. They have no right to claim that they have not been informed. Taliban incidents like burning of tents and school buildings, explosions near schools, and threats to female teacher are well documented and were a focus of international concern during the reign of the Taliban. Threats such as those delivered in the narrative of this night letter can not be taken lightly. In January 2006 Malim Abdul Habib, the headmaster of Shaikh Mathi Baba high school, which is attended by 1,300 boys and girls, was stabbed eight times before he was decapitated in the courtyard of his home in Qalat, Zabul.⁷⁶

The second part of the letter warns students not to go to boy's schools: "an explosion might occur inside the school compounds. In case of getting

Figure 5: Taliban Islamic Movement Representative of Parwan and Kapisa Provinces Warning⁷⁷



Translation:

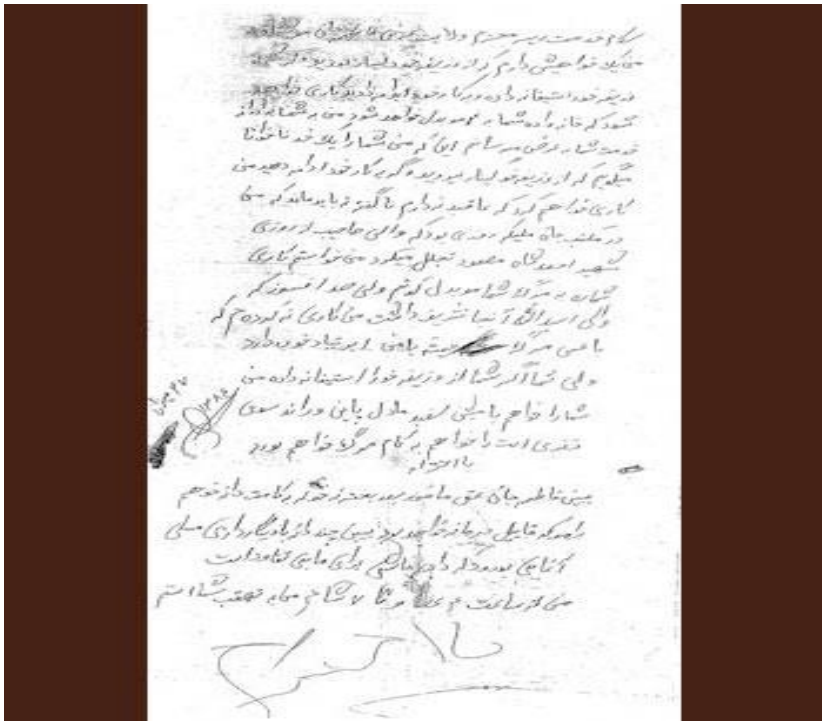
Taliban Islamic Movement Representative of Parwan and Kapisa Provinces Warning

This is a warning to all those dishonorable people, including ulema and teachers, not to teach girls. Based on the information given to us, we strongly ask those people whose names been particularly reported to us, not to commit this act of evil. Otherwise, it is they who bear all the responsibilities. They have no right to claim that they have not been informed.

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hurt, it is they who bear all the responsibilities. They have no right to claim that they have not been informed.” This threat levied at a boy’s school that was constructed by a US Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) represents an additional indication of the Taliban’s strategy of negating any and all reconstruction and infrastructure development in the Afghan hinterlands.

Figure 6: Taliban Might Letter from Ghazni⁷⁸



Translation:

Greetings toward the respected director [of education] of Ghazni province, Fatima Moshtaq. I have one request, that you step aside from your duties. Otherwise, if you don't resign your position and continue your work, something will happen that will transform your family and you to grief. I am telling you this as a brother, that I consider you a godless person. I am telling you to leave your post and if you continue your work, I will do something that doesn't have a good ending. It should not be left unsaid that

one day in the Jan Malika school I heard Wali Sahib praise Ahmad Shah Masood, I wanted transform your life to death and with much regret Wali Assadullah was present there and I didn't do anything to cause your death. But if you don't resign your work, I will attack you and take you to death.

With respects,
27 Meezan 1384

At the bottom (last paragraph):

Look dear Fatima consider your poor employee who will suffer. He was in front of the house look at how many body guards you have for instance the one who was there but if you have them it doesn't matter to us. I was following you from 4 in the afternoon till 7 at night.

With Respects.

The shabnamah presented in Figure 6 is an example of Taliban intimidation directed at a specific individual—Fatima Moshtaq, the Ghazni Province Director of Education. Threats were apparently directed against Moshtaq because of her role in female education. She is warned that both she and her family are in grave danger. The letter calls on her to resign her position—in the eyes of the Taliban, a position that should never be held by a women. Similar threats have been directed at numerous government officials by Taliban night letters.

Local education officials in Ghazni blame the Taliban for scores of the attacks on educational institutions. According to Human Rights Watch during 2004-2005, 31 percent of students officially enrolled in Ghazni schools were girls. The two of the eighteen provincial districts that happen to lie in southern Ghazni and are areas of significant insurgent activity have no girls enrolled in school⁷⁹—yet another indication that the Taliban intimidation campaign is succeeding.

Finally, Figure 7a presents a 2003 Qandahar shabnamah while Figure 7b presents the night letter's translation. After the recitation of a Koranic verse (“Jihad is a right in Allah's Path—Jihad yesterday, Jihad until the Day of Judgment”) this proclamation authored by “Jamiat-e Jaish al Muslemin” presents a series of specific actions and instructions that

Figure 7a: Night Letter from Kandahar⁸⁰

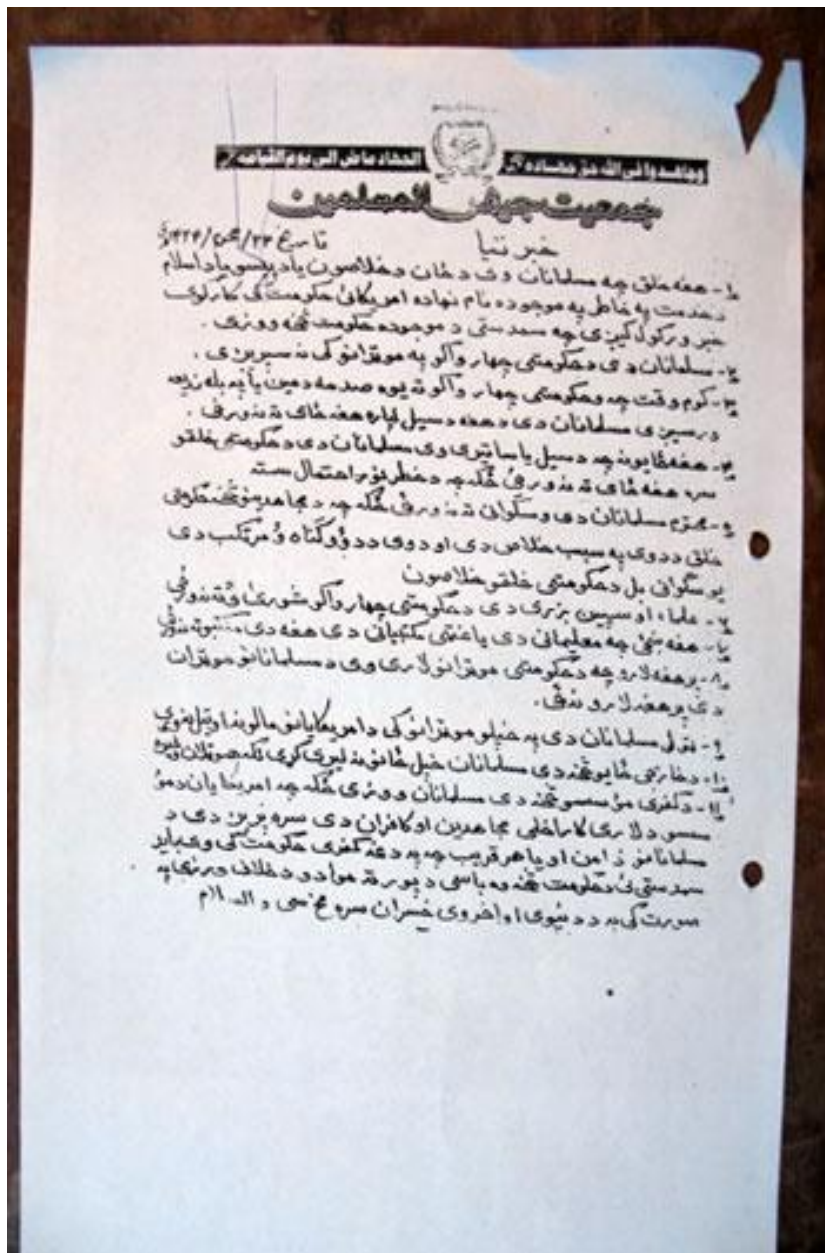


Figure 7b: Translation of Night Letter from Kandahar⁸¹

(Arabic Koranic verse): Jihad is a right in Allah's Path - Jihad yesterday, Jihad until the Day of Judgment.

Jamiat-e Jaish alMuslemin

Announcement

Date: Date: 24/Moharram/1424 [23 April 2003]

1. This letter aims to address those who are Muslim but work with the current American puppet government, either for money or, assuming they serve Islam, to abandon their jobs immediately,
2. Muslims do not use government vehicles,
3. Whenever a governmental vehicle is exploded or damaged by any means, Muslims do not go there in order to have a look at the site,
4. Where there is a feast, Muslims should not go there with government officials, because danger may threaten them,
5. Respected Muslim does not go to [illegible] because whoever goes there commit double sins: one they commit [illegible] and second they rescue government officials,
6. Ulema and influential leaders of the community should not go to the governmental shura (council),
7. Those women who are teachers and adult girls who are students should not go to schools,
8. Muslim cars should not use the roads used by government officials' cars,
9. All Muslims should desist from transporting American equipment and oil in their cars,
10. Muslims should avoid going to places where foreigners stay, such as hotels, etc.
11. Muslims should not work in organizations [NGOs] because Americans use those NGOs for their own purpose.
12. Muslims' sons who are working with the current infidel's government

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should get out of it immediately. Those, whoever, who act in opposition to the above-mentioned rule bear the mortal and eternal responsibilities. Al-Salaam Qandaharis presently working with the Karzai Government (“American puppets”) are to follow:

- immediately quit your government or NGO job,
- do not use government vehicles and do not go to areas where such vehicles have been damaged or destroyed,
- never go to a feast where government officials are to be present,
- *ulema* as well as community leaders should not attend governmental *shuras*,
- woman and girls are forbidden from educational participation,
- Muslim cars should not use the roads used by government officials,
- do not transport American equipment, and
- avoid hotels frequented by westerners.

These instructions represent an integrated program to obstruct government operations in Qandahar.

The letter written in 2003 appears to foreshadow the use of improvised explosive devises (IEDs) and vehicle-born improvised explosive devises (VBIEDs) as well as suicide bombings—presently a grave concern and a tactic previously unknown in Afghanistan. Despite a quarter-century of war, suicide attacks in Afghanistan have been relatively rare. “Suicide is not a characteristic tactic of the Afghan people ... they have a cultural aversion to it.”⁸² Only five suicide attacks—none of which targeted civilians—were reported during the first three and a half years after the Taliban were driven from power.

The recent use of IEDs has demonstrated an unusual level of internal coordination and a growing technological sophistication in the Afghan insurgency. Since the summer of 2004, a variety of guerilla tactics,

including assassinations and kidnappings, in Afghanistan⁸³ suggest that insurgents are borrowing tactics from Iraq.⁸⁴ In the first six months of 2006, Afghan insurgents set off 32 suicide bombs killing 82 people and wounding 244, six more than in all of 2005.⁸⁵ Since July 1, militants have staged 27 suicide bombings, killing 98 people and wounding 188. According the NATO officials a total of 173 people, mostly citizens, have been killed this year by suicide attacks.⁸⁶

The great majority of the suicide attacks carried out during the last two years appear to be “outsourced” to non-Afghans, most often to Punjabis from the south of Pakistan and young foreign Islamists recruited from radical groups in the Middle East. Recently, such attacks have targeted government officials such Hakim Taniwal, the governor of Afghanistan's Paktia province; during his funeral another suicide bomber detonated an explosive device killing at least an additional six people. Recent attacks have also targeted U.S. and coalition forces. The quote of Mullah Dadullah cited in the introduction of the paper, would seem to suggest that suicide bombings will be used as a regular Taliban tactic in the future.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Analysts and observers have recently argued that “the Taliban are now drawing increasing support from the Afghan population.”⁸⁷ While it is impossible to evaluate specifically how the Taliban’s night letter campaign has contributed to this “support,” Taliban narratives have clearly resonated; where their messages have not resonated with the populous, the Taliban has compensated by waging an effective intimidation campaign. This has clearly presented a dilemma for the Karzai government as well as US and coalition counterinsurgency strategies.

The network of Afghan ethnic and political affiliations and loyalties is complex and continuously changing. It is difficult, if not impossible to capture local and provincial alliances and refer to them as definitive lasting

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relationships. This factor works against US strategists who find it easier to plan an operation targeting a fixed population with clearly delineated alliances, rather than shifting loyalties and politicization resulting from personal or tribal feuds. OEF was a particular challenge to US information operation message strategists in that it was vital to have an intimate grasp of ethnic and local relationships on the ground. The vast majority of these analysts were virtually clueless in their understanding of the Taliban's environment. Although taking Kabul was a politico-strategic victory for coalition forces, the countryside was still fragmented, and ethnic-alliance topography had yet to be mapped by Special Operations Forces (SOF) in the areas. Afghan geography created impassible barriers for tactical PSYOP which made radio or leaflet campaigns the only hope to get messages to the rural population. But our messages have not resonated and the Taliban have clearly taken an immeasurable lead in the information war. Night letters such as those analyzed here have become a central component of their strategy.⁸⁸

The level of US cultural intelligence prior to and even during the initial campaign fell short of adequate and could not compete with the Taliban information campaign which made use of its indigenous grasp of local, provincial, and national themes to render their message more powerful among their audience. Some of the US narratives have been down right silly and an embarrassment.

Understanding the Taliban and their tribal roots more precisely could enable a better calibration of information and psychological operations, a more nuanced understanding of the battlefield and the human terrain by US and NATO forces, and would suggest a realignment of reconstruction priorities based on historical models to isolate the movement and prevent its further mobilization. Assessing their night letters is one small way to do this.

In the introduction, the question was posed as to why and how Pashtun tribal customs as exemplified or interpreted by the Taliban moral sentiments supersede the state's central rule of law. Much of the areas of Taliban operations and control are ungoverned spaces where tribal independence from the state is highly cherished. These areas are primarily inhabited by segmentary societies, such as the Ghilzai. Lindholm's characterization of segmentary societies⁸⁹ supports the notion that tribal organizational and normative factors, with which the Taliban are quite familiar, impede the establishment of state authority. Segmentary societies differ from other forms of society in that they only tend to unite when they feel they are losing influence over their own way of life. The Taliban were brilliant in exploiting such sentiments during their initial rise to power in 1994-1996 when Afghans were extremely war weary and seeking to extend control over their lives that was lost over two decades of war as well as during the archaic and ineffectual mujahideen rule after the fall of Najibullah. The Taliban under their Ghilzai leadership offered stability, and the Afghan people welcomed it with open arms (at least until they recognized what the Taliban ultimately represented).

The Taliban through their present night letter campaigns are mimicking their successful strategy of 1994-96 but with a series of modifications. The narratives of the night letters represent the preservation of traditional Pashtun values and society at the expense of modernity. Night letters used in urban areas by the Taliban, not assessed by the analysis presented here, directly confront some of the ills of modernity, such as alcohol, pornography, and prostitution that are now very visible in urban areas such as Kabul and that the average Pashtun abhors.⁹⁰ Expect to see more such letters targeting urban areas and a more sophisticated campaign against modernity as the Taliban insurgency push north—a phenomenon that we have started to witness in 2006.

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The Taliban as well as the Ghilzai society have deep interests in preserving traditional social structures and organizations and preventing social change. Maintaining the social status quo is an explicit goal of a segmentary society.⁹¹ These root goals and world views are clearly evidenced in Taliban shabnamahs, and they severely hamper Kabul's ability to offer social or economic progress as an incentive to accept state authority. Moreover, through their intimidation campaign the Taliban have been able to scare off those few NGOs and humanitarian organizations that could deliver on Karzai's wishes. This is proving to be a brilliant strategy to defy Kabul and the counterinsurgency.

Ghilzai Pashtuns also, as suggested above, highly value and have grown accustomed to their independence; they have preserved their way of life for centuries, despite the efforts of some very powerful forces to alter it. Though there have been times when parts of this tribal society has experienced short durations of subjugation by alien forces, they were permitted to conduct their lives in accordance with Pashtunwali. Even today, the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATAs) of Pakistan, which are predominantly inhabited by the Pashtun, are exempt from Pakistani law. Independence is the historical norm for the Ghilzai, and the Taliban night letters dwell on this fact. The risk of losing tribal independence to "infidels and puppets of the West" outweighs the possibility of improving tribal social welfare or increasing economic opportunities that would probably be gained by accepting state authority. Any concession in tribal independence should exceed any compensation offered in return for submission to state authority. Kabul as well as the United States and their coalition partners have failed to understand this. Ultimately all of this is academic, if the Taliban are successful in their insurgency. As of today, few informed analysts could realistically argue that the United States and their coalition partners are on a road to success.

NOTES

¹ An earlier version of this paper was delivered at a “Conference on Tribal Politics and Militancy in the Tri-Border Region: The Baluch and Pashtun Tribes of Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan,” Monterey, California, September 2006. I would like to thank Capt. Keely Fahoum for invaluable assistance in the preparation of this paper. I would also like to thank Mariam Abou Zahab, Chris Mason, Thomas Barfield, and Larry Goodson for comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper.

² STRATFOR, “The Afghan Stalemate,” *Geopolitical Diary*, September 14, 2006, http://www.stratfor.com/products/premium/read_article.php?id=275232&selected=Analyses .

³ Anna Badkhen, “Afghan government failure reopens door to the Taliban,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 17, 2006, A1.

⁴ See Thomas H. Johnson and W. Chris Mason, “Terrorism, Insurgency and Afghanistan,” in James JF Forrest (ed.) *Countering Terrorism in the 21st Century, Volume III: Lessons Learned From the Fight Against Terrorism* (New York: Praeger, forthcoming, 2007).

⁵ The Associated Press, “Top Taliban military commander dismisses NATO casualty reports, warns journalists,” *International Herald Tribune* (Asian and Pacific Edition), September 4, 2006, Internet Version, http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/09/04/asia/AS_GEN_Afghan_Taliban.php .

⁶ This loose fitting cotton slipover shirt which has a long knee-length tail along with baggy pants held together with a draw-string represents the standard Pashtun garment. It is also called a *peerahan-toonban*.

⁷ See M. Chris Mason, “Pashtun Tribes and Governance in Afghanistan: Center vs. Periphery,” paper delivered at a Conference on Tribal Politics and Militancy in the Tri-Border Region: The Baluch and Pashtun Tribes of Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan, September 2006, Monterey, CA.

⁸ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban* (Yale University Press, 2001), 18-19; Michael Griffin, *Reaping the Whirlwind: Afghanistan, Al Qaeda and the Holy War* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 70.

⁹ Olaf Caroe states that Ghilzais are descendants of Khalaj Turks who came with Attila and the Huns. Caroe also states that after several centuries these tribes became Pashtunized, and they formed a unique dialect of Pakhtu with a heavy Turkish vocabulary. He also states the word Ghilzai comes from Khalaj which evolved through time from Khalaj to Khalji to Ghalji to Ghalzai or Ghilzai (Sir Olaf Caroe, *The Pathans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 15-19.

¹⁰ See Thomas H. Johnson and W. Chris Mason, “Terrorism, Insurgency and Afghanistan.”

¹¹ James W. Spain, *The Pathan Borderland* (Karachi, Pakistan: Indus Publications, 1963) 41, 57; Sir Olaf Caroe, *The Pathans*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968) 15-19.

¹² (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Segmentary_lineage).

¹³ Charles Allen. *Soldier Sahibs* (New York: Carrol & Graf Publishers, 2000), 119.

¹⁴ Charles Allen. *Soldier Sahibs*,13.

¹⁵ John C. Griffiths, *Afghanistan* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), 46-47.

¹⁶ Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 126-127.

¹⁷ Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan*, 322-325.

¹⁸ The only periods where the Pashtuns have not held power in Afghanistan was briefly in 1929 when Habibullah Ghazi, a Tajik, took power until he was overthrown and Durrani returned to power. Burhanuddin Rabbani Tajik leader of the Jamiat-i-Islami was an ineffectual Mujahideen President of pre-Taliban Afghanistan from June 1992 until the Taliban took Kabul in September of 1996.

¹⁹ The competition and distrust between the *Ghilzai* and the *Durrani* played a major role in the split of the PDPA where the *Khalq* (the people or masses) led by Nur Mohammed Taraki represented *Ghilzai* Pashtuns and the *Parcham* (Banner) led by Babrak Karmal represented the *Durrani* Pashtun, See: Henry S. Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union* (Durham: Duke University, 1985, 2nd Edition).

²⁰ See Henry S. Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union*.

²¹ Gailani's NIFA party often stood in for the royal family, partially because of the anomalous position of King Zahir Shah.

²² Both Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a sworn enemy of the US and long rival to the Taliban until he signed an alliance of convenience with them after OEF's initial stage, and Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, fundamentalist leader of the Wahabbi Iittihad-i-Islami (Islamic Unity), are both Ghilzai.

²³ Thomas H. Johnson and W. Chris Mason, “Terrorism, Insurgency and Afghanistan.”

²⁴ International Crisis Group, “Afghanistan: The Problem of Pashtun Alienation,” *ICG Asia Report*, No.62, Kabul/Brussels, 5 August 2003, 17.

²⁵ Other seminaries outside the border areas that were important foundations for the Taliban included ones in Karachi—Binori Town and Jamia Farooqia—and in Lahore—Jamia Ashrafia. Similarly, there were important seminaries in Peshawar, Akora Khattack and Quetta, which all played a pivotal role in building up the Taliban movement. See Syed Saleem Shahzad, “How the Taliban Builds its Army,” *Asia Times*, August 27, 2003.

²⁶ See Owen Bennett Jones, *Pakistan: Eye of the Storm* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CN, 2002); Barbara Metcalf, “The Madrasa at Deoband: A Model for Religious Education in Modern India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 12, no. 1 (1978), and; Usha Sanyal, “Generational Changes in the Leadership of the Ahl-e Sunnat Movement in North India during the Twentieth Century,” *Modern Asian Studies* 32, no. 3 (July 1998).

²⁷ Ahmed Rashid, “The Taliban: Exporting Extremism,” *Foreign Affairs*, (November/December 1999).

²⁸ See Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban* (Yale University Press, 2001), 77, 83, 139.

²⁹ “The Taliban government in Kabul recently rechristened the Islamic State of Afghanistan as Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan under a decree by the Emirul Momineen Mullah Mohammad Omar.” See London Al-Hayah in Arabic, “Taleban Prime Minister Interviewed,” October 3, 1997, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, FTS19971003000379.

³⁰ Cleavage between Kabul and Qandahar has existed for centuries. The bureaucratic class in Kabul lives very differently when compared to other urban Afghans and especially when compared to the rural hinterland population. Kabuli bureaucrats and financial aristocrats are primarily but by no means all Tajik, but Dari (Afghan Farsi) is the lingua franca for all of them, even for most educated Kabuli Pashtuns. Since the 1960s the Dari-speaking elite professionals have been comfortable in adopting Western ways and languages. These people represent the vast majority of the Afghans westerners usually come in contact with and comprises almost all of the pro-American Afghans. They likewise were the Kabulis who supported the King, then Daoud, then a series of Soviet Afghan communist and Soviet leaders. The Taliban have always despised these Kabulis as have many other eastern and southern Afghan tribal elements.

³¹ David Edwards, *Heroes of the Age: Moral Fault Lines on the Afghan Border* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996).

³² Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan*, 114.

³³ The semantics used here have been informed by the work of William D. Casebeer. See William D. Casebeer, *Natural Ethical Facts: Evolution, Connectionism, and Moral Cognition* (Boston: MIT Press, 2003); William D. Casebeer and James Russell, “Storytelling and Terrorism: Towards a

Comprehensive Counter-Narrative Strategy,” *Strategic Insights*, Volume IV, Issue 3 (March 2005), and: Troy S. Thomas and William D. Casebeer, *Turbulent Arena: Global Effects against Non-State Adversaries*, INSS Occasional Paper 58, June 2005.

³⁴ While such components of culture are critical in some contexts (See William Graham Sumner notes in *Folkways and Mores*, New York: Schocken, 1906), they are not a subject of analysis here.

³⁵ See Daniel G. Bates and Fred Plog, *Cultural Anthropology, 2nd Edition* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 7.

³⁶ See David Edwards, *Heroes of the Age*.

³⁷ Mark Turner *The Literary Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 1.

³⁸ See, for example, Alicia Juarero, *Dynamics in Action* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999); Troy Thomas, William Casebeer and Stephen Kiser, *Warlords Rising: Confronting Violent Non-State Actors* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005); or Thomas and Casebeer, *Violent Systems*; A. C. Graesser and G. V. Nakamura, (1982), “The impact of a schema on comprehension and memory.” in H. Bower (Ed.), *The Psychology of Learning and Motivation*, 16, 59–109 (Academic Press, 1990), Maybel Chau-Ping Wong, “The effects of story schemata on narrative recall,” <https://repository.ust.hk/dspace/handle/1783.1/1337> (2004) and; Daniel Dennett, “The Self as Center of Narrative Gravity,” <http://ase.tufts.edu/cogstud/papers/selfctr.htm> (1992).

³⁹ See D. A. Snow and R. Benford, “Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization,” in B. Klandermans, H. Kriesi & S. Tarrow (eds.), *From Structure to Action* (Greenwich: JAI Press, 1988), Vol.1, pp. 197–217.

⁴⁰ For example, see: Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), or Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, “Toward an Integrated Perspective on Social Movements and Revolution,” in Lichback and Zuckerman (eds), *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture and Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁴¹ The use of oral narratives for the transmittal of instructions and legends is crucial especially in rural Afghanistan when you consider that the vast majority of the rural population is illiterate. Night letters are generally delivered to a literate village member and read to the community during a mass meeting.

⁴² Hafizullah Emadi, *Culture and Customs of Afghanistan* (London: Greenwood Press, 2005) 98.

⁴³ Sandy Gall, *Afghanistan: Agony of a Nation* (London: The Bodley Head, 1988) 99.

⁴⁴ Nelofer Pazira, *A Bed of Red Flowers: In Search of My Afghanistan* (New York: Free Press, 2005), 102.

⁴⁵ I would like to thank NPS student Capt. Keely M. Fahoum, USAF, for her outstanding support of some Taliban night letter analysis presented here. Capt. Fahoum's earlier conceptualizations on Taliban shabnamah have been critical to my thinking on the subject.

⁴⁶ For example of a media account of night letters posted near the Spin Boldak border, see: Ron Synovitz, "Afghanistan: U.S. Investigates Taliban 'Night Letters' Threatening Villagers," *RadioLiberty*, March 10, 2004, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/03/c47dc6f9-5e79-4213-8c0e-2430cf0557b5.html>.

⁴⁷ Aryn Baker, "Deadly Notes in the Night: How the Taliban is using a new kind of terrorist threat to intimidate Afghans," *Time Magazine*, July 5, 2006.

⁴⁸ Aryn Baker, "Deadly Notes in the Night."

⁴⁹ PYSOP officer interview by Capt. Keely M. Fahoum, June 14, 2006.

US PSYOP personnel have expressed their frustration because of their inability to respond to Taliban night letters in a timely, effective manner. While the Taliban could hand deliver their communiqués to strategic points of contact within rural villages, US PSYOP planners have limited physical access or intimate knowledge of village politics and social structure. During OEF, PSYOP personnel and analysts struggled with bureaucratic red tape which made it next to impossible to respond to Taliban propaganda efforts in a timely manner. (Personal communication with two PSYOPS officers at the Naval Postgraduate School, May-July 2006.)

⁵⁰ This particular Night Letter was provided in May 2006 by a government analyst returning from an Afghanistan deployment.

⁵¹ Translation provided by Amin Tarzi, interview, July 14, 2006, and Farid Mohammad, September 2008.

⁵² Sir Percy Sykes, *A History of Afghanistan* (London: Macmillian, 1940), 367.

⁵³ Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan*, 314.

⁵⁴ Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan*, 314.

⁵⁵ Olaf Caroe, *The Pathans*, 15-19.

⁵⁶ The only Ghilzai to hold the Afghan "throne" was Mir Wais, founder of the short-lived Hotaki Dynasty (1709-38) who also led an Afghan tribal revolt against Persian rule that eventually led to the Afghan domination of Persia

from 1722 until 1734 when Nadir Shah began to wrest control from the Ghilzais. He was deposed by the tribal leadership that would eventually establish the Durrani Afghan Empire.

⁵⁷ Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan*, 314.

⁵⁸ Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Books: 2004), 238.

⁵⁹ Jeffery J. Roberts, *The Origins of Conflict in Afghanistan* (Westport: Praeger Publishing, 2003), xiii.

⁶⁰ Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad went Global* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 83.

⁶¹ Provided by a government analyst deployed in Afghanistan in 2003, translated by Amin Tarzi.

⁶² Thomas H. Johnson and W. Chris Mason, "Terrorism, Insurgency and Afghanistan."

⁶³ Anna Badkhen, "Afghan government failure reopens door to the Taliban," A4.

⁶⁴ Source: <http://hrw.org/campaigns/afghanistan/2006/education/letter8.htm> .

⁶⁵ Source: <http://hrw.org/campaigns/afghanistan/2006/education/letter8.htm> .

⁶⁶ See especially chapter eight of his *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 3rd Edition (University of California Press, 2003).

⁶⁷ See Bruce Lawrence (ed.), *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden*, (London: Verso, 2005).

⁶⁸ A term of Persian origin, meaning an army, a camp; or one belonging to an army, a soldier.

⁶⁹ Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan*, 453.

⁷⁰ Hong Kong AFP, "Taleban Not to Extradite Alleged Saudi Terrorist bin Laden," March 27, 1997.

⁷¹ Rahimullah Yusufzai, "Taleban Leader To Tell Bin Laden To Show Restraint," *Islamabad The News (Internet Version) in English*, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, FTS19980824000082.

⁷² Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, 83.

⁷³ He reportedly started the Taliban after a dream in which Allah came to him in the shape of a man, asking him to lead the faithful. In 1996 he made a risky but brilliant propaganda move, which again supports the notion of him being a charismatic leader, by taking the garment which Afghans believe to be the

Prophet Mohammed's shroud or cloak out of Qandahar's royal mausoleum for the first time in 60 years and wearing it in a public rally as a way to identify himself with the Prophet (Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban*, Yale University Press, 2001, p. 20). The cloak is believed by many of the 90 percent of Pashtuns who are illiterate to contain supernatural and mystical powers. This action also represented Omar's absolute faith in his perceived divine right to rule and gave him legitimacy in his role as leader of the Afghan people ordained by Allah; soon after Omar was named *Amir-ul Momineen* or leader of the faithful—not just of the Afghans but of all Muslims. The cloak of the Prophet Mohammed, which had been folded and padlocked in a series of chests in a crypt in the royal mausoleum at Qandahar; “myth had it that the padlocks to the crypt could be opened only when touched by a true *Amir-ul Momineen*, a king of the Muslims.” See: Joseph A. Raelin, “The Myth of Charismatic Leaders,” March 2003, http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0MNT/is_3_57/ai_98901483 .

⁷⁴ Richard F. Nyrop and Donald M. Seekins (eds.), *Afghanistan Country Study*, (Washington, DC: The American University, Foreign Area Studies, 1986) <http://www.gl.iit.edu/govdocs/afghanistan/Family.html> .

⁷⁵ Miles Bredin, “Class war: battle to educate Afghan girls and boys hindered by fear of Taliban retribution,” *The Independent*, September 12, 2006.

⁷⁶ Noor Khan, “Militants behead Afghan principal for educating girls: Taliban assaults cited in closing of schools,” *The Boston Globe* January 5, 2006.

⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch, <http://hrw.org/campaigns/afghanistan/2006/education/letter5.htm>.

⁷⁸ Humans Right Watch, <http://hrw.org/campaigns/afghanistan/2006/education/letter3.htm>.

⁷⁹ Human Right Watch, <http://hrw.org/campaigns/afghanistan/2006/education/letter3.htm>.

⁸⁰ Humans Right Watch, <http://hrw.org/campaigns/afghanistan/2006/education/letter9.htm>.

⁸¹ Humans Right Watch, <http://hrw.org/campaigns/afghanistan/2006/education/letter9.htm>.

⁸² Esther Pan, “Afghanistan's New Security Threat,” *Backgrounder*, Council on Foreign Affairs, February 14, 2006. Also see: *Griff Witte*, “Suicide Bombers Kill Dozens in Afghanistan, Violence in South Is Seen as Message to NATO,” *Washington Post Foreign Service*, Tuesday, January 17, 2006; A11.

⁸³ For a chronology of suicide bombings in Afghanistan, compiled by Radio Liberty see: <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/01/9ac36a59-d683-4189-a2b9-94fe5fbf32ad.html>.

⁸⁴ Griff Witte, “Afghans Confront Surge In Violence: Foreign Support Seen Behind Attacks That Mimic Those in Iraq,” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 28, 2005, 1.

⁸⁵ Eric Schmitt, “Springtime Killing in Afghanistan,” *The New York Times*, May 28, 2006.

⁸⁶ Anna Badkhen, “Afghan government failure reopens door to the Taliban,” A4.

⁸⁷ Syed Saleem Shahzad, “In search of the Taliban's missing link,” *Asia Times Online*, September 16, 2006, http://atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/H116Df01.html.

⁸⁸ This very effective Taliban information operation has recently been complemented with a professional and sophisticated Pashto and Arabic website (English version is “under construction”), Alemarah.org or “Voice of Jihad” that lists occurrences of police corruption and reports of coalition attacks on innocent civilians. This website is clearly aimed at expanding Taliban influence in both Afghanistan and Pakistan and presents visitors with up-to-date news on Taliban activities and attacks in Afghanistan, editorials, official announcements, commentary, audio and video libraries, testimonials by suicide bombers, poetry, magazines, books, and online contact information.

⁸⁹ Charles Lindholm, “The Segmentary Lineage System: Its Applicability to Pakistan’s Political Structure,” in Ainslie T. Embree, ed., *Pakistan’s Western Borderlands: The Transformation of Political Order* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House PVT, Ltd, 1977), 41-66.

⁹⁰ While there are numerous Ghilzai Pashtuns living in urban areas of both Pakistan and Afghanistan, the vast majority live in rural areas.

⁹¹ Charles Lindholm, “The Segmentary Lineage System: Its Applicability to Pakistan’s Political Structure,” 60.

