Belling the cat: The neo-Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan

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BELLING THE CAT: THE NEO-TALIBAN INSURGENCY IN AFGHANISTAN

BY

ANDREW R. SMITH
B.A. Political Science and English Literature, University of New Hampshire, 2009

THESIS

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts
in
Political Science

December, 2011
This thesis has been examined and approved.

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Date
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Source: http://www.state.gov/p/sca/ci/af/

Source: http://afpakwar.com
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Note: Map is dated April 23, 2009
Source: http://www.reuters.com
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ABSTRACT

BELLING THE CAT: THE NEO-TALIBAN INSURGENCY IN AFGHANISTAN

by

Andrew R. Smith

University of New Hampshire, December, 2011

It has been over a decade since the United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan under Operation Enduring Freedom. Today, Afghanistan and the Taliban are at the forefront of US foreign policy. This thesis aims to define the Taliban movement in Afghanistan, from past to present, and asks why they still exist as a political movement after a decade of war and counterinsurgency efforts. It discusses the rise of both the Taliban and the neo-Taliban and observes their differences and similarities.

Subsequently, using Cornelia Beyer's "Synthetic Approach," the Taliban insurgency and US-led counterinsurgency efforts are analyzed. The Synthetic Approach allows the opportunity to look at the Afghan insurgency using multiple variables from an international perspective. The Taliban's tactics, edicts, and geopolitical space are dynamic and constantly shifting. This thesis employs an equally dynamic theoretical framework with which to trace the Taliban and explain their resilient nature.
INTRODUCTION

The basic concept of power is the ability to influence others to get them to do what you want. There are three major ways to do that: one is to threaten them with sticks; the second is to pay them with carrots; the third is to attract them or co-opt them, so that they want what you want. If you can get others to be attracted, to want what you want, it costs you much less in carrots and sticks.

- Joseph Nye

After almost a decade of military and political involvement in Afghanistan, the United States and its NATO allies continue struggling to eliminate the “neo-Taliban” insurgency. Today's military clashes with the Taliban and predictions of never-ending conflict within Afghanistan are stark contrasts to the public declarations of military and government leaders in 2005, who stated: "the Taliban is a force in decline;" "US military estimates suggest there may be only 800 Taliban fighters left;" and that "Peaceful elections are a sign that the Taliban are disorganized, weak, and on the run."

Public and private sector analysts, researchers, journalists, politicians, and pundits are constantly trying to explain the variables which allow the Taliban to continuously combat Western forces, attract recruits, and retain territorial and ideological footholds within Afghanistan. With Osama bin-Laden dead, relations with Pakistan colder than ever, and cooperation with President Hamid Karzai and the Afghan government faltering; the United States and its NATO allies are desperately looking to adopt an effective strategy which can eliminate the major threats of the neo-Taliban insurgency and facilitate the establishment of a stable Afghanistan able to govern and protect itself. In Antonio Giustozzi, Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), I.
reality, no one expects that Afghanistan will be wholly at peace when NATO troops withdraw, nor that the Taliban insurgency will have been routed. On June 22nd, President Obama announced that America will begin drawing down its troops in Afghanistan in July 2011, effectively marking the end of the troop "surge" which began in late 2009. However, for many Americans worried about troubles at home and the ineffectiveness of political and military strategy in Afghanistan, the essential question is: Why is the United States still fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan after removing them from power over a decade ago and investing billions of dollars in resources and man power to stabilize the country?

Research on the Taliban, the neo-Taliban and the Afghan insurgency continues to develop as events and information regarding the war unfold. The complexity of Afghanistan and the region cannot be encompassed in one study or understood through a single perspective. The neo-Taliban insurgency is a regional insurgency, with military and ideological roots dating back to the Cold War. This analysis builds on the developing field of Taliban and neo-Taliban research by applying an analytical framework that uses a synthesis of realist and constructivist ideas in order to provide an international perspective on the neo-Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan. The analysis proposes an international perspective which applies the ideas of power, polarity, equilibrium, hegemony, and the mutuality of both ideas and material facts to the Taliban and Afghan insurgency in order to help explain the complex dynamics underlying the ongoing

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2 "Neither a picnic nor a Switzerland," The Economist, June 23, 2011, 56.
3 The Economist, "Neither a picnic nor a Switzerland," 56.
conflict and provide a better understanding of the variables which prevent an easy peace in the country and the region.

The analysis begins in Chapter 1 with a history of the Taliban in Afghanistan, tracing their ideological and developmental roots beginning with the Mujahedeen fighters of the Soviet-Afghan war and ending with the inception of the neo-Taliban insurgency of today. Chapter 2 is a review of Taliban and neo-Taliban literature. The literature is separated into three categories by level of analysis, starting with the individual and leading to the state and regional levels. This chapter also introduces the synthetic framework laid out by Cornelia Beyer and explains how her approach will be adapted to the neo-Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan. Chapter 3 focuses on applying the synthetic approach to Afghanistan. The chapter combines various ideas from the paradigms of realism and constructivism in order to better understand the roles that state and non-state actors play in Afghanistan. Uni-multipolarity, power equilibrium, hegemony, and tit-for-tat are some of the ideas used to help analyze major variables of the Afghan insurgency, such as state corruption, insurgency/counterinsurgency strategy, and the relationships between state and sub-state actors in Afghanistan and the region. Chapter 4 concludes the analysis with a summary of the important power dynamics identified in the analysis. With the help of Joseph Nye's three-dimensional chess game, the chapter finishes by reflecting on the United States' search for balance in Afghanistan between material and ideational powers.
CHAPTER I

HISTORY OF THE TALIBAN IN AFGHANISTAN

The Taliban are an Islamic-fundamentalist group which controlled the majority of Afghanistan from 1997 to 2001. Since their emergence after the Soviet-Afghan war, the Taliban have played many different roles. The Taliban began as a revolutionary grassroots movement, and eventually became the recognized government of the state of Afghanistan. The Taliban were removed from power by the United States and its allies during Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001. Today the Taliban have become an integral part of the Afghan insurgency. There are few constants which accurately describe the Taliban throughout their modern history. Their leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar rarely appears in public or meets with media, furthering the mysticism and conjecture regarding the structure of the Taliban leadership and their administrative methods. Outlining the complex history of the Taliban and the actors involved is essential for understanding why they continue to function as an insurgent group in Afghanistan and why their ideology has remained popular among rural and tribal Afghans despite the counterinsurgency efforts of NATO forces currently in Afghanistan.

The Taliban: From Mujahedeen to Political Movement:

The structural and ideological roots of the Taliban began with the Mujahedeen during the Soviet-Afghan war. Any Afghan who took up arms against occupying Soviet forces and engaged in jihad were, “in the true sense, Mujahidin, or fighters in a holy war. Mujahedeen parties assigned their own leaders at the local level and some of these rose to
prominence." The Mujahedeen were a complex group of Islamic jihadists controlled by various military leaders from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Seven of the most influential groups comprising the Mujahedeen were eventually recognized by the Pakistani government and receive major financial aid and military hardware in order to fight the Russian military. These influential groups of Mujahedeen fighters were:


**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Name</th>
<th>Leader(s)</th>
<th>Ideological Orientation</th>
<th>Ethnic Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Jamiat-i-Islami</em></td>
<td>Burhanuddin Rabbani, Ahmed Shah Masoud</td>
<td>Islamist</td>
<td>Tajik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hisb-e-Islami</em></td>
<td>Gulbuddin Hekmatyar</td>
<td>Islamist</td>
<td>Pushtun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hisb-e-Islami</em></td>
<td>Younis Khalis</td>
<td>Islamist (Deoband)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ittihad-i-Islami</em></td>
<td>Abdul Rasoul Sayyaf</td>
<td>Islamist (Wahabbi)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Afghan National Liberation Front</em></td>
<td>Sibghatullah Mujadidi</td>
<td>Afghan Traditionalist</td>
<td>Pushtun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Harakat-i-Inqilab-i-Islami</em></td>
<td>Nabi Muhammadi</td>
<td>Afghan Traditionalist</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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In the early 1980's, each of the seven major Mujahedeen groups received official recognition as Pakistan selected and funded specific resistance groups to fight against Russian forces in Afghanistan.⁹

Islamist leaders that were previously unknown now found access to international assistance through the ISI¹⁰ and were able to form extensive networks of armed political organizations. They were given free reign over millions of Afghans who were living in refugee camps in Pakistan, and the assistance they received was used to recruit and influence the refugee populations. Their connections with the Islamists in Pakistan allowed them to build bridges with other Islamists and conservative groups in North Africa, the Middle East, and North America, energizing the flow of activists and resources to Afghanistan as well as throughout the larger network of Islamists around the world.¹¹

Prior to the Soviet-Afghan war, Islamists barely had a base of influence in Afghan society. However, with the majority of war funds and arms distributed to Islamist groups such as Hizb-e-Islami led by Hekmatyar and Jamiat-e-Islami led by Burhannudin Rabbani; they were able to build highly centralized, political organizations which wielded "tremendous clout" by the end of the war.¹²

However, each Mujahedeen group was not built on the same ideology, ethnicity, or with the same goals in mind. These differences only began to play a major role after the end of the Soviet-Afghan war. Four of the major Mujahedeen parties defined themselves as Islamist: seeking to create a political movement with an ideological base

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¹⁰ The ISI is Pakistan's Interservices Intelligence Agency


¹² Rashid, Taliban, 19.
that drew on reinterpretation of the essential elements of Islam.\textsuperscript{13} The remaining Mujahedeen groups defined themselves as traditionalists: “they emerged from traditional tribal or other groupings within Afghanistan.”\textsuperscript{14} The various tribal, ethnic, and ideological differences among Mujahedeen groups would not lead to significant conflict during the war. At the time, the Mujahedeen militant groups and commanders were united by a common goal to resist the imposition of Russian communism and the destruction of both tribal and Islamic ways of life. Additionally, abundant and continuous financial and military aid from foreign governments and beneficiaries eliminated the need for competition among Mujahedeen parties for resources.\textsuperscript{15} However, the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1989 would pit former Mujahedeen parties against one another in a struggle to control territory and find alternative sources of income.

Before withdrawing from Afghanistan, the Soviet Union established a puppet government under the control of Muhammad Najibullah. Through foreign financial support, the Soviet Union was able to keep Najibullah in power after their military withdrew. Najibullah’s regime managed to control most of the major urban areas in Afghanistan while Mujahedeen factions fought over control of rural and tribal areas.\textsuperscript{16} Until 1992, Najibullah controlled Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif, Kandahar, Herat, and Jalalabad.\textsuperscript{17} Najibullah fell from power when his most prominent militia leader, Rashid

\textsuperscript{13} Marsden, War and Religion in Afghanistan, 28.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{15} Ahmed Rashid’s research indicates that the Mujahedeen received a total of over ten billion dollars, most in the form of weaponry, from the combined contributions of the United States, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and other European and Islamic countries.
\textsuperscript{16} Marsden, War and Religion in Afghanistan, 36.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 35.
Dostam, deserted and joined forces with Burhannudin Rabbani, the leader of the Mujahedeen group *Jamiat-e-Islami*, setting the stage for “the armed but peaceful entry of the Mujahedeen into Kabul on April 25th, 1992.”\(^\text{18}\) However, the capture of Kabul by new leaders would result in further fractionalization among Mujahedeen and ex-Mujahedeen forces as each vied for power.

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the leader of one faction of *Hisb-e-Islami* became angry, arguing that he had been cheated on the power-sharing deal between himself, Rabanni and Dostam regarding the capture of Kabul.\(^\text{19}\) In order to assert himself and the power of *Hisb-e-Islami* in Kabul, Hekmatyar provoked a civil war, shelling Kabul in an attempt to delegitimize Rabbani and gain power. By 1994 Afghanistan and Kabul were in a state of virtual disintegration after fifteen years of war.\(^\text{20}\) Rashid's analysis shows that Afghanistan "was divided into warlord fiefdoms and all the warlords had fought, switched sides and fought again in a bewildering array of alliances, betrayals and bloodshed."\(^\text{21}\) Northern Afghanistan was controlled by Dostum, who had subsequently broken his alliance with Rabbani. Rabbani controlled Kabul and northeast Afghanistan. Herat was under the control of another warlord, Ismael Khan. Mujahedeen commanders based in Jalalabad controlled the eastern border provinces. Finally, southern Afghanistan was controlled by “dozens of petty ex-Mujahedeen warlords and bandits who plundered the population at will.”\(^\text{22}\) By the mid 90’s, Afghanistan was in a state of chaos and


\(^{19}\) Marsden, *War and Religion in Afghanistan*, 37.


\(^{21}\) Ibid., 21.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 21.
borderline anarchy. The stage was set for any domestic group with enough political and material resources to force their way into a position of power.

It is also important to note the absence of international relations with Afghanistan after the end of the Soviet-Afghan war and leading up to the Taliban's run for power. Afghanistan failed to register at the international level in the early nineties. Barnett Rubin's research on Afghanistan points out that "The U.N., the U.S., and Russia abandoned efforts at conflict resolution in the country after April 1992, and the regional powers stepped into the breach." The UN's humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan were limited by danger and the security of personnel, lack of government, and failure of world powers to fund most of the programs it did propose. Political turmoil within Afghanistan was largely ignored by the international community and left to be resolved by the various warlords and factions waging civil war within the country. The governments of Central Asia, as well as Russia, expressed concern about the spread of weapons, disorder, and extremist Islamic movements from Afghanistan during the nineties. Unfortunately, the international climate was not focused on Afghanistan or central Asia and no significant steps were taken to bring the country under control.

**The Taliban’s Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan:**

While warring fiefdoms throughout Afghanistan continued to harass one another for control of cities and provinces; groups of Mujahedeen and ex-Mujahedeen who had fought the Najibullah regime began re-convening to discuss possible resolutions to

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25 Ibid.

26 Ibid
ending the violence. Ahmed Rashid concisely summarizes the inception of the Taliban as a group in his analysis:

After much discussion these divergent but deeply concerned groups chalked out an agenda which still remains the Taliban’s declared aims – restore peace, disarm the population, enforce Sharia law and defend the integrity and Islamic character of Afghanistan. As most of them were part-time or full-time students at madrassas, the name they chose for themselves was natural. A talib is an Islamic student, one who seeks knowledge compared to the mullah who is one who gives knowledge. By choosing such a name the Taliban (plural of Talib) distanced themselves from the party politics of the Mujahedeen and signaled that they were a movement for cleansing society rather than a party trying to grab power.  

The Afghans who united under the mission of the Taliban chose Mullah Mohammed Omar as their leader and quickly began to assert their dominance over the various warlords and factions fighting for the control of Southern Afghanistan.

To outsiders, the Taliban seemed to appear out of nowhere when they first came to the world’s notice in 1994. The Taliban’s first military conquests were over roadblocks, checkpoints, and small garrisons run by bandits and mercenaries along the main roads of Southern Afghanistan. The specific events which catalyzed Mullah Omar’s mobilization of a small group of Taliban to combat better equipped Kandahar warlords are subject to “an entire factory of myths and stories.” However, what is certain is that the Taliban’s initial successes helped Omar emerged as a “Robin Hood figure, helping the poor against the rapacious commanders.” The Taliban’s reputation as righteous, heroic protectors of rural and tribal populations spread like wildfire throughout Southern Afghanistan.

27 Rashid, Taliban, 22-23.
28 Marsden, War and Religion in Afghanistan, 44.
29 Rashid, Taliban, 25.
30 Ibid.
Following their initial victories in the countryside, the Taliban advanced on Kandahar and took the city with almost no resistance. The Taliban announced to the city that it was their mission to free Afghanistan of its corrupt leadership and create an Islamic society. They began issuing decrees requiring men to wear turbans, beards, short hair, shalwar kameez\(^2\) and for women to wear the burqa.\(^3\) Women were banned from working and from attending school. Further decrees banned music, games, radio and television. Regardless of their strict codes, the Taliban’s ability to bring order to Kandahar after two years of virtual anarchy earned them considerable popularity among the population. The Taliban’s popular support, combined with their distinctive white turbans and obvious religious fervor and purity, lent them an almost supernatural aura.\(^4\) As the Taliban’s reputation preceded their advances Westward from Kandahar, they continued to meet little resistance from the armed groups and bandits who had previously controlled the areas.\(^5\)

After establishing a base of operations in Kandahar, the Taliban quickly found an ally in President Rabbani who still had control of Kabul. Rabbani promised to help the Taliban with funds if they opposed Hekmatyar, who was relentlessly laying siege to the city. The Taliban also bolstered their armaments and numbers by seizing abandoned weaponry and encouraging local people to join the ranks of their fighters.\(^6\) Early support

\(^{31}\) Marsden, *War and Religion in Afghanistan*, 45.

\(^{32}\) Traditional dress worn by both men and women in South Asia and Central Asia, composed of loose fitting trousers and a long shirt or tunic.

\(^{33}\) Marsden, *War and Religion in Afghanistan*, 45.

\(^{34}\) Ibid.

\(^{35}\) Ibid.
for the Taliban also came from Islamic fundamentalist groups in Pakistan. Many high-ranking Taliban officials had grown up and studied in madrassas run by extremist groups such as *Jamiat-e-Ulema* Islam (JUI) while living in Pakistani refugee camps during the war.\(^{37}\) Old ties to fundamental madrassas throughout the refugee areas of Pakistan would be the major source of the Taliban’s military manpower as they continued to advance through Afghanistan.\(^{38}\) By December 1994, some 12,000 Afghan and Pakistani students had joined the Taliban in Kandahar.\(^{39}\)

On September 5\(^{\text{th}}\), 1995 the Taliban captured Herat from Ismail Khan’s forces. They set about implementing the same edicts and laws they had in Kandahar, this time to the chagrin of the local population. On September 11\(^{\text{th}}\), 1996 the Taliban marched into Jalalabad and on the 26\(^{\text{th}}\) they successfully captured Kabul.\(^{40}\) Within days the Taliban moved north and began engaging Dostam’s forces in order to capture the remaining provinces of Afghanistan. Pakistan recognized the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan in early 1997. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates followed Pakistan’s example and officially recognized the Taliban as well.\(^{41}\) To consolidate their leadership role, the Taliban renamed the country the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. However, the Taliban’s extremely oppressive religious edicts began to take their toll economically, mentally, and socially on the newly acquired cities of Herat and Kabul.

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\(^{36}\) Marsden, *War and Religion in Afghanistan*, 45.


\(^{38}\) Ibid.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 29.


\(^{41}\) Ibid., 52.
The Taliban leaders were all from the poorest, most conservative and least literate Southern Pashtun provinces of Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{42} In Mullah Omar's village: "Women had always gone around fully veiled and no girl had ever gone to school because there were none."\textsuperscript{43} Omar and his colleagues transposed their own "milieu," their own experience, or lack of it, with women, education, and culture to the entire country and justified their policies through the Koran.\textsuperscript{44} The forceful, extremist dominion that the Taliban created in diverse, modernizing cities such as Herat and Kabul ignored centuries of cultural tradition and development. The majority of Afghanistan was not even remotely like the south, where the Taliban originated.\textsuperscript{45} Afghan Pashtuns in the east were proud to send their girls to school, forty percent of Kabul women worked, Herat's female elite spoke French as a second language; Afghans went to the movies, played sports, and danced and sang at weddings.\textsuperscript{46} The new Taliban rulers viewed all these activities as signs of iniquity and saw "northerners" as impure Muslims who had to be forcibly re-Islamized.\textsuperscript{47}

In stark contrast to the Taliban's early image as liberators, their oppressive rule changed the perceptions of citizens. Afghans began to see the Taliban as a type of hostile occupier in major cities. Within twenty-four hours of taking Kabul, all women were banned from work, girl’s schools and colleges were shut down, and new dress codes were

\textsuperscript{42} Rashid, Taliban, 110.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 111.
imposed. Once again, the Taliban banned TV, videos, satellite dishes, music and all
games including chess, football and kite-flying.\textsuperscript{48}

The Taliban set up a six-man Shura to rule Kabul, which was dominated by
Durrani Pashtuns and did not include a single Kabuli[...]None of the Shura
members had ever lived in a large city, most had never even visited Kabul, but
they were now running a vibrant, semi-modern, multi-ethnic city of 1.2 million
people in which Pashtuns were only a small minority.\textsuperscript{49}

For all intents and purposes, Kabul was treated as an occupied city by the Taliban in
order to force their beliefs among the population and create their version of an ideal,
Islamic state.

For the first time in Afghanistan’s history, the Taliban began to institutionalize
Islamism in a top to bottom process within the state bureaucracy and society at large.\textsuperscript{50}

However, during the Taliban’s reign they were never able to make the transition from
popular movement to effective state government. The Taliban, like many other popular
revolutionary movements, “failed to differentiate between running a popular militaristic
movement and administering a functioning state.”\textsuperscript{51} The inability of Taliban leadership to
bridge the political gap between themselves and the people they governed would further
seclude the Taliban within their own ideology and leave them disconnected from the
domestic and international affairs of the Afghan state.

Key Taliban leaders were expected to play both civil and military roles due to
constant fighting on multiple fronts. Even with control over the majority of Afghan
provinces, the Taliban had to spend most of its time and resources fighting the Northern

\textsuperscript{48} Rashid, \textit{Taliban}, 50.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 51.

\textsuperscript{50} Nojumi, ”The Rise and Fall,” 108.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 109.
Alliance, comprised of Dostum, Ahmad Shah Masud, and various smaller resistance
groups still functioning in Northern Afghanistan. Bureaucratic roles were often ignored
for military ones, further isolating the Taliban leadership from the masses. As a result, the
Taliban relied on controlling the Afghan people in cities and urban areas through a
framework of “black versus white, virtue versus vice, Islamic versus un-Islamic.” In the
absence of bureaucratic and managerial skills, the Taliban relied on their idea of
“puritanical morality” when formulating and implementing public policy. The Taliban’s
Islamic or un-Islamic, black and white approach to governance resulted in the absence of
any public services or significant reconstruction projects.

While the Taliban brought relative stability to a country embroiled in civil war
and chaos since 1992, they were unable to sustain the administrative and bureaucratic
elements necessary for a transitional government to be effective. When it came to the
military conquest of Afghanistan, the Taliban established and executed a long-term plan
in order to achieve their goals. However, much more sensitive questions regarding how
the Taliban planned to rule Afghanistan and what they planned for the country’s
economic and social development were to remain permanently unanswered – even after
the capture of Kabul.

al-Qaeda and the Fall of the Taliban:

The Taliban’s protracted war against the Northern Alliance resulted in a large
number of casualties and high consumption of resources. “The continued resistance of the

52 Rashid, *Taliban*, 53.


54 Ibid.

55 Rashid, *Taliban*, 43.
Northern Alliance, combined with financial difficulties due to UN and U.S. embargos, made the Taliban desperate to produce human and capital resources." The Taliban relied heavily on drug trafficking between Afghanistan and Pakistan for revenue and weapons. By 1997, ninety-six per cent of Afghan heroin came from areas under Taliban control. Taxes on opium exports were the sole source of income fueling the Taliban's war economy. “In 1995 UNDCP estimated that Pakistan-Afghanistan drugs exports were earning some 50 billion rupees (US$1.35 billion) a year. By 1998 heroin exports had doubled in value to US$3 billion.”

For human resources, the Taliban found adequate supply from Osama Bin Laden and al-Qaeda. In 1996, Bin Laden and the base of al-Qaeda operations were expelled from Khartoum, Sudan under pressure from the United States and Saudi Arabia. Bin Laden returned to Afghanistan just as the Taliban had consolidated power over the majority of country. With the support of the Taliban, al-Qaeda grew to approximately 5,000 members. Bin Laden himself became quite popular with the Taliban leadership and took pains to make sure he stayed in their good graces. Bin Laden paid for the construction of houses for Mullah Omar’s family and other top Taliban leaders, provided funds for Taliban military equipment, and lent his own forces to fight alongside the Taliban in their continuing campaign against the Northern Alliance.

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56 Nojumi, "The Rise and Fall," 112.
57 Rashid, Taliban, 120.
58 Ibid., 124.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
military units were put on the front lines against Masud and the Northern Alliance. As fighting continued, the Taliban became more dependent on al-Qaeda’s military and financial support. According to Nojumi, “By the end of 2000, al-Qaeda contributed around 30 percent to 40 percent of the Taliban’s core military forces.” Al-Qaeda’s contributions to the Taliban military and the popularity of Bin Laden’s international Islamist rhetoric made him a pivotal actor responsible for the Taliban’s continued military success against the Northern Alliance.

Bin Laden’s relationship with top Taliban leaders eventually began to influence their policymaking. Until Bin Laden’s arrival, the Taliban leadership were not particularly antagonistic to the United States or the West. However, with the prodding of Bin Laden and al-Qaeda, the Taliban became increasingly vociferous against the United States, the UN, Saudi Arabia and Muslim regimes around the world. Their statements increasingly reflected the “world view” and language of defiance that characterized Bin Laden and al-Qaeda. As the Taliban became more antagonistic through the persuasion of Bin Laden, the United States put pressure on the Taliban to have Bin Laden expelled. Unfortunately, the State Department and Mullah Omar were unable to come to terms on an agreement for Bin Laden’s expulsion from Afghanistan, sending Bin Laden into hiding with the help of the Taliban in 1999.

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63 Ibid.
64 Rashid, Taliban, 139.
65 Ibid., 139.
66 Ibid., 139-140.
67 Ibid., 140.
After the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, U.S. led coalition forces, along with the Northern Alliance, launched Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. President George W. Bush stated that the intent of the operation was “to disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations” and bring terrorists to justice.\textsuperscript{68} General Tommy Franks, commander of military operations in Afghanistan, stated that the central mission in Operation Enduring Freedom was “the destruction of the al-Qaeda terrorist network and the removal of the Taliban leadership.”\textsuperscript{69} By December, coalition forces controlled all major cities in Afghanistan including Mazar-e Sharif, Herat, Kandahar and Kabul. Soon after the military successes of coalition forces, the political and administrative structure of a post-Taliban Afghanistan was mapped out in Bonn, Germany. In what became known as the Bonn Agreement, various anti-Taliban Afghan groups met under UN auspices and agreed to convene an emergency Loya Jirga (grand assembly) by June 2002 to decide the electoral and constitutional proceedings of the country.\textsuperscript{70} Sixteen hundred delegates from around Afghanistan assembled and elected Hamid Karzai as their president. By December 2003, delegates of a Constitutional Loya Jirga approved a new constitution and opened the way for presidential election in October 2004.\textsuperscript{71}

\textbf{The Taliban Resurgence and the “neo-Taliban”:}

After the initial successes of coalition forces in Afghanistan, and the ensuing political agreements laid out in Bonn; it seemed as if the Taliban and al-Qaeda were

\begin{footnotes}
\item[68] John G. Clement, \textit{Operation Enduring Freedom as an Enabling Campaign in the War on Terrorism} (Kansas: School of Advanced Military Studies, 2003), 29.
\item[69] Ibid., 29.
\item[70] Rashid, \textit{Taliban}, 221.
\item[71] Nojumi, “The Rise and Fall,” 115-116.
\end{footnotes}
vanquished within the blink of an eye and order would begin to be restored to a country embroiled in war and chaos since the Soviet invasion in 1979. However, the Taliban would prove to be more resilient than anticipated and began to regroup and consolidate their leadership within the tribal areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan as early as 2002. By 2003, US estimates of insurgent Taliban fighters within Afghanistan ranged around 1,000, a figure which expanded to 2-3,000 by 2004 and 3-4,000 by 2006.\(^{72}\) While exact numbers of Taliban fighters in Afghanistan and Pakistan are difficult to pin down due to seasonal mobilization of “part-time” fighters and varying rates of movement across borders, research estimates that Taliban insurgents numbered approximately 17,000 by 2006.\(^{73}\)

After the invasion of coalition forces, the Taliban found refuge and were able to regroup in the same areas of Pakistan where they originally lived as refugees during the Soviet-Afghan war. Still controlled by the JUI – the same party that helped launch the Taliban in 1994 – the border provinces of Pakistan served as the epicenter for the resurgence of the Taliban.\(^{74}\)

Mullah Omar, who had been hiding out in Helmand province, arrived in Quetta, Pakistan in the winter of 2002. Taking key figures from the former regime to create a new Taliban Shura, Omar appointed four commanders to reorganize resistance in the four southern provinces of Afghanistan (Uruzgan, Helmand, Kandahar and Zabul).\(^{75}\)

\(^{72}\) Giustozzi, *Koran Kalashnikov, and Laptop*, 33. Also see Table 3, "Estimates of the strength of the Taliban, 2006" on page 60 for more information.

\(^{73}\) Giustozzi, *Koran Kalashnikov, and Laptop*, 33-35.

\(^{74}\) Rashid, *Taliban*, 223.

\(^{75}\) Ibid.
With backing from JUI-led provincial governments, Pakistani madrassas, and the clandestine support of the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the Taliban began to reorganize.\textsuperscript{76}

After stockpiling weapons, the Taliban launched their first guerilla attacks in the winter of 2002-3. They targeted the southern provinces of Kandahar, Zabul and Helmand. The Taliban also began targeting international aid workers and civilians. By autumn the Taliban had established almost complete control over Zabul and Helmand provinces and set up supply lines from Pakistan.\textsuperscript{77} All of this occurred while the United States and coalition forces were busy hunting Osama Bin Laden and carrying out the invasion of Iraq.

By 2005, Western perceptions that the Taliban had been defeated began to change. Analysts such as Antonio Giustozzi focused their attention on the resurgence of the Taliban and the quiet, ongoing guerilla war being waged in Afghanistan. With the help of al-Qaeda, the Taliban dramatically improved their ambush tactics, their use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and suicide bombers became a regular feature of their arsenal.\textsuperscript{78} In 2006, the Taliban organized a broad offensive with the goal of re-capturing Kandahar. Due to lack of troop presence in southern Afghanistan NATO forces resorted to excessive use of airpower and “sweep and clear” tactics in order to root out Taliban insurgents. These tactics antagonized local populations and turned them against NATO forces.\textsuperscript{79} The Taliban’s attack on Kandahar in 2006, which organized thousands of

\textsuperscript{76} Rashid, \textit{Taliban}, 224.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 225.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 228, 229.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 230.
insurgents in battalion-sized units along with the logistical support of arms and ammunitions, was a turning point in the Western perception of the Taliban and Pakistan. It was now clear that the Taliban had not been "defeated," as previously thought, and that the Taliban had established a base of organization and operation within Pakistan.

By 2007, the resurgent Taliban, or "neo-Taliban," established themselves as a formidable insurgency. The neo-Taliban developed innovative strategies and tactics. They even set up "sophisticated media outlets, which produced tens of thousands of DVDs and inspirational tapes [...] The Taliban now used web sites, FM radio stations and email, and their spokesmen gave interviews to journalists based in Pakistan." Constant and effective harassment by Taliban insurgents resulted in a U.S. troop surge in 2009, during which the Obama administration approved the deployment of 21,000 Marines to southern Afghanistan. By the time of presidential elections that same year, the Taliban controlled 164 out of 364 districts in Afghanistan. Voter "turnout was half that of the first presidential election in 2004, when it was 73 percent. There were 400 Taliban attacks on election day in which 26 people were killed and dozens more wounded – one of the worst days of violence in the country’s history." Although the UN and NATO declared the elections a success, the successful attacks of the Taliban on election day combined with dismal voter turnout and rampant voter fraud were all stark reminders that the Taliban insurgency had developed into a serious problem.

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81 Ibid., 231.
82 Ibid., 234.
83 Ibid., 235.
After almost a decade of military and political involvement in Afghanistan, the United States and its NATO allies continue to struggle to eliminate the "neo-Taliban" insurgency. Military and civilian researchers are still trying to define the variables which allowed the neo-Taliban to develop into such an effective fighting and recruiting force in the years following the Taliban's removal from power. With al-Qaeda's influence, the "peasant" led Taliban of the 1990s evolved into a sophisticated insurgency group "composed of hard-core jihadists who desire no compromise with the Americans or the Kabul regime. Some, like Mullah Omar, are wedded to the al-Qaeda philosophy of global jihad." Today the governments of Afghanistan and the United States are struggling to adopt an effective strategy which can eliminate all aspects of the neo-Taliban movement and restore stability to southern Afghanistan.

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84 Rashid, *Taliban*, 236.
CHAPTER II

THE ORIGINATION OF NEO-TALIBAN LITERATURE

The Taliban rose to prominence out of the tribal and ethnic conflict that was left in the wake of Russia’s withdrawal from Afghanistan in early 1989. Intellectual attention to the Taliban began after they consolidated control of most of Afghanistan and established a uniform government. Research such as Peter Marsden’s “The Taliban: War and Religion in Afghanistan” and Ahmed Rashid’s “Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia” are two examples of analyses which thoroughly studied the Taliban movement since its beginning in the mid nineties. These studies help form the basis of our historical and anthropological understanding of the Taliban since the 1990's. However, after the fall of the Taliban in 2001, a new body of research emerged examining the Taliban’s resurgence in the wake of Operation Enduring Freedom. Since the Afghan war, Taliban research includes counterinsurgency and insurgency theory, nation-building studies, international relations, and most importantly an understanding of who the Taliban really are and how they have evolved over the past decade.

The “Neo-Taliban” Afghan insurgency, first coined by The Economist magazine in 2003, is relatively understudied when compared to the extensive body of literature regarding the original Taliban who appeared out of the Afghan civil war years of 1989-

85 In 2008 Antonio Giustozzi published “Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan.” Also in 2008, Robert Crews and Amin Tarzi published articles analyzing the “Moderate Taliban” and the “Neo-Taliban.” The phrase “Neo-Taliban” was used previous to The Economist magazine article by Ahmed Rashid while explaining the proliferation of Taliban ideology into Pakistan (see “The Taliban: exporting extremism,” 1999). However, “neo-Taliban” was not used by Rashid in the context of the Taliban’s military and ideological resurgence post 2001.
Research on the post 2001 "neo-Taliban" seeks to answer three fundamental questions: who are the neo-Taliban; How have they organized a political and military insurgency; and how have they successfully competed for the hearts and minds of Afghan citizens? Scholars answer these questions in a number of different ways, each focusing on different causal factors. Studies on the Taliban, neo-Taliban and the Afghan insurgency can be separated into three major schools of thought based on distinct levels of analyses. These categories are broadly defined as the system or international level of analysis, including the regional level; the unit or state level of analysis; and the individual or sub-state level of analysis. The following section explores the recent literature on the Taliban and Afghanistan according to a categorical approach based on levels of analysis. Finally, the literature review concludes with the proposed application of a "synthetic" approach to help better understand the neo-Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan.

**Research of the Neo-Taliban and Afghanistan at the Individual Level of Analysis:**

Explaining the success of the neo-Taliban at the individual level of analysis provides an explanation of the complex ethnic, tribal, and religious makeup of Afghanistan. Unlike the Taliban of the mid-nineties, the neo-Taliban are not a "monolithic organization but one in which there are several interest groups."

The original Taliban were Pashtun dominated, however the neo-Taliban's identity is not based on one ethnic group. Also, the Taliban of the nineties were motivated to fight because they wanted to unite Afghanistan under their interpretation of sharia. The neo-Taliban are


87 Rashid, *Taliban*, 236.
motivated by a myriad of reasons which cut across different religious, ideological, and geographic spectrums.

While the majority of hard-core Taliban continue to refer to themselves as Taliban and have sought alliance and support with hardcore Taliban because it elicits power, fear, and unity in many Afghans. Current research stresses that we must continue to analyze the makeup of today's Taliban and label them as neo-Taliban in order to reflect the complex and fractional nature of the insurgency. Most importantly, as research on the Taliban and neo-Taliban continues, scholars identify new motives for insurgents which further illustrates the complex and constantly evolving nature of the neo-Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan.

Taliban and neo-Taliban insurgents fight for different reasons; however they have a common enemy in the occupying Western forces and the perceived "puppet" Afghan government. Traditional Taliban insurgents aim to overthrow the new Afghan government in order to re-impose their radical interpretation of Sunni Islam. The Taliban are joined by neo-Taliban insurgents who are motivated by enumerable reasons:

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88 "Hard-Core" Taliban refers to Taliban who adhere to the group's strict interpretation of sharia law and have been taught fundamental Islam based on an extreme form of Deobandism taught in the Afghan refugee camps of Pakistan.

89 Seth Jones, In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2010), 201.


92 Jones, In the Graveyard of Empires, 230.
to expand al-Qaeda’s international terrorist network, hatred of occupying forces and local
government, need for income, safety, and fear. Due to the variety of motivational factors,
much confusion surrounds the identity of the opposition in Afghanistan. According to
Amin Tarzi, there is not much evidence of “an umbrella organization or a centralized
body directing activities, but instead several independent groups loosely linked by their
drive to oust the foreign forces in order to establish their own strongholds of power.”93

The heterogeneity of neo-Taliban insurgents at the individual level makes the
establishment of an accurate explanatory model almost impossible. Additionally, much of
the data collected regarding Taliban motivations is unreliable due to fears of Taliban
retaliation.94 Reliable data suggest that the vast majority of Afghans do not want the
Taliban to return to power and the insurgency does not include a huge amount of the
populace.95 The individual level of analysis provides the least amount of comprehensive
analysis to help explain the success of the neo-Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan.

**The State Level of Analysis and the Afghan Insurgency:**

Scholarship on the Afghan insurgency and the neo-Taliban focuses heavily on
variables at the state level of analysis. State-level analyses tend to address two major
categories when explaining the success of the neo-Taliban. First, scholars attribute much
of the neo-Taliban’s success to mounting frustration and widespread corruption in Afghan
government institutions at national and local levels, and at the continuing lack of basic

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services. Second, scholars such as Antonio Giustozzi, Seth Jones, and Roland Paris focus on analyzing counterinsurgency and insurgency strategy and policy. This approach argues that the success of the neo-Taliban can be explained by analyzing the inadequacies of NATO's various counterinsurgency strategies and the success of the neo-Taliban's "hearts and minds" tactics. Both state-level approaches focus on the goals of specific groups whose main objectives are to consolidate power within Afghanistan's borders, thus largely removing them from the international arena.

**Insurgency/Counterinsurgency Approach:**

An insurgency/counterinsurgency perspective on the Afghan insurgency helps explain the success and the motivations of the neo-Taliban from a strategic perspective. In his book “In the Graveyard of Empires: America’s War in Afghanistan,” Seth Jones analyzes the structure of counterinsurgency movements and what motivates insurgents to fight. While Jones' research takes into account regional and international perspectives, his analysis focuses on interpreting historical data and insurgency theory. Jones defines four principal actors in insurgencies. First, the insurgents, those hoping to overthrow the established national government or secede from it. In Afghanistan’s case, insurgent forces are comprised of the remnants of the Taliban, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s Hezb-i-Islami, al Qaida, and other foreign fighters. The second set of actors in the Afghan insurgency are the local government, which includes the government’s security forces, the army and the police, as well as key national and local political institutions. The third

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97 Ibid., 35.

98 Jones, In the Graveyard of Empires, 152.

99 Ibid.
group consists of "external states and other non-state entities, which might support either side. Outside actors can tip the balance of war in favor of either insurgents or the government, but they can rarely win it for either side." Jones identifies the external actors in Afghanistan as the United States, NATO forces, and the United Nations — supporting the Afghan government — and the international jihadi network and some individuals from neighboring states, such as Pakistan and Iran — supporting the insurgency.

The last group of actors in an insurgency are the local population. Jones argues that this group is the most important because "it is for their hearts and minds that the war is being fought in the first place." Essentially it is the insurgent’s job to propagate their message and separate the population from the government and its external forces while at the same time fighting and eluding the police and military. If insurgents manage to do this, Jones argues, and if they are able to acquire the active or passive support of the people, they are more likely to win the war.

In the end, the successful exercise of political power by the neo-Taliban depends on "the tacit or explicit agreement of the population — or, at worst, on its submissiveness." Insurgencies are extremely complex conflicts that depend on both material and ideological dominance in order for one side to prevail.

The strategy of neo-Taliban insurgents is outlined by Paris as "a sophisticated political-military strategy aimed at undermining confidence in the Karzai government"

100 Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 152.
101 Ibid., 153.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
through guerilla attacks on military and civilian targets, while at the same time offering ordinary Afghans an alternative government in the form of religious justice."\textsuperscript{104} This describes the neo-Taliban's strategy since reappearing in 2001, and they are very successful in its execution. NATO counterinsurgency strategy, on the other hand, is not so steadfast. Policy analysis by Giustozzi, Jones, and others reveals disagreement among NATO allies regarding counterinsurgency strategy and describes the ad-hoc implementation of multiple, sometimes conflicting counterinsurgency strategies by uncoordinated NATO forces.\textsuperscript{105} Research on counterinsurgency strategy shows that NATO is ineffective at eliminating the spread of the neo-Taliban through military means.

**Governmental Approach:**

Research at the state level also suggests that state governance has a large impact on Afghan counterinsurgency strategy. Insurgencies are, to a large extent, a waiting game.\textsuperscript{106} In order to win the game, you need effective governance that can combat the encroachment of insurgency-administered justice. By 2006 the neo-Taliban established such deep roots in Afghanistan and Pakistan that they believed they were strong enough militarily and politically to outlast Western forces in the long run. According to Ahmed Rashid,

\begin{quote}
As long as the Karzai government failed to govern effectively or provide services and jobs to the people, as long as it allowed corruption and drug trafficking to take place under its very nose, the Taliban were winning by default. The failure of the government to provide quick and effective justice to the people only further helped the Taliban cause.\textsuperscript{107}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{104} Paris, "NATO's Choice," 36.


Corruption in government has been a red flag for researchers and correlates well with the continued spread of neo-Taliban influence.\textsuperscript{108}

Corruption and ineffectiveness in the Afghan government and the rise of neo-Taliban popularity is usually explained in two ways by researchers. One approach focuses on analyzing corruption within government institutions and the other approach addresses the deficiencies of the institutions themselves. The first approach, supported by Roland Paris, Seth Jones and Ahmed Rashid, argues that widespread corruption within Karzai's government forced Afghan citizens to turn to insurgent-sponsored governmental programs for basic needs.\textsuperscript{109} In 2007, Lieutenant General Eikenberry linked government ineffectiveness and corruption with the success of neo-Taliban recruiting:

"'The Long-term threat to campaign success, thought, is the potential irretrievable loss of legitimacy of the Government of Afghanistan. If the Afghan government is unable to counter population frustration with the lack of progress in reform and national development, the Afghan people may lose confidence in the nature of their political system.' The result, he cautioned, would be a point 'at which the Government of Afghanistan becomes irrelevant to its people, and the goal of establishing a democratic, moderate, self-sustaining state could be lost forever.'"\textsuperscript{110}

Analyst Seth Jones describes corruption and incompetence as a "cancer" in the Afghan government. Jones outlines three major categories of corruption specific to Afghanistan: drug trafficking, bribery among senior officials, and pervasive extortion among Afghan

\begin{footnotes}
\item[107] Rashid, \textit{Taliban}, 231-232.
\item[108] Jones, \textit{In the Graveyard of Empires}, 183.
\item[110] Jones, \textit{In the Graveyard of Empires}, 192.
\end{footnotes}
police and judges.\textsuperscript{111} Jones' research also concludes that "Afghanistan's insurgency was caused by a supply of disgruntled villagers unhappy with their government[...] The existence of a weak and ineffectual government was a critical precondition to the rise of violence in Afghanistan."\textsuperscript{112} The perceived failure and corruption of Afghanistan's government is one of the most important variables explaining the neo-Taliban's motivation to fight.

Research on the effects of corrupt and inadequate governance are supported by studies from the United Nations, the European Union, the Afghan government, and the U.S. government.\textsuperscript{113} Consensus among these studies finds that the appointment of unprofessional, corrupt and ineffective government officials, especially at local levels, reduced the trust and confidence of the Afghan people, making them easy prey for the neo-Taliban's anti-government propaganda.\textsuperscript{114} Jones points out that in 2006, the interrogation of more than 100 neo-Taliban fighters by the U.S. military concluded: "the critical reasons why [insurgent] fighters support the Taliban had little to do with religious ideology. Rather, they had to do with bad government and economics. The government could not protect them or deliver services, and they were often simply paid better by the Taliban."\textsuperscript{115} Unlike the Afghan government, the Taliban rely on opium cultivation, production, and trafficking for almost all of their funding needs.\textsuperscript{116} In 2008, the United

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\textsuperscript{111} Jones, \textit{In the Graveyard of Empires}, 317.
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\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 315.
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\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 300.
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\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 200.
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\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 201.
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Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) released a survey which estimates that the Taliban and other anti-government forces earned $250-470 million of income from opium farming and trafficking.\textsuperscript{117}

The second governance-based approach used to explain the accelerated rise of the neo-Taliban focuses on the structure of the Afghan government and its implementation. In "Defining Success in Afghanistan," Biddle et al argues that many of the failings of the Afghan government are due to the administration's hastily organized, top-down implementation of a Western-style democracy which is incompatible with the Afghan state. Also popular among neo-Taliban literature is a critique of the failed implementation of "Western," centralized democracy in Afghanistan. Jones argues that the top-down approach to centralized government in Afghanistan only secured control of small, urban areas and restricted the capabilities of the government to a select portion of the population. He describes the style of centralized government in Afghanistan as the country's "fatal flaw," concluding -- along with the majority of other researchers -- that for the Afghan government to outlast the neo-Taliban, they need to focus on "going local."\textsuperscript{118} Unfortunately, the policy proposals for going local and creating an Afghan government with both local and national representation are equally as general and vague as the calls for anti-corruption measures.

Rashid argues that the Afghan government will never be effective until NATO and Afghan officials deal with poverty, economic malaise, education, and joblessness


\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{118} Jones, \textit{In the Graveyard of Empires}, 336.
among the populations of both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Jones suggests the establishment of well-coordinated tribal engagement strategy and other bottom-up approaches. Biddle et al suggest a process of decentralization and "mixed sovereignty" in order to accommodate the numerous political needs of Afghanistan's rural and tribal populations. Tarzi proposes incorporating "moderate Taliban" into the political system, eradicating criminal networks, and cutting off foreign lifelines to insurgents. The range of opinions among neo-Taliban and Afghanistan scholars illustrates how difficult it is to come to a consensus on how to solve the governance dilemma.

Insurgency strategy and institutional analysis at the state level help explain the rise and success of the neo-Taliban and illustrates many of the specific problems within the Afghan government and among the coalition allies meant to help defend and reconstruct the Afghan state. However, this level of analysis has difficulty including the Taliban in an international context, let alone a regional one. Additionally, the state level of analysis runs the risk of over-simplifying the Afghan government and the neo-Taliban, opting to describe each as a homogeneous group with established, agreed upon goals.

**Afghanistan, Insurgency, and the Regional Level of Analysis:**

Scholars such as Peter Marsden, Ahmed Rashid, Neamatollah Nojumi and Nasreen Akhtar analyze the rise of the neo-Taliban and the Afghan insurgency from the international and regional levels of analysis. These scholars focus heavily on the dynamic histories and relationships between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the United States. In 2001,

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120 Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 320.


the task of rebuilding Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban was delegated among various states and state-run international organizations. The United States, NATO, and a larger international coalition has a United Nations mandate to reconstruct the Afghan state. Researchers such as Ahmed Rashid and Nasreen Akhtar argue that the best way to understand the rise of the neo-Taliban and the Afghan insurgency is to study the power dynamics between the international actors involved in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Most important among these actors are those with the most at stake in Afghanistan politically and economically -- the United States and Pakistan.

Regional analysis by scholars suggests that the successful resurgence of the neo-Taliban in 2001, along with the successful rise of the Taliban in 1996, can be traced back to the influence of one state actor, Pakistan. During the Taliban's rise, Pakistan's government and military equipped, trained, financed, and guided the Taliban struggle in order to advance its own interests. Those interests, according to Akhtar, were defined broadly as the support of the Taliban movement in order to checkmate its regional rivals and keep itself in a position of greater influence than others in the region, specifically India. According to Rashid, one of the foremost scholars on relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the seven tribal areas in northern Pakistan known as the Federal Administered Tribal Agencies (FATA) served as the initial staging grounds of


125 Rashid, *Taliban*, 246.


the Taliban resurgence. Using historical analysis, scholars such as Akhtar, Rashid, and Marsden argue that support for the Taliban during the 1990's cemented ethnic, religious, and political ties which would allow the defeated Taliban leadership of 2001 a place of refuge and a geographical headquarters from which stage a resurgence within Afghanistan.

Finding a way to close the porous borders between Afghanistan and Pakistan is a pivotal objective in the fight against the neo-Taliban in Afghanistan. The international school of thought also helps explain why the neo-Taliban were able to take refuge in Pakistan, and why Pakistan continues to be a base of operation for the neo-Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan today. Akhtar and Nojumi argue that the Pakistani government's support for the Taliban over the years made it the sole international stakeholder concerned with the Taliban's success or failure. Thus Pakistani officials largely turned a blind eye to the arrival of Taliban fighters within the FATA. Continued indifference by Pakistani officials towards Taliban refugees and documented refusal of officials to apprehend or report Taliban personnel living in Pakistan has further shaped relations and discourses between Pakistan, the United States, and Afghanistan regarding the conflict. Rashid concludes that "the lack of trust between the Pakistani military and the US government helped fuel the revival of the Taliban movement."

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The strength of the regional perspective's explanation of the neo-Taliban's rise is the fact that it contextualizes the Afghan insurgency within a regional power dynamic. The research of scholars like Rashid and Akhtar brings attention to the volatile international environment in which Afghanistan is being reconstructed. Researchers remind us that successful state-building efforts in Afghanistan are contingent, in part, on the "positive involvement of all state actors that have the capacity to influence its internal politics and security[...]. At the moment, Afghanistan's neighbor Pakistan is playing a crucial role with American forces and NATO. Pakistan is fighting a war against terrorism on behalf of the U.S. administration." However, the international perspective can overlook specific actors at the state and individual levels which better explain why neo-Taliban militants fight, who they are, and who should be developing an effective strategy to combat them.

**Concluding Thoughts On the State of Neo-Taliban Literature:**

The literature reviewed helps identify the different actors that make up the neo-Taliban and their motivations for opposing the Afghan government and NATO forces. Each level of analysis provides important information regarding the conflict in Afghanistan. The regional, state, and individual perspectives of Afghanistan and the neo-Taliban show that the neo-Taliban insurgency is not occurring in a historical or political vacuum. Every actor involved in the conflict, whether they are part of the Taliban, the Afghan government, or NATO are operating within an international environment. The major weakness of the international explanatory model is the absence of a theoretical application which helps structure the dynamics of the conflict according to international

133 Rashid, *Taliban*, 225.

relations norms. In order to better understand the neo-Taliban in an international context, this analysis proposes a unique theoretical approach which combines elements of the state and sub-state dynamics of the neo-Taliban in a way which does not ignore the structure of the international environment in which the neo-Taliban exist.

Accurately explaining the neo-Taliban, Afghan insurgency requires combining variables at the individual, state, regional, and international levels of analysis. It is necessary to consolidate these variables into one theoretical framework in order to gain a better understanding of the structural dynamics and discourses which shape this conflict. In an effort to enhance the field of neo-Taliban literature, this analysis will apply Cornelia Beyer's "Synthetic Approach," -- which she uses to explain international terrorism in the Middle East -- to the neo-Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan. Applying Beyer's synthetic approach to the neo-Taliban and Afghanistan will illustrate the complex relationships between state and non-state actors currently involved in Afghanistan, their power dynamics, and the ideological discourses which structure their relationships.

Beyer's article, *Hegemony, Equilibrium and Counterpower: A Synthetic Approach* uses international terrorism as an illustration to examine the effects of U.S. hegemony in "mind and matter" on the Middle East. Beyer believes that in order for International Relations to progress, key tenets of structural realism and constructivism must be combined to form a synthetic theoretical approach. Beyer's framework rests on several key principles. First, in accordance with influential realist theoretician Kenneth Waltz, that the international system is configured according to material polarity. Material polarity refers to the idea that a state's domination is based on material factors such as...

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gross domestic product, military power, natural resources, arms, and population.\textsuperscript{136}

Beyer's synthetic approach to explaining international terrorism is first contingent on the idea that the world is unipolar, with the United States able to exert the most political, economic and military power throughout the world.\textsuperscript{137} Beyer believes that it is the United States’ powerful “material factors,” that allow it to dominate internationally.

However, Beyer adds that "it is not only material factors that can explain US dominance in international affairs, ideational factors also have to be considered, as a tool and resource of power."\textsuperscript{138} The United States has the most material power according to realists, but it also has the most ideational power in some regions of the world, constructivists would argue, making it a regional hegemon.

Hegemony implies more than just having preponderant material capabilities at one's disposal; additional factors also play a role, such as the capacity to exercise power based on material capabilities, and 'soft power' or ideological power, meaning the capability to change others' behavior by influencing their belief system, their way of thinking, and even their rationality.\textsuperscript{139}

In order to "understand the multidimensional reality of US predominance," Beyer argues we must reconcile realist and constructivist approaches into one, synthetic theoretical framework. This is possible, Beyer posits, because the ideational and the material are intrinsically linked and partly interdependent.\textsuperscript{140} Beyer’s proof lies in the belief that human affairs are structured by both material and ideational factors.

\textsuperscript{136} Beyer, "Synthetic Approach," 413.

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 414.
For material change to occur, ideas have to be expressed in creative or destructive action. Humans therefore act as the creators of ideas and as the mediators between ideas and the material. Regarded by realists as material facts (population) and in constructivism as bearers of ideas (agents), humans operate in both dimensions, able to transform the ideational into the material, and vice versa.\textsuperscript{141}

According to this view, ideas are needed for creating and changing material facts, which are represented in matter (infrastructure, government buildings, the police, the media, etc).\textsuperscript{142} Essentially, nothing--except the original conditions of nature which existed before human life--can exist without preceding ideas, which are the catalysts for altering material in a creative or destructive manner. The United States, Beyer concludes is the most dominant state in both the ideational (its discourse and ideology) and material (its economy, armaments) dimensions. US hegemony, therefore, rests on material foundations but was created and is maintained via the promotion of ideas.\textsuperscript{143}

Beyer goes on to apply the logic of her synthetic approach to help explain international terrorism in the Middle East. According to Waltz, unipolarity in the international system naturally leads to counter-balancing in an attempt to return the "balance of power" in relations between nations.\textsuperscript{144} In the Middle East, especially in a country such as Afghanistan with few natural resources and a government of elites approved by the United States, there are no counter-balancing forces present to resist the hegemonic imposition of US material and ideational dominance. Terrorism, therefore, is a result of the absence of a tendency towards equilibrium at the state level.\textsuperscript{145} Logically,

\textsuperscript{141} Beyer, "Synthetic Approach," 415.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 414.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 415.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 421.
if insufficient balancing occurs at the state level, actors at the sub-state level compensate by using terrorism or insurgency to balance foreign intervention and the spread of ideological or cultural influence that not all Middle Eastern populations approve of.  

**Conceptualizing, Defining, and Measuring the “Synthetic Approach”:**

Cornelia Beyer’s synthetic approach to explaining the rise of international terrorism in *Hegemony, Equilibrium and Counterpower* utilizes a combination of several key components of international relations theory. This analysis will use Beyer’s theoretical foundation in order to gain a better understand of the neo-Taliban’s complex makeup and the Afghan insurgency in an international context. Beyer’s synthetic approach combines key elements of realism and constructivism into two major pillars of thought. Within the first pillar, Beyer merges the realist interpretations of unipolarity in the international system with the constructivist idea of hegemony. The combination of these two frameworks creates what Beyer describes as hegemony in mind and matter or “thick hegemony.”  

Thick hegemony helps explain how power is distributed throughout the international system according to both material (realism) and ideational (constructivism) considerations. Within the second pillar, Beyer uses realism’s balance-of-power model and a constructivist interpretation of “tendency towards equilibrium” to explain the shifting power constellations among states both regionally and internationally.

Understanding and accurately measuring the power of state and sub-state actors according to their capabilities requires the consideration of both material factors (population, territory, resource endowment, economic capability) and nonmaterial factors.

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147 Ibid., 415.
(political stability and competence). Beyer's synthetic approach encourages measuring material and non-material considerations in conjunction with one another when trying to determine the power and influence of state and non-state actors. In the context of the Afghan war and Taliban insurgency, a synthetic approach enhances our understanding of the complex distribution of power among major state and sub-state actors and offers comprehensive explanations to questions regarding the ongoing military insurgency in Afghanistan and the country's uncertain future. In order to apply these frameworks to the neo-Taliban and Afghanistan, several additional terms must be defined and measured.

**Polarity and Hegemony:**

Beyer's analysis rests on the idea that the United States is arguably the sole superpower in a unipolar system. Many realist scholars, most notably Kenneth Waltz, believe that the structure of the international system is best defined in terms of distribution of power. A state's "power" is traditionally determined through the measurement of its resources and capabilities. The resources and capabilities of a state are factors such as the measure of its population, technological capabilities, territory, resource endowment, economic capability, and military might. These strictly material factors are then measured relationally among important international actors in order to determine "poles of power." Essentially, this process establishes a formula to measure the international system's configuration in order to determine the center(s) of domination.

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149 Ibid.
150 Ibid.
151 Ibid.
and the number of dominating states.\textsuperscript{152} Using this formula, Waltz—with the support of additional scholarship\textsuperscript{153}—argues that unipolarity is a global reality.\textsuperscript{154}

In order to adapt Beyer's analysis to Afghanistan, this study will forego Beyer's dependence on a unipolar interpretation and instead apply the logic of Samuel Huntington's uni-multipolar system. Opposed to a unipolar system, where one superpower could effectively resolve important international issues alone, and no combination of other states would have the power to prevent it from doing so; Huntington's uni-multipolar system argues that solving key international issues in today's world requires the leadership of a superpower (the United States) but always with some combination of other major states.\textsuperscript{155} Huntington argues that the United States is at the apex of the uni-multipolar system and has the power to promote its interests in "virtually every part of the world."\textsuperscript{156} On the second tier of the uni-multipolar echelon are major regional powers that are preeminent in certain areas of the world but are unable to extend their interests and capabilities as globally as the United States. One example of a regional power is Pakistan in Southern Asia.\textsuperscript{157} Finally, at the third level are secondary regional powers whose interests often conflict with the more powerful regional states.\textsuperscript{158}


\textsuperscript{154} Beyer, "Synthetic Approach," 413.


\textsuperscript{156} Huntington, "Lonely Superpower," 36.

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 35.
Afghanistan, these third-level actors can be separated into two major groups. The first group is made up of the Afghan national government and any pro-government Afghan forces. The second group includes any anti-Government or anti-NATO forces, including the Taliban, neo-Taliban insurgents, and al-Qaeda. This analysis will apply Huntington's uni-multipolar approach to polarity in Afghanistan because it takes into consideration each actor's role in the conflict while still remaining within the theoretical confines of polarity, realism, and constructivism.

In order to better understand how the United States' position as the only regional (and to some extent global) superpower affects its ability to achieve its goals in Afghanistan requires more than just an understanding of material factors. A comprehensive understanding of U.S. capabilities in Afghanistan and Southern Asia must also combine the "ideational" or ideological factors that the United States uses as tools of power in the Middle East. Research supporting U.S. hegemony is extensive and well established.\textsuperscript{159} Combining the idea of hegemony with polarity adds a dimension of understanding that goes beyond just material considerations.

Hegemony implies more than just having preponderant material capabilities at one's disposal; additional factors also play a role, such as the capacity to exercise power based on material capabilities, and 'soft power' or ideological power, meaning the capability to change others' behavior by influencing their belief system, their way of thinking, and even their rationality.\textsuperscript{160}

\textsuperscript{158} Huntington, "Lonely Superpower," 35.


\textsuperscript{160} Beyer, "Synthetic Approach," 413.
Antonio Gramsci, a social scientist who pioneered the concept of hegemony, described it as "the additional power, beyond domination, that accrues to a dominant group by it convincing subordinate groups that its rule serves not only its own interests but also those of the sub-ordinate groups."\(^{161}\) Hegemony is measured through the domination of a state’s discourse and ideology. The ideational hegemony of the United States includes the promulgation of ideology such as free market economy, capitalism, consumerism, democracy, and freedom. The power and prominence of these ideas in domestic and international politics combined with the dominant material power of the United States form what Beyer calls "thick hegemony." "US hegemony, then, rests on material foundations, but was created and is maintained via the promotion of ideas."\(^{162}\)

The analytical framework of this research seeks to determine levels of hegemony in Afghanistan and Southeast Asia through a synthesis of material and ideational power. Understanding who the most powerful actors are in Afghanistan and what their interests are is essential for answering the main question of this research: why does the Taliban insurgency still exist after 10 years of occupation and nation-building?

**Balance of Power and Equilibrium:**

A synthetic analysis of the impact of hegemony in mind and matter on the Afghan insurgency and the Taliban requires the explanation of several more theoretical concepts. Balance of power and equilibrium are two powerful ideas in international relations which explain how and why states compete and cooperate with one another for international power. Waltz argues that unipolarity leads to counter-balancing by groups of weaker


states in order to restore the international "balance of power," which is most stable in a bipolar constellation.\textsuperscript{163} According to Waltz, "In an asymmetric constellation, the weaker power will balance against the stronger one; and symmetric powers will also balance against each other, but not if they can coalesce – align with each other, or bandwagon – with a stronger one, against a dominating power."\textsuperscript{164} Tendency towards equilibrium, described by balance of power politics, is assumed to be a rational outcome based on the competitive nature of states and the state of anarchy which international relations exists.\textsuperscript{165}

Constructivism, on the other hand, would attribute transformations among state relations to changes in the "underlying logic of interaction into a social, other-regarding one."\textsuperscript{166} Alexander Wendt argues that our understanding of the international system should include an appreciation of how the mechanics of "dyadic, triadic, and n-actor interaction shape and are in turn shaped by 'stocks of knowledge' that collectively constitute identities and interests and, more broadly, constitute the structures of international life."\textsuperscript{167} The constructivist perspective explains changes in international balance of power by focusing on the reasons why states accept or oppose asymmetric and symmetric conditions and why they abstain or initiate balancing procedures according to changes in internal ideas and norms.

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{164} Beyer, "Synthetic Approach," 416.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 417.
\end{footnote}
Combining constructivist and realist perceptions of balance of power and equilibrium allows consideration of both state and sub-state level variables more coherently. Wendt, Beyer and other analysts advocate the need for a synthetic use of international relations theory in order for the field to progress as a whole. According to Wendt:

Statism need not be bound by realist ideas about what 'state' must mean. State identities and interests can be collectively transformed within an anarchic context by many factors—individual, domestic, systemic, or transnational—and as such are an important dependent variable. Such a reconstruction of state-centric international theory is necessary if we are to theorize adequately about the emerging forms of transnational political identity that sovereign states will help bring into being. To the extent, I hope that statism, like the state, can be historically progressive.\footnote{Wendt, "Anarchy is What State make of it," 424-425.}

Following in Wendt and Beyer's theoretical footsteps, this analysis builds on the concept of a "synthetic" approach to international relations theory by applying realist and constructivist frameworks to analyze the Taliban and the Afghan insurgency. The relevant concepts for realist and constructivist thought, as they apply to this analysis, have been categorized and defined in this section and will be utilized throughout the subsequent analysis to contribute to the growing field of research which strives to better understand the neo-Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan.
CHAPTER III

APPLYING THE SYNTHETIC APPROACH TO AFGHANISTAN AND THE NEO-TALIBAN

The Taliban regime in Afghanistan officially came to an end in early December, 2001. By mid-2006, the Taliban's surviving leadership, along with neo-Taliban recruits had established areas of control in the Southern and Eastern provinces of Afghanistan, from which they launched significant attacks. In December 2009, President Obama announced a "surge" of 30,000 troops to Afghanistan to stabilize the countryside. Since then, U.S. and U.K. publicly announced a tentative withdrawal from Afghanistan by 2015. On June 22nd, President Obama announced his plan to withdraw all 33,000 members of the "surge" by 2012. 169 The war in Afghanistan has been going on longer than World War Two and Vietnam. As of June 7th, 2010 the Afghan War is the longest war in US history. 170 According to many analysts, securing Afghanistan is no longer about removing the Taliban from power or defeating al-Qaeda through military means; the future of a stable, democratic Afghanistan and a successful NATO withdrawal are now political problems. 171 Extending the ideas of power, polarity, equilibrium, thick hegemony, and the mutuality of both ideas and material facts to the Taliban and the

169 "A gamble that may not pay off," The Economist, June 25th-July 1st, 2011, 16.


Afghan insurgency helps explain the complex dynamics underlying the ongoing conflict and why NATO forces have not been able to remove the Taliban.

**The Afghan Insurgency and the Uni-Multipolar System:**

Interpreting the Afghan war according to Huntington's uni-multipolar system creates a unique way to look at the ongoing Taliban insurgency. As previously mentioned, the major actors involved in the Afghan war include global, regional, and local "poles" of power. These actors span across three levels. At the first level is the United States, a major superpower and a state actor which wishes to have the most influence in Afghanistan both materially and ideologically. At the second level is Pakistan, the only major regional power that is heavily invested in the future of Afghanistan. At the third level are secondary powers which either support the Afghan national government and the United States or align themselves with Taliban and neo-Taliban insurgents in order to resist US-led domination in the region. Examining how these actors interact and interpret their roles in Afghanistan and the wider region helps us understand the ongoing insurgency in Afghanistan in terms of power, hegemony, and equilibrium.

Huntington argues that in a uni-multipolar system, the residing superpower would prefer the emergence of a unipolar system in which it is the sole hegemon and often acts as if such a system exists. The other powers, however, "would prefer a multi-polar system in which they could pursue their interests, unilaterally and collectively, without being subject to constraints, coercion, and pressure by the stronger superpower." In

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173 Ibid.
Afghanistan, relations between the United States, the Afghan government, Pakistan, and sub-state actors follows this exact trajectory. As one of the world's few superpowers, the United States often acts unilaterally to achieve its goals. America's unilateral tendencies are constantly illustrated by cross border drone strikes in Pakistan and most recently with the killing of Osama bin-Laden inside Pakistan without the Pakistani government's cooperation, consent, or knowledge. Unilateral actions by the United States in Afghanistan and the region intimidate and anger Pakistan, the Afghan government, and sometimes even NATO allies.

The current uni-multipolar system in Afghanistan and Pakistan is devolving into a situation where second and third level actors such as Pakistan and the Afghan government feel threatened by what they see as the American pursuit of regional hegemony through unilateral means. For every multilateral success involving the cooperation of Afghan, NATO, and Pakistani forces, there is an opposite, unilateral action that not all sides agree is in their best interest. None of the principal power-wielders in Afghanistan are happy with the current status quo, and as long as the United States acts as if it were a unipolar hegemon in Afghanistan, without the consent or collaboration of the Afghan or Pakistani governments, cooperation and support will erode

For an extensive report on the raid and repercussions, see: "Now, Kill His Dream." The Economist, May 7th, 2011.


as regional, state, and sub-state actors increasingly assert themselves to promote their
own interests.\textsuperscript{177}

The next sections of this analysis employ some of the main concepts of
Huntington's view of polarity and Beyer's synthetic approach in order to further
understand the uni-multipolar power constellations within Afghanistan and the region and
how these power relationships affect the neo-Taliban insurgency. Ultimately, the goal of
adapting the synthetic approach and the idea of polarity to Afghanistan is to provide
alternative explanations for the continued rise of the Taliban and neo-Taliban and the
reasons for their resilience and determination.

**Power Equilibrium, the United States, Afghanistan, and Pakistan:**

According to Waltz's interpretation of polarity, balancing between states takes
place in unequal relationships of power.\textsuperscript{178} The power relationship between the states of
the Southeast Asia -- especially Afghanistan -- and the United States is highly unequal, so
balancing is expected. Comparing material indicators shows that Afghanistan and
surrounding countries, such as Pakistan, are significantly weaker than the United States
and its Western allies in military, economic, and technologic terms, with declining
relative values for GDP per capita income.\textsuperscript{179}

\textsuperscript{177} Huntington, "Lonely Superpower," 37.

\textsuperscript{178} Waltz, Theory of International Politics, 126.

\textsuperscript{179} Beyer, "Synthetic Approach," 420; World Bank Development Indicators.
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Realism's indicators of &quot;material&quot; power.</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Pakistan</th>
<th>Afghanistan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP (USD Billions)</td>
<td>14,119</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita (USD)</td>
<td>45,989</td>
<td>955</td>
<td>486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Spending (USD)</td>
<td>697,105,000,000</td>
<td>5,160,000,000</td>
<td>250,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>307,007,000</td>
<td>169,708,303</td>
<td>29,802,724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortality Rate (Deaths/1,000 population)</td>
<td>8.38</td>
<td>6.92</td>
<td>17.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These values would lead us to believe that the states of the Middle East and Southeast Asia, especially Afghanistan and Pakistan, would both oppose and try to balance the United States in order to assert their power and achieve their own interests.\(^{181}\) "Attempts to balance US power in the region "should take the form of regional integration in the Middle East, while seeking alignment specifically with China, and also with Russia."\(^{182}\) However, as Beyer points out, with the exceptions of Iran and Syria, there is little sign of such balancing among Middle Eastern and South Asian states.

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\(^{180}\) Data Sources: World Bank Development indicators and the CIA World Factbook. All figures recorded for year 2009.


\(^{182}\) Ibid.
The explanations as to why power balancing at the state level is largely absent in Afghanistan can be grouped into two major categories. The first and most evident explanations relate to the US removal of Afghanistan's state apparatus -- the Taliban -- and facilitation of the creation of a centralized democracy through the Bonn Agreement. The second group of explanations deals directly with Pakistan and helps explain the dynamic political relations between the United States, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Pakistan and the ISI invested significant amounts of money and training in Afghan development and Afghan militant movements since the mujahedeen began fighting the Soviet Union in 1979.\textsuperscript{183} Pakistan's cooperation with the United States at the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom marked a turning point in their relationship with Afghanistan and the Taliban. Afghanistan's only regional ally fell in step with the United States at the beginning of the war, widening a power void which would eventually be filled by elements of the Taliban insurgency.

Pakistan's role and allegiances within the uni-multipolar world of Southeast Asia have changed over time depending on fluid, sometimes conflicting interests. Before September 11th, Pakistan overtly supported the Taliban through the nation's spy agency, the Interservices Intelligence Agency (ISI). Economic and military support between Afghan militants and the ISI dates back to the Soviet-Afghan war, when the ISI trained and outfitted many mujahedeen fighters within Pakistan and sent them across the border to combat Soviet forces with new tactics and weaponry.\textsuperscript{184} When the Taliban came to

\textsuperscript{183} Rashid, \textit{Taliban}, 183.

power in the late 1990s, the ISI targeted them for support because they were the only group strong enough to fight against the warlords of the Northern Alliance, who controlled Northern Afghanistan and received financial and military support from Pakistan's regional rival, India.\textsuperscript{185} The regional power struggle between India and Pakistan played a large part in the alliance of the ISI and the Taliban, and it would be regional power shifts which would break them apart in 2001.

Days after September 11th, 2001 President Bush announced that America was at war with international terrorists and declared a state of emergency.\textsuperscript{186} On September 15th Pakistan's president, Pervez Musharraf was "given an ultimatum by President Bush ('you are either with us or against us'), and the military regime immediately decided to switch sides, from helping the Taliban to supporting the US invasion of Afghanistan that would destroy it."\textsuperscript{187} Once again, Pakistan's decision was guided by regional power dynamics. The major reason for acquiescing to the United States' demands, Musharraf stated, was that any other response could have led to "the bombing of Pakistan, threats to its nuclear facilities, and the creation of US military bases in neighboring India, Pakistan's long-standing enemy."\textsuperscript{188} Since 2001, different actors among the military, the government, and the ISI appeared to pursue a dual track of condemning and hunting the Taliban on one hand and clandestinely supporting them on the other.\textsuperscript{189} This sparked extensive debate in

\textsuperscript{185} Rashid, \textit{Taliban}, 217-218, 224.

\textsuperscript{186} Rashid, \textit{Taliban}, 219.

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{188} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{189} Akhtar, "Pakistan, Afghanistan, Taliban," 67.
Western and domestic media about whether Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf was committed to defeating the Taliban insurgency.\(^{190}\)

The debate has two major standpoints, some claiming that Musharraf was not in control or aware of ISI support for the Taliban and others arguing that Musharraf was no longer interested in the stability of the Karzai regime, thus allowing and maybe even supporting Taliban elements within Pakistan.\(^{191}\) Today Pakistan faces a new barrage of questions and doubts from Western sources after the location and killing of Osama bin-Laden within their borders and Pakistan's subsequent denial of any knowledge of bin-Laden's whereabouts previous to the American raid.\(^{192}\) Bin Laden's ability to hide in Pakistan is a perfect illustration of the inability of Pakistani officials to control unwanted elements within their own state borders. For many reasons, Pakistan and Afghanistan do not function like traditional states. The perception that Pakistan has control of its own territory and can find and eliminate Taliban elements within its own country are false.\(^ {193}\) The Taliban's ability to transcend Pakistani borders is based on a long history of support from Pakistani leaders. When the Taliban were picked as Pakistan's favorites to control Afghanistan, "Pakistan's military and civilian leaders insisted that the Taliban's success was Pakistan's success and that its policy was correct and unchangeable."\(^ {194}\) Pakistani officials believed that by supporting the Taliban they would eliminate Iranian, Russian, Indian and Christian influences in their region, and by spreading the message of the

\(^{190}\) Ibid.

\(^{191}\) Ibid., 67-68.


\(^{193}\) Rashid, \textit{Taliban}, 185.

\(^{194}\) Ibid., 194.
Afghan Mujaheddin they would "revive Islam and create a new Pakistan-led Islamic block of nations." This perception lives on, to some extent, today and has proved to be a constant source of doubt and indignation for Pakistan in the Afghan War and Taliban insurgency.

Whether or not the allegations against Pakistan are true doesn't matter, the damage is done. The Afghan War took a seemingly insurmountable toll on Pakistan economically and politically. Pakistan sacrificed hundreds of soldiers' lives, millions of dollars, and suffered thousands of terrorist attacks during the war. However, in a unipolar world which depends on the alliance and cooperation of lesser powers in order to balance the power of a hegemon, Pakistan has no one to turn to and is thus stuck tolerating the status-quo. Pakistan cannot forsake its allegiance to America's war on terror because it risks losing power in the region to India. However, an ailing economy and constant battles among Pakistani and American military forces and neo-Taliban in the border regions of Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) turned public opinion in Pakistan against the war and is helping fuel anti-American sentiment throughout the country. Pakistani policymakers are rethinking their long-term interests in Afghanistan and are beginning to speak out against perceptions of American hegemony in the region. In fact, they are boldly declaring that the US lacks understanding of the situation in Pakistan; that the US is taking its Pakistani alliance for granted; and

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195 Rashid, Taliban, 195.


197 "Insanity Clause," 48.

that Pakistan's support for the US war in Afghanistan is ultimately destabilizing its own country.\textsuperscript{199} Thus the power constellation containing Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the United States in Southeast Asia is shifting. As more and more Pakistani officials in the government and military see the United States as a threat, Pakistan seeks to balance America's growing power with Chinese allies.

Pakistan is desperately appealing to China. Much has been made of a trip there from which the prime minister, Yusuf Raza Gilani, has just returned. The government appears to see China as some kind of replacement for the Americans in Pakistan, and perhaps in Afghanistan too. Much is fantasy. Even the Chinese privately urge Pakistan to put down the extremists, repair relations with America and get its economy moving.\textsuperscript{200}

Since the beginning of the Afghan War, the United States has been trying to establish material and ideational hegemony in Afghanistan, or what Beyer would call "thick" hegemony. By sponsoring the state building process in Afghanistan, the United States helped create a government of client-elites who found it in their best interest to align themselves with their Western sponsor and cooperate under an asymmetrical power arrangement within a very small geographic area.\textsuperscript{201} However, US "thick" hegemony in Afghanistan has failed to materialize over the years. The United States used its material dominance in the region to appear a powerful hegemon, however it never gained the legitimacy needed to establish soft power and ideational hegemony among Afghan citizens, and Pakistani allies. Hegemonic stability theory explains the relationship that developed in Afghanistan among the United States, the newly formed Afghan government, and regional influence from the Pakistani government.

\textsuperscript{199} Rashid, \textit{Taliban}, 224 and "Asif Ali Zardari: Afghanistan War 'Destabilising Pakistan.'"

\textsuperscript{200} "Wishful Thinking," \textit{The Economist}, May 28, 2011, 48.

\textsuperscript{201} Beyer, "Synthetic Approach," 421.
Hegemonic stability theory argues that the role of the hegemon can be a collectively beneficial one in ensuring order via the promotion of political institutions, the implementation of norms and the facilitation of cooperation.\textsuperscript{202} Through multilateral, non-selfish behavior, the hegemon's material dominance "is accepted by other states as more profitable than threatening. The hegemon thus acquires ideational power: namely soft power and legitimacy."\textsuperscript{203} Cooperation under asymmetry between the United States and the newly established Afghan government was not the result of well established diplomatic ties between Bush and Karzai or the collective will of Afghans to see democracy and freedom transform their nation. Karzai and other Afghan government officials cooperated with the United States because the multilateral, constructive efforts of coalition forces transformed the logic of interaction in the direction of cooperation.\textsuperscript{204} The tendency towards equilibrium through alternate means of power balancing (such as violent, competitive relations) is absent as the cooperation of unequal partners is interpreted as achieving both party's needs at the state level.

While the relationship between the United States and the Afghan government at the state level favors cooperation, this sentiment is not echoed at the sub-state level. Popular opinion of the United States as a benign hegemon does not exist in Afghanistan. According to international polling in 2009, only 47% of Afghans view the United States "favorably" and just 37% of Afghans say they support NATO/ISAF forces in their


\textsuperscript{203} Beyer, "Synthetic Approach," 417.

\textsuperscript{204} Ibid., 418.
Turmoil and resentment is growing at the sub-state level among Afghan citizens and tribes. As the scholarship regarding corruption in the Afghan government shows, there is a serious lack of trust and legitimacy between citizens and government in Afghanistan. This is particularly prevalent in rural areas where the neo-Taliban vie for power by providing traditional state services where the Afghan government or coalition forces are absent. Thus the Taliban continue to represent an "antihegemonic coalition," developed at sub-state levels of the multipolar system within Afghanistan in order to counter American superpowerdom and American attempts at hegemony in the region.

Huntington points out that actors respond in various ways to American hegemony throughout the world, "At a relatively low level are widespread feelings of fear, resentment, and envy [...] At a somewhat higher level, resentment may turn to dissent, with other countries, including allies, refusing to cooperate [...] In a few cases, dissent has turned to outright opposition as countries attempt to defeat U.S. policy. The highest level of response would be the formation of an antihegemonic coalition involving several major powers." Huntington argues that in a uni-multipolar system, such a grouping of actors in opposition to one superpower would be a natural phenomenon. Thus we begin to see how the neo-Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan can be interpreted as an "antihegemonic coalition" of actors, driven by a logical desire to balance against the hegemonic tendencies of an overbearing actor within their system. According to this

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206 Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 158.

207 Huntington, "Lonely Superpower," 44.

208 Ibid.
perspective and building on Beyer's finding in her analysis on Terrorism in the Middle East, the Taliban and neo-Taliban insurgency are symptoms of natural balancing tendencies within the uni-multipolar system.\textsuperscript{209}

**Intervention and Insurgency Strategy and the Logic of "tit-for-tat" Reciprocity:**

Antonio Giustozzi succinctly describes the opposing strategies of neo-Taliban insurgents and NATO forces in his research. The conflict, he observes:

Pitts Taliban strength (abundance of committed, ideologically indoctrinated young fighters, able to achieve basic tasks even without supervision by field commanders) against government/coalition weaknesses (shortage of manpower, little presence in the villages, inability to patrol extensively away from the main roads, lack of effective intelligence network).\textsuperscript{210}

Analysts agree that counterinsurgency operations are largely ineffective and undermanned in rural parts of Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{211} Due to lack of financial support and troop presence, U.S. counterinsurgency efforts beginning in 2002 were conducted using “sweep and clear” tactics. Giustozzi defines three main reasons why sweep and clear tactics failed to eradicate the neo-Taliban insurgency. First, US heavy-handed, intrusive tactics invaded Afghan’s privacy and broke Afghan tribal and ethical codes of behavior. Second, formation and reliance on local anti-Taliban strongmen and militias in counterinsurgency efforts led to more abuse of rural populations. Third, heavy reliance on airstrikes led to increased collateral damage, distrust, and fear among Afghan civilians. In 2010 the United Nations Assistant Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) recorded 171 civilian deaths due to air strike and close air support, and 102 civilian deaths due to search and seizure or

\textsuperscript{209} Beyer, "Synthetic Approach," 422-423.

\textsuperscript{210} Giustozzi, *Koran Kalashnikov, and Laptop*, 102.

"raid" operations.\textsuperscript{212} Overall, sweep and clear tactics undermined US credibility and led local populations to fear and despise the forceful imposition of US material and ideational power.

In 2005 the U.S. military changed its counterinsurgency tactics. Realizing the ineffectiveness of sweep and clear operations, they initiated a "village-focused" counterinsurgency approach.\textsuperscript{213} With increased funds devoted to counterinsurgency efforts, the military introduced a series of "development" projects which sought to combat the insurgency by providing services and jobs to local Afghans based on a "benefits-for-information" approach. The logic behind this new approach was based on the belief that distributing aid and providing jobs would win local support and also create pro-government informers.\textsuperscript{214} The benefits-for-information approach essentially established a system of patronage between the U.S. military and Afghan civilians based on the provision of information about insurgent activities.\textsuperscript{215} From an equilibrium standpoint, the United States was trying to use its power to promote both material and ideational incentives for sub-state cooperation.

By 2006, the Taliban had amassed so many combatants that the safety and viability of small reconstruction teams dispersed throughout villages and towns were compromised. District garrisons of British and US troops were besieged by Taliban forces concentrated in the hundreds and sometimes thousands throughout Helmand and


\textsuperscript{213} Giustozzi, \textit{Koran Kalashnikov, and Laptop}, 194.

\textsuperscript{214} Ibid., 192.

\textsuperscript{215} Ibid., 192-193.
other parts of Southern Afghanistan. NATO's counterinsurgency strategy was forced to shift back towards a “sweep and clear” approach and large-scale military operations were re-implemented in order to push the Taliban back. By 2007, US government officials acknowledged the growing insurgency in Afghanistan. However, as Giustozzi and Jones point out in their research, the continuous alterations in military strategy adopted to deal with the insurgency led to confusion both logistically and financially within NATO, ultimately impeding their ability develop an effective way to combat the Taliban throughout Afghanistan.

US, Canadian, and British forces now employ a wide variety of counterinsurgency tactics, ranging from sweep and clear operations to small scale development operations. Dutch, German, and Australian troops, critical of America’s heavy reliance on airpower and overwhelming force, distance themselves from American counterinsurgency strategy. Crews and Sarwari write that “German troops admit that they avoided mixing with Americans out of fear that Afghans will fail to distinguish between them or that they will lose their ‘good reputation’ among Afghans.” Dutch and Australian forces adopted the “Dutch approach” to counterinsurgency, which focuses on supporting local government and establishing contact with the population instead of finding and eliminating insurgents. Dutch forces argue that Americans “were very arrogant and focused on destroying the ‘Taliban’ without even knowing exactly who

216 Ibid., 196.
217 Jones, In the Graveyard of Empires, 220.
220 Giustozzi, Koran Kalashnikov, and Laptop, 198.
The ad-hoc implementation of multiple, conflicting counterinsurgency strategies by often-times uncoordinated NATO forces is ineffective at eliminating the neo-Taliban insurgency. Additionally, it demonstrates a lack efficient use of material dominance among coalition forces at all levels.

Use of excessive force and airpower during counterinsurgency operations was a constant thorn in NATO's side since the beginning of the war when the tactic was used effectively to uproot and kill al-Qaeda forces still hiding in Afghanistan. Applying Beyer's use of tit-for-tat reciprocity within the synthetic framework adds additional insight into why material and psychological harm among the population can be so detrimental for the superpower's ability to maintain its power and establish hegemony.

Tit-for-tat, according to Robert Axelrod, describes a strategy of interaction between actors which proclaims a strict reciprocity: "cooperation answered with cooperation, defection with defection." Tit-for-tat is a balancing strategy in which actors expect the actions of others to be reciprocal behavior which recreates or maintains equilibrium. This reciprocity, argues Beyer, can take the form of either positive or negative action towards the other actor.

Therefore, the "enactment of power in an oppositional (offensive or violent) way leads to more violence (and hence to counter-violence) rather than submission, particularly in the absence of soft power." Using the logic of tit-for-tat and equilibrium, we find that violence (mistaken or intended) in the form of counterinsurgency operations

221 Ibid., 200.


is a reason for insurgents to engage in counter-violence in a reciprocal fashion in order to restore what they interpret as the equilibrium of power at the sub-state level. In Afghanistan, the reciprocal nature of violence has both an ideational and material component. Ideologically, collateral damage and the loss of civilian life can be used by the Taliban to "validate their narratives that the conflict in Afghanistan is 'a cosmic conflict between the righteous' and the infidel who want to kill innocent Muslims.'" Additionally, cultural dynamics influence violence in Afghanistan. Afghans, especially Pashtuns are historically independent and highly xenophobic. Local tribal codes of behavior and honor advocate revenge in the form of reciprocal acts of violence, thus promoting tit-for-tat behavior for acts of violence committed by NATO forces accidentally.

Materially, reciprocal attacks by insurgents can be measured in a number of ways. Because defeating the Afghan insurgency is now a battle for the "hearts and minds" of the people, measuring civilian casualties provides insight into escalating levels of insurgent violence. In addition to conducting armed engagements, guerilla operations, and planting improvised explosive devices (IEDs), neo-Taliban insurgents use civilians as targets and as human shields in order to maximize collateral damage and combat pro-government and pro-Western forces. In 2010, UNAMA reported a massive campaign of civilian assassinations carried out by neo-Taliban insurgents as a major strategy to counter pro-

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225 Johnson, "On The Edge of the Big Muddy," 124-125; Also see Zacef, "My Life With the Taliban."

government and NATO "surge" operations. UNAMA reports that in the southern regions of Afghanistan, where insurgents are most active, civilian casualties totaled 2,777 in 2010, a 20 percent increase over 2009 civilian casualties. Deliberate civilian assassinations and increased civilian casualties illustrate a ruthless campaign of tit-for-tat reciprocity on the part of the neo-Taliban which aims to undermine the power of NATO and government forces by turning the population against them.

**Corruption and Ineptitude In the Afghan Government:**

Arguably the most prominent political problem facing the legitimization of US power and "thick" hegemony in Afghanistan is the corruption of state government. The variable which best explains the rise of corruption and ineptitude in the Afghan government is lack of US funding. However, even when there is funding for reconstruction projects sponsored by the government, in most cases, the money provided never reaches its intended target. Analysts who address corruption in the Afghan government agree that external money is fueling the neo-Taliban insurgency and must be stopped. However, proposals usually call for sweeping, extensive anti-corruption measures to be implemented within government, police, and armed forces; the prosecution of narcotics traffickers; and the promotion of a sense of government legitimacy among local Afghans. Blanket statements calling for the confrontation of

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228 The Southern region of Afghanistan is composed of Helmand, Kandahar, Nimroz, Uruzgan, and Zabul provinces.


corruption and the improvement of competence and legitimacy of the national and local Afghan government are all stymied by the fact that US relations with regional and international actors are not robust enough to convince local populations that the United States and the Afghan government are less corrupt and more efficient than their neo-Taliban competitors.  

Seth Jones identifies two main motivations for why Afghan insurgents fight: religion and government. In some cases, Jones explains, insurgents were not recruited because of their love of the Taliban but because of their hatred for the Afghan government. According to a report by the Center for Strategies and International Studies (CSIS), 42 percent of Afghans believe their country is heading in the wrong direction due to governmental problems. The Taliban's rule during the 1990s made many Afghans adverse to their brutal punishments and harsh laws. Afghans who wanted to support the insurgency but had no religious or ideological motivations found different reasons to fight. Those reasons are often validated by perceptions that their government is corrupt, unrepresentative, and inept. According to polls, 12 percent of Afghans blame violence in the country on the Afghan government. Corruption in government presents both an ideational and material equilibrium problem for Afghan citizens. Corruption causes disequilibrium in the form of poverty, widespread unemployment, and wealth at

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231 Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 318-319.


233 Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 237.

234 Ibid., 237.


236 Ibid., 14.
the material end and cultural and religious disequilibrium at the ideological end. Many Afghan citizens feel that their government is a Western puppet, incapable of governing anything more than major urban areas.\textsuperscript{237} Afghans also have ideological reasons for despising their government, which are grounded in ethnicity. The alienated Pashtun communities in Southern and South-East Afghanistan are generalized as Taliban sympathizers and largely absent from government posts.\textsuperscript{238}

The U.S. Army/Marine Corps \textit{Counterinsurgency Field Manual}, written by Lt. Colonel John A. Nagl, states that "a counterinsurgency effort cannot achieve lasting success without the host nation government achieving legitimacy."\textsuperscript{239} The manual also gives a set of six indicators with which to determine government "legitimacy."\textsuperscript{240}

Table 3\textsuperscript{241}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators of Government Legitimacy According to the U.S. Army/Marine Corps \textit{Counterinsurgency Field Manual}.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ability to provide security for the populace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Selection of leaders at a frequency and in a manner considered just and fair by a substantial majority of the populace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Culturally acceptable levels of corruption.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. A high level of participation in or support for political processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A culturally acceptable level and rate of political, economic and social development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. A high level of regime acceptance by major institutions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{237} Jones, \textit{In the Graveyard of Empires}, 200.

\textsuperscript{238} Rashid, \textit{Taliban}, 212.


\textsuperscript{240} Qazi, \textit{The Neo-Taliban and Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan}, 493.

\textsuperscript{241} Source: Qazi, \textit{The Neo-Taliban and Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan}, 493.
Unfortunately, Afghanistan's model of centralized government does not fulfill the requirements of any of the indicators. The 2001 Bonn Agreement and 2004 Afghan constitution paved the way for the establishment of a centralized government which places "virtually all executive, legislative, and judicial authority in the national government." The president appoints every significant official in the executive branch, all security forces are national forces, and Kabul holds all policy, budgetary, and revenue-generating authority. The United States crafted its Afghanistan strategy on the assumption that stability would be achieved by building a strong central government, a long-term objective which insurgents effectively learned how to sabotage.

Resentment for the Afghan national government is a breeding ground for insurgency and a basis for its support. Taliban and neo-Taliban recruiters use the frustration and disenfranchisement of local populations to "legitimize their actions and to find human resources for recruitment. They not only capitalize on it, they instrumentalize it by attempting or promising to attempt a recreation of the equilibrium, and to reinstall 'justice', or even a certain alternative regional or world order." The Taliban insurgency, therefore, views corruption and ineptitude in the Afghan government as justification for counterbalancing actions. Finally, retaliation based on the logic of power equilibrium, in the form of violence against NATO and ISAF forces, becomes the insurgency's method of mimicking the balancing that is absent at the state level.

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242 Biddle, Christia and Thier, "Defining Success in Afghanistan," 52.
243 Biddle, Christia and Thier, "Defining Success in Afghanistan," 52.
244 Jones, In the Graveyard of Empires, 336.
Almost all researchers agree that stable governance is an essential component for defeating the insurgency in Afghanistan. Countless public officials pay lip service to the necessity of implementing a strong government. However, attempts to stem the de-facto partition of Afghanistan's countryside by neo-Taliban insurgents are insufficient. Jones describes the governance dilemma in Afghanistan according to Aesop's fable, "Belling the Cat."

A group of mice called together a committee to consider how to protect themselves from a cat that was harassing them. The best solution, one mouse proposed, was to bell the cat, which was met with general applause. But this left one key question: Who would put the bell around the cat's neck? This was a question of implementation, since there were no volunteers, the policy was useless.

Sufficient implementation and support for Afghanistan's governmental institutions is the Achilles' heel of US power in the region. Analysts recognize that the Afghan government has not lived up to the model of centralized government established at Bonn and in the Afghan constitution. The result is a government unable to provide key services or protect the local population, especially in rural areas. Thus the government is pegged as corrupt, inept, and unrepresentative of Afghanistan's rich ethnic and tribal heritages. Ultimately, ineffectual governance in Afghanistan is a key variable which motivates Taliban insurgents to fight. As the government loses further respect and

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246 Ibid.
247 Jones, In the Graveyard of Empires, 184.
248 Biddle, Christia and Thier, "Defining Success in Afghanistan," 58.
249 Jones, In the Graveyard of Empires, 184.
250 Ibid., 202.
control, civilians become more likely to fight their "disgusting government" both because they detest it and because they fear the consequences of not fighting.\footnote{Ibid.}
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The Future of the neo-Taliban Insurgency In Afghanistan:

According to Seth Jones, Afghanistan's insurgency was caused by a supply of disgruntled villagers unhappy with their government, and a demand for recruits by ideologically motivated leaders. "Too little outside support for the Afghan government and too much support for insurgents further undermined governance. This combination proved deadly for the onset -- and continuation -- of the insurgency." Using Beyer's synthetic approach, this analysis finds that the major factors leading to the neo-Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan can be traced back to imbalances of ideational and material power between the United States, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. These imbalances prevented the establishment of US "thick" hegemony and allowed the Taliban to remain a player in the region as a legitimate "antihegemonic coalition." In order for the United States, its allies, and the Afghan government to successfully withstand the neo-Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan, several key areas of power imbalance must be addressed. This analysis finds that there are three important power dynamics within the Afghan insurgency at the global, state, and sub-state levels of analysis. These dynamics can be categorized as: (1) the relationship between the United States, Pakistan, and the Afghan government, (2) the relationship between the Afghan government, NATO forces and Afghan citizens, and (3) the relationship between neo-Taliban insurgents, Afghan citizens, and pro-Western/pro-government forces. A synthetic analysis of the relationships among actors at all levels of

252 Jones, In the Graveyard of Empires, 315.
the Afghan War reveals the significance of material and ideational power equilibrium at all levels of international relations. The information provided by this analysis contributes to a growing field of international relations theorists, scholars and policymakers who argue that the United States must beat the Taliban at the local level by developing comprehensive political solutions, not just military solutions.253

The Afghan War is both a war of material might and a war of ideas. The United States must find a way to make its material power work in harmony with its ideational power. The US possesses the military might to crush Taliban forces on the battlefield, but its ability to do so is hampered by a corrupt domestic government and declining popular opinion among Afghan citizens. Synthetic analysis of the Afghan insurgency shows that the United States and the Afghan government have the material means to win the war but lack the soft power and legitimacy to consistently win the "hearts and minds" of the Afghan people. Comparison of key material factors indicates that although US spending and troop levels have increased over time, Taliban insurgency levels and presence have not consistently decreased or been eliminated. The inability of NATO forces to eliminate Taliban influence in Afghanistan is not simply due to lack of funding or troop levels. There is a severe lack of ideational soft power among NATO and Afghan government forces that is undermining their efforts at the military level. Until an appropriate equilibrium is reached at the ideational level, NATO and Afghan forces will not be able to defeat the Taliban through military means. This is not to suggest that material or hard power does not matter; training and developing the Afghan National Army and Police are

pivotal to success in Afghanistan. However, placing too much burden on material means without sufficient ideational backing is a serious mistake.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of US forces in Afghanistan</td>
<td>5,200</td>
<td>15,200</td>
<td>20,400</td>
<td>30,100</td>
<td>63,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of neo-Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>9,500</td>
<td>17,000</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Assistance to Afghanistan (USD millions)</td>
<td>815</td>
<td>2,483</td>
<td>3,527</td>
<td>5,656</td>
<td>15,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo-Taliban Presence in Afghanistan (percent of Afghan provinces)</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


255 Data Source: Giustozzi, Koran Kalashnikov, and Laptop, 35.


257 Neo-Taliban "presence" is achieved in a province if the province experiences an average of one or more insurgent attacks per month.

Joseph Nye describes power in the 21st century as a three-dimensional chess game:

On the top board of the three-dimensional game, the United States is the world's only superpower. But if you go to the middle board, of economic relations between states, there is already a balance of power. If you go to the bottom board of transnational relations, problems cross borders outside the control of governments, whether it's infectious diseases or drug smuggling or terrorism, no one is in charge; power is chaotically organized or distributed.²⁵⁸

Nye argues that while military power can be of some use occasionally on the bottom board, more often than not you will need other forms of power, particularly soft power in order to achieve your goals.²⁵⁹ Synthetic analysis of the neo-Taliban insurgency confirms Nye's perspective. According to Nye, soft power is essential to be able to attract majority of citizens to better opportunities, education, health care, justice, and dignity.²⁶⁰ The United States will not prevail in Afghanistan until the neo-Taliban can no longer recruit and radicalize Afghanistan's moderate citizens.²⁶¹ As of 2009, only 22 percent of Afghan citizens say that the Taliban has popular support in their area.²⁶² NATO and the Afghan government must continue to attract the moderates and the majority of Afghans to their cause in order to bolster their soft power in the fight against the neo-Taliban.

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²⁶⁰ Ibid., 4.
²⁶¹ Ibid., 3-4.
Fighting On the "Ideational" Front: Can the United States, NATO and the Afghan Government Gain Soft Power?

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Indicators of NATO and Afghan Government &quot;soft power&quot; Among Afghan Citizens In 2009.</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghans who blame the US, Afghan, or NATO forces for the country's violence.</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghans who call the U.S.-led invasion and overthrow of the Taliban a good thing for their country.</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghans who support the presence of the US military in Afghanistan.</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghans who see official corruption as a problem in their country.</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghans who think the government will defeat the Taliban with foreign support.</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghans who think the government is making progress in providing a better life for Afghans.</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nye argues that in order to increase its soft power, the United States must change both the substance and style of its foreign policy. Ideally, restoring soft power can be accomplished by reducing unilateralism and increasing government-to-government and government-to-civilian cooperation. The "with us or against us" approach of the Bush administration's War on Terror put the future of the Taliban and Afghanistan in black and white terms. The Taliban and al-Qaeda were the enemy and there would be no compromise. However, as the layers of al-Qaeda influence and involvement are peeled away from the Taliban, and researchers continue to develop an understanding of who the Taliban are; analysts and policymakers are adjusting their outlook. On June 18th, 2011 President Karzai announced that the US is engaged in talks with the Taliban. In July

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263 Data Source: Cordesman, "Afghan Public Opinion and the Afghan War."


265 Ibid., 4-5.
2011, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates stated that there could be political talks with the Taliban by the end of the year. The United Nations has also split a sanctions blacklist for the Taliban and al-Qaeda, hoping to encourage the Taliban to join reconciliation efforts and the political process.267

A revived political approach based on engaging "moderate" elements of the neo-Taliban and reintegrating them into the political process provide NATO and the Afghan government with a moderate amount of legitimacy and soft power. However, unilateral actions by the United States based on inaccurate perceptions of power and world politics continues to hinder progress at the second and third level dimensions of the Afghan War. The US raid to kill Osama bin Laden in Pakistan, and relentless NATO air strikes show that the United States still focuses on unilateral, military preeminence when it wants to get a job done. This approach deteriorates relations between the United States, the Afghan government, and Pakistan.268 In May of 2011, a NATO airstrike killed 12 children, prompting Karzai to issue a "last warning" to NATO to stop what he described as "arbitrary" operations by foreign forces.269 Likewise, the killing of bin Laden made previously tense relations between the United States and Pakistan appear even more volatile.270

The deteriorating relations among major state actors in Afghanistan calls into question the long-term stability of the power constellation that is developing in the region. The political attitudes of Pakistan and the Afghan government are becoming


267 "US in peace talks with Taliban."

269 Sommerville, "Afghan leader Karzai issues 'last warning' to NATO."

270 "Insanity Clause," 48.
increasingly volatile. As each actor continues to speak out against the other, condemning unilateral actions and calling into question each other's unity of purpose; any prospects of US ideational hegemony succeeding in Afghanistan look dimmer and dimmer. In reality, the ideational powers of actors in Afghanistan and Southeast Asia are constantly being contested. The United States is slowly coming to the realization that ideational hegemony cannot be achieved in Afghanistan as long as its relations with Pakistan and the Afghan government remain unstable. This instability is easily preyed upon by the Taliban insurgency and provides them with motivation to continue their balancing tendencies (both materially and ideationally) in order to gain an advantage over their regional rivals and survive as a political movement.

In conclusion, the most important reason why the Taliban insurgency still exists after ten years of war is the lack of "thick" hegemony in Afghanistan and the region among state actors. The Taliban were not defeated in 2001, they simply reverted to their mid 90s existence as a stateless, Islamic Fundamentalist movement. When they reemerged from Pakistan's tribal areas, the Taliban were dubbed "neo-Taliban" by researchers in an effort to understand their new insurgency tactics and illustrate the fact that the Taliban had changed but also stayed the same in many ways. With a renewed sense of insurgency and revolution, the Taliban began challenging the position and power of the United States, Pakistan, and the newly formed Afghan government within the region. The Taliban have proven that with or without control of the Afghan state, they have garnered a position of ideational and material significance within regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan that cannot be hindered using hearts and minds tactics, political rhetoric, money, state borders, or military might. This analysis suggests that as long as
ideational hegemony is not established among the United States, Pakistan, and the Afghan government, the Taliban insurgency will continue to play a role within the unipolar power constellation of the region.
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