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U.S. Military Operations Post-War on Terror

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U.S. Military Operations Post-War on Terror

-Kevin Butler

The armed forces of the United States are one of the most widely active militaries worldwide; not just during times of war, but also in peacekeeping and preemptive warfare operations around the globe. The U.S. has received both commendation, as well as criticism from the international community regarding the use of its power in recent years. The U.S. does indeed have a very strong worldwide presence, and uses that presence to protect the interests and welfare of the U.S. and its allies. Drone strikes in Pakistan, the military buildup in East Africa, and the training of friendly military forces are all examples of major operations the U.S. military undertakes in today's post-war international environment. A major reason for these peacetime operations is the fact that the U.S. has not dealt with conventional warfare and wartime diplomacy for several decades. The War on Terror was a major focal point in how the U.S. military perceives its enemies and allies. The days of conventional warfare are long over, and America's armed forces are now focused on controlling the spread of anti-American insurgent groups, rather than focus on training for direct large scale warfare. There are several historical focal points that explain modern U.S. defense policy. The War on Terror, and the lessons learned in its wake, helps provide many explanations for the current peacetime operations of the U.S. military worldwide.

Section 1: A contemporary history of the Middle East, and what forces led to 9/11.

To understand U.S. post-war military presence, it helps to understand the historical context of the situation. To do this, we must examine not only the War on Terror itself, but the cultural and political context of what led up to the rise of radical Islam, and American animosity in parts of the Middle East. To understand this context helps explain major events like 9/11, which is an example of a key focal point in developing modern U.S. defense policy. The earliest contemporary, relevant (to this analysis) event in the Middle East is the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Afghanistan was quite a stable nation, ruled by royal families for years prior to the Soviet invasion. The invasion led to major guerilla warfare by the Afghans, in response to the full scale invasion they had faced. The Afghans had managed to fight the Soviets to a stalemate, causing a withdrawal in 1989. However, the withdrawal of the Soviets was by no means an absolute victory for the Afghan people. High casualty rates, along with massive collateral damage crippled Afghanistan during the 1980's. The invasion and subsequent destruction of Afghanistan by the Soviet military overhauled much of pre-invasion Afghan culture. In the wake of the pullout, Afghanistan was left with a major power vacuum. The reason for the pullout was due in part to the military efforts of the Mujahedeen, a U.S. trained guerilla group that helped drive the Soviets out of the country. In the aftermath of the Soviet pullout, the Mujahedeen helped fill the power vacuum, and restored order to a country wrecked by instability. Over time, the Taliban, a splinter group led by former Mujahedeen fighter Mohammad Omar, usurped power from the now diminishing Mujahedeen run government. The Taliban were strongly influenced by the growing Wahhabi movement in the Middle East. Wahhabism was the rise of contemporary radical Islam, which spread from Saudi Arabia to other parts of the Middle

East during the 1980s and 1990s. This newly formed, Taliban led, radical Islamic government brought several key changes to the cultural landscape of Afghanistan. The rejection of Western values and influence led toward animosity for the United States, along with most progressive, developed nations. This animosity toward the developed world manifested itself in several terrorist attacks on the U.S., Britain, and other Western nations. In addition to the clashing of the progressive and traditional cultures of the West and Middle East, American influence in Iraq and Kuwait during the 1990s led to political animosity toward the U.S. as well. This “powder keg” of strained relations eventually culminated in the September 11 attacks on the U.S., orchestrated by Al-Qaeda, a smaller terror group with very close ties to the Taliban. Depending on political views, some may place more blame for the attacks on either the radical Islamic influence in Afghanistan, or on what many people saw as imperialist foreign policy by the U.S. Regardless of one’s political leanings, many experts agree that U.S. foreign policy, along with the rise of radical Islam, both played major parts in the 9/11 attacks. The 9/11 attacks are significant in explaining contemporary military influence around the world because it further shifted the country’s military and intelligence priorities away from the Cold War era conventional strategic approach it was taking to national defense, to a more decentralized, anti-insurgent approach to modern defense.

Section 2: 9/11, the War on Terror, and the initial invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan.

On September 11, 2001, the United States experienced the most devastating terrorist attack it had ever faced. Four planes full of passengers were destroyed in attacks on the Twin Towers, as well as the Pentagon. In the aftermath of the attacks, Americans wanted bold

actions to be taken to ensure terrorism on this scale would not be seen again in the U.S. In short time, Al-Qaeda was identified as the perpetrator, with accusations of possible aid from the Iraqi government. The U.S. government ordered the Taliban to extradite Osama Bin Laden, the leader of Al Qaeda, to the U.S. for trial. In response to the Taliban's lack of cooperation, George W. Bush decided to launch Operation Enduring Freedom, which began with a massive bombing campaign on Taliban strongholds in Afghanistan. Shortly after, American military bases were established outside most major Afghan cities, and the invasion of Afghanistan was under way.

In addition to the invasion of Afghanistan, the Bush administration scrutinized the Iraqi government for any possible connection to terrorist activity. Accusations by the U.S. government of Saddam Hussein funding terror groups, along with evidence of nuclear and biological weapons, eventually led to the U.S. declaring Operation Iraqi Freedom, a full scale invasion of Iraq by U.S. armed forces in 2003. The Iraq invasion was controversial due to the more vague, if any, influence Iraq actually had on the 9/11 attacks. There has never been any concrete evidence connecting Saddam Hussein to Al-Qaeda, and the terror group he was accused of funding was the PLO, who had no involvement with the attacks. CIA memos detailing possible weapons programs, along with Saddam Hussein's refusal to cooperate with U.N. weapons inspectors, led many to believe that the Iraqi government indeed had much to hide regarding possible involvement with the attacks. U.S. Special Forces, along with the CIA's Special Activities Division, helped spearhead the invasion in July of 2002. By March 20th of 2003, conventional military forces began the invasion of Iraq. By April 14th, the conventional military forces of Iraq were declared defeated, prompting President Bush to present his now

infamous “Mission Accomplished” speech on May 1st. These initial invasions led to the beginning of a long, costly “War on Terror”, and changed foreign perception of the U.S. in regards to its military capability. Due to the disparity in funding, size, and overall perspective on warfare, insurgent groups in Afghanistan and Iraq led major guerilla campaigns against U.S. forces, following the ousting of the Iraqi and Taliban governments. The world was now seeing how the U.S. could handle massive levels of unconventional and asymmetric warfare, and how it would adjust its forces to adapt to these new circumstances. Today, the U.S. prefers to handle insurgent groups more surgically, a good example being the drone strikes used in Pakistan. The use of drone strikes in Pakistan today demonstrates one of the lessons learned from the mistakes made in dealing with a less centralized enemy. This adaptation shows how the War on Terror strongly influences contemporary defense policy and military operations.

Section 3: The war in the Middle East: What was lost, what was achieved, and at what price.

Following the initial invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. had to clearly define its parameters for victory, and the benchmark goals they would need to fulfill to achieve that. Donald Rumsfeld, the Secretary of Defense at the time, laid out eight benchmark goals to be met by U.S. forces in order to declare victory in Iraq. The goals were to “End the reign of Saddam’s regime, eliminate Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction, drive out or capture terrorists, collect intelligence on terrorist networks, collect intelligence on Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction activity, secure Iraq’s oil fields, deliver humanitarian relief and end sanctions, and to help Iraq achieve representative self-government and to ensure its territorial integrity.” (Shanker, T) The U.S. began its official invasion on March 20th, and had captured the capital city

of Baghdad by April 14th, signaling victory in the first portion of the war. Within just three weeks, the U.S. had fulfilled its goal of defeating conventional forces in Iraq, and was now faced with a second, more complicated mission, to drive out insurgents while reinstating a representative Iraqi government. In the two-part process of the war, the U.S. began to realize that the second part, while expectedly less violent, was going to prove to be much more complex and frustrating than the traditional style of warfare it was used to.

While the U.S. predicted a decline in violence following the defeat of conventional forces, an increase in insurgent activity led toward a steady increase in fighting beginning in 2004. Up until this point, the U.S. had crushed Iraqi forces, had killed or captured over 300 members of the former Iraqi government, and had just begun to shift towards establishing a new government, and containing insurgent activity. The underestimation of the willingness of insurgents is a major cause for the decline in military progress beginning in 2004. A major catalyst responsible for insurgent fighting was the infamous killing and displaying of four U.S. connected military contractors. Four Blackwater contractors were killed while providing security for a humanitarian aid group outside of Fallujah. Their bodies were desecrated, burned, and eventually hanged over a bridge along the Euphrates. The images of the bodies outraged Western governments, prompting the invasion and capture of Fallujah from insurgent groups. The U.S. captured the city with only 95 American casualties, while causing the deaths of over 1350 insurgents. Civilian deaths were mostly low due to a city wide evacuation before the fighting. The battle of Fallujah is considered the most violent U.S. urban battle since the capture of Hue City during the Vietnam War. While U.S. forces achieved an outstanding military victory, the destruction of the city from the fighting caused animosity towards the U.S. from the

international community as well as local groups. The capture of Fallujah, while impressive from a military perspective, only hurt the image of the U.S. during the war, and began to shift public support away from the Iraq War. Insurgent groups also began to rise in record numbers following the capture of Fallujah. A major lesson to be learned from the capturing of both Baghdad and Fallujah was that while the U.S. was capable of achieving outstanding victories in conventional warfare, the fallout and poor publicity caused by mass fighting only served to encourage insurgents to attack the U.S. from a more asymmetrical standpoint. The U.S. is often criticized for its preemptive warfare tactics it uses post-war, such as the drone strikes of insurgents in Pakistan, or the funding of allied armies. It's important to note that these practices were highly influenced by the frustration the military dealt with in large scale asymmetrical fighting, following its achievements in a more conventional style of warfare. For the future, the U.S. wants to avoid fighting insurgent groups with conventional forces on a larger scale, due in part to the lessons learned following the capture of Fallujah and Baghdad. The failures of the large scale warfare of the Iraq War, and the lessons learned from it, help explain the preemptive containment style of fighting the U.S. uses in today's post-war world.

The war in Afghanistan proved to be equally frustrating as the war in Iraq. However, the lessons learned in both theatres help develop contemporary U.S. defense policy. Following the attacks on September 11, the U.S. demanded that the Taliban extradite Osama bin Laden in order to prevent military retaliation. The Taliban refused, and on October 7, the CIA's Special Activities Division, along with U.S. Special Forces, began military operations in Afghanistan. Air strikes were also carried out in the capital city of Kabul, along with Kandahar and Jalalabad. The city of Herat was taken by U.S., NATO, and Northern Alliance groups by November. The city of

Mazar-i Sharif was taken by U.S. Special Forces on November 9th, resulting in a major blow to the transportation and supply lines of Al-Qaeda. The taking of Mazar-i Sharif also allowed for the U.S. to fly planes directly into the airport, as opposed to flying into nearby Uzbekistan. This allowed for quicker humanitarian aid to displaced civilians. In short time, Kabul, Kandahar, Kunduz, and eventually Tora Bora were all taken by U.S. and allied military forces. By 2002, all major Afghan cities were no longer under Taliban control, and instead were being controlled by either the U.S. or the Afghan Northern Alliance. For the next step, the U.S. launched Operation Anaconda in 2002. Similar to the opening invasion, the goal of the U.S. was to drive out remaining Taliban forces from the rural regions they now found themselves hiding in. The operation was completed by 2003; leaving Afghanistan officially liberated from Taliban control. The Taliban would eventually retreat to Pakistan, where the U.S. continues to fight them through its use of attack drones. The success and low causality rate the U.S. has had with its drone strike campaign in Pakistan is an example of how the U.S. continues to eliminate enemy forces in the region using surgical counterinsurgency methods, rather than a large scale conventional war.

However, like Iraq, America's early military success was due mostly in part to America's proficiency in fighting conventional battles. With the Taliban driven out into the tribal regions of Afghanistan, the American military progress was abbot to slow down. Beginning in 2003, an insurgency effort led by Al-Qaeda was being conducted in order to frustrate U.S. and Afghan ability to rebuild the nation under the new Afghan government. Mainly restricted to Southern Afghanistan, U.S. forces found themselves engaged with a more asymmetrical military force than they first encountered. Ambushes, IED attacks, and suicide bombings all increased as neo-

Taliban groups fought to break American morale for the war effort. Like Iraq, this second phase of the fighting proved to be much more difficult than the initial invasion, due to the unseen difficulties the U.S. faced in fighting an insurgency. In response, the U.S. decided to focus its forces on the training of the Afghan military, in hopes that Afghanistan's own government could eventually be powerful enough to hold off Taliban forces without U.S. involvement. This plan grew to be frustrating, due to the difficulty in training a brand new military. However, the main issue with "nation building" a friendly Afghanistan was the corruption faced by the Afghan government. President Hamid Karzai was often criticized for accepting bribes from Taliban allied groups, and the Afghan military was known to have major issues with intelligence leaks due to Taliban supporters imbedded in the higher levels of the friendly Afghan forces. The ISI, Pakistan's intelligence service, was later revealed to be a strong supporter of the Taliban resistance, and was found to have delivered intelligence support to them throughout the war. These issues were hoped to be handled by the time the U.S. withdrew from Afghanistan. Since the beginning of the pullout in 2011, the Afghan military has been fairly successful in keeping the Taliban at bay. The Northern Alliance, a group of tribes dedicated to keeping Afghanistan free of Taliban rule, has so far been successful in keeping the nation secure. The funding and training of the Northern Alliance, along with the Afghan military, allowed for the U.S. to control the region through its allies rather than continue fighting with its own forces. This is an example of why the U.S. feels the need to train and fund friendly military forces in developing countries around the world.

Section 4: Leaving the warzones: America's goal of ensuring long term stability in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The U.S. had easily defeated conventional forces in Iraq, and was making major progress in fighting the Taliban's forces in Afghanistan. However, dealing with the ensuing insurgencies proved to be a more complicated and overall difficult task to undertake. "The Surge" as it was coined by President George W. Bush, proved to greatly reduce the effectiveness of the insurgent forces in Iraq, primarily around Baghdad. The addition of 20,000 new troops, five brigades in total, resulted in effective containment of insurgent forces. The Surge was created in response to the newly formed and extremely fragile Iraqi government, created during the national elections of 2005.

Until the U.S. invasion, Iraq operated under the (theoretically) democratically elected Baath party. Saddam Hussein, a Sunni Muslim and ethnocentric Arab, greatly discriminated against his countrymen based on both religion as well as race, as shown by his treatment of the ethnic Kurds in Northern Iraq, as well as the religious Shiite population of Baghdad. The racial and religious mistreatment caused by Saddam caused tensions to rise between Kurds, Arabs, Sunnis, and Shiites. This unrest led to worries leading up to the first truly democratic Iraqi elections. Former Baath party loyalists, as well as Sunni insurgents, attempted to intimidate Kurds and Shiites from voting through attacks on Kurd and Sunni population centers. Al-Qaeda pledged their support to Sunni extremists attempting to disrupt elections. Shiite and Kurd factions also successfully kept most Sunni's from reaching the polls, as evidenced by the extremely low Sunni voter turnout rate in parts of the country. Fortunately, despite the violence Iraq still carried on with its' first national election, leading toward the development of a new constitution as well as the appointing of the various congressional and executive positions to be held by new party members.

The elections resulted in 275 members being appointed to the national assembly. As required by International Mission for Iraqi Elections, roughly one third of those elected were women. Also, the national assembly elected a Kurd as President, and a Shiite as Prime Minister. These elections proved that Iraq was ready to progress past its discriminatory past.

However, despite the enormous political progress the U.S. had made in creating a democratic Iraq, the new Iraqi government could do little to repel Sunni and Baath opposition forces. This new fragile government prompted President Bush to issue 20,000 extra troops to Baghdad, dubbed "The Surge". The aim of the Surge was to win over hearts and minds of the Iraqi people, as opposed to an increase in fighting. The additional troops were not meant to attack, but to provide security for the Iraqi people while the formation and implementation of new government policies took place. Another major cause for decline of violence was the cease-fire called by Cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, the leader of a separate Shiite insurgent group. This decline in violence allowed the new Iraqi government to shift power from U.S. forces over to the new Iraqi military. However, this transition did not take place without its' share of issues, most notably the incompetence of Iraq's brand new military, especially compared to the battle hardened extremist groups.

Due to progress made by the new Iraqi government, President Obama reluctantly continued the Surge, sending additional reinforcements to keep Baghdad peaceful before slowly beginning the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq. The U.S. began to transfer power to the Iraqi military by providing training for its personnel, as well as the sale of over \$13.5 billion worth of arms. These arms sales included M-4 and M-16 assault rifles, as well

as F-16 fighter planes and M-1 Abrams tanks. The U.N. also lifted its Saddam era sanctions, which allowed for a civilian nuclear program, as well as handing over control of Iraq's oil revenues to the Iraqi government, and the abolition of the widely criticized Food for Oil program. By December of 2011, U.S. forces had fully withdrawn from Iraq, with the exception of diplomatic personnel and embassy guards.

Since the withdrawal of U.S. troops, the city of Fallujah has fallen to Sunni insurgents, and Baghdad remains one of the most violent cities in the country. Many Americans doubt the necessity of a near decade long war, which ultimately ended with mixed results. This helped the U.S. rethink the idea behind its "nation building" approach that was widely criticized for being a ham-fisted and culturally dismissive approach towards long term stability. The training of counterinsurgents in Sri Lanka is a strong example of current U.S. policy, and how America is taking a new, preemptive approach to counterterrorism. Sri Lanka has a growing radical Muslim presence, and helping the Sri Lanka army shut down insurgency before the country reaches full-blown Iraq level civil war is an example of preemptive contemporary U.S. military operations, and how the lessons learned from mistakes made in the War on Terror influenced the planning of these large scale operations.

The U.S. saw similar early strides in Afghanistan, only to be bogged down by the ensuing Taliban insurgency. The U.S. sought to establish a new, democratic government after the ousting of the Taliban. Following the upheaval caused by the Soviet invasion in 1979, Afghanistan has had frequent issues with a lack of centralization and authority within its' national government. The Mujahedeen sought to solve the issues presented by the power

vacuum created by the upheaval. From the more extreme corners of the Mujahedeen rose the Taliban, who acted as the official governing body of Afghanistan from 1996 until the invasion of 2001. Following the invasion, the Taliban acted as an insurgency against America's attempts to create a new, democratic Afghan government. Similar to Iraq, the U.S. required Afghanistan's parliament to contain at least 25% women. Surprisingly, a higher than expected 28% of Parliament seats were taken by women in the 2005 parliamentary election. Despite some Taliban disruption, the presidential and parliamentary elections went significantly smoother than similar elections held in Iraq. Over three quarters of registered voters cast their ballot for president, and, despite some fraud accusations, the incumbent (and formerly U.S. appointed) President Hamid Karzai one reelection with over three times the vote of any other candidate. Though, while progress was being made as far as the overall establishment of a new political process, the new Afghan government was experiencing troubles stemming from within. Accusations of corruption, mostly aimed toward President Karzai, cast a doubt over political progress being made during the war.

Afghanistan's first democratic election went well in theory, but the new Afghan government faced many new hurdles to work over. Accusations of corruption, aimed at President Hamid Karzai and his family, have cast a shadow of doubt over the progress the U.S. had made. Karzai has been accused of having employee connections to Unocal, a California based oil company, while granting them contracts to work in Afghanistan. His brother, Mahmud Karzai, has been investigated in a real estate fraud scheme involving the Kabul Bank. Most disturbingly, Karzai has allegedly been in talks with the Taliban, now operating out of Pakistan, to determine how to divide power after the U.S. pulls out of the country.

The U.S. has learned several lessons from the frustration it dealt with in organizing long lasting democracies in Iraq and Afghanistan. The U.S. has stepped up its training of friendly troops in Southeast Asia, most notably the insurgency ridden nation of Sri Lanka. As previously mentioned, the U.S. has also stepped up its drone strikes in Pakistan against the remnants of the now fleeing Taliban. The U.S. has realized the difficulty involved in establishing democracies from scratch, and is now working to preemptively prevent the rise of anti-U.S. governments from being established in friendly regions. The U.S. military succeeded spectacularly in defeating conventional forces, and has mixed success with fighting the ensuing insurgencies. The main culprit responsible for the lack of progress in the war was the frustration faced when establishing new governments and military's from scratch. In response to this, the U.S. has clearly taken a preemptive approach to prevent the rise of unfriendly governments. The U.S. has faced much criticism for this practice, frequently facing accusations of imperialism due to overuse of its military capabilities. However, the hope is that long term prevention may lead to less full scale wars breaking out. Essentially, the U.S. military is confident that drone strikes in Pakistan today could prevent another full scale war in the future. While this justification is subject to criticism, the U.S. seems intent on continuing with its new direction of military operations, keeping in mind the lessons it learned in dealing with the frustration involved with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Section 5: The world today: Deployment of forces post-war, lessons learned from the War on Terror, and how those lessons affect operations in today's military.

The victories, as well as the frustrations the U.S. faced during the Iraq and Afghan wars provide the current military stronger insight as to how it should direct its foreign policy in the international post-war environment. The difficulty faced with fighting a full scale war against guerilla insurgents has taught the U.S. military the importance of pre-emptive warfare. The increase in drone strikes carried out during Obama's administration post-war are a clear display of the emphasis the military is trying to place on surgical operations, as opposed to allowing insurgents to regroup into a threat that can only be treated with large scale warfare. Displayed by *figure 1.0*, as the war effort came to a close, drone strikes in Pakistan increased dramatically. The reason for the strikes in Pakistan is because of the success the U.S., along with the Northern Alliance, faced as they drove the Taliban toward the eastern edge of Afghanistan, and over the border into neighboring Pakistan, as illustrated by *figure1.1*. The training of Indonesia's military by the U.S. to help fight their own radical Islamic insurgency is another step towards suppressing the threat of terrorism without resorting to larger scale operations. A side effect stemming from the War on Terror was the dispersion of radical Islamists caused by their exit from Afghanistan. As a result, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and now Southeast Asia face a bigger threat of extremism than ever before. This might help explain the major efforts being undertaken by the U.S. to help rid both Somalia as well as Indonesia of their terrorism problems. *Figure 2.0* displays the results of U.S. military operations in Somalia, following the drawdown in Iraq and Afghanistan. The retreat of terror group Al-Shabaab is a direct result of increased U.S. military aid and assistance to the Somalian government. The war also taught the U.S. the importance of relying on international efforts to quell military threats that exist on an international scale. The help provided by allied nations, as well as NATO, provided assistance to

the war effort without overstepping international boundaries or laws. The post-war military operations currently being undertaken by the U.S. to handle international threats reflect the nation's unwillingness to fight further large scale wars. Due to this, the U.S. military is confident that small scale pre-emptive operations must be undertaken in order to prevent U.S. enemy forces from being strong enough to necessitate the need for large scale warfare.

Appendix

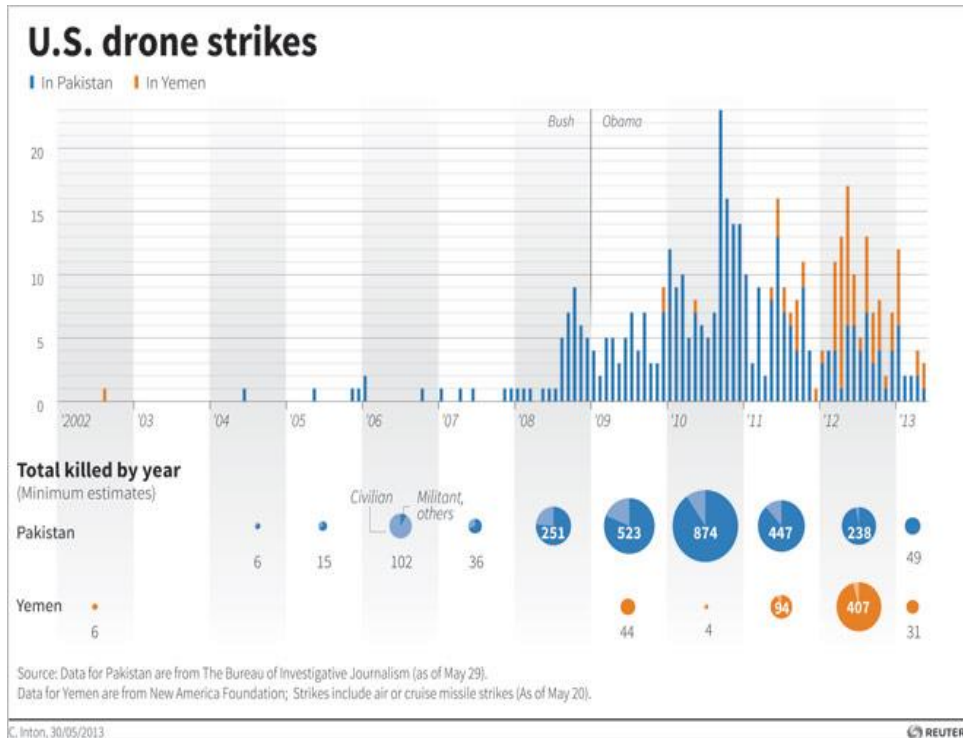


Figure 1.0

This chart displays the increase in U.S. drone strikes during the final phases in the War on Terror. Pakistan, and to a lesser extent, Yemen, experienced a surge of insurgents following their ousting in Afghanistan, as result, drone strikes in both regions increased dramatically as insurgents were driven further from Afghanistan.

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Figure 1.1

This map displays the location of Taliban influence. The Taliban is primarily focused along the Afghan-Pakistan border. This is a result of the Northern Alliance driving them from northern Afghanistan, as well as U.S. forces driving them from central Afghanistan. Their current sphere of influence could be interpreted as another indicator of Taliban retreat from their former Afghan-wide influence.

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Figure 2.0

This map displays the retreat of the Islamic militant group Al-Shabaab from the more urban areas of Somalia, such as Mogadishu, into the rural region of the West. It's worth noting there was a major increase in U.S. military personnel as well as distributed military aid throughout the Eastern region during this period.

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Figure 3.0

This figure displays all major terrorist attacks from 2002 through 2011. Areas of particular interest include Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia and the Philippines, Somalia, and the Middle East, particularly Iraq and Afghanistan.

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