

DARK CLOUDS AND DEADLY SKIES:
ASSESSING THE STRATEGIC EFFECTIVENESS OF USING REMOTELY
PILOTED AIRCRAFT OUTSIDE OF DESIGNATED COMBAT ZONES

BY

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APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis meets master's-level standards of research, argumentation, and expression.

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DISCLAIMER

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the U.S. Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.



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ABSTRACT

With major combat operations complete in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States continues to face resilient terrorist threats from violent extremist networks across the globe. These threats are not limited to designated combat zones and are not projected to diminish in the near future. As a response, the United States has adopted the tactic of targeted strikes abroad to disrupt and degrade extremist networks and deny safehaven to those who plot against the United States or its allies. The number of strikes and geographic locations where these events occur are increasing and often take place in areas not designated as combat zones. One of the primary tactics used to carry out strikes against violent extremist networks is the employment of armed Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA). The United States' reliance on RPAs has received international criticism and is commonly cited as a recruitment tool for the very networks the United States is trying to disrupt and degrade. With the diffusion and spread of religious extremism since the events of 11 September 2001 and the increased number of violent extremist networks, is this tactic of RPA strikes having the desired strategic effect? In the current confrontation with violent extremism, is the United States working towards a desired ends or inadvertently contributing to a larger problem? Are tactical actions nested within a strategic framework that can foster success?

This thesis first establishes the desired ends and preferred ways of combating violent extremist networks as they are articulated through existing U.S. strategy and policy documents. Next, this thesis explores the potential pathways that cause violent extremism to end and compares these to the most relevant airpower strategies. The goal of this exploration is to determine how airpower strategies, particularly through use of RPAs, can expedite a violent extremist group's movement towards an end consistent with U.S. policy and strategy. Then this thesis examines the ways RPAs are used specifically in Yemen, Somalia, and the FATA to determine what, if any contribution RPAs have made in achieving acceptable ends. Ultimately, the greatest benefit of RPAs may be the ability to preserve policy maker options, to keep strategy flexible enough to account for change and to engage violent extremist groups over time. The option to act allows the United States to capitalize on the cumulative benefits of "selectively repressing" violent extremist networks and may push them towards an acceptable end.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Violent extremism and an evolving terrorist threat raise a persistent risk of attacks on America and our allies.

- National Security Strategy, February 2015

The United States faces profound challenges and rapid changes within the global security environment in the 21st century. China is on the rise, Russia is exerting influence in a manner reminiscent of methods used at the height of the Cold War, there are new threats to the global commons, the Arab Spring has largely spread instability in the Middle East, and the confrontation with violent extremism is far from over.¹ In fact, violent extremism has spread. Arguably, the short-term capabilities of violent extremist organizations have been reduced but both the threat of terrorism and the spread of extremist ideology remains. It is the threat of violent extremism and the role of remotely piloted aircraft (RPAs) in combating violent extremist organizations that is the focus of this thesis.

The 2015 National Security Strategy states a variety of extremist organizations have gained influence, “in areas of instability, limited opportunity, and broken governance.”² Looking at areas outside of Iraq and Afghanistan, these organizations are not geographically limited to specific countries or regions. Violent extremist groups

¹ “National Security Strategy 2015.” *National Security Strategy Archive*. Accessed February 7, 2015. http://nssarchive.us/?page_id=8, p4.

² “National Security Strategy 2015.” *National Security Strategy Archive*. Accessed February 7, 2015. http://nssarchive.us/?page_id=8, p9.

range from South Asia, throughout the Middle East, and into North Africa.³

Additionally, technology has assisted the spread of violent ideologies to associated groups that may or may not have direct ties to a core group. These associated groups represent a potentially unknown threat as new extremists are encouraged to take action without the explicit direction or contact with a core group. The diffusion of extremist ideology and spreading of the desire to use terror tactics represents a very real concern, but many of these associated groups are limited in terms of capabilities. Alternatively, groups at the ideological core of the violent extremist movement tend to have both intent and capability. Groups such as al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen, al-Shabaab in Somalia, and the Taliban and al-Qaeda affiliated groups in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in Pakistan, have demonstrated the intent and requisite capability to conduct attacks against the West or Western interests.

Due to limited reach and capabilities of local national governments, finite access for Western forces, and the persistent credible threats that come from these areas, the U.S. has increased its use of RPAs to combat violent extremist networks. To confront these groups, the United States must reach and operate in or above ungoverned or under-governed areas and has come to rely on RPAs.

The reasons why RPAs were created, however, were not as an offensive or “fires” platform. RPAs were originally developed as Intelligence Reconnaissance and Surveillance (ISR) aircraft capable of collecting unique types of information without putting a pilot in harm’s way. This information included imagery intelligence (IMINT) that consisted of high-resolution photographs and real-time full motion video and also

³ “National Security Strategy 2015.” *National Security Strategy Archive*. Accessed February 7, 2015. http://nssarchive.us/?page_id=8, p9.

included the collection of signals intelligence (SIGINT). Without the added weight of a pilot and associated life support systems, RPAs could be smaller and loiter longer than manned aircraft, while still carrying adequate payloads. In an ISR role, RPAs are extremely effective at finding and gathering intelligence on suspected and known terrorists. RPAs can loiter for numerous hours collecting IMINT and associated SIGINT that provides definitive and accurate context to the pictures and video. The combination of these two intelligence collection methods with the persistence that the RPAs provided significantly reduced ambiguity with target identification and tracking. Prior to the development of RPAs, the only collection assets with similar fidelity of information existed at the “national” collection level and included assets such as reconnaissance satellites. The RPA as a multi-source intelligence collection platform ushered in a new era of immediately actionable, high-fidelity information.

This new capability gained operational credibility in the mid-1990s and evolved rapidly. The Predator RPA or MQ-1 had been used as an ISR platform since 1996 in Iraq and the Balkans with little fanfare but increasing operational success. In September through October of 2000, President William Clinton authorized RPA flights over Afghanistan in search of Osama Bin Laden. The MQ-1 Predators made approximately sixteen successful flights and are reported to have identified Osama Bin Laden on three separate occasions.⁴ The intent behind using the MQ-1 was to reduce the amount of time it took to get actionable intelligence to decision-makers to increase options for strikes or possible capture and detention. Intelligence operatives realized that even with near-real-

⁴ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks. *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States Including the Executive Summary*. Baton Rouge, LA: Claitor's Law Books and Publishing, 2004.

time analysis and awareness of potential targets, any delay in decision-making or operations would jeopardize mission success. To be successful in a dynamic environment against fleeting targets of opportunity, the intelligence and operations cycle had to be further refined and condensed.

In December of 2000, newly-elected President George W. Bush and other high-ranking security officials were briefed on Osama Bin Laden, the al-Qaeda threat, and the limited use of RPAs. At that time, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) personnel proposed that an armed Predator would be an invaluable tool to combat the growing threat of terrorism in Afghanistan.⁵ The intelligence capabilities of RPAs could be matched to the accuracy of precision-guided munitions. Ultimately, armed RPAs would revolutionize the so-called find, fix, finish, exploit, analyze, and disseminate (F3EAD) targeting cycle of counterterrorism for both the military and the CIA. Predators were armed shortly after the CIA's proposal, but would not be used as an offensive weapon until after the events of 11 September 2001 (9/11).

During the early use of armed RPAs, offensive missions outside of designated combat areas were sporadic and infrequent. The United States conducted its first acknowledged RPA strike in November of 2001 in Afghanistan shortly after the September attacks against the World Trade Center and Pentagon.⁶ With this new capability, the United States continued to find, fix, and finish senior leaders of Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan linked to the 9/11 attacks. A year later, in November of 2002, the United

⁵ "9-11 Commission Report." 24 March 2004, available at: <http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf>

⁶ Testimony of Mr Richard A. Clarke, Former National Coordinator for Counterterrorism, National Security Council, during the eighth public hearing of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States held on 24 March 2004. Accessed on 20 May 2015, available at: <http://www.9-11commission.gov/hearings/hearing8.htm>

States conducted its first RPA strike in Yemen by targeting and killing Al-Qaeda members associated with the attack on the USS Cole in 2000.⁷ This event marked a significant step in the expansion of the global fight against terrorism: an attack against Al-Qaeda leaders outside of a designated combat area. The next attack outside of a designated combat area did not occur again until 2004 when the United States targeted a Taliban commander in the FATA in Pakistan. According to contributors to the *Long War Journal* and the *Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, there have been approximately 111 strikes in Yemen, 13 strikes Somalia, and 373 strikes in Pakistan as of the end of 2015.⁸ With the combination of detailed and persistent SIGINT and IMINT information, especially full-motion video, RPAs gave the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) and other agencies the unique capability to conduct target development over a span of weeks or months. This capability allows intelligence organizations to better establish pattern of life, assess linkages, obtain approvals, determine collateral damage, and strike—with few or no ground forces in the areas where the strikes occurred. This paper will examine the role that RPAs have evolved to play in the fight against violent extremist networks outside of designated combat zones and whether or not the use of RPAs has been strategically effective.

Violent Extremist Networks

⁷ “CIA ‘Killed Al-Qaeda Suspects’ in Yemen.” *BBC*, November 5, 2002, sec. Middle East. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/2402479.stm>.

⁸ “Yemen Strikes | The Long War Journal.” Accessed March 19, 2015. <http://www.longwarjournal.org/yemen-strikes> and “Somalia: Reported Us Covert Actions 2001-2015 | The Bureau Of Investigative Journalism.” Accessed March 19, 2015. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2012/02/22/get-the-data-somalias-hidden-war/> and “Pakistan Strikes | The Long War Journal.” Accessed March 19, 2015. <http://www.longwarjournal.org/pakistan-strikes>.

With the numerous terms and definitions associated with terrorist activities and the organizations that prosecute attacks, it is necessary to first define a few key terms. In this paper, the term “violent extremist network” is intended to convey the broader meaning of organized terrorism such that it is a subnational group(s) or nonstate entity with shared or sympathetic ideals that deliberately creates and exploits fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change.⁹ Violent extremist network is used as a more apt descriptor of a *terrorist organization* and represents a shift in contemporary usage of the terminology and the conventional thinking about violent networks that use terrorism as a tactic. However, much of the contemporary literature uses the term “terrorism” or “terrorist” to convey a similar meaning. The 2015 National Security Strategy, for example, uses the term “violent extremism” and “terrorism” interchangeably. Like the 2015 NSS, violent extremism and terrorism will be used interchangeably to convey the broader meaning as defined above.

Designated Combat Zones

As with violent extremism, there is some confusion in counterterrorism actions over what constitutes a combat zone. According to Title 26 of U.S. Code, Section 112, a combat zone is, “any area which the President of the United States by Executive Order designates... as an area in which Armed Forces of the United States are or have engaged in combat.”¹⁰ There are currently three such Executive Orders (EO): EO 12744, which

⁹ Hoffman, Bruce. *Inside Terrorism*. Revised & enlarged edition. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006, p40.

¹⁰ “Title 26, US Code,” United States Government Publishing Office, available at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/USCODE-2011-title26/pdf/USCODE-2011-title26-subtitleA-chap1-subchapB-partIII-sec112.pdf>, accessed 20 March 2015.

encompasses specific locations in the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq; EO 13119, which covers The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Albania; and EO 13239, which covers Afghanistan.¹¹ Members of the Armed Forces serving in countries outside of these primary combat zones, however, can be in areas granted or designated to have a “combat zone status.” Such status is granted by passing a law or through DoD certification so that military members who are in countries not identified in an Executive Order but who are deployed in support of or performing combat operations over a combat zone can be granted or designated to have a combat zone status to receive the appropriate military benefits.¹² Pakistan received combat zone status in September of 2001, Yemen received combat zone status in April of 2002, and Somalia received combat zone status in January of 2004. For the purposes of this work, combat operations within these countries are considered to be outside of an officially designated combat zone as defined by existing Presidential Executive Orders.

Personality Strike vs. Signature Strike

Based on a review of available literature, there seems to be confusion as to what constitutes a personality strike versus a signature strike. A general understanding of these terms is important because these types of strikes represent the vast majority of strikes that occur outside of designated combat zones. Personality strikes and signature strikes are simply two types of strike operations intended to specifically target leadership by decapitation or degrade militant capability by denial, strategic approaches that are

¹¹ “Executive Orders Disposition Tables,” The National Archives, available at: <http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/executive-orders/disposition.html>, accessed on 20 March 2015.

¹² “Combat Zones,” The Internal Revenue Service, available at: <http://www.irs.gov/uac/Combat-Zones>, accessed on 20 March 2015.

discussed in detail in Chapter 2. These terms are most often associated with RPA operations. Both types of strikes require detailed and accurate intelligence and are the most prevalent types of strikes conducted by RPAs, especially outside of combat zones. Ultimately, personality strikes and signature strikes target different capabilities and are intended to achieve different effects.

Personality strikes target a specific and known individual who holds a key leadership position or performs a specific critical function for the targeted network. These types of strikes degrade capabilities, disrupt planning, reduce safehaven, and weaken ties with other organizations. Personality strikes are developed, assessed, and approved based on the effect that removing an individual from the organization will have on the network's overall capability. While the time required for personality strikes varies significantly, operations can take weeks to months and rely upon hundreds to thousands of hours of IMINT and SIGINT collection. The multi-source intelligence, persistence, and loiter time afforded by RPAs allows for near-certain identification of the targeted individual. Once approved to conduct an operation, RPA operators will strike at a time and place to limit potential collateral damage. Personality strikes are a critical tool for decapitation and denial strategies intended to disrupt and degrade a violent extremist network's capabilities.

A signature strike is a kinetic operation based on pattern of life behavior from corroborating sources indicating individuals are involved in violent extremist activities and pose a credible and imminent threat. These types of strikes deny capability, prevent operations, reduce safehaven, and attrit resources. While many anti-drone activists mistakenly assert that signature strikes give the U.S. carte-blanche to strike any

questionable activity in a known violent extremist area, this is simply not the case.¹³ The intelligence required for a signature strike is based on a pattern of behavior developed and established over time. This pattern of behavior reveals specific capabilities often directly associated with key known personalities or networks and is the result of multiple sources of corroborating intelligence that indicate a credible and imminent threat exists. Signature strikes allow the United States to conduct a denial strategy and reduce al-Qaeda's overall material and manpower capability to conduct effective attacks.

Assassination vs. Targeted Killing

Another area that warrants mention is the fact that authors and reporters tend to use the terms "assassination" and "targeted killing" interchangeably, yet these terms mean different things. The term "assassination" is defined as "the murder of an important person for political or religious reasons."¹⁴ Assassination refers to political or religious leaders whose death relates to a potential political gain resulting from their removal. In this case, the person assassinated is not posing a direct threat, nor are they planning or conducting operations against the United States. The United States officially proscribed assassination in 1976 when President Gerald Ford issued Executive Order 11905 and made political assassination illegal.¹⁵ Domestic and international norms consider assassination an illegitimate use of force by a state.

¹³ Williams, Brian Glyn, "Inside the Murky World of 'Signature Strikes' and the Killing of Americans with Drones," Huffington Post, available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brian-glyn-williams/inside-the-murky-world-of-b_3367780.html, accessed on 22 March 2015.

¹⁴ "Assassinate" Oxforddictionaries.com, Available at: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/english/assassinate> (accessed 23 Mar 2015).

¹⁵ Executive Order 11905, National Archives, available at: <http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/executive-orders-15.html>; Assassination is now addressed in EO12333 at, National Archives, available at: <http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/executive-order/12333.html>

Targeted killing is similar to assassination but different in kind. In the book, *Targeted Killing: Self-Defense, Preemption and the War on Terrorism*, Thomas Hunter explains targeted killing as “the premeditated, pre-emptive, and intentional killing of an individual or individuals known or believed to represent a present and/or future threat to the safety and security of a state through affiliation with terrorist groups or individuals.”¹⁶ Based on this definition, actions taken by the United States in accordance with current policy are preemptive acts of self-defense against enemies to prevent imminent or future attacks.¹⁷ Domestic and international norms consider preemptive self-defense a legitimate use of force by a state. Thus, targeted killing is a legitimate use of state force.

These terms barely scratch the surface of the current legal, ethical, and moral debate on the use of force to counter violent extremist groups. Ultimately, states must grapple with how to use force against extremist groups wielding extranormative or illegal violence against the state. However, these debates and issues fall outside of the scope of this research. For the purpose of this thesis, targeted killing, RPA “strikes,” and associated operations against violent extremist groups are considered legal and supported by the accepted precedent of preemptive self-defense. This thesis is more concerned with addressing the question of the strategic effectiveness of RPA strikes.

Strategic Effectiveness

Strategic effectiveness is a broad concept. In basic terms, strategy is a vision coupled with relevant context that informs a plan to achieve goals under conditions of

¹⁶ Hunter, Thomas B. *Targeted Killing: Self-Defense, Preemption, and the War on Terrorism*. 1st edition. United States? BookSurge Publishing, 2009, pVII.

¹⁷ Precedent was set by the British in the Caroline incident of 1837. See British-American diplomacy, “The Caroline Case,” available at: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/br-1842d.asp

uncertainty or risk. Lawrence Freedmen, for example, suggests strategy is “a comprehensive way to try to pursue political ends, including the threat or actual use of force, in a dialectic of wills.”¹⁸ The strategy of the United States is woven throughout several documents that help define and determine the ends and potential ways and means to accomplish these goals. Such documents include national security strategy, national military strategy, and counterterrorism strategy. For the purpose of this paper, the term “strategy” simply refers to the science and art of selecting the ways and means within the relevant context that are then applied to meet stated goals and objectives for the applicable level of strategy. All strategy should be nested within and support the desired ends of policy. It is important to understand the United States’ strategy to determine if the ways and means applied are supporting the nation’s goals.

Effectiveness can be defined a number of ways. Different criteria are often used to measure effective or non-effective actions in terms of success or failure. Often, these criteria lend themselves to quantitative or qualitative assessments. Amos N. Guiora defines effectiveness with respect to counterterrorism as causing, “the terrorist infrastructure to suffer serious damage—including damage to finances, intelligence, resources, or personnel—thereby preventing a particular, planned attack from going forth and/or postponing or impacting plans for future attacks while minimizing collateral damage, exercising fiscal responsibility, and preserving civil liberties.”¹⁹ This definition, while thorough, encompasses several factors that would be difficult to quantify or assess. The Oxford English Dictionary contains a simple definition of effectiveness: “the degree

¹⁸ Freedman, Lawrence. *Strategy: A History*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

¹⁹ Guiora, Amos N. *Accountability and Effectiveness in Homeland Security*. SSRN Scholarly Paper. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, February 1, 2008. <http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=1090328>.

to which something is successful in producing a desired result.”²⁰ This definition provides potentially measurable criteria for determining the effectiveness of a particular action. Essentially, something is effective if it has achieved an intended outcome that promotes or furthers desired ends. By examining the linkages between the results of tactical actions to their desired strategic ends, one can determine how effective those actions are within the context of the desired strategy. Thus, strategic effectiveness can be something measurable but is only relevant to the specific ends being sought.

The Character of the Struggle Against Violent Extremist Networks

The ways in which the United States employs RPAs in the fight against violent extremism is dependent not only on the strategic ends that are sought but also on the character of the conflict itself. The character of any particular war can be fluid. An accurate characterization of the conflict is critical to determining a viable strategy. Clausewitz states that, “all planning, particularly strategic planning, must pay attention to the character of contemporary warfare.”²¹ It is the character of a given conflict in relation to the desired ends and political will that will inform the relevant strategy. In a democracy, such information is achieved through debates and negotiations and is in turn influenced by the perceived opportunity or threat. If a perceived threat is grave enough, a nation may entertain a much broader range of potential options to address the threat. Alternatively, if the perceived threat is minor, the potential ways and means available to a nation, especially a democratic one, will be constrained. Thus, a resultant strategy may

²⁰ “Effectiveness,” Oxforddictionaries.com, accessed on 24 February 2015, available at: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/effectiveness?searchDictCode=all

²¹ Clausewitz, Carl von. *On War*. Princeton University Press, 1989, p220.

be a compromised use of ways and means to achieve strategic ends based on the perception of a given opportunity or threat. Strategy also reflects the type of war being fought.

War is generally categorized into three different types: total war, general war, and limited war. Total war is an all-out armed conflict between belligerents that is unrestricted where each of the participants make every attempt to destroy their enemy with all available ways and means, including nuclear weapons. Often, this type of war is further characterized by the disregard of established or recognized laws of war.²² General war is an armed conflict between belligerents where each involved attempts to destroy or defeat the other but none of the belligerents are willing to use all available resources to achieve their desired ends. Finally, limited war is armed struggle between belligerents where the ends or objectives sought by one of the participants is limited and one or more of the participants is using restrained resources or methods to achieve their desired ends.²³ The struggle against violent extremism falls within the categorization of limited warfare.

From the perspective of the United States, the fight against violent extremism is limited given the narrow objectives and ends it seeks. As a result of these objectives and ends, the U.S. only applies limited means or resources in restricted ways. Many violent extremists, however, are so committed to their cause that they are willing to sacrifice their lives and the lives of their families to achieve their ends.

²² “Total War,” Oxforddictionaries.com, Available at: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/total-war?searchDictCode=all (accessed, 24 Feb 2015).

²³ “Limited War,” Oxforddictionaries.com, Available at: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/limited-war?searchDictCode=all (accessed, 24 Feb 2015).

The struggle against violent extremism is inherently a form of irregular warfare. Irregular warfare (IW) is defined as, “a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations. IW favors the indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capabilities, in order to erode an adversary’s power, influence, and will.”²⁴ Violence in IW is purposeful and primarily used to demonstrate the incompetence of the establishment and is also used as a tool to persuade, coerce, or intimidate a population to ultimately reduce an adversary’s power, influence, and will.²⁵ The ultimate goal for combatants within IW is to exert control and influence over a target population to gain political legitimacy to enact political, social, economic, or religious change.

Some argue the advantages of airpower, such as the ability to strike an adversary’s strategic center of gravity, are ineffective in an IW campaign. Enemies using irregular warfare tactics often do not have easily identifiable command structures that can be targeted with predictable results.²⁶ Others suggest irregular warfare is a ground-centric fight in which airpower plays a supporting role. Airpower, however, provides unique capabilities and asymmetric advantages within IW. AFDD 2-3 notes that, “the Air Force provides valuable and unique capabilities in IW. In many cases, these capabilities provide flexible and persistent options for dealing with the IW challenges by

²⁴ Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associate Terms*.

²⁵ Joint Staff, *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, Version 1.0 (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, June 2007), p5-6.

²⁶ Allen G. Peck, “Airpower’s Crucial Role in Irregular Warfare,” *Air and Space Power Journal*, Summer 2007, Volume XXI, No 2 AFRP 10-1. (Montgomery AL, Air University Press) 2.
<http://www.airpower.au.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj07/sum07.htm> (Accessed February 2015)

providing a less intrusive force that can respond quickly and improve a commander's overall situational awareness."²⁷

Innovative Airman with access to airpower capabilities can use adaptive tactics, techniques, and procedures to counter a thinking and adaptive IW enemy.²⁸ Such capabilities, including mobility and ISR, provide distinct advantages in an IW environment and immediately reduce an enemy's freedom of maneuver and action. RPAs offer unique airpower capability. To assess the strategic effectiveness of RPAs, one should link their tactical use to relevant airpower strategies and assess how these means and ways contribute to moving a violent extremist network towards an acceptable and obtainable end.

If airpower strategy contributes to an acceptable end to violent extremist networks, then RPA operations can have a strategic effect. The next chapter reviews U.S. policy and strategy documents to identify specific goals in the struggle against violent extremism. Chapter 3 combines an exploration of pathways for how terrorism ends with various airpower strategies. The purpose of this exploration is to connect strategies with desired ends of terrorism. By applying criteria from Chapters 2 and 3 to case studies in Yemen, Somalia, and the FATA, it is possible to determine if RPAs are having a positive strategic effect, and if so, to what degree. Within each case study, it is necessary to use secondary sources and related media reports associated with RPA operations. Official unclassified sources for RPA strike data does not exist. Therefore, this paper relies upon

²⁷ Air Force Doctrine Document 2-3, *Irregular Warfare*, 1 August 2007, (Washington DC: United States Air Force), foreword.

²⁸ Allen G. Peck, "Airpower's Crucial Role in Irregular Warfare," *Air and Space Power Journal*, Summer 2007, Volume XXI, No 2 AFRP 10-1. (Montgomery AL, Air University Press) 2.
<http://www.airpower.au.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj07/sum07.htm> (Accessed February 2015).

several publicly accessible databases that report on and archive events related to RPA strikes outside of designated combat areas.²⁹ Recognizing that the U.S. is engaged in a long IW fight, it is critical to examine the strategy, policy, and relevant ways in order to make an assessment on the effectiveness of a particular tool in achieving acceptable strategic ends.



²⁹ “World of Drones.” International Security: New America Foundation, <https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/>, and The Long War Journal, <https://www.LongWarJournal.org>, and “Get the Data: Drone Wars,” The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/>

CHAPTER 2

The National Strategy to Combat Violent Extremism

We are now pursuing a more sustainable approach that prioritize targeted counterterrorism operations, collective action with responsible partners, and increased efforts to prevent the growth of violent extremism and radicalization that drives increased threats

– National Security Strategy, February 2015

The U.S. strategy against Violent Extremist Networks (VENs) is discernible through several published documents. Strategic guidance documents inform internal processes, such as the development of military strategy. At a variety of levels, these documents identify the United States' strategic intent and desired ends. This chapter reviews the strategic guidance of the United States from the level of grand strategy through military strategy and specifically focuses on counterterrorism.

The National Security Strategy

The broadest of U.S. strategy document is the *National Security Strategy of the United States (NSS)*. The NSS can be considered as a statement of “Grand Strategy.” In addition, the NSS serves a number of functions that include communicating the strategic vision both internally and externally and contributing to the overall agenda of the President.¹ These functions of the NSS serve to further the administration's strategic narrative and help build understanding, if not consensus, of the United States' overall

¹ Snider, Don. *The National Security Strategy: Documenting Strategic Vision*. Strategic Studies Institute, March 15, 1995. <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=332>.

security strategy. Ultimately, the NSS establishes the rationale and the desired ends for the United States' continuing fight against violent extremist networks.

According to the NSS published in February of 2015, the United States recognizes four enduring national interests. These interests are security, prosperity, values, and international order as being critical to securing the country and advancing American leadership.² Within the enduring interest of maintaining U.S. security at home and abroad, the 2015 NSS identifies, "Combat the Persistent Threat of Terrorism" as one of the key components of the overall strategy.³ Within this key component, the strategy outlines that the United States faces adversaries that are not confined to a distinct country or region and that the United States' focus has shifted to more sustainable counterterrorism operations, partnerships, and combined efforts to prevent the growth of violent extremism and radicalization.⁴

The shift in focus in counterterrorism differs from the previous NSS. The 2010 NSS identified, "Disrupt, Dismantle, and Defeat Al-Qa'ida and its Violent Extremist Affiliates in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Around the World" as one of the key components to the overall strategy.⁵ Within the context of this component of the strategy, the 2010 NSS further stated that the *United States* is waging a global campaign to defeat al-Qa'ida and its terrorist affiliates.⁶ The 2015 NSS recognizes the changing character of violent

² "National Security Strategy 2015." *National Security Strategy Archive*. Accessed February 7, 2015. http://nssarchive.us/?page_id=8.

³ "National Security Strategy 2015." *National Security Strategy Archive*. Accessed February 7, 2015. http://nssarchive.us/?page_id=8.

⁴ "National Security Strategy 2015." *National Security Strategy Archive*. Accessed February 7, 2015. http://nssarchive.us/?page_id=8.

⁵ "National Security Strategy 2010." *National Security Strategy Archive*. Accessed January 28, 2015. http://nssarchive.us/?page_id=8.

⁶ "National Security Strategy 2010." *National Security Strategy Archive*. Accessed January 28, 2015. http://nssarchive.us/?page_id=8. p19.

extremism and emphasizes that counterterrorism operations need to be sustained, with the help of partners, to prevent and ultimately defeat the proliferation of violent ideologies.

Neither the 2015 nor the 2010 NSS reveal substantive details about how the strategy is to be carried out. Instead, both documents simply identify desired ends and broad intent. Other strategic documents should reflect and support the broad guidance as contained within the NSS. The supporting strategic documents, however, do not yet reflect how they will implement the change in counterterrorism emphasis in the 2015 NSS. Since the changes are primarily in areas of scope and tone with respect to violent extremism, current strategic documents remain relevant in examining the options available to the United States. Further details on potential ways and means can be divined from the National Defense Strategy (NDS), the National Military Strategy, and the National Counterterrorism Strategy.

The National Defense Strategy and National Military Strategy

The Defense Department released the most recent National Defense Strategy as part of its Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) process in 2014. The QDR is a comprehensive examination of defense programs to ensure that the United States is postured to continue to meet anticipated challenges over the next 20 years. The NDS portion of the QDR recognizes that the military is just one element of the national instruments of power.⁷

In terms of combating violent extremism, the NDS states that, “the Department of Defense’s activities to protect the homeland do not stop at our nation’s borders” and that

⁷ “Quadrennial Defense Review 2014,” Department of Defense, accessed on 19 April 2015, available at: http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2014_Quadrennial_Defense_Review.pdf, p11.

the department will, “collaborate with interagency and international partners to tackle root drivers of conflict, including building capacity with allied partner militaries, and to sustain a global effort to detect, disrupt, and defeat terrorist plots.”⁸ These quotes clearly articulate the DoD’s broad strategy for combating violent extremism, emphasize a proactive or offensive approach, and increase the emphasis on building partner capacity.

The next in the hierarchy of strategy documents is the National Military Strategy (NMS). Its purpose is to “provide the ways and means by which our military will advance our enduring national interests.”⁹ The NMS begins to address how the United States plans to wage a global campaign against core al-Qaeda and associated elements. The NMS identifies “counter violent extremism” as the primary military objective in support of the United States’ enduring security requirements.¹⁰ To be successful, the NMS outlines that the United States must employ military power in a precise and principled way, build partner capacity, support a comprehensive national approach to make efforts sustainable, and develop deterrence principles against extremists.¹¹

The NMS acknowledges, however, that the fight against violent extremist networks will not be decisive.¹² It recognizes that the proliferation of technologies

⁸ “Quadrennial Defense Review 2014,” Department of Defense, accessed on 19 April 2015, available at: http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2014_Quadrennial_Defense_Review.pdf, p16.

⁹ Quoted from Admiral M. G. Mullen’s cover letter to the NMS. United States Department of Defense. “The National Military Strategy of the United States of America.” United States Department of Defense, February 8, 2011. http://www.jcs.mil/content/files/2011-02/020811084800_2011_NMS_-_08_FEB_2011.pdf.

¹⁰ United States Department of Defense. “The National Military Strategy of the United States of America.” United States Department of Defense, February 8, 2011, p4. http://www.jcs.mil/content/files/2011-02/020811084800_2011_NMS_-_08_FEB_2011.pdf.

¹¹ United States Department of Defense. “The National Military Strategy of the United States of America.” United States Department of Defense, February 8, 2011, p6. http://www.jcs.mil/content/files/2011-02/020811084800_2011_NMS_-_08_FEB_2011.pdf.

¹² United States Department of Defense. “The National Military Strategy of the United States of America.” United States Department of Defense, February 8, 2011, p6. http://www.jcs.mil/content/files/2011-02/020811084800_2011_NMS_-_08_FEB_2011.pdf.

enhances a terrorists' ability to plan and coordinate attacks from remote regions of the world and complicates confronting terrorists from within their sanctuaries. The document further states that to overcome this challenge, the United States must be prepared to find, capture, or kill violent extremists who threaten our security wherever they reside.¹³ This statement sets the foundation for the ways in which the United States intends to prosecute a global war against violent extremist networks, especially in areas outside of designated combat zones, where the United States will have limited access. The NDS and the NMS both inform the National Strategy for Counterterrorism.

The National Strategy for Counterterrorism

The 2011 National Strategy for Counterterrorism (NSCT) defines the ways and means by which the United States intends to confront violent extremist networks that use terrorism. The document's authors reiterate that the United States is at war and is waging a broad and sustained campaign that must utilize every element of American power to defeat violent extremist networks. The NSCT identifies several nations and groups that support terrorism against the United States to include Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas but focuses on a primary threat: al-Qaeda and its affiliates and adherents. Affiliates are those groups that have formally aligned with al-Qaeda against the United States and are the subject of Chapters 4 and 5. Adherents are those individuals or groups who directly cooperate or are inspired by al-Qaeda to take action and commit terrorist activities largely on their own.¹⁴

¹³ United States Department of Defense. "The National Military Strategy of the United States of America." United States Department of Defense, February 8, 2011, p6. http://www.jcs.mil/content/files/2011-02/020811084800_2011_NMS_-_08_FEB_2011.pdf.

¹⁴ *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, Washington, DC: The White House, June 2011, p3.

The NSCT does not yet reflect the expansion of violent extremism beyond al-Qaeda affiliates and adherents as recognized in the 2015 NSS. The ways in which we can influence and defeat violent extremist networks through counterterrorism efforts, however, remain relevant. The specific counterterrorism goals outlined in the National Strategy for Counterterrorism include:

- Protecting the homeland by constantly reducing our vulnerabilities and adapting and updating defenses.
- Disrupting, degrading, dismantling and defeating al-Qa'ida wherever it takes root.
- Preventing terrorists from acquiring or developing weapons of mass destruction.
- Eliminating the safehavens al-Qa'ida needs to train, plot and launch attacks.
- Degrading links between al-Qa'ida, its affiliates and adherents.
- Countering al-Qa'ida ideology and its attempts to justify violence.
- Depriving al-Qa'ida and its affiliates of their enabling means, including illicit financing, logistical support, and online communications.¹⁵

These goals act as the framework for U.S. counterterrorism efforts in support of the NMS, the NDS, and the NSS. In sum they comprise the broad plan designed to enable the defeat of al-Qaeda and its affiliates and adherents or violent extremist networks.

There is one area in which the NMS, NDS, and NSS appear inconsistent with the 2015 NSS. This area is the new emphasis on working with or through partner nations to expand global reach, global response, and global effectiveness. By partnering with capable and willing nations to leverage the appropriate means through a variety of ways, the United States should be in a better position to confront global violent extremist networks and achieve the goals outlined above.

One common theme between the primary strategic guidance documents is the fact that the fight against violent extremist networks will be lengthy. The reason for this is simple. The war the United States faces today is inherently an irregular warfare

¹⁵ *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, Washington, DC: The White House, June 2011, p8-10.

campaign that requires more than the application of military force to succeed. As identified in the 2015 NSS, the United States must encourage, assist, and promote foreign action against those extremist networks that threaten our security. The United States must partner to succeed by securing access to and placement in foreign nations where we will be able to influence violent networks directly or indirectly.

National Policy

Policy is critical to strategy as it further defines available ways and means to achieve strategic ends. Policies also reflect the political climate in terms of national will and convey the relative strategic importance of a perceived threat or opportunity.

Policies do this by simply eliminating certain options while allowing or encouraging others. In terms of combating violent extremist networks, the Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) remains the primary policy and legal document that allows the United States to take actions to deter and prevent acts of international terrorism.¹⁶ The AUMF specifically states that the: “The President is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on 11 September 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons.”¹⁷

¹⁶ “Authorization for Use of Military Force (2001 - S.J.Res. 23).” *GovTrack.us*. Accessed February 1, 2015. <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/107/sjres23>.

¹⁷ “Authorization for Use of Military Force (2001 - S.J.Res. 23).” *GovTrack.us*. Accessed February 1, 2015. <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/107/sjres23>.

The AUMF, approved by Congress as a joint resolution, gives the President broad and significant powers in terms of the use of military force to combat terrorism. This policy remains the foundation for continued actions against violent extremist networks that the President deems continue to pose a threat to national security. Some critics charge that current counterterrorism actions in Africa and elsewhere exceed the intended application of the AUMF in the fight against terrorism.¹⁸ While the legal and ethical aspects of the AUMF generate much debate, they are outside of the scope of this thesis, which is focused on the strategy, policy, and means to combat violent extremist networks.

Concerns over the broadness of the AUMF and its potential misinterpretation were addressed by President Barack Obama in 2013. In a speech at the National Defense University, the President announced that he would release more specific policy guidance: “U.S. Policy Standards and Procedures for the Use of Force in Counterterrorism Operations Outside of the United States and Areas of Active Hostilities.” During the speech, the President summarized the events, circumstances, and threats that changed the global security environment by detailing, “the nature of today’s threats and how we should confront them.”¹⁹ Essentially, the President explained that we must continue to dismantle networks that directly threaten our security while at the same time setting conditions that make it less likely for new violent groups gain influence.

Several priorities and methods during the President’s 2013 speech directly influence the use of RPAs. In particular, the U.S. should approach operations as “a series

¹⁸ See for example, Robert Golan-Vilella, “Time to Narrow the AUMF,” *The National Interest*, 18 September 2013, available online at <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/time-narrow-the-aumf-9082>, accessed 19 May 2015 and Jennifer Daskal and Stephen I. Vladeck, “After the AUMF,” *Harvard National Security Journal*, Vol. 5: 115-146, available online at <http://harvardnsj.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Daskal-Vladeck-Final1.pdf>, accessed 19 May 2015.

¹⁹ “Obama’s Speech on Drone Policy,” *The New York Times*, May 23, 2013, sec. U.S. / Politics. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/24/us/politics/transcript-of-obamas-speech-on-drone-policy.html>.

of persistent, targeted efforts to dismantle specific networks of violent extremists that threaten America.”²⁰ To help accomplish this, the President emphasized that the preference of the U.S. remains the detention and prosecution of terrorists. Although the President emphasized the building and enabling partnerships, supporting the security forces of other nations, providing military aid to those who are combating terrorism, and sharing intelligence with other nations, these ways presuppose that a given partner is willing, capable, or both. Violent extremist networks, however, are often established in areas that are essentially ungoverned and outside of the reach of local security forces.

The President recognized the reality of ungoverned space and acknowledged that in some cases governments may not have the capability to confront or even find terrorists. He further added extremist networks purposefully seek out areas where nations have little control, reach, or influence to counter terrorist activities and ideology. Additionally, circumstances such as military risk, political reach, national will, collateral damage, and the international environment will often reduce potential options to detain and prosecute terrorists. The President argued that it is the confluence of these circumstances that creates the need for the United States to use precise targeted action to facilitate dismantling extremist networks and enable long-term strategic success.²¹

U.S. Policy Standards and Procedures for the Use of Force in Counterterrorism

Operations Outside of the United States and Areas of Active Hostilities

²⁰ “Obama’s Speech on Drone Policy.” *The New York Times*, May 23, 2013, sec. U.S. / Politics. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/24/us/politics/transcript-of-obamas-speech-on-drone-policy.html>.

²¹ “Obama’s Speech on Drone Policy.” *The New York Times*, May 23, 2013, sec. U.S. / Politics. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/24/us/politics/transcript-of-obamas-speech-on-drone-policy.html>.

To clarify what the President said in his speech, the White House released a two-page fact sheet entitled, “U.S. Policy Standards and Procedures for the Use of Force in Counterterrorism Operations Outside of the United States and Areas of Active Hostilities.” The fact sheet explained current counterterrorism policy standards and procedures and indicated a preference for capturing extremists to gain intelligence and “mitigate and disrupt” terrorist plots.²² Capture operations should only be conducted under legal conditions and where the sovereignty of other nations can be respected. When conditions are unfavorable for capture, military forces will only use force to prevent or stop attacks against U.S. persons in self-defense. The fact sheet further states that force will be used only when there are certain preconditions that are met. These preconditions include that the use of force is legal, force is only used when there is a continuing imminent threat to U.S. persons, the action meets detailed criteria, and the action respects national sovereignty and international law. The detailed criteria required are defined as:

1. Near certainty that the terrorist target is present;
2. Near certainty that non-combatants will not be injured or killed;
3. An assessment that capture is not feasible at the time of the operation;
4. An assessment that the relevant governmental authorities in the country where action is contemplated cannot or will not effectively address the threat to U.S. persons; and
5. An assessment that no other reasonable alternatives exist to effectively address the threat to U.S. persons.²³

The criteria and preconditions within the fact sheet presuppose an abundance of intelligence information in order to make informed decisions. They also drive the potential ways and means that the United States can use to combat violent extremism.

²² “Fact Sheet: U.S. Policy Standards and Procedures for the Use of Force in Counterterrorism Operations Outside of the United States and Areas of Active Hostilities.” *The White House, Office of the Press Secretary*, 23 May 2013.

²³ “Fact Sheet: U.S. Policy Standards and Procedures for the Use of Force in Counterterrorism Operations Outside of the United States and Areas of Active Hostilities.” *The White House, Office of the Press Secretary*, 23 May 2013.

Arguably, a critical tool to gain the fidelity of information necessary to meet the President's policy guidance is the persistence afforded by RPAs. Either intentionally or unintentionally, the President's policy guidance reinforces the growing trend over the last thirteen years of using RPAs to conduct intelligence and direct strikes outside of designated combat areas.

This chapter demonstrates how strategy and policy identify the desired ends and constrain the acceptable ways and means used to confront violent extremist networks. U.S. strategy documents, from the NSS down to the NSCT, define the broad goals and specific objectives of counterterrorism action against violent extremist networks. These documents all serve to shape the actions of the United States, and in turn, are shaped by policy. The combination of strategy and policy informs the relevant and preferred U.S. approaches for confronting violent extremist networks. This combination sets the framework for all U.S. counterterrorism initiatives and establishes the criteria by which they are evaluated. Therefore, it is important to consider how remotely piloted aircraft can achieve success against violent extremist networks within the constraints of the United States' relevant strategy and applicable policies.

CHAPTER 3

Potential Airpower Strategies to Combat Violent Extremism

So it is within this context that the United States has taken lethal, targeted action against al Qaeda and its associated forces, including with remotely piloted aircraft commonly referred to as drones.

– President Barrack Obama
*Speech to the National Defense University, 23
May 2013*

This chapter explores the linkages between how violent extremist networks can end and how airpower can contribute to their end through relevant ways. Audrey Kurth Cronin uses historical data to understand the pathways that cause the decline and demise of terrorist campaigns. These pathways identify where efforts can have the greatest chance of success and where military force can be most effective. From these efforts is then possible to assess which airpower strategies remain relevant and will have the greatest effect on the desired ends. Therefore, it is important to first understand how terrorism and violent extremist networks can end prior to examining potential airpower strategies. This chapter concludes with an evaluation of airpower strategies relevant to RPAs against violent extremist networks.

How Violent Extremism Can End

In the book *How Terrorism Ends*, Audrey Kurth Cronin reviews historical examples and identifies six primary pathways that cause terrorist groups to end. The six pathways are: success, repression, failure, reorientation, decapitation, and negotiation. Cronin applies her evaluation of history to the present and argues any strategy to defeat

al-Qaeda or any other violent extremist organization should work towards expediting the organization's movement towards one of these pathways.¹

Of these six pathways for terrorism to end, three do not appear to apply the current context of U.S. strategy and policy against al-Qaeda. These three are success, reorientation, and negotiation. U.S. decision makers will not allow al-Qaeda to achieve its objectives of establishing a global caliphate. Reorientation—transitioning to another modus operandi—is also problematic for U.S. policy makers as groups often move towards criminal behavior or graduate to other types of regular or irregular warfare. Finally, negotiation with groups such as al-Qaeda seems to be a poor primary option for bringing an end to terrorism under current strategy and policy. The United States has maintained a standing policy of refusing to negotiate with terrorists and conferring legitimacy on them in the process.²

The three remaining pathways Cronin identifies for extremist organizations to end are decapitation, repression, and failure. These three pathways are the most aligned with national counterterrorism strategy. Decapitation—causing a group to end by capturing or killing the leader—aligns with a national strategy as we must be prepared to find, capture, or kill violent extremists who threaten our security wherever they reside.³ Repression—overwhelming terrorism with force—aligns with the idea of using pre-emptive self-defense to protect the homeland by disrupting, degrading, denying, and systematically

¹ Cronin, Audrey Kurth. *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011.

² Democratic states such as the U.S. and the United Kingdom have engaged in negotiations with terrorist groups occasionally. For examples, see Peter Neumann, "Negotiating With Terrorists," *Foreign Affairs*, 86:1 (January/February 2007), available online at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2007-01-01/negotiating-terrorists>, accessed 25 May 2015.

³ United States Department of Defense. "The National Military Strategy of the United States of America." United States Department of Defense, February 8, 2011, p6. http://www.jcs.mil/content/files/2011-02/020811084800_2011_NMS_-_08_FEB_2011.pdf.

dismantling networks. Finally failure—where a group ceases to use terror tactics because of implosion, backlash, or becoming marginalized—supports national security objectives by depriving groups of enabling means, support and safehaven. These three pathways offer viable ways that are necessary to bringing about a group's end but are ultimately insufficient to capitalize on the full utility of using RPAs against VENs. A brief look at each pathway identifies areas where RPAs may provide additional options.

Cronin does not consider decapitation a useful method to pursue to end a mature organization like al-Qaeda as she does not believe that eliminating a few key leaders will ultimately result in an end to the organization. Cronin defines decapitation as, “arrest or assassination of the top leaders or operational leaders of a group.”⁴ She assesses that utilizing this method applies primarily when an organization's leader represents a “cult of personality” and therefore the tactical action of capturing or killing the leader will have a definite strategic impact.⁵ She does recognize, however, that “important tactical benefits have been achieved” when pursuing a methodology of decapitation where a cult of personality may not exist.⁶ This recognition of the utility of decapitation at the tactical and operational levels suggests it may contribute to the strategic success of other initiatives against terrorist groups. Decapitation may not be *the* solution but the pressure it provides against terrorist group leaders and facilitators may be operationally and strategically significant. In summary, decapitation may represent necessary but

⁴ Cronin, Audrey Kurth. *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011. p16.

⁵ Cronin, Audrey Kurth. *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011. p14.

⁶ Cronin, Audrey Kurth. *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011. p194.

ultimately insufficient action to put a mature violent extremist network on a pathway towards an end acceptable to U.S. strategy and policy.

Cronin's work does not account for the unique capabilities of RPAs, however RPAs are well-suited for the intelligence collection and precision required for leadership decapitation. Cronin advocates for leadership decapitation early in a violent extremist group's development when removing a critical leader is likely to have the greatest effect. While Cronin recognizes some of the tactical benefits of decapitation, she does not explore the cumulative benefits of removing key leaders throughout an organization, especially in mature networks. RPAs represent new technologies and Cronin's assessment is based on historical examples in which RPAs were unavailable. As this chapter argues, decapitation can serve to expedite an acceptable end when combined with other relevant pathways such as repression and failure.

Cronin argues that repression—through overwhelming, brute force—has historically been an effective pathway to cause terrorism to end. She does not believe it is a viable option, however, because the United States does not have the political will to employ such brute force. According to Cronin's definition, repression is the use of overwhelming brute force in a relatively short period of time to stamp out terrorism.⁷ This definition of repression, however, is too narrow. It may be possible to repress and degrade an organization by applying selective force—as opposed to brute force—over a longer period of time. Such a selective use of force would take advantage of cumulative effects of an airpower strategy discussed in the next section.

⁷ Cronin, Audrey Kurth. *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Selective use of force using the unique capabilities of RPAs offers a wider range of options for repression than previously existed. By re-examining Cronin's idea of repression, RPAs offer another acceptable avenue to cause extremist groups to end. While repression is normally thought to require a large ground force or sustained heavy aerial bombing, RPAs can repress violent extremist networks using limited force at low cost and nominal risk to U.S. forces. The cost, risk, and use of force translate into the ability of the U.S. to conduct sustained strikes and maintain domestic political will to use force.

The selective use of force, in a targeted and precise way to decapitate and degrade terrorist organizations, can be termed *selective repression*. This term differs from Cronin's definition of repression as the application of overwhelming force. Selective repression is applied over time to deny an organization's imminent actions, reduce their material capabilities, and simultaneously target key leaders to disrupt operational and strategic planning initiatives. Such repression supports a long-term airpower strategy based upon cumulative actions. Selective repression can also be considered a viable way for terrorism to end, given enough time and patience, through the failure of violent extremist networks to achieve their goals.

Finally, Cronin argues that failure occurs by reducing both active and passive popular support for a violent extremist organization. Failure is pathway almost all state leaders see as acceptable and desirable for terrorism to end. Cronin defines failure as when a group ceases to use terror tactics because it implodes, loses popular support, provokes a widespread backlash, or simply burns out.⁸ Arguably, failure is the desired

⁸ Cronin, Audrey Kurth. *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011. p11.

outcome of a sustained campaign that combines U.S. selective repression with the indirect approaches by partner nations against local threats. The case study of Somalia, in Chapter 5, suggests one model for the use of selective repression in this way.

To summarize, the pathways for terrorism to end on favorable terms for states are based on either the judicious or overwhelming use of force. Force is applied using a variety of means and RPAs constitute a means of strategy that bridge or modify some of Cronin's pathways. As a means of airpower, RPAs can be used in a variety of ways. The next section surveys the airpower strategies most relevant to the U.S. use of RPAs against violent extremist networks.

Airpower Strategies

Airpower can support a multitude of strategies or operations for a desired political ends. The various strategies airpower supports also provide a range of possible options to the policymaker. According to Colin Gray, the range of airpower strategy options can be summarized as a series of pairs. These pairs include: direct or indirect, sequential or cumulative, attritional or maneuverist-annihilating, persisting or raiding, coercive or brute force, offensive or defensive, symmetrical or asymmetrical, or a complex combination of them.⁹ These airpower strategies represent a wide range of potential options to achieve strategic gains. They also frame the potential ways that RPAs can be used against violent extremist networks outside of designated combat areas. Not all airpower strategies, however, apply against violent extremist networks.

⁹ Gray, Colin S., Air University Press, and Benjamin S. Lambeth. *Airpower for Strategic Effect*. Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.: Military Bookshop, 2012.

Considering the relevant counterterrorism strategy and policy discussed in Chapter 2, and the pathways through which terrorism ends, several of the airpower strategies outlined by Colin Gray are not viable options for U.S. policy makers. For example, President Obama's "U.S. Policy Standards and Procedures for the Use of Force in Counterterrorism Operations Outside of the United States and Areas of Active Hostilities" specifically prohibits a punishment strategy with respect to terrorist activities.¹⁰ The 2015 NSS conveys preference for offensive action against violent extremism and essentially eliminates a conventional persistent or annihilation-maneuvering strategy: "we shifted away from a model of fighting costly, large-scale ground wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in which the United States—particularly our military—bore an enormous burden."¹¹ Several of the airpower strategies discussed below are useful and necessary but play a purely supporting role for broader initiatives to achieve stated U.S. strategic objectives.

Based on current U.S. policy and strategy, the potential relevant airpower strategies related to RPAs against violent extremist networks are: direct, cumulative, attritional, raiding, coercive, offensive, and asymmetrical. A brief summary of each follows.

Direct

¹⁰ "Fact Sheet: U.S. Policy Standards and Procedures for the Use of Force in Counterterrorism Operations Outside of the United States and Areas of Active Hostilities." *The White House, Office of the Press Secretary*, 23 May 2013.

¹¹ "National Security Strategy 2015." *National Security Strategy Archive*. Accessed February 7, 2015, p9. http://nssarchive.us/?page_id=8.

Military practitioners and theorists agree that the fight against violent extremism will not be a short conflict and that a combination of direct and indirect strategies will likely be the key to success in the long-term. In a statement to the Senate Armed Services Committee on the future of Special Operations Forces in March of 2008, Admiral Eric T. Olsen, then commander for USSOCOM, outlined the strategy to deter, disrupt, and defeat global violent extremist networks to be successful in the long-war.¹² He highlighted the need and importance to pursue two vital and symbiotic approaches: direct and indirect.¹³ In the current fight, airpower can engage the enemy directly while supporting partner efforts and broader indirect methods.

The direct and indirect approaches can and should be mutually supportive. In this case, the direct approach refers to the immediate need to pursue extremist organizations, their resources, and their infrastructure where they operate and seek safehaven. Alternatively, the indirect approach characterizes operations geared towards the underlying causes of extremist ideologies and the environments in which extremist groups operate. In IW, the direct approach establishes security and sets conditions through U.S. action while the indirect approach places emphasis on the need to leverage partner nation capacity and work by, with, and through selected nations to achieve success. In the fight against violent extremism, airpower provides myriad capabilities that are uniquely suited to engage the enemy directly.

¹² Statement of Admiral Eric T. Olsen, United States Navy, Commander, United States Special Operations Command, before the Senate Armed Services Committee on the Posture of Special Operations, March 4, 2008, (Washington DC: Released by the Senate Armed Services Committee, March 2008), 2.

¹³ Statement of Admiral Eric T. Olsen, United States Navy, Commander, United States Special Operations Command, before the Senate Armed Services Committee on the Posture of Special Operations, March 4, 2008, (Washington DC: Released by the Senate Armed Services Committee, March 2008), 5.

The direct approach is a strategy where one actor seeks to engage the enemy in decisive battle to destroy or degrade the enemy's capability to wage war. In many ways, this type of strategy is appealing as it offers the allure of a shorter conflict with potentially decisive results. The principle of war of "concentration of force" as well as Carl von Clausewitz's concept of decisiveness against the enemy's "center of gravity" epitomizes the direct approach.¹⁴ To Clausewitz, the center of gravity is the point upon which the entire conflict hinges and where overwhelming force should be brought to bear for victory.¹⁵ Clausewitz states that, "the main concern of the commanders-in-chief must be to seek the necessary major battle and fight it with such superiority of numbers, and under such conditions, as will promise decisive victory."¹⁶ In a conventional conflict, the United States enjoys unsurpassed capabilities to engage with the enemy.

The character of the current conflict against violent extremism suggests terrorists avoid almost any type of decisive direct engagement. Violent extremist networks by their very nature are structured clandestinely to prevent a decisive loss. Instead, extremist networks rely upon dispersal and blending with the local populace to avoid the inherent risk and increased vulnerability of direct engagements.¹⁷ As a result, violent extremists will avoid direct confrontation unless they have near certain advantage. The ability to conduct harassing attacks, such as terrorism, and then fade back into the local populace is the norm in IW. Mao recognized that attacks of this nature can consume security forces

¹⁴ Jomini states that the greatest possible effect should be brought to bear at an enemy's decisive point and Mahan states that a great fleet depends upon concentration. Jomini, Antoine-Henri. *The Art of War*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2007, p104. and Mahan, A. T. *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660 - 1783*. 5th ed. 1894. Reprint, Mineola, NY: Dover, 1987. p540.

¹⁵ Clausewitz, Carl von. *On War*. Trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989, p597.

¹⁶ Clausewitz, Carl von. *On War*. Princeton University Press, 1989, p635.

¹⁷ For a detailed discussion, see James Kiras, "Irregular Warfare," in in David Jordan, James Kiras, et al. *Understanding Modern Warfare* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 224-291.

twenty-four hours a day and “worry it to death.”¹⁸ Oftentimes, the mere presence of friendly forces afford violent extremists the ability to prosecute these type of attacks.¹⁹ Airpower denies the enemy the opportunity to conduct such attacks.

Airpower provides the ability to engage the enemy directly, even when the enemy seeks to avoid direct confrontation. Precision engagement supported by accurate intelligence also provides the U.S. options to degrade and destroy capabilities and capacities of distributed networks in support of broader efforts. A direct approach can help establish favorable conditions on the ground and deny violent extremist networks the strategic advantage of exploiting ground forces. This approach allows the United States to apply direct methodologies if and when the opportunity arises while avoiding strategic opportunity for the enemy. It is the combination of direct and indirect methods that will likely result in more significant strategic gains over the long-term.

Utilizing direct and indirect approaches is dependent on the United States’ ability to gain access and placement to influence violent extremist networks. RPAs provide additional options to engage the enemy directly and indirectly. These options increase choices for decision makers and include everything from intelligence collection to strike capabilities. While RPAs can be effective in supporting indirect approaches in a variety of ways such as providing intelligence or supplementing host nation operational capabilities, it is the unique capability of RPAs to directly engage the enemy in an IW conflict with low relative collateral damage that provides a potential advantage.

¹⁸ Mao Tse-tung. "On Protracted War." *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. II, Foreign Languages Press: Peking, 1967, p120.

¹⁹ A central argument of Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005).

Cumulative

A cumulative strategy employs a type of warfare, “in which the entire pattern is made up of a collection of lesser actions, but these lesser or individual actions are not sequentially interdependent.”²⁰ With this type of warfare, progress is less discernable until the sum of actions at some point is sufficient to be overwhelming. In this regard, a cumulative strategy is much akin to IW principles where you attrit and exhaust your enemy, through multiple actions and ambushes, until they no longer have the means or the will to continue to fight. There is no single action identified that is critical to the overall effort. Instead, the strategy considers the totality of multiple efforts to accumulate and exhaust an enemy. For this reason, cumulative strategies require time and patience, and are seemingly less decisive as day to day operations occur. These strategies may also have more chance of success when fewer troops are put into harm’s way and continued actions can stand the scrutiny of potential political pressure. RPAs provide the ability to act over a longer period and achieve combined effects. For example, a cumulative strategy of leadership decapitation and force or material attrition could have a significant impact to a network or organization over time.

Attritional

An attritional strategy seeks to exhaust an enemy’s physical and morale strength to eventually eliminate his capability and/or will to continue. In this regard, attrition is an offensive cumulative effort of multiple interdependent and simultaneous initiatives designed to overwhelm an enemy’s means and will to resist. Unfortunately, attritional

²⁰ Wylie, Rear Adm J. C. USN. *Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power Control*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1989, p23.

strategies are immediately associated with the senseless character of trench warfare in WWI when the inflexibility of thought caused the needless deaths of hundreds of thousands of soldiers on both sides. This example does not reflect an accurate characterization of an attrition strategy as this type of strategy is not merely a battle of available resources. It does highlight the fact that strategists need to consider the risk and potential damages to friendly forces, however, prior to adopting a strategy of attrition.

An attrition strategy allows for a variety of offensive options that can be used at a time and place where they will have the greatest effect. As stated above, these efforts will have the most effect if they occur simultaneously. To be effective, simultaneity requires multiple lines of effort to counter an enemy's strategy, exhaust physical strength, and eliminate his will to continue. In the fight against violent extremism, this effort could mean reduction of sanctuary through training local police and military forces, collecting of actionable intelligence with focused ISR, elimination of equipment and key leadership through precision engagement, and the establishment of education and strategic messaging to counter-extremist ideologies. These actions set conditions for change to occur and airpower can play a direct or supporting role in several of these initiatives. This type of strategy can be effective in an irregular warfare conflict where the struggle is not against an easily identified enemy with regular fielded forces

Raiding

A raiding strategy is one where force is employed to effect a near-term gain by using, "short, sharp raids of modest scale and immediate purpose..."²¹ This use of force

²¹ Gray, Colin S. *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice*. Oxford ; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011, p68.

tends to be a much more palatable strategy assuming that raiding operations will work towards achieving the desired strategic ends. RPAs perform a type of raiding strategy by collecting intelligence and then striking to achieve immediate purpose. A downside to this strategy is the short timeline available to achieve strategic effect. Raiding operations are by definition short and modest. Alternatively, a persisting strategy is one where friendly forces apply relentless pressure until the enemy is no longer capable or willing to fight.²² A characteristic of this type of strategy is to seize and hold territory and to be prepared for an enduring engagement.

RPAs should change the way we think about persistence and raiding strategies as defined by Colin Gray. RPAs are able to reap the benefits of constant presence and intelligence without the previously associated drawbacks of a persistence strategy. If the U.S. were able to maintain the capability to conduct operations or “raids” over a longer period of time through airpower, a combination of the two strategies may help alleviate the identified downside of the raiding strategy while preventing the unpalatable timetable and cost of a persistence strategy. Thus, if persistence is conceived in terms of time as opposed to physical presence, a *persistent raiding* strategy may bear the strategic effects desired while avoiding the cost and risk of an enduring presence. In this case, airpower is uniquely suited for a strategy of this kind. Likewise, RPAs can provide both persistence in terms of time and presence and accomplish precise raiding operations without the force presence required by other means.

Coercive

²² Gray, Colin S. *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice*. Oxford ; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Coercive strategies support the broader strategic goal of political change. This type of strategy is aimed at preventing a future action or stopping an existing action. It is important to consider under what conditions a coercive air strategy could be effective against an extremist network. According to Robert Pape, there are four main categories of coercive air strategies that include punishment, risk, denial, and decapitation.²³ These categories cover a range of options that can be applied towards a nation or organization in order to effect change. It is clear to see, however, that these strategies could have different effects based on whether they are applied towards a nation or an extremist group. As an example, it may be difficult, if not impossible, to conduct an effective punishment campaign against extremists as they generally have little regard for the local populace and may see less discriminate violence as advantageous to their cause. U.S. stated policy specifically proscribes a punishment strategy against extremist networks for operations outside of designated combat areas. This leaves risk, denial, and decapitation.

A risk strategy is primarily based upon the threat of violence if a communicated condition is not met. The concept of manipulating risk to achieve political ends is largely identified with Thomas Schelling's book *Arms and Influence*, in which he argues violence is raised in a controlled manner until the enemy concedes.²⁴ Most often, this strategy is associated with the gradual application of violence until the potential losses to the enemy cause sufficient pain that outweighs the political benefit of continuing the conflict.

A risk strategy may be less effective against violent extremists as they have little that could be held effectively at risk. Essentially, the power to destroy may not result in

²³ Pape, Robert A. *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War*. Cornell University Press, 1996, p58.

²⁴ Schelling, Thomas C, *Arms and Influence*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.

the desired behavior, especially in a religiously-motivated struggle. There are also inherent difficulties in executing a risk strategy such as ensuring that the communications or message sent is the message received. During Vietnam, the U.S. pursued a risk strategy against the North Vietnamese by gradually increasing the bombing to demonstrate capability and resolve. The graduated "Rolling Thunder" air campaign, however, communicated to the Viet Cong that the U.S. cared less about winning in Vietnam than potentially widening the conflict.²⁵ Rolling Thunder in Vietnam is but one example that demonstrates how easily a message conveyed through bombing or a cessation of bombing can be misinterpreted by the enemy.²⁶ Additionally, a risk strategy is inherently a controlled strategy of punishment and therefore not a viable option for use in areas outside of combat zones.

A denial strategy is aimed at weakening an enemy's forces by attacking them directly or attacking the resources upon which they depend so that they can no longer achieve their aims. Robert Pape posits that there are three main denial strategies for air power that include interdicting the main sources of military production, attacking rear-area support operations to include tactical supply networks, and using air power directly on the battlefield against fielded forces.²⁷ Within the context of fighting violent extremist networks and their inherently distributed nature, it may be difficult to identify and target the specific resources upon which extremists depend. If specific resources required for sustainment can be identified, however, targeting these resources would contribute to

²⁵ Clodfelter, Mark. *Limits of Air Power*. Simon and Schuster, 1989, p67.

²⁶ Clodfelter, Mark. *Limits of Air Power*. Simon and Schuster, 1989, p59.

²⁷ Pape, Robert A. *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War*. Cornell University Press, 1996, p72.

reducing the enemy's capability and support efforts for long-term success.²⁸

Alternatively, the denial strategy of attacking the enemy's supply networks may prove difficult as these networks are most likely the same networks that the local populace uses to distribute goods and services among the population. Finally, a campaign focused on destroying enemy forces and capabilities may weaken extremist networks enough to allow for the local government to fight back unilaterally or with U.S. support.

In terms of a coercive denial strategy against violent extremism, targeting the enemy directly should have the greatest effect. Pape states that, "in guerilla warfare, when meaningful counterconcentration does not occur and when logistic requirements are miniscule, air power is most effectively used directly against guerillas rather than against their combat support functions."²⁹ He further posits that air power's effectiveness is limited by the difficulty of identifying friend or foe and can potentially be offset by increased loiter times. The use of RPAs addresses both of the difficulties of identifying enemy forces from the air and the increased loiter time required to gain better intelligence and fidelity. As a coercive strategy executed from the air, a denial strategy aimed at the enemy's forces may be uniquely suited to RPAs.

The final coercive air strategy is decapitation. An airpower decapitation strategy is targeted at the enemy's leadership and command structure to gain advantage and ultimately achieve a desired outcome by reducing the enemy's capabilities utilizing one or a number of specific lines of effort. This decapitation strategy is slightly broader than Cronin's idea of decapitation as a pathway to bring violent extremism to an end. In this

²⁸ Better control of the legal uses of ammonium nitrate (fertilizer) combined with the destruction of stockpiles of illegal ammonium nitrate (used to make home-made explosives – HME) reduced the capacity of the Taliban to make improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Afghanistan.

²⁹ Pape, Robert A. *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War*. Cornell University Press, 1996, p79.

case, decapitation is pursued by targeting specific leaders in addition to targeting political control by setting conditions where domestic opposition groups can succeed or by targeting military command and communication to isolate military leaders from units in the field.³⁰ Airpower decapitation strategies are focused on a nation's political and military leadership that command and control an enemy's actions during war. Because violent extremist networks do not have the same political and military structures that a nation does, it may be difficult to pursue these specific decapitation strategies as outlined above.

In an irregular warfare campaign, targeting leadership, setting conditions for other domestic groups to take control, and targeting command and control capabilities can still be effective strategies to pursue against a distributed network. While violent extremist networks are inherently distributed, there are still personnel who hold key leadership positions or have specialized knowledge that are valuable to the overall organization. These individuals, if removed from the network, will have an immediate and long-term negative effect to the overall network as opposed to solely targeting fielded forces. Likewise, targeting a group's mechanisms for maintaining internal control can also be effective. Often with violent extremist networks, targeting mechanisms for control translates to disrupting communications or removing the personnel with the responsibility to judge and administer punishments, extort money, or redistribute resources. Severing communications in a distributed network without destroying the entire communications network is problematic, however, because extremists communicate over existing public networks and do not have a centralized or hierarchical architecture. Thus, a decapitation

³⁰ Pape, Robert A. *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War*. Cornell University Press, 1996, p80.

strategy aimed at key leadership or expertise, or personnel who are providing key functions within the group has a good chance of yielding positive results.

Offensive

The idea of an offensive strategy is one in which the struggle occurs away from areas of importance or vulnerability to the initiator and happens at the time and place of their choosing. An offensive strategy embodies the idea of taking the fight to the enemy. The word “offensive” is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as, “an organized and forceful campaign to achieve something, typically a political or social end.”³¹ In this regard, offensive strategies have some inherent positive characteristics that make them desirable under certain conditions. An offensive strategy allows the first mover to initially control the pace and area of the conflict by seizing the initiative and attacking under favorable or desirable conditions. This advantage can catch an enemy off-guard or ill-prepared for confrontation and has the added benefit of allowing concentration of the attacking force at an enemy’s weak point. With respect to violent extremism, the United States has undertaken both an offensive and defensive strategy. The purpose of the offensive strategy is to apply pressure overseas where violent extremist networks exist. The defensive strategy is to prevent attacks against the United States or its allies. Nested within an offensive framework, air power, and particularly RPAs, play an extremely important role in allowing the United States to reach violent extremist organizations.

³¹ “Offensive.” Oxforddictionaries.com, Available at: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/offensive?searchDictCode=all (accessed, 24 Feb 2015).

Asymmetrical

An asymmetrical strategy is unique in the respect that it is dependent on how similar or dissimilar one anticipates being to the type of strategy used by their adversary.³² However, it has also come to imply how far one is from employing conventional military forces. Thus, Desert Storm may be seen as an example of the United States fighting a war symmetrically because it was a conventional conflict where both participants utilized “regular” warfare techniques. In war, there are no belligerents that would purposefully seek complete symmetry of capability with their enemy, which would negate any advantage one might exploit relative to their opponent. For this reason, belligerents seek asymmetry to gain advantage. Asymmetry is, “having parts which fail to correspond to one another in shape, size, or arrangement; lacking symmetry.”³³ These differences are what provides unique advantages during conflict, and can also provide unique advantages in terms of strategy. The United States enjoys asymmetric advantages in areas of communications, intelligence, and technology and should continue to leverage and take advantage of them in the fight against violent extremism.

Relevant Airpower Strategies

Based on the cursory examination of the potential airpower strategies, it is clear that desired ends, current policies, and the character of the conflict serve to limit strategic airpower choices in terms of ways and means. As a result, the relevant airpower

³² Gray, Colin S. *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice*. Oxford ; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011, p70.

³³ “Asymmetrical.” Oxforddictionaries.com, Available at: http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/asymmetrical?searchDictCode=all (accessed, 24 Feb 2015).

strategies that could be applied against violent extremist networks are direct, cumulative, persistent-raiding, coercive, offensive, and asymmetrical. These airpower strategies simply represent the potential ways in which to use airpower to confront and combat violent extremism. As counterterrorism operations are inherently complex, any number or combination of methods may be applied. States, as well as violent extremist organizations, choose methods of action based on the expected utility and assessed effectiveness of those methods.

By utilizing the relevant airpower strategies, RPAs can expedite acceptable ends to extremist groups by supporting host nations and applying selective repression. RPAs allow for the unique combination of several of the aforementioned airpower strategies to achieve cumulative effects while denying the enemy the strategic narrative of having a large number of Western forces on the ground. Thus, the combined use of relevant airpower strategies over time will yield the greatest effect. With consent and cooperation from partner nations, U.S. forces can build partner capacity through Foreign Internal Defense and security assistance and provide RPA capabilities for governments to operate on their own. These capabilities increase the perceived legitimacy of a partner nation and improve their ability to provide security, which is one of the areas that terrorists try to exploit. This strategy also allows the United States to have the persistence that is required to set conditions so that local initiatives can be successful. Providing expertise, intelligence, and RPA capabilities to partner nations increases the combined effects against violent extremist networks and expedites movements towards an acceptable ends. The cumulative effects of the relevant airpower strategies supporting selective repression, may cause violent extremist groups to end.

Criteria for Evaluation

Divining criteria for evaluation of airpower strategies are important because they will determine whether or not specific ways and means applied are *effective* at working towards an acceptable end. One must also consider criteria that are relevant to the means and ways applied. For example, the United States may have little influence on the core ideology and the justification of violence used by terrorist organizations through the employment of all instruments of national power. Consequently, airpower would have even less ability to influence ideology than perhaps other methods employed by the Department of State, allies, or partner nations. As a result, the criteria selected must be applicable to the ways and means applied. Criteria should consider what airpower can do with respect to combating violent extremism

Relevant airpower initiatives should support this general framework and be nested within the broader counterterrorism strategy as described in Chapter 2. As such, the criteria used to evaluate positive or negative strategic effects of airpower, specifically RPAs, in this thesis are based on the preference to reduce threats to the United States by focusing on the counterterrorism goals as outlined in the National Strategy for Counterterrorism (NSCT). To assist the reader and the evaluation, the author removed those goals in the NSCT in which airpower could have little effect. The remaining criteria, in which airpower can play a role, are:

- Disrupting, degrading, dismantling and defeating [VENs] wherever it takes root.
- Eliminating the safehavens [VENs] need to train, plot and launch attacks.
- Degrade links between [VENs] adherents and affiliates.

These evaluation criteria must be understood in their specific case study contexts and connect with the preceding discussion of RPAs, selective repression, and airpower strategies. The next three chapters assess RPA operations outside of designated combat zones in Yemen, Somalia, and the FATA according to these evaluation criteria to determine whether operations are contributing to positive strategic effects against violent extremist networks.



CHAPTER 4

The Use of Remotely Piloted Aircraft in Yemen

On 3 November 2002, the United States conducted its first strike outside of a designated combat zone using a remotely piloted aircraft (RPA). The strike targeted Qaed Salim Sunian al-Harithi, al-Qaeda's chief operative in Yemen and the leader responsible for the bombing of the USS Cole.¹ In addition to al-Harithi, the strike killed five other al-Qaeda militants: an al-Qaeda operative named Kamal Derwish and four associates who also belonged to the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army.²³ Derwish, also known as Abu Ahmad al-Hijazi, was a U.S. citizen and the lead recruiter of a terrorist cell in Buffalo, New York broken up by authorities.⁴ According to news releases associated with the operation in Yemen, there were no civilian casualties during the strike.⁵

The strike against al-Harithi set more than one precedent in the war against violent extremism. The United States accomplished, with accurate and timely intelligence and the use of an armed RPA, what the Yemeni government had previously attempted to do several times during ground operations and failed. One failure resulted

¹ "Drone Wars Yemen: Analysis." Accessed March 22, 2015.

<http://securitydata.newamerica.net/drones/yemen/analysis.html>.

² The USS Cole was attacked on 12 October 2000 causing 56 casualties as well as damage to the ship.

"Drone Wars Yemen: Analysis." Accessed March 22, 2015.

<http://securitydata.newamerica.net/drones/yemen/analysis.html>.

³ "Yemen: Reported US Covert Actions 2001-2011." The Bureau of Investigative Journalism.

<http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2012/03/29/yemen-reported-us-covert-actions-since-2001/> (19 Mar 15)

⁴ "Yemen: Reported US Covert Actions 2001-2011." The Bureau of Investigative Journalism.

<http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2012/03/29/yemen-reported-us-covert-actions-since-2001/> (19 Mar 15)

⁵ Associated Press News Release: http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2002-11-04-yemen-explosion_x.htm; Public Broadcasting Service:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/sleeper/inside/derwish.html> Post:

<http://tech.mit.edu/V122/N54/long4-54.54w.html>

in the death of 18 Yemeni security force personnel.⁶ The strike also marked a departure from using armed RPAs in a designated combat zone such as Afghanistan. The action reflected the need for the Bush Administration to respond forcefully to the threat of international terrorism.

In particular, the strike against al-Harithi tested the broad legal authority to use military force. The entire operation simultaneously signified a shift in United States policy to move towards “anticipatory self-defense” in order to kill or capture known terrorists who posed an imminent threat to the United States or U.S. citizens.⁷ Finally, the strike was important for the precedent it set; a U.S. citizen who was a known al-Qaeda associate was killed. The fact that an American was killed in an RPA strike did not sit well with everyone. National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, for example, responded to concerns a week after the strike by saying, “I can assure you that no constitutional questions are raised here.”⁸ While the specific details about the killing of Derwish were not discussed or publicly known at the time, U.S. intelligence agencies considered the strike a tactical success as it eliminated a known terrorist threat.

Background to the Use of RPAs in Yemen

In late November of 2001, Yemen’s counterterrorism efforts began in earnest when President Ali Abdullah Saleh signed a cooperation agreement with the United

⁶ “Yemen: Reported US Covert Actions 2001-2011.” The Bureau of Investigative Journalism. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2012/03/29/yemen-reported-us-covert-actions-since-2001/> (19 Mar 15)

⁷ Dolan, Chris J., and Betty Glad. *Striking First: The Preventive War Doctrine and the Reshaping of U.S. Foreign Policy*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

⁸ “Transcript: Condoleezza Rice on Fox News Sunday.” Text. Article. *FoxNews.com*, November 11, 2002. <http://www.foxnews.com/story/2002/11/11/transcript-condoleezza-rice-on-fox-news-sunday>.

States for counterterrorism assistance.⁹ The \$400-million-dollar assistance package included U.S. Special Forces personnel on the ground that would train Yemen's Republican Guard to disrupt, degrade and defeat al-Qaeda forces and prevent them from establishing a safehaven in Yemen. The deal provided helicopters, signals intelligence equipment, and anti-terrorism training. The package also authorized the U.S. to fly armed Predators over Yemen in support of counterterrorism operations.¹⁰

While the U.S. assisted Yemen with the full cooperation of its government, President Saleh wished to be discrete about U.S. activities for domestic reasons.¹¹ The U.S. and Yemen had allegedly agreed that any counterterrorism actions would be credited to Yemen's security forces or explained in other ways besides direct U.S. involvement.¹² This arrangement highlights the close working relationship often required to conduct operations within a sovereign nation. Any operation requires the full consent and cooperation of the nation in which the action takes place or could be considered an act of war. In this case, cooperation and partnership allows counterterrorism operations to occur directly or indirectly within the host nation. Without cooperation, the United States loses what the military often terms "freedom of action," meaning the ability to conduct or influence those activities necessary to develop or perform operations in support of established security objectives. Thus, the methodology of working by, with, and through

⁹ "Yemen: Reported US Covert Actions 2001-2011." The Bureau of Investigative Journalism. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2012/03/29/yemen-reported-us-covert-actions-since-2001/> (19 Mar 15)

¹⁰ Scahill, Jeremy. "The Dangerous US Game in Yemen." *The Nation*, March 30, 2011. <http://www.thenation.com/article/159578/dangerous-us-game-yemen?page=0,1>.

¹¹ Scahill, Jeremy. "The Dangerous US Game in Yemen." *The Nation*, March 30, 2011. <http://www.thenation.com/article/159578/dangerous-us-game-yemen?page=0,1>.

¹² Mazzetti, Mark. *The Way of the Knife: The CIA, a Secret Army, and a War at the Ends of the Earth*. Penguin, 2013. p87.

partner nations became a critical aspect to a campaign plan designed to confront international violent extremist networks abroad.

On 5 November 2002, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz essentially confirmed that the death of al-Harithi and the five other al-Qaeda associates was largely the work of the United States. President Saleh was reportedly upset about the disclosure and concerned about potential political backlash in Yemen.¹³ When working with countries that prefer to be discrete about their full relationship with the United States, future operations and freedom of action may depend on the United States' ability to honor those requests. During the Aspen Institute's Security Forum in 2011, United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) Commander Admiral Erik T. Olsen responded to questions regarding the secrecy of specific operations in the following way: "Our access [to foreign countries] depends on our ability to not talk about it."¹⁴ Olsen's response highlights the importance and need to establish mutual relationships with partner nations that rely on cooperation and trust, and that the United States can and will respect the wishes of those countries. Without the ability to operate in this manner, the United States jeopardizes achieving broad national security objectives discussed in Chapter 2.

The media disclosure of U.S. action may have limited the type of U.S. involvement in counterterrorism operations in Yemen. However, the United States remained engaged in counterterrorism efforts in Yemen even if RPAs operations were

¹³ Scahill, Jeremy. *Dirty Wars: The World Is a Battlefield*. Reprint edition. Nation Books, 2014. p77. and Mazzetti, Mark. *The Way of the Knife: The CIA, a Secret Army, and a War at the Ends of the Earth*. Penguin, 2013. p100.

¹⁴ "ASF 2011 and the McCloskey Speaker Series: Featuring Admiral Eric Olson," The Aspen Institute Security Forum 2011. Available at: <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/video/admiral-eric-olson-aspen-security-forum>, accessed 21 March 2015.

limited. Ultimately, U.S. intelligence agencies deemed the strike a tactical success. The use of RPAs allowed real-time intelligence collection, contributed to positively identifying the target, and successfully eliminated the threat. The success of the operation also expanded potential U.S. options in dealing with terrorism in nations not designated as combat zones. With their small operational footprint compared to other military activities, RPA operations could be considered partnering to bolster a nation's overall counterterrorism efforts. In this case, President Saleh eventually welcomed other forms of assistance from the United States and began to take concerted internal actions to confront violent extremist networks. The 2002 strike represented one type of counterterrorism tactic. The proven success of the tactic increased viable options to fight international terrorism outside of designated combat areas and may have influenced the policy of the United States in terms of the preferred ways to achieve counterterrorism objectives. In Yemen, however, the United States did not conduct another strike until December of 2009.¹⁵

In a speech at West Point in 2002, President George W. Bush reiterated the United States' new policy in fighting terrorism foreshadowed by the Yemen strike. He stated, "Our security will require transforming the military you will lead—a military that must be ready to strike at a moment's notice in any dark corner of the world. And our security will require all Americans to be forward-looking and resolute, to be ready for preemptive action when necessary to defend our liberty and defend our lives."¹⁶ Bush's

¹⁵ "Drone Wars Yemen: Analysis." Accessed March 22, 2015.
<http://securitydata.newamerica.net/drones/yemen/analysis.html>.

¹⁶ President George W. Bush's Speech to the Graduating Class of the United States Military Academy at West Point, 2002. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html>, Accessed 22 March 2015.

statement clearly communicates the direct, offensive “anticipatory self-defense” mindset within the Bush Administration to address violent extremism.

Despite the absence of U.S.-led strikes in Yemen between 2002 and 2009, the United States remained active in assisting the Yemeni government with their counterterrorism efforts through indirect action to include funding, training, and intelligence. The United States saw these efforts as successful.¹⁷ Through assistance and partnership, Yemen’s President Saleh degraded al-Qaeda’s capability, disrupted plots, and reduced safehavens.¹⁸ Yemen’s security forces were able to capture several key individuals who were important to al-Qaeda’s operations in Yemen and abroad. These combined operations highlight the importance of partnering with nations affected by violent extremist networks. From 2002 through 2006, al-Qaeda’s ability to plan and conduct attacks focused on Western targets was practically non-existent. Al-Qaeda’s lack of capability lends credence to the strategic effectiveness of selective repression through limited direct action in conjunction with indirect support through funding, training, and intelligence. Yemen’s success in counterterrorism operations, however, reduced the immediate need for the U.S. to continue to assist Yemen. As a result, the United States shifted priorities to other nations where al-Qaeda remained strong, and to operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Ultimately, the United States reduced Yemen’s financial aid and monetary support.

¹⁷ “Losing Yemen?,” Foreign Policy, 5 November 2012, available at: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/11/05/losing_yemen?print=yes&hidecomments=yes&page=full

¹⁸ “Yemen: Reported US Covert Actions 2001-2011.” The Bureau of Investigative Journalism. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2012/03/29/yemen-reported-us-covert-actions-since-2001/> (19 Mar 15)

President Saleh's cooperation and successful counterterrorism actions were partly a result of the assistance and aid Yemen received. However, two factors served to reduce the amount of aid flowing into Yemen. The first was President Saleh's success with Yemen's internal counterterrorism operations and the corresponding reduction of the al Qaeda threat. Success drove a shift in U.S. priorities in Yemen from counterterrorism to political reform. The slow pace of political reform led the State Department to cut \$20 million dollars in economic aid to the Yemeni government.¹⁹ The second factor was the widespread perception of corruption within Yemen's political establishment. Concerns over rampant corruption in Yemen, for example, led the leaders of the World Bank to reduce aid from \$420 million to \$280 million dollars in late 2005.²⁰ Arguably, the reduction in aid from various sources limited Yemen's ability to sustain effective counterterrorism operations and its security situation began to decline. The decline suggests that focused direct pressure from internal or external sources combined with indirect methodologies can have a positive effect if they are maintained over an adequate period of time.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) as we now understand it was formed in 2006. That year, there was a prison break at a maximum security prison outside of Sanaa where 23 convicted al-Qaeda operatives escaped. The event has been described as a "genesis moment" for AQAP by Gregory D. Johnsen, an analyst at Princeton University and a former Fulbright fellow in Yemen. He also stated that, "al-Qaeda had

¹⁹ "Yemen: Reported US Covert Actions 2001-2011." The Bureau of Investigative Journalism. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2012/03/29/yemen-reported-us-covert-actions-since-2001/> (19 Mar 15)

²⁰ "Yemen: Reported US Covert Actions 2001-2011." The Bureau of Investigative Journalism. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2012/03/29/yemen-reported-us-covert-actions-since-2001/> (19 Mar 15)

been basically defeated before [2006],” and, “this was when the organization got its start.”²¹ The core leadership cadre of AQAP was among the escapees in the February 2006 prison break.²² Al-Qaeda began to regroup, established a presence in Marib province, and started conducting attacks.

AQAP primarily attacked soft “Western” targets and initially conducted attacks against the tourist industry. They attacked a group of Spanish tourists in 2007 that killed eight, a group of Belgian tourists in 2008 that killed two, and a group of Korean tourists in 2009 that killed four.²³ In 2009 AQAP also claimed responsibility for the failed Christmas Day “underwear bombing” attempt on Northwest Airlines Flight 253 and the failed printer bomb in October of 2010.²⁴ Al-Qaeda also attempted to attack the U.S. Embassy in Sanaa with mortars in March of 2008, and then again in September of 2008 by utilizing a complex methodology of suicide bombers supported by other militants with small arms and rocket-propelled-grenades.²⁵ In late 2008, Anwar Al-Awlaki was also known to have been in sporadic communication with Major Nidal Hasan, who would later commit the Fort Hood Massacre that took place on 5 November 2009.²⁶

While the situation in Yemen was getting worse, the actions of Al-Qaeda in Yemen did not rise to the level to warrant additional attention and resources in 2007 and

²¹ “A History of Prison Breaks in Yemen.” *Foreign Policy*. Accessed March 23, 2015. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/06/22/a-history-of-prison-breaks-in-yemen/>.

²² “Counterterrorism Guide: Al-Qa’ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP),” National Counterterrorism Center, available at: <http://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/aqap.html>, accessed on 22 March 2015.

²³ “Yemen: Reported US Covert Actions 2001-2011.” *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2012/03/29/yemen-reported-us-covert-actions-since-2001/> (19 Mar 15)

²⁴ “Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).” *Council on Foreign Relations*. Accessed April 5, 2015. <http://www.cfr.org/yemen/al-qaeda-arabian-peninsula-aqap/p9369>.

²⁵ “Yemen: Reported US Covert Actions 2001-2011.” *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2012/03/29/yemen-reported-us-covert-actions-since-2001/> (19 Mar 15)

²⁶ “Fort Hood Shooting News,” American Broadcasting Company, available at: <http://abcnews.go.com/topics/news/fort-hood-tragedy.htm>, accessed on 19 March 2015.

2008. The United States remained focused on the surge in Iraq. However, this situation began to change in January of 2009 when al-Qaeda in Yemen and Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia merged to form AQAP.²⁷ Just weeks after this announcement, United States Central Command (USCENTCOM), led by General David Petraeus, approved a plan developed with the Embassy in Sanaa to expand operations in Yemen and once again reduce al-Qaeda's ability to conduct attacks.²⁸ Strikes in Yemen began again in December of 2009.

The first strike in Yemen since 2002, and President Obama's first authorized strike in Yemen, targeted al-Qaeda leadership at a training camp in Abyan province.²⁹ This operation used ship-based missiles as opposed to an RPA and occurred simultaneously with several ground raids performed by Yemeni security forces.³⁰ Like the initial strike in 2002, press reports indicate that al-Qaeda leadership, such as the Saudi-born Saleh Mohammed Ali al Anbouri and Saleh al-Qazimi, were the primary targets.³¹ Media reports suggested that between 13 and 34 militants were killed along with 41 civilians.³² The Bureau of Investigative Journalism reported 55 to 58 people

²⁷ "Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Accessed April 5, 2015. <http://www.cfr.org/yemen/al-qaeda-arabian-peninsula-aqap/p9369>.

²⁸ Scahill, Jeremy. "The Dangerous US Game in Yemen." *The Nation*, March 30, 2011. <http://www.thenation.com/article/159578/dangerous-us-game-yemen?page=0,1>.

²⁹ "Drone Wars Yemen: Analysis." Accessed March 22, 2015. <http://securitydata.newamerica.net/drones/yemen/analysis.html>.

³⁰ Sources vary on the number of cruise missiles used. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism reports at least one.

³¹ "Yemen: Reported US Covert Actions 2001-2011." *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2012/03/29/yemen-reported-us-covert-actions-since-2001/> (19 Mar 15)

³² "Thursday, December 17, 2009, United States Air Strike, Al Ma'jalah (village) in Abyan (province), Drone Wars: Yemen, available at: <http://securitydata.newamerica.net/drones/yemen/001-2009.html>, accessed on 19 March 2015.

killed with 41 civilian casualties.³³ Finally, the Long War Journal reported approximately 41 civilians killed in the strike.³⁴ All of these sources are based on what was reported by the local and national press.

For the most part, the U.S. remains silent in the debates surrounding civilian casualties related to specific strikes. In the only article that includes a U.S. assessment of the casualties, Michael Isikoff, a National Investigative correspondent, references a cable. In this cable General Petraeus dismissed the notion that a high number of innocents were killed and insisted that the only civilians killed in the strike were, “the wife and two children of an al-Qaida operative.”³⁵ This statement confirms that there were known civilian casualties during the strike even if their specific number is open to debate. If the numbers of civilian casualties reported by the press are accurate, however, the strike may represent a strategic miscalculation. While the high numbers of civilian casualties remains a possibility, the article further stated that General Petraeus proposed to use other methods for strikes instead of cruise missiles in the future.³⁶ Clearly, this event intended to be a larger strike that would eliminate leadership and a potential training facility and it highlights the differences in the ways and means used to achieve a desired end.

³³ “Yemen: Reported US Covert Actions 2001-2011.” The Bureau of Investigative Journalism. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2012/03/29/yemen-reported-us-covert-actions-since-2001/> (19 Mar 15)

³⁴ “Yemen Strikes: Charting the Data for US Airstrikes in Yemen, 2-02-2015,” *The Long War Journal*, Available at: <http://www.longwarjournal.org/yemen-strikes>, accessed on 19 March 2015.

³⁵ Isikoff, Michael, “Yemen cable gives al-Qaida new ‘recruiting’ tool,” National Investigative Correspondent, NBC News, available at: http://www.nbcnews.com/id/40423710/ns/us_news-security/t/yemen-cable-gives-al-qaida-new-recruiting-tool/#.VRGY5_nF_wk, accessed on 24 March 2015.

³⁶ Isikoff, Michael, “Yemen cable gives al-Qaida new ‘recruiting’ tool,” National Investigative Correspondent, NBC News, available at: http://www.nbcnews.com/id/40423710/ns/us_news-security/t/yemen-cable-gives-al-qaida-new-recruiting-tool/#.VRGY5_nF_wk, accessed on 24 March 2015.

In Yemen, there was one more strike in 2009, one to four strikes in 2010, and approximately ten strikes in 2011.³⁷ However, AQAP had reconstituted after the 2006 prison break and established strongholds in Abyan and Shabwah district in Southern Yemen.³⁸ AQAP's reconstitution efforts, the reduction of aid to Yemen, and the United States' focus on Iraq and Afghanistan contributed to AQAP's ability to take advantage of under-governed areas in Yemen and increase their operational capabilities.³⁹ As a result, the United States and the Yemeni government had to step up the number of strikes to reduce immediate threats. Targets remained top AQAP leadership and specific operational locations related to imminent attacks. This focus reinforces the idea that targeting leadership has a positive effect on reducing an organization's ability to prosecute attacks in the short-term. Operations were aimed to disrupt, degrade and dismantle existing networks, eliminate established safehavens, and degrade links to al-Qaeda leadership outside of Yemen. A variety of means were used in the strikes to include RPAs, cruise missiles, and Yemeni special operations and security forces. The data suggests that the means used to conduct the strikes effects the number of civilian casualties.

While the specific strike data for Yemen varies based on the available public databases, the data set from the New America Foundation's International Security site includes information on civilian casualties, militant casualties, and unknown casualties.⁴⁰

³⁷ "Drone Wars Yemen: Analysis." Accessed March 22, 2015.

<http://securitydata.newamerica.net/drones/yemen/analysis.html>.

³⁸ "Counterterrorism Guide: AQAP," National Counterterrorism Center, available at:

<http://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/aqap.html> accessed on 20 Mar 2015.

³⁹ "Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Accessed April 5, 2015.

<http://www.cfr.org/yemen/al-qaeda-arabian-peninsula-aqap/p9369>.

⁴⁰ "World of Drones." International Security: New America Foundation, available at:

<https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/>

It also bases the types of casualties on the number of credible news sources that report similar information. Realizing that this data could be flawed due to the fact that multiple news agencies can use the same sources for their information, the New America Foundation's database does include high and low ranges and provides information as to whether each strike was an airstrike (cruise missile or other) or an RPA strike.⁴¹ Based on this data through 2011, they identified a total of 14 strikes in which nine were RPA strikes and five were cruise missile or "other" air strikes. The nine RPA strikes correlate to a civilian casualty rate of approximately 12%. Of the other airstrikes, there is a civilian casualty rate of approximately 51%. While this difference is due to a large extent to the estimated 41 civilian casualties that occurred in December of 2009, it does indicate that the type of attack matters in terms of collateral damage.

Counterterrorism efforts by the United States and the Government of Yemen reduced AQAP's capabilities during from 2009 until 2011. AQAP was unable to plan and execute attacks against external, Western targets; conduct additional spectacular attacks within the country; and, control its forces or territory due to leadership and management casualties. President Saleh even mentioned after the 2009 attacks that villagers in Marib were denying entry to AQAP members in areas where they previously enjoyed sanctuary. With a minimal ground footprint, combined with the use of remotely piloted aircraft in partnership with Yemini security forces, the United States had a positive impact on reducing AQAPs ability to conduct terrorist operations through selective repression. However, the political situation in Yemen changed and the Arab Spring provided opportunities for AQAP for political mobilization. In 2011, the group

⁴¹ "World of Drones." International Security: New America Foundation, available at: <https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/>

redoubled efforts to gain sanctuary in Yemen and the affiliated group Jama'at Ansar al-Sharia came into being.⁴² Ansar al-Sharia primarily focused on internal operations and capitalized on political unrest unfolding as a result of the Arab Spring.⁴³

Perhaps the most controversial deliberate targeting and killing with a RPA within Yemen occurred in 2011. The target of this strike was not only an AQAP leader but also an American citizen, Anwar al-Awlaki. President Obama said that, "The death of Awlaki is a major blow to al-Qaeda's most active operational affiliate" as he was filling the "lead role in planning and directing the efforts to murder innocent Americans."⁴⁴ The attack also killed another high-level AQAP member, Samir Khan, who was a Pakistani-born US citizen and one of the editors of *Inspire* magazine. The magazine, which spreads al Qaeda propaganda in English, is noteworthy for its slick production values and simple "how-to" instructions for committing acts of terrorism.⁴⁵

Both of these individuals represent a significant loss to AQAPs ability to prosecute attacks, especially attacks against Western interests outside of Yemen. While many argue that targeting Anwar al-Awlaki was illegal because of his U.S. citizenship, President Obama stated in a speech to the National Defense University in May of 2013 that, "when a U.S. citizen goes abroad to wage war against America and is actively

⁴² "Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Accessed April 5, 2015. <http://www.cfr.org/yemen/al-qaeda-arabian-peninsula-aqap/p9369>.

⁴³ Hudson, Owens and Callen. "Drone Warfare in Yemen: Fostering Emirates through Counterterrorism?," Middle East Policy Council, Fall 2012, Vol XIX, No. 3, available at: <http://www.mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/drone-warfare-yemen-fostering-emirates-through-counterterrorism?print>, accessed on 28 March 2015.

⁴⁴ Schmitt, Mark Mazzetti, Eric, and Robert F. Worth. "American-Born Qaeda Leader Is Killed by U.S. Missile in Yemen." *The New York Times*, September 30, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/01/world/middleeast/anwar-al-awlaki-is-killed-in-yemen.html>.

⁴⁵ The perpetrators of the 15 April 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, allegedly followed instructions from an issue of *Inspire* magazine to build bombs out of common kitchen pressure cookers. For details see Azmat Khan, "The Magazine that 'Inspired' the Boston Bombers," *PBS Frontline*, 30 April 2013, available online at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/iraq-war-on-terror/topsecretamerica/the-magazine-that-inspired-the-boston-bombers/>, accessed 14 April 2015.

plotting to kill U.S. citizens, and when neither the United States, nor our partners are in a position to capture him before he carries out a plot, his citizenship should no more serve as a shield than a sniper shooting down on an innocent crowd should be protected from a SWAT team.”⁴⁶

The Arab Spring during 2011 brought political uncertainty to Yemen. Demonstrations in the capital of Sanaa called for the resignation of President Saleh and highlighted numerous other grievances.⁴⁷ The protests continued off and on for weeks and as a result President Saleh announced that he would not seek another presidential term in 2013.⁴⁸ The timetable did not satisfy the Yemeni citizens and protests continued, however, especially after the resignation of Egyptian President Mubarak.⁴⁹ President Saleh faced opposition from within his government and throughout large areas of Yemen, yet he still maintained a dedicated and loyal following among certain groups. Protests continued for months and Yemenis began to take sides and ally along traditional tribal lines as the political situation intensified. Eventually, President Saleh agreed to sign a deal where he would step down in return for immunity.⁵⁰ An election was held in February of 2012, in which the previous Vice President, Abd al-Rab Mansur al-Hadi was the only candidate and received 99% of the vote.⁵¹ Saleh ultimately resigned and seceded

⁴⁶ “Remarks by the President at the National Defense University,” The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/23/remarks-president-national-defense-university>, accessed on 20 Mar 2015.

⁴⁷ “Yemenis Rally against President.” *BBC*, January 27, 2011, sec. Middle East. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12298019>.

⁴⁸ “Yemeni President Signals He Won’t Stay beyond 2013.” *Reuters*, February 2, 2011.

⁴⁹ “YEMEN: Protests Revived in ‘Friday of Rage.’” *LA Times Blogs - Babylon & Beyond*, February 11, 2011. <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/babylonbeyond/2011/02/yemen-protests-revived-in-friday-of-rage.html>.

⁵⁰ Hatem, Mohammed (23 April 2011). “Yemen's Saleh Agrees to Step Down in Exchange for Immunity, Official Says”. *Bloomberg*. Available at: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2011-04-23/yemen-s-saleh-agrees-to-step-down-in-exchange-for-immunity-official-says>, accessed on 25 Mar 2015.

⁵¹ “New Yemen President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi Takes Oath.” *BBC News*. Accessed March 28, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-17163321>.

power to al-Hadi in February of 2012. However, Saleh maintained some political influence as the head of the General People's Congress Party.

Yemen's new President Hadi embraced counterterrorism operations, especially the use of RPAs. He gave "an unqualified endorsement of American drone strikes" during his first visit to the U.S. after being elected President.⁵² President Hadi is quoted as saying, "They pinpoint the target and have zero margin of error, if you know what target you are aiming at."⁵³ In 2012, the U.S. conducted approximately 47 RPA strikes in Yemen which is more than the previous nine years combined. The RPA strikes eliminated approximately 321 AQAP and Ansar al-Sharia militants and resulted in three civilian casualties for a civilian casualty rate of less than one percent. The increased frequency of strikes is indicative of al-Hadi's acceptance that AQAP and the associated Ansar al-Sharia regained some lost ground during the Arab Spring and that the United States and Yemen chose to utilize more of a denial strategy as opposed to decapitation. This increase supports efforts to disrupt and degrade active AQAP planning and operations to target the United States and its interests. This also supports efforts to reduce and eliminate safehaven by striking AQAP elements deep in areas of Yemen where the government has little control. All of these put AQAP on a path towards an acceptable end for U.S. policy and strategy through selective repression.

Al-Qaeda documents released in 2015 captured after Osama bin Laden's death show how effective a persistent RPA campaign can be at eliminating the enemy's ability

⁵² Shane, Scott. "Yemen's Leader, President Hadi, Praises U.S. Drone Strikes." *The New York Times*, September 29, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/29/world/middleeast/yemens-leader-president-hadi-praises-us-drone-strikes.html>.

⁵³ Shane, Scott. "Yemen's Leader, President Hadi, Praises U.S. Drone Strikes." *The New York Times*, September 29, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/29/world/middleeast/yemens-leader-president-hadi-praises-us-drone-strikes.html>.

to take to the offense and conduct outward attacks. The documents show that al-Qaeda had to, “hide in the shadows and couldn’t pull off any successful operations in the West for many years before the death of bin Laden.”⁵⁴ RPA operations in Yemen essentially forced AQAP elements to concentrate on local attacks against softer targets as they were preoccupied with ensuring their own security and had less capacity to plan and execute external attacks.

In spite of RPA successes and Yemeni backing, civilian casualties remain the focus of the strikes. In 2013 and 2014 combined, the United States conducted approximately 44 RPA strikes against AQAP and Ansar al-Sharia elements in Yemen.⁵⁵ Of these 44 strikes, there were three that are reported to have resulted in civilian casualties. These include one strike in 2013 that potentially resulted in 11 to 15 casualties, and two strikes in 2014 that resulted in one civilian casualty and three civilian casualties respectively and 12 to 15 militants killed.⁵⁶ It should be noted that several news sources reported that the strike in 2013 targeted known al-Qaeda militants who were supposedly returning from a wedding party. The casualties of this strike included Saleh al-Tays and Abdullah al-Tays, who were on Yemen’s list of wanted al-Qaeda suspects, even though the current data by New America Foundation shows that only civilians were killed in the strike.⁵⁷ It is also apparent, however, that there were likely several civilians among those killed.

⁵⁴ “A Gripping Glimpse into Bin Laden’s Decline and Fall - CNN.com.” *CNN*. Accessed March 25, 2015. <http://www.cnn.com/2015/03/10/opinions/bergen-bin-laden-al-qaeda-decline-fall/index.html>.

⁵⁵ “Drone Wars Yemen: Analysis.” Accessed March 25, 2015. <http://securitydata.newamerica.net/drones/yemen/analysis2679.html?page=1>.

⁵⁶ “Drone Wars Yemen: Analysis.” Accessed March 25, 2015. <http://securitydata.newamerica.net/drones/yemen/analysis2679.html?page=1>.

⁵⁷ “Officials: U.S. Drone Strike Kills 13 on Way to Wedding Party in Yemen.” *Timesfreepress.com*. Accessed March 28, 2015. <http://www.timesfreepress.com/news/local/story/2013/dec/12/officials-us-drone-strike-kills-13-way-wedding-par/126413/> and “Relatives want justice for Yemen drone

The continued emphasis on reducing civilian casualties highlights the importance of minimizing collateral damage in targeted killing strikes. Using the data as provided by New America Foundation, in 2013 and 2014 there were an estimated 188 al-Qaeda and Ansar al-Sharia militants killed and approximately 14 to 19 civilians killed resulting in a civilian casualty rate of approximately 10%. The 10% civilian casualty rate for 2013 and 2014 is primarily the result of one strike in December of 2013 that resulted in a high number of civilian casualties. This strike highlights the importance of collateral damage considerations in relation to the strategic narrative when reviewing and accepting risk during dynamic targeting operations. Essentially, one or two strikes that result in a number of civilian casualties will overshadow months and months of civilian casualty-free strikes. Of the various means available to the US, RPA strikes seem most likely to minimize such casualties.

On 10 September 2014, President Obama made a foreign policy speech that outlined the nation's plan going forward with respect to fighting violent extremist networks and reflected successful past efforts and initiatives.⁵⁸ The stated objective is to degrade and ultimately destroy these networks through a comprehensive and sustained counter-terrorism strategy. Within this strategy, the president emphasized four points:

- We will conduct a systematic campaign of airstrikes.
- We will increase support to forces fighting terrorists on the ground.
- We will draw on counterterrorism capabilities to prevent attacks. Some of these capabilities include working with partners, cutting of funding, strengthening defenses, countering ideology, and stemming the flow of foreign fighters.

strike,” Al Jazeera. Accessed March 25, 2015.
<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/12/relatives-want-justice-yemen-drone-strike-20131214111559659476.html>

⁵⁸ “Transcript: President Obama On How U.S. Will Address Islamic State.” *NPR.org*. Accessed March 29, 2015. <http://www.npr.org/2014/09/10/347515100/transcript-president-obama-on-how-u-s-will-address-islamic-state>.

- We will continue providing humanitarian assistance to innocent civilians who have been displaced.⁵⁹

In broad terms, these points reiterate the goals identified in the National Security Strategy and the objectives in the National Counterterrorism Strategy. The President also stated, “This strategy of taking out terrorists who threaten us, while supporting partners on the front lines, is one that we have successfully pursued in Yemen and Somalia for years.”⁶⁰ To properly assess the strategic effect of RPAs within this construct, however, one must compare the individual counterterrorism goals to the actual successes or failures resulting from the use of RPAs. This does present some difficulty, as we are forced to make assessments without the complete picture from what really occurred on the ground, or what information the United States has that is not releasable due to classification.

In terms of disrupting, degrading, dismantling and defeating al-Qa’ida wherever it takes root, RPAs have proven to be a valuable tool in the fight against violent extremism in Yemen. However, RPAs seem to have the most effect disrupting and degrading violent extremist networks. In 2013, the United States disrupted an al-Qaeda plot by authorizing a series of strikes that were intended to prevent a plan to target American embassies around the world. RPAs were used in a series of rapid succession strikes in response to an imminent threat that forced the closure of 19 U.S. embassies worldwide.⁶¹ The strikes successfully prevented any U.S. embassy from being attacked and all 19

⁵⁹ “Transcript: President Obama On How U.S. Will Address Islamic State.” *NPR.org*. Accessed March 29, 2015. <http://www.npr.org/2014/09/10/347515100/transcript-president-obama-on-how-u-s-will-address-islamic-state>.

⁶⁰ “Transcript: President Obama On How U.S. Will Address Islamic State.” *NPR.org*. Accessed March 29, 2015. <http://www.npr.org/2014/09/10/347515100/transcript-president-obama-on-how-u-s-will-address-islamic-state>.

⁶¹ Gearan, Greg Miller, Anne, and Sudarsan Raghavan. “Obama Administration Authorized Recent Drone Strikes in Yemen.” *The Washington Post*, August 6, 2013. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-personnel-evacuated-from-yemen-after-al-qaeda-order-to-attack-is-revealed/2013/08/06/2c984300-fe88-11e2-96a8-d3b921c0924a_story.html.

embassies re-opened without incident. In terms of degrading capabilities, RPA strikes have been responsible for eliminating AQAP leadership to include American born cleric Anwar al-Alawki, and *Inspire* magazine editor Samir Khan, among numerous others.⁶² RPA strikes have also killed AQAP's chief bomb-maker Ibrahim Al-Asiri and have reduced AQAPs ability to conduct sophisticated bombings.⁶³ These actions help set conditions to allow for other initiatives to capitalize on changes in the threat environment and continue to dismantle and work towards defeating violent extremist organizations. However, these successes appear to be primarily short-term. Thus, RPAs strikes have been necessary in disrupting planned attacks and degrading existing networks through attrition of key leadership and personnel and have reduced AQAPs ability to conduct sophisticated attacks from Yemen. RPAs were only marginally successful in dismantling organizations, however, and were not sufficient to defeat AQAP.

Another key area where RPAs have proven to be extremely valuable in Yemen is in eliminating the safehavens required to train, plot, and launch attacks. RPAs have provided what is known as “persistent stare capability” or “the unblinking eye” and allows platforms to collect and analyze a variety of information essentially 24-hours-a-day and seven-days-a-week to develop a more comprehensive intelligence picture.⁶⁴ This capability significantly complicates a targeted organization's freedom of movement and

⁶² “Anwar Al-Awlaki.” Accessed March 29, 2015.

http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/a/anwar_al_awlaki/index.html and “Two U.S.-Born, Al Qaeda Militants Killed in Yemen.” *NY Daily News*. Accessed March 29, 2015. <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/anwar-al-awlaki-samir-khan-dead-al-qaeda-propagandists-killed-u-s-missile-strikes-yemen-article-1.958584>.

⁶³ “AQAP Bomb-Maker ‘Most Likely’ Killed, Says Security Source.” *ASHARQ AL-AWSAT*. Accessed March 29, 2015. <http://www.aawsat.net/2014/04/article55331597/aqap-bomb-maker-most-likely-killed-says-security-source>.

⁶⁴ “Military UAVs: Up in the Sky, an Unblinking Eye.” *Newsweek*, May 31, 2008. <http://www.newsweek.com/military-uavs-sky-unblinking-eye-89463>.

forces members of the organization to hide activities, reduce their visible presence, minimize communications, and even go into hiding. All of these contribute to a degradation of an established terrorist safehaven and a disruption of AQAP's operational capability.

Finally, RPAs in Yemen supported degrading links between al-Qaeda and its affiliates and adherents by eliminating key leaders of those capabilities that intended to prosecute attacks or build additional capability using affiliates and adherents. In Yemen, Anwar al-Awlaki serves as a good example of a leader who fostered and encouraged adherents to act upon their own in accordance with AQAP's ideology. The removal of Anwar al-Awlaki from AQAP's leadership lessened their capability to reach Western based sympathizers with extremist messages and reduced AQAP's ability to recruit additional adherents. As a result, RPAs contributed positively to furthering strategic objective as outlined by the National Security Strategy and National counterterrorism strategy. Admittedly, RPAs cannot achieve all of the stated objectives within either of these guidance documents but can make a positive impact on the three objectives where the applicable means have a possibility making a difference. Through the cumulative effects afforded by selective repression, RPAs can help set conditions that enable other initiatives to take hold. In these cases, the use of RPAs has achieved the intended outcome of disrupting and degrading AQAP, reducing safehaven, and degrading links between AQAP and its affiliates and adherents.

In light of recent events and the destabilization of the Government of Yemen, it is important recognize that the current political situation goes beyond the terrorist activities

of AQAP or Ansar al-Sharia.⁶⁵ Terrorist organizations deliberately choose weak or failing states as safehavens because these governments have reduced capability to govern in the outer reaches of society. The Arab Spring, desire for democratization, change in leadership, al-Houthi rebellion, and existing sectarian tension have all contributed to further destabilize Yemen and shape the threat posed by AQAP.⁶⁶ Former President Saleh's aligning with the Houthis, who many believe are backed by Iran, further exacerbated existing sectarian and political rivalries within Yemen. These events should not be seen as a direct corollary to the success or failure of the United States' counterterrorism strategy in Yemen.

Summary

RPA operations in Yemen have degraded al-Qaeda and AQAP capabilities in spite of the political instability and turmoil that continues to plague the nation. These operations set several precedents in the war against violent extremism and paved the way for RPAs as a means to combat terrorism in areas not designated as a combat zone. In particular, the first strike tested the broad legal authority granted under the Authorized Use of Military Force (AUMF), signified a shift in policy towards pre-emptive action, and gave notice that U.S. citizenship would not serve as a shield if one aligned with groups planning attacks against the United States. With new found ability to deny imminent attacks and degrade organizational capabilities by removing key leaders, the United States expanded the use of RPAs.

⁶⁵ "Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Accessed April 5, 2015. <http://www.cfr.org/yemen/al-qaeda-arabian-peninsula-aqap/p9369>.

⁶⁶ "Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Accessed April 5, 2015. <http://www.cfr.org/yemen/al-qaeda-arabian-peninsula-aqap/p9369>.

While another strike did not occur in Yemen until 2009, the U.S. continued to partner with the Yemeni government, provided financial assistance and training, and provided detailed intelligence in support of Yemeni security operations. From 2002 through 2006, Al-Qaeda's ability to plan and conduct attacks focused on Western targets was practically non-existent. This lack of operational capability lends credence to a strategy of limited direct action in conjunction with indirect support through funding, training, and intelligence. Shifting priorities and Yemen's inability to make political progress, however, reduced direct aid and contributed to a resurgence of al-Qaeda in Yemen.

Al-Qaeda's resurgence led to the formation of AQAP in 2006 and caused the expansion of U.S. operations in Yemen. This resurgence highlights the need to remain engaged over long-term and demonstrates the necessity of strike operation in establishing and maintaining security. As a result, RPAs and cruise missile were used to deny safehaven and reduce imminent threats, eliminate key leadership, and degrade capability and links within the overall organization. Civilian casualty concerns began to highlight the benefits of using RPAs as opposed to other strike methods. Additionally, the detailed intelligence collected by RPAs allowed for the tactical expansion of the use of RPA to signature strikes, as opposed to personality strikes targeting specific leaders. Signature strikes allow for the United States to conduct a denial strategy and reduce al-Qaeda's overall material and manpower capability to conduct attacks.

Counterterrorism efforts by the United States and the Government of Yemen successfully reduced AQAP's capabilities from 2009 until 2011. The cumulative effects of RPAs using selective repression combined with the Yemeni government initiatives

reduced AQAP's overall capabilities. AQAP lost the ability to plan and conduct successful attacks against Western targets, was unable to conduct spectacular attacks within the country, and was unable to adequately control its forces or territory due to leadership casualties. These setbacks equated to a significant loss of sanctuary within Yemen. These results confirm that RPAs contributed to disrupting operations, degrading capabilities, dismantling the larger network, and reducing safehavens. However, the political situation in Yemen was in flux and the Arab Spring provided new opportunities for AQAP for political mobilization.

RPAs in Yemen have proven to be a valuable tool in the fight against violent extremism. In 2012, longtime President Saleh succeeded power to his Vice President, Abd al-Rab Mansur al-Hadi. Yemen's new President al-Hadi embraced counterterrorism operations and continued targeting extremist groups using RPAs. These operations were successful at disrupting, degrading, dismantling, and denying safehaven to extremists. In 2013, the United States disrupted an al-Qaeda plot through a series of RPA strikes that prevented a plan to target American embassies around the world. In terms of dismantling and degrading capabilities, RPA strikes have been responsible for eliminating AQAP leadership to include American born cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, and Inspire magazine editor Samir Khan and have also reduced AQAPs ability to conduct sophisticated bombings.⁶⁷ The unique capabilities of RPAs have also reduced safehaven through significantly complicating freedom of movement by forcing militants to reduce their visible presence,

⁶⁷ "Anwar Al-Awlaki." Accessed March 29, 2015.

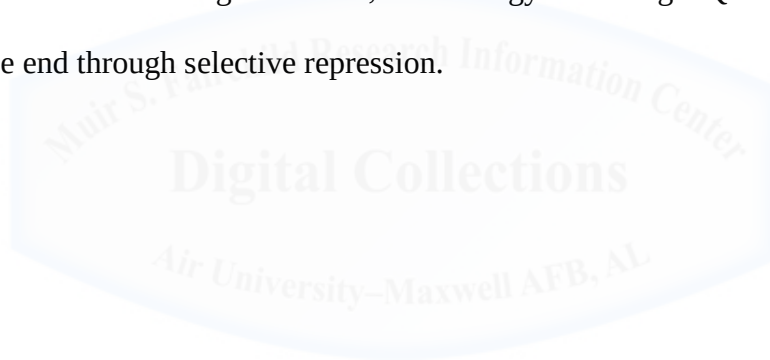
http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/a/anwar_al_awlaki/index.html and "Two U.S.-Born, Al Qaeda Militants Killed in Yemen." *NY Daily News*. Accessed March 29, 2015.

<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/anwar-al-awlaki-samir-khan-dead-al-qaeda-propagandists-killed-u-s-missile-strikes-yemen-article-1.958584>. and "AQAP Bomb-Maker 'Most Likely' Killed, Says Security Source." *ASHARQ AL-AWSAT*. Accessed March 29, 2015.

<http://www.aawsat.net/2014/04/article55331597/aqap-bomb-maker-most-likely-killed-says-security-source>.

minimize communications, and even go into hiding. Selective repression degrades and disrupts operational capability and helps to achieve the criteria as outlined in national security documents.

While operations in Yemen have not yet led to an acceptable ends for al-Qaeda, the use of RPAs has contributed towards the goals as outlined in the National Counterterrorism Strategy. Simply, the use of RPAs is having a positive strategic effect. In this regard, RPA operations have taken advantage of asymmetric capabilities and relied on the cumulative effect of utilizing offensive, direct, raiding, coercive (denial and decapitation) and attritional airpower strategies. Over time, if the United States remains engaged with the Yemeni government, this strategy will bring AQAP towards an acceptable end through selective repression.



CHAPTER 6

The Use of Remotely Piloted Aircraft in Somalia

The first lethal RPA strike in Somalia occurred on 23 June 2011.¹ However, this event did not mark the start of the United States' counterterrorism operations in the country. Somalia has consistently been the world's example of a failed state in which poverty and insecurity are rampant. The country struggles with basic issues of governance in urban and rural areas and is burdened with a deep political divide between the north and the south. Somalia has been without a functioning central government since the fall of a military dictatorship in 1991.²

As with any failed state, there are a number of illegal activities that prove ripe for continued destabilization and provide a potential sanctuary for violent extremist networks and terrorist activities. However, Somalia's strategic location near international shipping lanes makes the threat of terrorist activities emanating from it even more significant.³ Additionally, if the security situation in Somalia worsened, instability could spill into Kenya and Ethiopia and destabilize the region. Such regional instability could also create an environment ripe for greater competition for resources by local clans and even deadlier piracy operations. As a result, the United States has been engaged in Somalia since the early 1990s, but it was the terrorist attacks on the United States in September of 2001 that focused attention on Somalia as a potential safehaven for terrorists.

¹ "Somalia: Reported US Covert Actions 2001-2015." The Bureau of Investigative Journalism. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2012/02/22/get-the-data-somalias-hidden-war/#SOM024>, (20 Mar 15)

² Menkhaus, Kenneth John. *Somalia: State Collapse and the Threat of Terrorism*. Oxford University Press for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2004, p8.

³ "Somalia." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Accessed April 5, 2015. <http://www.cfr.org/somalia/somalia/p21421>.

Background to the Use of RPAs in Yemen

In 2001, Somalia struggled to establish a viable government under the auspices of the Transitional National Government (TNG) formed in 2000 at the Somalia National Peace Conference (SNPC). The SNPC aimed to bring together internal factions of Somalia's civil war under a representative government.⁴ While the TNG succeeded in setting up a basic government, there were still many groups who opposed the initiative. The Council of Islamic Courts or Islamic Courts Union (ICU), with Hassan Dahir Aweys as their leader, was one such group. The stated goal of the ICU was to unify the country under an Islamic community under Sharia law.⁵ However, the United States linked Aweys to violent Islamic extremist groups and had him placed on its national terror list. United States' national security leaders were also concerned with potential al-Qaeda activities and training sites in Somalia and in November of 2003 conducted intelligence activities to improve their collective understanding of the ICU's connections to the wider al-Qaida network.⁶ These efforts were designed to assist a strategy of bolstering a central government in Somalia to reduce potential extremist sanctuary.⁷ However, the TNG made little progress and opposition groups, including the ICU, gained influence in Somalia and attention from the United States.

⁴ "Peace Plan," Somalia National Peace Conference. Available at: <http://www.banadir.com/whatisthere.htm>, accessed on 4 April 2005.

⁵ "Islamic Courts Union | Mapping Militant Organizations." Accessed April 6, 2015. <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/107>.

⁶ "The Secret War: How U.S. Hunted AQ in Africa." *Army Times*. Accessed April 6, 2015. <http://archive.armytimes.com/article/20111030/NEWS/110300316/The-Secret-War-How-U-S-hunted-AQ-Africa>.

⁷ "Somalia." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Accessed April 5, 2015. <http://www.cfr.org/somalia/somalia/p21421>.

In 2004, the TNG became the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), consisting of a loose coalition of Somali leaders who intended to create the foundation of a new Somali federal government.⁸ The new TFG was as ineffective as its predecessor, but managed to generate a violent response from opposition groups. A radical militant group associated with the ICU, Harakat al-Shabaab, began assassinating TFG members.⁹ This new development alarmed U.S. intelligence analysts. The United States allegedly increased its intelligence activities within the country in response.¹⁰ Such activities allowed the U.S. intelligence operatives to work with local Somali clan leaders and capture several key individuals, including Mohammed Ali Isse, who was responsible for organizing the killings of four aid workers in 2003 and 2004.¹¹ Ultimately, personnel from various agencies worked with local Somalis to counter the spread of violent Islamic extremism.

Partnered operations in Somalia through 2005 led to the capture of “seven or eight” of al Qaida’s leaders.¹² However, radical elements within the ICU had still managed to gain influence and prevented the TFG from making progress. In December of 2006, Ethiopian forces invaded Somalia to assist the TFG. While the invasion caught many off guard, the United States provided support to both the TFG and Ethiopian forces.

⁸ “Somalia.” *Council on Foreign Relations*. Accessed April 5, 2015.
<http://www.cfr.org/somalia/somalia/p21421>.

⁹ “Somalia.” *Council on Foreign Relations*. Accessed April 5, 2015.
<http://www.cfr.org/somalia/somalia/p21421>.

¹⁰ “Somalia: Reported US Covert Actions 2001-2015.” *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*.
<http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2012/02/22/get-the-data-somalias-hidden-war/#SOM024>, (20 Mar 15)

¹¹ “Nobody Is Watching.” *Chicagotribune.com*. Accessed April 14, 2015.
http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-shadow_war2nov24-story.html.

¹² “The Secret War: Africa Ops May Be Just Starting.” *Army Times*. Accessed April 14, 2015.
<http://archive.armytimes.com/article/20111205/NEWS/112050312/The-Secret-War-Africa-ops-may-just-starting>.

After a few days, Ethiopian forces had entered Mogadishu and caused militants to flee south. As a result, U.S. forces increased naval patrols off the coast of Somalia to catch individuals as they fled. U.S. special operations forces personnel also conducted the first offensive combat operation in Somalia and struck an al-Qaeda convoy.¹³ The al-Qaeda militants who were targeted were believed to be responsible for the 1998 embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania that killed 225 people. An Islamist spokesman claimed that many nomadic tribesmen, including children, were killed in the attack. However, Ethiopian military personnel and others arrived at the scene within hours and reported eight militants killed and three injured.¹⁴ The United States conducted three more airstrikes in January targeting al-Qaeda leadership.

The Ethiopian intervention is a watershed in the conflict as it became a rallying cry for the ICU and for al-Shabaab. The presence of foreign forces coincided with a dramatic rise in what would be considered al-Qaeda-style suicide attacks against Ethiopian forces.¹⁵ In the book *Cutting the Fuse*, Robert Pape and James Feldman argue that foreign intervention on the ground is one of the root causes of suicide bombings and therefore they should be avoided in favor of over-the-horizon military support in conjunction with political and economic efforts to support local partners.¹⁶ Al-Shabaab also capitalized on the foreign intervention by recruiting members from Somalia's large

¹³ "Somalia: Reported US Covert Actions 2001-2015." The Bureau of Investigative Journalism. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2012/02/22/get-the-data-somalias-hidden-war/#SOM024>, (20 Mar 15)

¹⁴ "Somalia: Reported US Covert Actions 2001-2015." The Bureau of Investigative Journalism. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2012/02/22/get-the-data-somalias-hidden-war/#SOM024>, (20 Mar 15)

¹⁵ Alisha Ryu, "Suicide Bombing Increase in Somalia," VOA, 25 June 2009, accessed on 10 April 2015, available at: http://www.51voa.com/VOA_Standard_English/VOA_Standard_English_32299.html

¹⁶ Pape, Robert A., and James K. Feldman. *Cutting the Fuse: The Explosion of Global Suicide Terrorism and How to Stop It*. Chicago; London: University Of Chicago Press, 2010.

diaspora population in several countries, including the United States. Al-Shabaab exploited informal diaspora networks and successfully brought recruits to Somalia.¹⁷ The influx of “foreign fighters” raised concerns as it increased the possibility of trained Jihadists with U.S. passports returning home to conduct terror attacks.¹⁸ The possibility of trained terrorists returning home focused attention on al-Shabaab within the U.S. intelligence community.¹⁹ With the presence of Ethiopian forces on the ground, the United States increased military support using intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities and limited strike operations.

Over the course of seven years, from 2001 until 2008, the United States conducted approximately seven strikes in Somalia. These operations targeted al-Qaeda leadership to include Aden Hashi Ayro (he head of al-Shabaab), Hassan Turki (an al-Qaeda brigade leader), Fazul Abdullah Mohammed (the suspected mastermind of the 1998 embassy bombings), and Abu Talha al-Sudani (a Sudanese explosives expert), among others.²⁰ While these operations were individual tactical successes, they did little strategically to counter al-Shabaab’s growing influence in the south much less establish a viable government in Somalia. However, they did reduce al-Qaeda’s operational capability in Somalia. In 2008, the United States designated al-Shabaab as a Foreign Terrorist Organization and a Specially Designated Global Terrorist entity and offered

¹⁷ Hansen, Stig Jarle. *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group*. 1 edition. Oxford University Press, 2013.

¹⁸ “‘Nobody Is Watching.’” *Chicagotribune.com*. Accessed April 14, 2015.
http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-shadow_war2nov24-story.html.

¹⁹ “US Policy Risks Terrorism Blowback in Somalia.” *The M&G Online*. Accessed April 14, 2015.
<http://mg.co.za/article/2008-09-05-us-policy-risks-terrorism-blowback-in-somalia/>.

²⁰ “Somalia: Reported US Covert Actions 2001-2015.” The Bureau of Investigative Journalism.
<http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2012/02/22/get-the-data-somalias-hidden-war/#SOM024>, (20 Mar 15)

rewards for the capture of several al-Shabaab leaders.²¹ These rewards increased the amount of information available concerning al-Shabaab militants but had little direct strategic effect.

Throughout most of 2008, the leaders of al-Shabaab became increasingly radicalized and distant from moderate Islamic groups in Somalia. In 2009, the TFG entered into a power-sharing agreement with a moderate Islamist group called the Alliance of the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS). The ARS was led by Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed and included members of the ICU. After the agreement, Ethiopian forces withdrew from Somalia. Al-Shabaab, however, rejected the peace deal and accused the ICU of settling for a Western-backed secular government. The power-sharing parliament integrated over 200 ICU and ARS members, and Sheikh Ahmed won the TFG presidential election, creating an Islamic-led TFG.²² Al-Shabaab continued to denounce the TFG and conduct attacks on what its leaders saw as an apostate regime. However, Ethiopia's withdrawal from Somalia removed much of al-Shabaab's primary grievance and forced al-Shabaab to grapple with the challenges of governance in the portions of Southern Somalia that it essentially controlled.

At the same time, both the TFG and al-Shabaab had to deal with the vacuum left by the withdrawal of Ethiopia's forces. Al-Shabaab seized control of large portions of Somalia to include the former capital of the Transitional Federal Government in Baidoa, which forced al-Shabaab to establish structures for local governance.²³ Membership

²¹ "Counterterrorism Guide: Al-Shabaab," National Counterterrorism Center, available at: http://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/al_shabaab.html, accessed on 10 April 2015.

²² "Moderate Islamist picked as Somali President," Edition, CNN.com, 2009-01-31, accessed on 10 April 2015, available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/africa/01/31/somalia.election.president/>

²³ Hansen, Stig Jarle. *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group*. 1 edition. Oxford University Press, 2013. p73.

expanded as clans and others attempted to gain favor with al-Shabaab to retain influence in local areas. Some members of al-Shabaab thought Ethiopia's withdrawal should signal the end of armed conflict and that they should align and support the TFG's new president, who used to be the head of the Sharia Courts Union. However, core elements of al-Shabaab could not be dissuaded.

Al-Shabaab members continued to reject the new TFG government as it was secular and not Islamic. This rejection isolated hardcore al-Shabaab militants and ideologues from a portion of their previous base of support. This isolation, combined with the responsibility to provide for a population through local governance, as well as rapid organizational growth, created problems for al-Shabaab for which they were ill-equipped to handle.²⁴ Debates regarding governance and how to defeat enemies exposed old rivalries within the group and caused it to splinter, weakening al-Shabaab. The group also faced a superior military force in Mogadishu where African Union in Somalia (AMISOM) forces were stationed to protect the newest version of the TFG.²⁵ However, al-Shabaab managed to establish some tools for governance in certain areas and controlled much of southern Somalia. The group also conducted terror attacks against the TFG and Western targets. During these changes United States assets and analysts continued to collect intelligence and monitor the situation in Somalia.

In 2009, the United States conducted a single strike targeting Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, who was wanted in connection with the 2002 terrorist attacks in Mombasa, Kenya. U.S. Intelligence officials had apparently been tracking Nabhan for years but had

²⁴ Hansen, Stig Jarle. *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group*. 1 edition. Oxford University Press, 2013. p74.

²⁵ Hansen, Stig Jarle. *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group*. 1 edition. Oxford University Press, 2013. p82.

received more specific information about his whereabouts, associations, activities, and habits.²⁶ This specific information, termed “pattern of life” information, led to the approval to conduct a raid. The special operations raid successfully interdicted a convoy of vehicles travelling from Mogadishu to Barawe and killed Saleh Nabhan, along with several other al-Qaeda operatives and members of al-Shabaab.²⁷ With the leader of al-Qaeda in Somalia killed, the United States would not conduct another offensive operation in the country until April of 2011. Arguably, the United States’ limited campaign in Somalia against core elements of al-Qaeda was successful with eliminating key leaders and degrading the organization’s capabilities without providing additional fuel to the conflict. This campaign shows that even sporadic and infrequent selective repression efforts can have an effect. Despite these successes against al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab was still able to grow and spread its influence.

Al-Shabaab gained international attention and notoriety when it claimed responsibility for suicide bombings in Kampala, Uganda in July of 2010 that claimed more than 70 lives.²⁸ Additionally, during a battle between al-Shabaab and Somali forces for control of the town of Dhobley in April 2011, the United States struck al-Shabaab for the first time, killing up to three-dozen militants and an al-Shabaab leader named Jabreel Malik Muhammed.²⁹ With al-Shabaab’s inability to compromise, its growing threat to

²⁶ “Years of Detective Work Led to Al-Qaida Target.” *Army Times*. Accessed April 14, 2015. <http://archive.armytimes.com/article/20111121/NEWS/111210315/Years-detective-work-led-al-Qaida-target>.

²⁷ “Years of Detective Work Led to Al-Qaida Target.” *Army Times*. Accessed April 14, 2015. <http://archive.armytimes.com/article/20111121/NEWS/111210315/Years-detective-work-led-al-Qaida-target>.

²⁸ “Counterterrorism Guide: Al-Shabaab,” National Counterterrorism Center, available at: http://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/al_shabaab.html, accessed on 10 April 2015.

²⁹ “Is the US Launching Airstrikes against Shabaab in Somalia? | The Long War Journal.” Accessed April 14, 2015. http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/04/is_the_us_launching_airstrikes.php. It is not believed that the strikes originated from RPAs.

the TFG, its operational capability, and its increasing influence in the southern part of Somalia, U.S. and AMISOM forces needed to apply greater pressure to the group and reduce its operational capabilities. Such pressure, however, could only come through more accurate and refined intelligence on al-Shabaab to better understand what its leaders were planning, as well as to conduct preventative strikes when terrorist attacks were imminent. Furthermore, U.S. and AMISOM leaders also wanted to avoid committing large ground forces that would only support al-Shabaab's recruiting efforts. As a result, it was only logical that the United States increase its use of RPAs to target al-Shabaab's leadership and material capability, in order to disrupt and degrade their attack planning and operations.

In early June 2011, al-Shabaab leaders pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda and Ayman al Zawahiri. Zawahiri was selected as al-Qaeda's leader after the killing of Osama bin Laden.³⁰ While there were certainly strong linkages between the two groups prior to this event, with several al-Shabaab leaders individually swearing allegiance to al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, this public declaration demonstrated the group's intent and confirmed it as a growing threat to the United States.³¹ On 23 June 2011, the United States used RPAs to strike two separate locations, including a training camp near Kismayo. According to U.S. officials, the strikes targeted two senior al-Shabaab militants who were planning attacks against the United Kingdom and marked a change in focus from previous efforts.³²

³⁰ "Somalia's Shabaab Vows Allegiance to New Al Qaeda Emir Zawahiri | The Long War Journal." Accessed April 14, 2015. http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/06/somalias_shabaab_vow.php.

³¹ White, Jonathan. *Terrorism and Homeland Security*. Cengage Learning, 2011. p405.

³² DeYoung, Karen. "CIA Idles Drone Flights from Base in Pakistan." *The Washington Post*, July 1, 2011. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/cia-idles-drone-flights-from-base-in-pakistan/2011/07/01/AGpOiKuH_story.html.

The strike on 23 June 2011 marked the first use of armed RPAs in Somalia and a shift in emphasis from al-Qaeda to al-Shabaab. This confirms that al-Shabaab had evolved to the point where they posed an imminent and serious threat and led to additional strikes. Another strike occurred a few days later on 28 June near Taabta village but its details are limited.³³ In July, another strike that targeted three al-Shabaab training camps near Afmadow.³⁴ The expansion in the numbers and types of target shows that the United States needed to increase selective repression against al-Shabaab. The number of strikes, however, remained in the single digits.

In September of 2011, Press TV, which is an Iranian news organization, claimed that there had been over 80 drone strikes and drone crashes in Somalia that had killed more than 1,300 civilians. In almost each of the claimed attacks, according to Press TV, the drone was successfully shot down by militants after killing scores of civilians.³⁵ The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, which tracks RPA strikes, was unable to find any independent corroboration of the Press TV reports. The entire story appears to be part of Iranian information operations to generate backlash against the United States in general, and more specifically, against its use of RPAs in Somalia. In spite of the Press TV accusations, other sources suggest RPA operations and airstrikes in Somalia seem to be very accurate with minimal collateral damage. Perhaps more importantly, such strikes have not led to a recruiting boon that the introduction of Ethiopian forces in Somalia did.

³³ Pelton, Robert Young. "Drones in the News But Much More Down Below." *Somalia Report*. Accessed April 14, 2015. <http://www.somaliareport.com/index.php/post/1620>

³⁴ Cadde, Aweys. "Airstrikes Hit Lower Juba...Again." *Somalia Report*. 6 July 2011. Accessed April 14, 2015. http://www.somaliareport.com/index.php/post/1105/Airstrikes_Hit_Lower_JubaAgain

³⁵ Emma Slater and Chris Woods. "Iranian TV Station 'faked' Somali Deaths by US Drones." *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*. December 2, 2011. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2011/12/02/iranian-tv-station-faked-1370-somali-deaths-by-us-drones/>

The United States continued to utilize a combination of RPAs and other strike options to prevent imminent attacks and reduce al-Shabaab capabilities. The United States conducted two strikes in September of 2011, and an alleged four more in October. However, two of the reported strikes in October are questionable as they were reported by only one source, which claimed high numbers of civilian casualties.³⁶ It is possible that one or more of the strikes in October were related to the Kenyan Defense Forces entering Somalia to conduct operations against al-Shabaab for repeated kidnappings of tourists along the coast.³⁷

The Kenyan Defense Force operations were a coordinated military endeavor between Somali forces, Ethiopian forces, and Kenyan forces. Immediately, al-Shabaab attempted to capitalize on the Kenyan incursion by calling on all Somalis to rise up and attack the Kenyan troops stating that, “Kenya violated the territorial rights of Somalia by entering our holy land, but I assure you that they will return disappointed.”³⁸ While the extent of U.S. involvement in the operation is unknown, some reports suggest the United States supported Kenyan forces with intelligence. Other reports suggested French advice and support to the Kenyan military.³⁹ While the level or specifics of support remains unclear, the United States’ use of targeted airstrikes using RPAs continued. Such strikes

³⁶ Cadde, Aweys. “TFG Official Confirms New Drone Strikes.” *Somalia Report*. 13 October 2011. Accessed April 14, 2015.

http://www.somaliareport.com/index.php/post/1761/TFG_Official_Confirms_New_Drone_Strikes, and Ilmi, Qanciye Farah. “Airstrikes on al-Shabaab Area Leaves 11 Dead.” *Somalia Report*. Accessed April 14, 2015. http://www.somaliareport.com/index.php/post/1829/Airstrikes_on_Al-Shabaab_Area_Leaves_11_Dead

³⁷ Kron, Josh; Gettleman, Jeffrey. “Other Nations Join Somalia Fight, Kenya Says”. *The New York Times*. 23 October 2011. Accessed 14 April 2015.

³⁸ “Kenya Sends Troops to Attack al-Shabaab.” *Al Jazeera*. 24 October 2011. Accessed 14 April 2015. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/10/20111016115410991692.html>

³⁹ “Somalie: pas de coup de main français pour corriger les islamistes somaliens?” (in French). *Ouest France*. 24 October 2011. Retrieved 2011-10-25.

supported a strategy against al-Shabaab to preempt imminent attacks, degrade operational capability, as well as partner with local forces. An assumption underpinning this strategy appears to be maintaining a very small U.S. presence on the ground, in order to deny the enemy fuel for their strategic narrative of defensive jihad against invading infidels.

The United States began to increase its use of RPAs in Somalia. In January of 2012, The United States reportedly used an RPA to target a British-Lebanese al-Shabaab militant named Bilal al-Berjawi.⁴⁰ Berjawi was confirmed killed by several sources, including the al-Kataib media foundation, which is a media organization often used by al-Shabaab.⁴¹ In February, an RPA supposedly killed a senior al-Shabaab Egyptian named Sheikh Abu Ibrihim. Along with Ibrihim, Mohammed Sakr, who was a former British citizen and Berjawi's deputy, was also reported killed in the strike. Al-Shabaab's foreign fighters represented a very different threat, consisting of individuals able to spread the group's influence and terror activities overseas. Somalia was also plagued with piracy that was loosely associated with extremist activities.

Increased European Union (EU) involvement influenced U.S. interest and operations in Somalia in 2012. In March, the EU authorized potential ground strikes in Somalia to curb the growing trend of piracy off the Somali coast.⁴² The EU made the decision as part of a comprehensive approach to the Somalia crisis as a way to reduce

⁴⁰ "Senior Shabaab Commander Rumored to Have Been Killed in Recent Predator Strike | The Long War Journal." Accessed April 14, 2015.

http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/07/senior_shabaab_comma_1.php.

⁴¹ Cobain, Ian. "British 'Al-Qaida Member' Killed in US Drone Attack in Somalia." *The Guardian*. Accessed April 14, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jan/22/british-al-qaida-suspect-drone-somalia>.

⁴² Press, Associated. "EU Expands Somali Pirate Mission to Include Attacks on Land Bases." *The Guardian*. Accessed April 14, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/mar/23/somalia-pirate-mission-expanded-eu>.

illegal money from going into Somalia and funding a variety of illegal activities.⁴³ With the increased focus on Somalia, the United States offered a bounty in June of 2012 of up to seven million dollars for information relating to the remaining key leaders of al-Shabaab.⁴⁴ The bounty was announced as African Union forces made progress against al-Shabaab. Also in June, President Obama officially acknowledged that the United States had and was conducting operations in Somalia and Yemen to prevent terrorist attacks against the Homeland and U.S. citizens and interests abroad.⁴⁵ After President Obama's acknowledgement, several organizations, including the American Civil Liberties Union, called for full disclosure and increased transparency of military operations.⁴⁶ However, military security and on-going operations required much of the information to remain classified and unreleasable to the public.

In September of 2012, Somalia elected a new President, Hassan Sheikh Mohammed. Sheikh Mohammed ascended from the Peace and Development Party that is linked to the Al-Islah party, the Somalia equivalent of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁴⁷ The fact that the government of Somalia was still primarily secular remained a point of contention with al-Shabaab and the group continued their attacks. In support of the TFG and President Mohammed, the Kenyan Air Force conducted several strikes to dislodge al-

⁴³ "EU Carries out First Airstrikes against Somali Pirate Targets." Text. Article. *Associated Press*, May 15, 2012. <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2012/05/15/eu-carries-out-first-airstrikes-against-somali-pirate-targets/>.

⁴⁴ "Al-Shabaab: US Puts Bounty on Somali Militants." *BBC News*. 7 June 2012. Accessed April 14, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-18353329>.

⁴⁵ "Presidential Letter – 2012 War Powers Resolution 6-Month Report" *Whitehouse.gov*. 15 June 2012. Accessed April 14, 2015. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/06/15/presidential-letter-2012-war-powers-resolution-6-month-report>

⁴⁶ "Somalia: Reported US Covert Actions 2001-2015." The Bureau of Investigative Journalism. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2012/02/22/get-the-data-somalias-hidden-war/#SOM024>, (20 Mar 15)

⁴⁷ "AFRICA - Somalia Picks Brotherhood Candidate as New President." Accessed April 14, 2015. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/somalia-picks-brotherhood-candidate-as-new-president.aspx?pageID=238&nID=29868&NewsCatID=357>.

Shabaab from the Kismayo airport.⁴⁸ At the end of September, the Kenyan Army, in conjunction with the Somali National Army and Kenyan Navy, retook from al-Shabaab the port city of Kismayo, the last deep-water port that the extremist group held.⁴⁹ The loss of Kismayo represented a significant strategic setback for al-Shabaab and potentially signaled the beginning of the end of the organization's aspirations to create a single Islamic state with Somalia. Facing selective repression, as well as and ground operations aimed at removing them from key areas, al-Shabaab's leaders and facilitators had to focus on their own personal security as opposed to planning and conducting attacks.

In October of 2012, the U.S. military acknowledged that it was flying armed RPAs out of Camp Lemonier in Djibouti into both Yemen and Somalia.⁵⁰ While some international news organizations such as Iran's Press TV assert that RPAs were striking targets constantly in both Yemen and Somalia, other data suggested a more targeted and discrete effort on the basis of the limited number of actual strikes. This effort indicates that the United States was pursuing a decapitation and limited denial campaign in Somalia.

To degrade enemy capabilities in Somalia, the U.S. used the cumulative effects of selective repression through denial, decapitation, and attrition. Denial operations were to reduce al-Shabaab's immediate capability to prosecute short-term or imminent attacks, and decapitation strikes were to create leadership vacuums and reduce al-Shabaab's ability to organize and plan future coordinated attacks. Conducted over a period of time,

⁴⁸ "Kenyan Fighter Jets Bomb Rebel-Held Somali Port City." *RTTNews*. Accessed April 14, 2015. <http://www.rttnews.com/1972697/kenyan-fighter-jets-bomb-rebel-held-somali-port-city.aspx>.

⁴⁹ Sheikh, Abdi. "Kenya Troops Fight on Beaches in Assault on Somali Rebel City." *Reuters UK*. Accessed April 14, 2015. <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/09/28/us-somalia-conflict-idUKBRE88R08I20120928>.

⁵⁰ Whitlock, Craig. "Remote U.S. Base at Core of Secret Operations." *The Washington Post*, October 25, 2012. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/remote-us-base-at-core-of-secret-operations/2012/10/25/a26a9392-197a-11e2-bd10-5ff056538b7c_story.html.

these tactics support a broader and longer-term effort of attrition to the point where al-Shabaab is no longer able to conduct effective external attacks. RPA strikes are not designed to be decisive, but rather are intended to set conditions to let other initiatives, such as local security or AMISOM operations, to take root and have effect. If maintained, this approach will diminish a violent Islamic extremist group's ability to conduct operations and may lead its demise. These actions support working towards an acceptable ends such as selective repression, decapitation, or failure as identified in Chapter 3. This approach supports and foreshadowed the comprehensive and sustained counterterrorism strategy as outlined by President Obama in September of 2014. This strategy involves a systematic campaign of airstrikes allows partners to strengthen defenses, counter ideology, stem the flow of foreign fighters, and fight terrorists on the ground.⁵¹ As stated in President Obama's speech, "This strategy of taking out terrorists who threaten us, while supporting partners on the front lines, is one that we have successfully pursued in Yemen and Somalia for years."⁵²

With Kenyan and AMISOM forces on the ground confronting al-Shabaab, and RPAs providing detailed intelligence and persistent surveillance and strike capability, al-Shabaab lost most of the gains they had made across Somalia. In addition, many al-Shabaab members, including senior leaders, attempted to flee to Yemen.⁵³ In spite of these losses, al-Shabaab continued to prosecute sporadic local attacks in Somalia

⁵¹ "Transcript: President Obama On How U.S. Will Address Islamic State." *NPR.org*. Accessed March 29, 2015. <http://www.npr.org/2014/09/10/347515100/transcript-president-obama-on-how-u-s-will-address-islamic-state>.

⁵² "Transcript: President Obama On How U.S. Will Address Islamic State." *NPR.org*. Accessed March 29, 2015. <http://www.npr.org/2014/09/10/347515100/transcript-president-obama-on-how-u-s-will-address-islamic-state>.

⁵³ "Are Al-Shabaab Fighters Fleeing to Yemen?" *Somalia Report*. 15 March 2012. Accessed on 14 April 2015. http://www.somaliareport.com/index.php/post/3079/Are_Al-Shabaab_Fighters_Fleeing_to_Yemen

targeting the TFG, and conducted at least one attack in Nairobi, Kenya where a suspected al-Shabaab militant threw a grenade into a crowd at a bus station, killing four.⁵⁴ The persistent presence of foreign troops, in this case Kenyan soldiers, allegedly spurred al-Shabaab retaliation in the form of the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi (2013).⁵⁵ Within Somalia, al-Shabaab continued to target the President's palace and conducted several attacks in various cities but these attacks and others veiled serious stress and fracturing within the group.

Evidence of such stress and fracturing included the ultimatum to Abu Mansoor al-Amriki, issued by al-Shabaab leaders, to turn himself in or face execution. Al Amriki was an American al-Shabaab commander who had a falling out with other group leaders over the direction of the group and he posted several criticisms via Twitter.⁵⁶ Al-Amriki was later killed by al-Shabaab in September of 2013.

In Barawe, al-Shabaab militants loyal to Ahmed Abdi Godane, who was the Emir of al-Shabaab, clashed with rival factions that resulted in two co-founders of the group, Ibrahim Haji Mee'aad and Abul Hamid Hashi Olhayi, being killed.⁵⁷ In June, United Nations forces reported that Sheik Hassan Dahir Aweys had turned himself in after a fallout, and subsequently infighting, with Abdi Godane.⁵⁸ While the motivations and

⁵⁴ "Kenya Blames al-Shabaab for Deadly Nairobi Grenade Attack." *BBC News*. March 11, 2012, accessed on 14 April 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17326086>

⁵⁵ "Nairobi Westgate shoot-out 'kills 20' in Kenya". *BBC News*. 21 September 2013. Retrieved 14 April 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-24186780>

⁵⁶ Williams, Matt. "Mother of US-Born Militant Confronts al-Shabaab Threat: 'It's in God's Hands.'" *The Guardian*. 19 January 2013. Accessed 14 April 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/19/omar-hammami-mother-al-shabaab>

⁵⁷ "Africa - Al Shabaab Extremists Kill Two of Their Chiefs." *France 24*. Accessed April 15, 2015. <http://www.france24.com/en/20130630-somalia-al-shabaab-al-qaeda-islamist-extremists-kill-two-top-commanders/>.

⁵⁸ "Elders Say Al-Shabaab Leader Sheik Hassan Aweys Has Not Surrendered." *UPI*. Accessed April 15, 2015. http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2013/06/28/Elders-say-al-Shabaab-leader-Sheik-Hassan-Aweys-has-not-surrendered/63261372426435/.

circumstances are unclear, Aweys was taken into custody by Somali security forces.⁵⁹

Aweys had previously supported Mukhtar Robow, al-Shabaab's primary spokesperson, in a bid for power to see Godane replaced as the group's Emir. Godane reportedly assigned a commander to embark on an offensive against Robow and his supporters.⁶⁰ In September of 2014, as part of a broader Somali-led mission to remove al-Shabaab presence in areas of the countryside, Ahmed Abdi Godane was killed by an RPA strike. Analysts assessed that Godane's death would lead to further fracturing of al-Shabaab and contribute to the group's eventual demise.⁶¹

Since Ahmed Abdi Godane's death, al-Shabaab has been rudderless and largely ineffectual strategically. Abu Ubaidah was appointed as Godane's replacement as the Emir and has continued sporadic attacks against non-Muslims and Christians. However, several other al-Shabaab leaders, including Zakariya Ahmed Ismail and Mohammed Said Atom, turned themselves in to government authorities. With the help of the United States and AMISOM, Somali government forces continued to have success against al-Shabaab's remaining leadership. In February 2015, al-Shabaab released a video calling for attacks on the Mall of America and similar shopping centers in the United States and Canada.⁶² In March, a U.S. RPA strike killed two al-Shabaab militants including its leader for

⁵⁹ "Prominent Militant Arrested in Blow to Somali Islamists." *Reuters*, June 26, 2013.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/06/26/us-somalia-rebels-idUSBRE95P14F20130626>.

⁶⁰ "Somalia: Al Shabaab leader assigns a commander to launch fighting against Mukhtar Robow wing". *Qalin News*. 4 August 2013. Accessed 14 April 2015.

⁶¹ Mogadishu, Associated Press in. "Al-Shabaab in Somalia Confirms Leader Was Targeted in US Drone Strike." *The Guardian*. Accessed April 15, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/02/al-shabaab-confirms-leader-targeted-us-drone-strike-somalia> and "Pentagon: Top Somali Militant Killed in U.S. Operation - CNN.com." *CNN*. 5 September 2014. Accessed April 15, 2015.

<http://www.cnn.com/2014/09/05/world/africa/somali-militant-killed/index.html> and "Wanted Extremist Leader Surrenders in Somalia". *Associated Press*. 27 December 2014. Accessed 14 April 2015.

⁶² "No "imminent threat" to West Edmonton Mall visitors, RCMP says". *Edmonton Journal*. 22 February 2015. Accessed 14 April 2015.

external operations, Aden Garaar, who was responsible for the Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi as well as the threat to the United States and Canada. The benefits of RPAs were clear to the Somali government.

In March, Federal Government of Somalia announced that it will employ its own RPAs against the remaining elements of al-Shabaab.⁶³ The Somali operations would be separate from current AMISOM missions and demonstrates an increased capability for independent actions by the Somali government. This capability is a significant milestone for the Government of Somalia and their ability to help provide security in the countryside as well as the cities. In April, the Federal Government passed an anti-terrorism law that allows the government to handle al-Shabaab and other extremist militant groups more efficiently.⁶⁴ The law represents progress towards normalcy and increased security within Somalia. Even though al-Shabaab still maintains some capability, as demonstrated by the attacks on the Garissa University College in Kenya in April 2015, the group is arguably in decline and moving towards collapse.

The key to the gains against al-Shabaab in Somalia appears to be facilitated by persistent pressure applied by the judicious use of RPAs through selective repression. RPAs in Somalia allowed the United States to utilize airpower strategies, outlined in Chapter Two, that supported overall national security objectives. These airpower strategies included direct, offensive operations focused on the coercive strategies of denial and decapitation of al-Shabaab's forces. The use of RPAs also provided a technological asymmetric advantage in terms of intelligence capabilities as well as the

⁶³ "Somalia to Deploy Drones in Battle with Al-Shabaab." *Voice of America*. 7 March 2015. Accessed 14 April 2015. <http://www.voanews.com/articleprintview/2671581.html>

⁶⁴ "Somali Cabinet Passes Anti-Terrorist Bill." *GOOBJOOG NEWS*. Accessed April 15, 2015. <http://goobjoog.com/english/?p=12479>.

ability to monitor, assess, develop, and strike key targets. Over time, the cumulative effect of the RPA operations and the attrition of leadership contributed to disrupting and degrading extremist capabilities and eliminated much of al-Shabaab's safehaven.

The elimination of key leaders with close ties to core al-Qaeda elements and AQAP leadership arguably reduced the key linkages between these organizations. RPA strikes contributed to the extremist group's movement towards one or a combination of acceptable U.S. strategic ends to include decapitation, selective repression, or failure. Thus, the use of airpower strategies nested within the larger counterterrorism efforts contributed to stated objectives and moved al-Shabaab towards an acceptable potential end. The use of RPAs in Somalia had a positive strategic effect.

Summary

RPA operations in Somalia allowed the United States to utilize relevant airpower strategies to support counterterrorism national security objectives. Somalia has consistently been the world's example of a failed state where poverty and insecurity are rampant. This situation provided a rich environment for extremist organizations to gain and maintain safehaven and plan and conduct attacks. With violence and the threat of instability spilling over into neighboring countries, Somalia's security situation is important to the region and the United States. In 2004, a radical militant group associated with the Islamic Courts Union, Harakat al-Shabaab, began assassinating Transitional Federal Government members and this new development alarmed U.S. intelligence analysts.⁶⁵ Al-Shabaab's actions highlighted the need to gain intelligence on

⁶⁵ "Somalia." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Accessed April 5, 2015. <http://www.cfr.org/somalia/somalia/p21421>.

the situation in Somalia and led to the decision to assist the government of Somalia with counterterrorism efforts, and eventually RPAs.

The United States began to assist the TFG with funding and intelligence. Eventually this assistance led to partner operations that led to the capture of several al-Qaeda leaders in 2005. However, al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab still managed to gain influence and prevented the TFG from making progress. This influence led to Ethiopian forces entering Somalia in December 2006 to increase security. In January of 2007, the United States conducted its first offensive action against known al-Qaeda operatives in Somalia since the 9/11 terror attacks. While these actions improved security in the short-term, the presence of Ethiopian forces became a rallying cry and recruiting tool for al-Shabaab. Rapid recruitment and growth, especially from Somalia's large diaspora population, raised concerns about the possibility of trained extremists spreading violence to other nations. The United States increased military support using intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, and limited strike operations.

Despite political gains by the Islamic Courts Union, the leaders of al-Shabaab became increasingly radicalized and distant from moderate Islamic groups in Somalia. In 2009, the TFG entered into a peaceful power-sharing agreement with a moderate Islamist group. Al-Shabaab rejected the peace deal, however, and accused the ICU of settling for a Western-backed secular government. After a tentative peace had been reached between moderate Islamist groups and the TFG, Ethiopian forces withdrew from Somalia. Some al-Shabaab members thought Ethiopia's withdrawal should signal the end of armed conflict and that they should align and support the TFG's new president, who used to be the head of the Sharia Courts Union. However, core al-Shabaab members continued to

reject the new TFG government as it was secular and not Islamic. The withdrawal of Ethiopian forces created a security vacuum and allowed more extreme elements greater freedom of maneuver and action. The United States continued to assist the embattled TFG with limited strikes against al-Qaeda and elements of al-Shabaab and human collectors on the ground employed by the United State continued to collect intelligence and monitor the situation in Somalia.

With indications that the situation was deteriorating, the United States became more involved and increased strike operations. By 2009, the United States had conducted a total of eight strikes against extremist elements in Somalia. These events include a single helicopter raid targeting Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, who represented a serious threat to the United States and was an influential leader within al-Qaeda. Arguably, the United States' limited campaign in Somalia against core elements of al-Qaeda succeeded by eliminating key leaders and degrading the organization's capabilities without providing a visible grievance that could be used as a recruiting tool. The practice of limited strikes to deny and degrade enemy capability had immediate short-term effects. These effects contributed to degrading the organization over the long-term. As a result, it was only logical that the United States increase its use of RPAs for intelligence collection and continue to target al-Qaeda's leadership and materiel capability, in order to disrupt attack planning and operations.

By 2011, strike operations expanded to include armed RPAs. 23 June 2011 marked the first lethal drone strike in Somalia. This event also reflected a shift in priority towards countering the growing capability and influence of al-Shabaab. The United States used a combination of RPAs and other strike options to prevent imminent attacks

and reduce al-Shabaab capabilities. The use of RPAs also had the added benefit of preventing al-Shabaab from capitalizing on any presence of Western forces. This benefit allowed the United States to reduce leadership and material capability without generating a boost in morale and personnel for al-Shabaab forces.

Due to the success of RPAs, the United States expanded RPA operations. RPAs continued to target al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab leadership and materiel capability. Policy makers recognized the success of relevant airpower strategies in reducing enemy capability and setting positive conditions. As a result, President Obama officially acknowledged that the United States had and was conducting operations in Somalia and Yemen to prevent terrorist attacks against the Homeland and U.S. citizens and interests abroad.⁶⁶ While the announcement caused some groups in the United States to call for complete transparency, the overall reaction was mild. Thus, RPAs reflected the need to combat violent extremism, while at the same time RPA operations managed to stay below the tolerance threshold of the U.S. public. The ability to remain below tolerance thresholds allows the United States to engage as required over a longer period of time, and negates the previous option by extremist groups to wait it out.

With the pressure of Kenyan and AMISOM forces on the ground, and RPAs providing persistent intelligence and strike capability, al-Shabaab lost most of the gains they had made across Somalia. Many al-Shabaab members, including senior leaders, attempted to flee to Yemen.⁶⁷ This exodus caused the group to begin to fracture and fight

⁶⁶ “Presidential Letter – 2012 War Powers Resolution 6-Month Report” *Whitehouse.gov*. 15 June 2012. Accessed April 14, 2015. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/06/15/presidential-letter-2012-war-powers-resolution-6-month-report>

⁶⁷ “Are Al-Shabaab Fighters Fleeing to Yemen?” *Somalia Report*. 15 March 2012. Accessed on 14 April 2015. http://www.somaliareport.com/index.php/post/3079/Are_Al-Shabaab_Fighters_Fleeing_to_Yemen

amongst themselves. Audrey Kurth Cronin identifies fracturing as one of the symptoms when a group is progressing towards failure. The public ultimatum to former member Abu Mansoor al-Amriki, issued by al-Shabaab leaders, to turn himself in or face execution, is evidence of fracturing. Al-Amriki was later killed by al-Shabaab in September of 2013. After al-Shabaab's Emir was killed in 2014, Analysts assessed that Godane's death would lead to further fracturing of al-Shabaab and contribute to the group's eventual demise.

Since Ahmed Abdi Godane's death, al-Shabaab has been rudderless and largely ineffective. U.S. RPAs combined with partner nation assistance, systematically degraded al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab capability in Somalia. The use of RPAs enabled airpower strategies to degrade, deny, disrupt and dismantle al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda and reduce the capability of those organizations to conduct attacks against the United States. RPAs also eliminated safehavens that both organizations previously enjoyed in Somalia. By applying targeted force over, contributed to expediting a potential acceptable end to these violent extremist organizations. While VENs and terrorism cannot be entirely eliminated, adequate pressure over time can lead to an acceptable ends. The cumulative effects of airpower strategies applied to combat the long-war, can contribute to an acceptable ends through selective repression.

CHAPTER 7

The Use of Remotely Piloted Aircraft in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas

Three days after 9/11, the U.S. Congress passed an Authorization for the Use of Military Force against al-Qaeda and any associated groups responsible for the terrorist attacks.¹ On 20 September 2001, President George Bush delivered an address to a joint session of Congress and the American people where he made several demands, including that the Taliban deliver the leaders of al-Qaeda to U.S. authorities. He further stated that the demands were not open to negotiation or discussion and that, “They will hand over the terrorists, or they will share in their fate.”² The Taliban did not and shortly thereafter, on 7 October 2001, U.S. and British forces began bombing campaigns against known al-Qaeda and Taliban locations and training camps in Afghanistan.³ These operations marked the beginning of America’s longest war.

The Taliban quickly crumbled under the weight of a United States-led Coalition and Afghanistan’s Northern Alliance forces. It was apparent that after more than a decade of civil war, Afghanistan’s infrastructure was in shambles and Coalition forces realized that the Afghan people needed help with recovery and rebuilding efforts. In November of 2001, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1378 which stated that the UN would play a central role in setting up a transitional government and called on member states to provide, “long-term assistance for the social and economic

¹ “Authorization for Use of Military Force (2001 - S.J.Res. 23).” *GovTrack.us*. Accessed February 11, 2015. <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/107/sjres23>.

² “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People.” United States Capital, Washington D.C., 20 September 2001, Accessed on 15 April 2015. <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>

³ “Timeline: U.S. War in Afghanistan.” Council on Foreign Relations. Accessed April 15, 2015. <http://www.cfr.org/afghanistan/us-war-afghanistan/p20018>.

rehabilitation of Afghanistan and welcomes initiatives towards this end.”⁴ This Resolution set the conditions for increased Coalition presence in Afghanistan. The United States remained focused, however, on bringing Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and Osama bin Laden to justice and had tracked him to an area in the Afghan mountains.

The United States, Coalition, and Northern Alliance fighters were confident that they knew Osama bin-Laden’s location and began operations to encircle and trap the Taliban and al-Qaeda forces in the mountains. After a pitched two-week battle in the Tora Bora Mountains southeast of Kabul, Osama bin-Laden escaped to Pakistan in December 2001. His escape was a huge setback and boosted the morale of al-Qaeda militants. As more international and U.S. forces arrived in Afghanistan to provide security assistance, al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters fled by the thousands and found refuge in the under-governed spaces of Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas. These events set the stage for the United States’ eventual use of RPAs in the border areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Background to the Use of RPAs in the FATA

In May 2003, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld declared that major combat operations in Afghanistan were over and subsequent activities would focus on security, stability, and reconstruction.⁵ Later in August, NATO assumed responsibility and control of International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) which focused on rebuilding the

⁴ “United Nations Security Council Resolution 1378 (2001),” UNSCR S/RES/1378 (2001), 14 November 2001, Accessed on 14 April 2015. <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>

⁵ “Secretary Rumsfeld Joint Media Availability with President Karzai (Transcript).” U.S. DoD. 1 May 2003, Accessed 14 April 2015. <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=2562>

political and material infrastructure of Afghanistan. ISAF and Coalition initiatives essentially amounted to building a country from almost nothing, rather than rebuilding one. The Taliban and remnants of al-Qaeda, with freedom of movement and sanctuary along the Pakistani border, began sowing the seeds of an insurgency. Groups that had originally fled from the presence of Coalition forces were becoming more engaged as they reacted to what they perceived as injustices.

One Taliban commander with ties to Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, Nek Muhammad, was incensed at the support Pakistan provided to foreign fighters in Afghanistan and at Pakistan's apparent shift in loyalties from the Taliban to the U.S. in 2001.⁶ Nek Muhammed was primarily based in the FATA, coordinated offensive operations within Pakistan, and provided sanctuary for al-Qaeda fighters as they moved in and out of Afghanistan. On Christmas Day in 2003, Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf escaped an assassination attempt when two Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIEDs) intercepted his convoy and exploded.⁷ The attack was attributed to a hard-line extremist group operating in Pakistan's FATA and eventually linked to Nek Muhammad. As a result, Pakistan began to exert more pressure on extremist groups in the FATA.

The Bush Administration also applied pressure on the Pakistani Government to do something about the growing problem in the FATA and offered to help with intelligence

⁶ Khan, Ilyas M., "Profile of Nek Mohammad." *Dawn the Internet Edition*. 19 June 2004. Accessed 14 April 2015.
<http://www.webcitation.org/query?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.dawn.com%2F2004%2F06%2F19%2Flatest.htm&date=2009-05-16>

⁷ Masood, Salman. "PAKISTANI LEADER ESCAPES ATTEMPT AT ASSASSINATION." *The New York Times*, December 26, 2003, sec. World. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/26/world/pakistani-leader-escapes-attempt-at-assassination.html>.

and the use of RPAs.⁸ Eventually the two struck a deal where the U.S. would operate RPAs over Pakistani airspace to collect intelligence and eliminate key extremist leaders and material capability used to engage Coalition forces in Afghanistan. The deal was contingent, however, upon Pakistan being allowed to approve or disapprove every strike.⁹ The U.S. had also apparently agreed to take care of Pakistan's Nek Muhammad problem.¹⁰ In *The Way of the Knife*, Mark Mazzetti notes Nek Muhammad's final days: "Less than twenty-four hours after Nek Muhammad spoke to the BBC and wondered aloud about the strange bird that was following him, a predator fixed on his position and fired a Hellfire missile at the compound where he had been resting."¹¹ This action marked the first U.S. RPA strike in Pakistan and eventually led to a much broader effort to reduce extremist activity in the border area between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

It is important to note that the character of operations in Afghanistan and the use of RPAs in the FATA evolved as did the character of the conflict. Eventually, the use of RPAs in the FATA became entirely different from the use of RPAs in Yemen and Somalia. The FATA provided safehaven for extremists to travel into Afghanistan and conduct attacks and then disappear back over the Pakistan border. Intelligence agencies estimated that thousands of Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters fled Afghanistan and regrouped in the mountainous border regions of Pakistan's tribal areas.¹² The FATA

⁸ Mazzetti, Mark. "Origins of C.I.A.'s Not-So-Secret Drone War in Pakistan." *The New York Times*, April 6, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/07/world/asia/origins-of-cias-not-so-secret-drone-war-in-pakistan.html>.

⁹ Mazzetti, Mark. "Origins of C.I.A.'s Not-So-Secret Drone War in Pakistan." *The New York Times*, April 6, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/07/world/asia/origins-of-cias-not-so-secret-drone-war-in-pakistan.html>.

¹⁰ Mazzetti, Mark. *The Way of the Knife: The CIA, a Secret Army, and a War at the Ends of the Earth*. Penguin, 2013.

¹¹ Mazzetti, Mark. *The Way of the Knife: The CIA, a Secret Army, and a War at the Ends of the Earth*. Penguin, 2013, p109-110.

¹² Rashid, Ahmed. *Taliban*. Yale University Press, 2010. p237-240.

safehaven allowed fighters to provide various militant groups with refuge, weapons, ammunition, and other supplies such as ammonium nitrate to make improvised explosive devices (IEDs). In much the same way that the Viet Cong used the porous border with Laos during the Vietnam conflict, the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and various other groups intent on attacking Coalition forces used the FATA in Pakistan as a sanctuary. As a result, al-Qaeda and the Taliban re-emerged from their safehaven stronger with a solid base of support.¹³ Over time, the FATA and surrounding areas proved to be fertile recruiting grounds given the close ties that existed between the Taliban and their Pashtun tribes.

Although limited in numbers in the early years in FATA, RPAs provided surveillance and developed intelligence almost around the clock. Militants who conducted or planned attacks against Coalition forces from the FATA in Pakistan could be identified, tracked, and even killed. In this respect, the RPAs were striking known combatants who were using arbitrary geographic boundaries as a shield and doing their best to blend in with the local populace. The blending of terrorists and insurgents taking refuge in Pakistan eventually led to a significant increase in RPA strikes for selective repression aimed to degrade and attrit the material capabilities of the Taliban and al-Qaeda and reduce the number of militants.

The RPA campaign in Pakistan began in much the same way as in Yemen and Somalia described in Chapters 4 and 5. The United States operated with the permission and oversight of the host nation and targeted key leaders or individuals posing an imminent threat to U.S. or allied personnel, facilities, or interests. These actions support

¹³ Franzen, Simon, "Unity in Terrorism, the Relationship Between Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and Militants in Pakistan." *The Institute of Middle Eastern Democracy*. October 2012. Accessed on 14 April 2015, <http://instmed.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Al-Qaeda-and-the-Taliban.pdf>

direct and offensive airpower strategies utilizing asymmetric capabilities as applied in both Yemen and Somalia. RPAs also supported decapitation and denial efforts to degrade al-Qaeda and the Taliban's capabilities to effectively plan and conduct attacks. These strategies are reflected in the relatively low numbers of RPA strikes that primarily targeted leadership in the first few years of the campaign in Pakistan.

As RPA operations in Pakistan got underway, there were relatively few strikes as compared to the growing threat. After the single strike in 2004 that killed Nek Muhammad, the following year saw, Haitham al-Yemeni, a known al-Qaeda explosive expert, and Abu Hamza Rabia, al-Qaeda's number three leader at the time, targeted in strikes.¹⁴ Haitham al-Yemeni was killed but Abu Hamza Rabia only wounded. A second strike in 2005 targeting Abu Rabia was successful and also killed Suleiman al Moghrabi and Amer Azizi, both of whom were linked to the Madrid bombings in Spain in 2005. In 2006, there were four RPA strikes that targeted specific individuals and an al-Qaeda training camp. A few of these initial attacks, especially the attack on a training camp in Bajour targeting Ayman al-Zawahiri, tested the strength of the agreement between the United States and Pakistan concerning the use of RPAs in the FATA.

In January of 2006, there were two reported operations in Pakistan against suspected al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders in the FATA. The first was a raid to capture a known al-Qaeda leader in Saidgai, North Waziristan. The second was an RPA strike on a compound where Ayman al-Zawahiri was expected to meet with other top leaders.¹⁵

¹⁴ "Get the Data: Drone Wars, The Bush Years: Pakistan Strikes 2004-2009," *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism* August 10, 2011. Accessed 14 April 2015.

<http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2011/08/10/the-bush-years-2004-2009/>

¹⁵ "Get the Data: Drone Wars, The Bush Years: Pakistan Strikes 2004-2009," *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism* August 10, 2011. Accessed 14 April 2015.

<http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2011/08/10/the-bush-years-2004-2009/> and "US Targeted Zawahiri

Initial reports on the Zawahiri strike stated that all of the individuals killed were al-Qaeda militants. Subsequent reports noted that only six of the ten-to-eighteen people killed were militants.¹⁶ Later reporting by the *Washington Post* suggested that none of the al-Qaeda militants identified were killed during the strike.¹⁷ Reporters from the *New York Times* suggested that a local cleric, Maulavi Liaqat, removed several of the bodies immediately following the attack, which raises questions as to who was present during the time of the strike.¹⁸ As with many strikes, there are often conflicting details and sources have a variety of motivations for providing information, emphasizing specific sources, embellishing information, or simply leaving out key details. This strike was significant, however, as it was the first time that members of the Pakistani government protested and laid the blame for an RPA strike on the United States.¹⁹

A strike in October of 2006 on a madrassa in Bajaur, allegedly housing Taliban training, was a source of significant criticism from within Pakistan. The strike resulted in somewhere between 81 and 83 people killed. This strike remains the one by the U.S. causing the heaviest casualties in Pakistan. Ayman al-Zawahiri was allegedly in the madrassa, information which subsequently turned out to be false. Pakistani news reports

during Past Raids in Pakistan | The Long War Journal.” November 29, 2010, Accessed April 16, 2015. http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/11/us_targets_zawahiri_during_pas.php.

¹⁶ “US Targeted Zawahiri during Past Raids in Pakistan | The Long War Journal.” November 29, 2010, Accessed April 16, 2015.

http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/11/us_targets_zawahiri_during_pas.php.

¹⁷ Whitlock, Craig. “The New Al-Qaeda Central.” *The Washington Post*. September 9, 2007. Accessed 14 April 2015. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/08/AR2007090801845_pf.html

¹⁸ Pakistan, Carlotta Gall; Douglas Jehl Contributed Reporting From Washington For This Article, Mohammad Khan Contributed From Peshawar, and Salman Massod From Islamabad. “AIRSTRIKE BY U.S. DRAWS PROTESTS FROM PAKISTANIS.” *The New York Times*, January 15, 2006. http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/international/asia/15pakistan.html?pagewanted=print&_r=0

¹⁹ Pakistan, Carlotta Gall; Douglas Jehl Contributed Reporting From Washington For This Article, Mohammad Khan Contributed From Peshawar, and Salman Massod From Islamabad. “AIRSTRIKE BY U.S. DRAWS PROTESTS FROM PAKISTANIS.” *The New York Times*, January 15, 2006. http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/international/asia/15pakistan.html?pagewanted=print&_r=0

released shortly after the incident suggested most of the Bajaur victims were under the age of twenty.²⁰ The Government of Pakistan initially claimed it was responsible for the attack, but public pressure led it to blame the incident on the United States. However, many officials still felt the strike was justified. In an interview with former President Pervez Musharraf in 2012, *New Statesman* reporter Jemina Khan specifically asked about the Bajour event. He is quoted as saying, "It's all bullshit – sorry for the word – that it was a madrassa and seminary and children were studying Quran. [Al-Qaeda] used [the madrassa] as cover."²¹ While the truth regarding the strike may never be known, it did succeed in bringing greater attention and scrutiny to U.S. operations in Pakistan, which some saw as a tactical victory for the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Regardless of the specific reaction and consequences, RPA strikes in Pakistan increased in frequency from 2006 onward.

In 2007, there were approximately six RPA strikes in Pakistan that targeted Taliban and al-Qaeda leadership and a training facility.²² These strikes witnessed another watershed, the first U.S. RPA strike in Pakistan on member of the Haqqani family.²³ The Haqqani family, which runs a network of cells, is a Pashtun insurgent group that desires to establish Sharia law in Afghanistan.²⁴ After being largely displaced from Afghanistan,

²⁰ "Most Bajaur Victims Were under 20" - *Thenews.com.pk*. *The News International, Pakistan*. Accessed April 16, 2015. <http://www.thenews.com.pk/TodaysPrintDetail.aspx?ID=4043&Cat=13&dt=11/5/2006>.

²¹ Khan, Jemina. "Pervez Musharraf: 'If You Are Weak, Anyone Can Come and Kick You.'" *New Statesman*. 13 June 2012. Accessed 14 April 2015. <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/politics/2012/06/pervez-musharraf-if-weak-anyone-kick-you>

²² "Get the Data: Drone Wars, The Bush Years: Pakistan Strikes 2004-2009," *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism* August 10, 2011. Accessed 14 April 2015. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2011/08/10/the-bush-years-2004-2009/>

²³ "Get the Data: Drone Wars, The Bush Years: Pakistan Strikes 2004-2009," *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism* August 10, 2011. Accessed 14 April 2015. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2011/08/10/the-bush-years-2004-2009/>

²⁴ Jeffrey Dressler; *The Haqqani Network, A Strategic Threat*. Institute for the Study of War 2010.

the family based its operations out of Waziristan, Pakistan. Members of the Haqqani network maintained close ties with the Taliban, began targeting U.S. and Coalition forces in Afghanistan, and conducted operations in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.²⁵ The United States allegedly conducted an RPA strike against several Haqqani leaders on 2 November 2007. This RPA strike is noteworthy because it marks the expansion of threats to Afghanistan and Pakistan by the US beyond core al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

While Pakistani leaders were less concerned about the Haqqani network, and may have even assisted its members in the past, other terrorist groups within Pakistan expanded the range of threats against which RPAs were used.²⁶ Pakistan was home to over thirty transnational terrorist groups, including over a dozen domestic terrorist organizations.²⁷ Groups such as Hizb-ul-Majahideen and the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which is commonly referred to as the Pakistani Taliban, conducted attacks against Pakistan's government and their leaders vowed to resist government influence and establish strict Sharia law.²⁸ The TTP formed as an umbrella group and coordinated the activities of more than a dozen foreign and domestic Islamist groups operating in Pakistan.²⁹ The leaders of a number of these groups shared similar ideological worldviews and found common ground by focusing operations on common enemies. The

²⁵ "No Sanctuaries in Pakistan": Haqqani Network Shifts Base to Afghanistan." *The Express Tribune*. Accessed April 16, 2015. <http://tribune.com.pk/story/254368/no-haqqani-network-sanctuaries-in-pakistan-sirajuddin/>.

²⁶ "America Gives Aid To Pakistan, Pakistan Gives Terrorism To The World." December 16, 2014. Accessed April 16, 2015. <http://www.mintpressnews.com/america-gives-aid-pakistan-pakistan-gives-terrorism-world/199921/>.

²⁷ "Terrorist and Extremist Groups of Pakistan." Institute for Conflict Management, 2001. http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/Pakistan/terroristoutfits/group_list.htm

²⁸ "Terrorist Groups: Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)," *National Counterterrorism Center*. 14 April 2015, Available at: <http://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/ttp.html>

²⁹ Bajoria, Jayshree (6 February 2008). "Pakistan's New Generation of Terrorists". Council on Foreign Relations. Retrieved 14 April 2015. <http://www.cfr.org/pakistan/pakistans-new-generation-terrorists/p15422>

concerns of Pakistani leaders over the growing strength of a number of terrorist groups increased their desire to use force to limit their capabilities.

Pakistani concerns and requests led the United States to expand its RPA operations in the FATA at the end of 2007. During this timeframe the United States began to conduct “signature strikes” in the FATA to as part of a broader denial strategy. The United States also conducted a strike outside of the FATA at the request of the Pakistani government. In December of 2007, an RPA allegedly targeted Shaykh Issa al-Masri in Jani Kehl, Bannu Frontier. Shaykh al-Masri was an Egyptian al-Qaeda member with close ties to both the Haqqani network and the Taliban. He was also believed ultimately responsible for the successful assassination of former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, given that he issued a fatwa calling for her assassination.³⁰ The strike against al-Masri occurred just days after Benazir Bhutto was assassinated.³¹ Al-Masri was injured in the attack, but not killed. This attack demonstrates that far from being an innocent bystander, the successive Pakistani leaders have not only been complicit in the use of RPAs but have requested they be used more frequently. Given the ability of RPAs to monitor and collect intelligence in the FATA, an area that the Pakistani military was unable or unwilling to go, Pakistan and American leaders began to rely on them more heavily to target the growing number of extremists within Pakistan.

In 2008, the number of RPA strikes in Pakistan increased sevenfold over the previous year from five to somewhere between 31 and 35 strikes.³² This indicates a shift

³⁰ “Senior Al Qaeda Leader Leaves Pakistan, Directs Iraq Operations from Syria | The Long War Journal.” Accessed April 17, 2015. http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/08/senior_al_qaeda_lead_5.php.

³¹ “Senior Al Qaeda Leader Leaves Pakistan, Directs Iraq Operations from Syria | The Long War Journal.” Accessed April 17, 2015. http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/08/senior_al_qaeda_lead_5.php.

³² Thomas Rogers. “Pakistan Strikes | The Long War Journal.” Accessed April 22, 2015. <http://www.longwarjournal.org/pakistan-strikes> and “Get the Data: Drone Wars, The Bush Years: Pakistan

in targeting strategy and according to various sources, these strikes killed approximately 253 to 389 individuals including between 31 to 172 civilian casualties. The strikes targeted a more diverse range of extremists than previous years, which were focused almost exclusively on al-Qaeda's key leadership and preempting imminent threats. The expansion in number and target of strikes suggests an increased emphasis on reducing overall terrorist capability, or a denial strategy, as opposed to merely targeting top leaders, primarily a decapitation strategy. Targeting leadership did remain a priority, however, as just over half of the strikes eliminated approximately 19 High Value Individuals (HVIs), or key leaders.³³ The expansion of strikes in 2008 targeted militants and leaders of al-Qaeda, Taliban, the Haqqani network, TTP, Uzbek militants, as well as a number of foreign fighters including those holding U.S. passports.³⁴ The shift from a decapitation and limited denial strategy to a strategy of general denial, focused on targeted attrition, is apparent.

A further indication of a shift in strategy is the geographic expansion of RPA strikes within Pakistan. In November of 2008, there was yet another strike that occurred outside of the FATA. This strike was the first outside of the FATA widely reported in the Pakistani press. The target of the strike was members of the Quetta Shura, a ruling council meeting for regional militant groups. The strike reportedly killed six militants, including Abdullah Azzam al Saudi, and possibly three civilians.³⁵ After the strike,

Strikes 2004-2009," *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism* August 10, 2011. Accessed 14 April 2015. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2011/08/10/the-bush-years-2004-2009/>.

³³ "US Strikes in Pakistan, HVTs | The Long War Journal." Accessed April 22, 2015. <http://www.longwarjournal.org/pakistan-strikes-hvts>.

³⁴ "Get the Data: Drone Wars, The Bush Years: Pakistan Strikes 2004-2009," *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism* August 10, 2011. Accessed 14 April 2015. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2011/08/10/the-bush-years-2004-2009/>

³⁵ "Pakistan Protest to US Ambassador." *BBC*, November 20, 2008, sec. South Asia, available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7738966.stm.

Pakistani media outlets went beyond reporting and suggested that the use of RPAs outside of the FATA could eventually expand to strikes in Peshawar or even Islamabad. Such suggestions increased vocal opposition by the Pakistani public to RPA strikes and spurred some protests. Despite growing numbers of protests, in increasingly fiery rhetoric from some Pakistani politicians, the RPA program within the country continued to expand.

Public Pakistani protests occurred during the same timeframe that the Pakistani Government approved, sanctioned, and even encouraged the use of RPAs to assist in securing its border areas with Afghanistan.³⁶ Discrete sanctioning and approval, however, occurred simultaneously with public statements decrying infractions against Pakistan's sovereignty. Such behavior suggests many of dramatic political exchanges between the United States and Pakistan over the use of RPAs were primarily designed for domestic or international consumption as necessary. In August of 2008, for example, then-Prime Minister Yousef Raza Gilani is quoted as saying, "I don't care if [Americans conduct RPA strikes] as long as they get the right people. We'll protest in the National Assembly and then ignore it."³⁷ But recent reports indicate that Pakistan's involvement in the RPA strikes went much deeper and that targets were selected and developed jointly between the Central Intelligence Agency and its Pakistani counterpart, the Inter-Service Intelligence directorate or ISI.³⁸ Additionally, the base from which RPAs flew was

³⁶ Khan, M. Ilyas. "Secret Memos 'Show Pakistan Endorsed US Drone Strikes.'" *BBC News*. 24 October 2013. Accessed April 17, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-24649840>.

³⁷ Khan, M. Ilyas. "Secret Memos 'Show Pakistan Endorsed US Drone Strikes.'" *BBC News*. 24 October 2013. Accessed April 17, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-24649840>.

³⁸ Miller, Greg, and Bob Woodward. "Secret Memos Reveal Explicit Nature of U.S., Pakistan Agreement on Drones." *The Washington Post*, October 23, 2013. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/top-pakistani-leaders-secretly-backed-cia-drone-campaign-secret-documents-show/2013/10/23/15e6b0d8-3beb-11e3-b6a9-da62c264f40e_story.html.

located in Pakistan only with the government's explicit approval.³⁹ While some press and other reports suggest the United States has unilaterally used RPAs against terrorist threats regardless of violations of national sovereignty, the reality is that American leaders only expanded such operations with the explicit approval and assistance of foreign governments such as Pakistan. In addition, the expansion of RPA strikes served the desired strategic ends of both the United States and host-nations. In the case of the FATA in Pakistan, the increased number of strikes furthered the strategy of general denial and targeted attrition through selective repression.

On 23 January 2009, President Barack Obama authorized the first RPA strike of his administration in the FATA.⁴⁰ This strike was the first of approximately 53 in Pakistan throughout 2009. The increased number of strikes adds further credence to the expansion of strategy driving RPA use from leadership decapitation and limited denial to general denial and attrition. Casualty estimates for these strikes ranges wildly. Some sources suggest total fatalities at 463, of which 43 were civilians, while others put the figures at 744 fatalities and 210 civilian dead respectively. Only 17 fatalities are alleged to be HVIs.⁴¹

Despite the high number of casualties, RPA strikes against leadership during this time remained a priority. In August of 2009, the TTP leader Baitullah Mehsud was targeted and killed and in early December, al-Qaeda's external operations planner, Saleh

³⁹ Khan, Air Marshal (Retd.) Ayaz Ahmed, "Shamsi Air Base," *Defence Journal*, November 2007, Volume 11, No. 4, Karachi, Pakistan.

⁴⁰ Serle, Jack. "More than 2,400 Dead as Obama's Drone Campaign Marks Five Years," *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, available at: <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2014/01/23/more-than-2400-dead-as-obamas-drone-campaign-marks-five-years/>, accessed on 4 April 2015.

⁴¹ Thomas Rogers. "Pakistan Strikes | The Long War Journal." Accessed April 22, 2015. <http://www.longwarjournal.org/pakistan-strikes> and "Get the Data: Drone Wars, Obama 2010 Pakistan Strikes," *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism* August 10, 2011. Accessed 14 April 2015. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2011/08/10/obama-2010-strikes/>

al-Somali, was also killed. Sometime during 2009, the leader of Lashkar al-Zil, the al-Qaeda Shadow Army, died in an RPA strike. The deaths of these key leaders supposedly triggered retaliatory actions including a joint al-Qaeda and TTP coordinated suicide attack against a CIA outpost in Khost on 30 December 2009.⁴² The attack at Khost, labelled “the deadliest attack on agency personnel in decades,” has additional significance.⁴³ It appears to be the first successful instance of a retribution or revenge attack directly related to RPA operations. Second, the attack at Khost suggests the impact of the RPAs as a tactic. The Khost attack is also significant as it contributed, either directly or indirectly, to increased use of RPAs in 2010.

In 2010, the reported number of RPA strikes in Pakistan more than doubled. In fact, the total number of strikes exceeded all previous years combined. This expansion of strikes increased the pressure on al-Qaeda, the Taliban, the TTP, and others as part of a strategy to deny groups safehaven in the FATA. Given issues with reporting and the veracity of data, the specifics regarding strikes during this year are unclear. For example, there were somewhere between 117 to 128 strikes in Pakistan, resulting in 755 to 1,108 people killed of whom between 14 to 197 were civilians.^{44,45} Included among the casualties were 19 dead HVIs.

⁴² “US Killed Al Qaeda’s Lashkar Al Zil Commander in Airstrike | The Long War Journal.” Accessed April 26, 2015. http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/01/us_killed_al_qaedas.php.

⁴³ Ian Shapira, “For CIA family, a deadly suicide bombing leads to painful divisions,” *Washington Post* (28 January 2012), Accessed 8 May 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/for-cia-family-a-deadly-suicide-bombing-leads-to-painful-divisions/2012/01/20/gIQAYJGVYQ_story.html.

⁴⁴ Thomas Rogers. “Pakistan Strikes | The Long War Journal.” Accessed April 22, 2015. <http://www.longwarjournal.org/pakistan-strikes>.

⁴⁵ “Get the Data: Drone Wars, Obama 2010 Pakistan Strikes,” *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism* August 10, 2011. Accessed 14 April 2015. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2011/08/10/obama-2010-strikes/>

What is most significant about the strikes in 2010 is not their number but rather the dramatic decrease in the number of alleged civilian casualties. According to the New America Foundation, noncombatant deaths in Pakistan dropped from an estimated twenty-five percent to approximately six percent in 2010.⁴⁶ An article in the *Los Angeles Times* suggests the reduced number of civilian casualties may be the result of increased sensitivity within the Obama Administration to civilian deaths. The author of the article, quoting a former CIA official, noted that the change was due to improvements to technology and operations that gave the U.S. leaders confidence of subsequent opportunities for attacks where civilian deaths might be avoided.⁴⁷ Even though the threat from Pakistani extremist groups increased at the same time the number of civilian deaths associated with RPA operations decreased, public protests against RPA strikes in Pakistan became more frequent.⁴⁸ These protests had little effect domestically within Pakistan as its elected government, for reasons outlined previously, approved operations and strikes. The protests did manage, however, to spark debate internationally regarding the use of RPAs.

International debate and discussion on the use of RPAs in Pakistan, spurred in part by public protests, has suggested they are detrimental to long-term stability efforts, increase the number of militants, and violate Pakistan's sovereignty. For these reasons,

⁴⁶ "Get the Data: Drone Wars, Obama 2010 Pakistan Strikes," *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism* August 10, 2011. Accessed 14 April 2015. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2011/08/10/obama-2010-strikes/>

⁴⁷ Dilanian, Ken. "CIA Drones May be Avoiding Pakistani Civilians." *The Los Angeles Times*. 22 February 2011, Accessed 24 April 2015: <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/feb/22/world/la-fg-drone-strikes-20110222>

⁴⁸ "On Eve of Elections, a Dismal Public Mood in Pakistan." *Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project*. Accessed April 17, 2015. <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/05/07/on-eve-of-elections-a-dismal-public-mood-in-pakistan/>.

RPA operations should cease.⁴⁹ Within Pakistan, protests over RPAs were usually coordinated by domestic political groups opposed to the incumbent government using messages and themes that resonated with the Pakistani public, including foreign interference in domestic political affairs. The leaders of such political groups tended to highlight two themes during the protests: violation of Pakistan's sovereignty; and, disproportionate and unnecessary civilian casualties.⁵⁰ Some of these protests drew upwards of 10,000 people and their size has been cited as a reason to cease continuing RPA operations in Pakistan.

Comparing the outcome of other protests helps put the Pakistani protests against RPAs in perspective. In comparison, the RPA protests have been relatively mild. Consider the example of the Danish publisher Jyllands-Posten. The publisher released caricatures of Mohammed in 2005.⁵¹ These caricatures of Mohammed led hundreds of thousands of people to protest across dozens of nations. More importantly, the protests and resulting violence claimed over 250 victims.⁵² Within Pakistan, large crowds protested the cartoons including an estimated 70,000 people in Peshawar. In Lahore and Islamabad, Western-owned businesses and merchandise were targeted and burned over the caricatures. Put simply, the protests within Pakistan over RPAs have not been

⁴⁹ "Pakistani PM Warns against Anti-US Drone Protests - World Socialist Web Site." Accessed April 26, 2015. <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2013/12/31/paki-d31.html>.

⁵⁰ "Pakistani PM Warns against Anti-US Drone Protests - World Socialist Web Site." Accessed April 26, 2015. <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2013/12/31/paki-d31.html>.

⁵¹ Polgreen, Lydia. "Nigeria Counts 100 Deaths Over Danish Caricatures." *The New York Times*. 26 February 2006, Accessed on 21 April 2015: <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/24/international/africa/24nigeria.html>

⁵² "Cartoon Violence Spreads: Arson and Death Threats as Muhammad Caricature Controversy Escalates." *Spiegel Online*, February 4, 2006, sec. International. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/cartoon-violence-spreads-arson-and-death-threats-as-muhammad-caricature-controversy-escalates-a-399177.html> and "Danish Cartoon Controversy." Accessed April 26, 2015. http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/d/danish_cartoon_controversy/index.html.

comparable. While RPA strikes are certainly not popular, they do not generate as fervent a response as other issues, leading to the conclusion that discontent related to RPAs may be overstated. Indeed, a recent poll within Pakistan suggests public protest during this time may have had more to do with the American presence in neighboring Afghanistan than with RPA strikes.⁵³

The argument that continued RPA operations in Pakistan are a constant violation of Pakistan's sovereignty began to gain traction within the international community as a result of internal protests in Pakistan in 2012. In March of 2013 a special U.N. human rights envoy conducted an exhaustive three day investigation in Pakistan by meeting with Pakistani government officials in Islamabad. The UN envoy concluded that, "The position of the Government of Pakistan is quite clear. It does not consent to the use of drones by the United States on its territory and it considers this to be a violation of Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity."⁵⁴ However, as mentioned previously, documents released through various news outlets show that this is in fact not the case and that the Pakistani government unbeknownst to the public, had been approving and assisting the United States with RPA operations from the onset.⁵⁵ This realization largely took the wind out of the sails of the protests within Pakistan and effectively tamped down the violation of sovereignty argument.

⁵³ Tim Craig, "After years of tension, anti-American sentiment ebbs in Pakistan," *Washington Post*, 3 May 2015, Accessed on 8 May 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/after-years-of-tension-anti-american-sentiment-ebbs-in-pakistan/2015/05/03/6d0eccfe-dd36-11e4-b6d7-b9bc8acf16f7_story.html

⁵⁴ Emmerson, Ben, "Pakistan: Statement by the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and counter-terrorism." United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. 15 March 2103. Accessed 14 April 2015.

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=13148&LangID=E>

⁵⁵ Miller, Greg, and Bob Woodward. "Secret Memos Reveal Explicit Nature of U.S., Pakistan Agreement on Drones." *The Washington Post*, October 23, 2013. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/top-pakistani-leaders-secretly-backed-cia-drone-campaign-secret-documents-show/2013/10/23/15e6b0d8-3beb-11e3-b6a9-da62c264f40e_story.html.

Policy makers continued to rely upon RPAs in the FATA from 2011 through 2014. In 2011 there were between 64 to 75 reported strikes killing 363 to 666 militants of whom anywhere from 30 to 152 were civilians.⁵⁶ In 2012 there were between 46 to 50 reported strikes killing 199 to 410 militants of whom anywhere from four to 63 were civilians.⁵⁷ In 2013 there were 27 to 28 reported strikes killing 109 to 195 militants of whom approximately zero-to-four were civilians.⁵⁸ Finally, in 2014 there were 24 to 25 reported strikes with approximately 115 to 186 militants killed of whom zero-to-two were civilians.⁵⁹ Of particular interest is the significant decrease in the number of reported civilian casualties between 2013 and 2014. While there are many potential reasons for the reduction in reported civilian casualties, this change has largely quieted protests in Pakistan and reduced the level of international attention. Reduced protests and attention has preserved the option to continue RPA operations in the FATA and may indicate a level of acceptance of the tactic.

During the 2011 to 2014 time period, RPAs degraded extremist capabilities in the FATA. U.S. policy makers continued to use RPAs to target the extremist groups' key

⁵⁶ Thomas Rogers. "Pakistan Strikes | The Long War Journal." Accessed April 22, 2015. <http://www.longwarjournal.org/pakistan-strikes> and "Get the Data: Drone Wars, Obama 2011 Pakistan Strikes," *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism* August 10, 2011. Accessed 14 April 2015. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2011/08/10/obama-2011-strikes/>

⁵⁶ Thomas Rogers. "Pakistan Strikes | The Long War Journal." Accessed April 22, 2015.

⁵⁷ Thomas Rogers. "Pakistan Strikes | The Long War Journal." Accessed April 22, 2015. <http://www.longwarjournal.org/pakistan-strikes> and "Get the Data: Drone Wars, Obama 2012 Pakistan Strikes," *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism* January 11, 2012. Accessed 14 April 2015. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2012/01/11/obama-2012-strikes/>

⁵⁸ Thomas Rogers. "Pakistan Strikes | The Long War Journal." Accessed April 22, 2015. <http://www.longwarjournal.org/pakistan-strikes> and "Get the Data: Drone Wars, Obama 2013 Pakistan Strikes," *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism* January 3, 2013. Accessed 14 April 2015. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2013/01/03/obama-2013-strikes/>

⁵⁹ Thomas Rogers. "Pakistan Strikes | The Long War Journal." Accessed April 22, 2015. <http://www.longwarjournal.org/pakistan-strikes> and "Get the Data: Drone Wars, Obama 2014 Pakistan Strikes," *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism* June 11, 2014. Accessed 14 April 2015. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2014/06/11/obama-2014-strikes/>

leaders in addition to their material and manpower capabilities. This focus reduced the operational capabilities of the targeted groups and maximized the deleterious effect that RPAs wrought when key leaders were removed from the battlespace. In 2014, according to data compiled by the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), civilian casualties resulting from Taliban attacks in Pakistan were reduced by approximately forty percent.⁶⁰ The combined elimination of key leaders and reduction of material capability imposed significant costs on the extremist organizations operating within the FATA and began to have a significant impact on extremist capabilities.⁶¹

The degradation in capability of extremist organizations operating in the FATA has reduced the requirement for RPA strikes. The removal of key leaders in critical functional areas such as internal operations, finances, external operations, intelligence, ideology, propaganda, and media relations significantly reduced the overall capabilities of the targeted groups.⁶² Personnel with expertise in these areas are hard to come by and difficult to replace especially when combined with the removal of top leadership. Without key leaders, recruitment, training, planning, and operations all suffer. The death of key leaders such as the Emir of the Pakistani Taliban, Hakimullah Mehsud, have left the organization floundering.⁶³ As a result, the number of RPA strikes have decreased steadily since the apex in 2010. While there are a variety of contributing factors to the reduced number of strikes, the primary reason is arguably that the number of strikes

⁶⁰ "Fatalities in Terrorist Violence in Pakistan 2003-2015," *South Asia Terrorism Portal*. Accessed April 26, 2015. <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/database/casualties.htm>

⁶¹ Thompson, Julia. "A Small Measure of Progress." *Foreign Policy*. December 22, 2014. Accessed April 23, 2015. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/12/22/a-small-measure-of-progress/>.

⁶² "US Strikes in Pakistan, HVTs | The Long War Journal." Accessed April 22, 2015. <http://www.longwarjournal.org/pakistan-strikes-hvts>.

⁶³ "Drone Strike in Pakistan Kills Head of Pakistan Taliban." *FoxNews.com*, November 1, 2013. <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2013/11/01/drone-strike-in-pakistan-kills-head-pakistan-taliban-security-sources-say/>.

tapered off as militant organizations became less able to conduct effective attacks against Western interests and the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The reduction of extremist capability is an indication that the RPA strikes served to create favorable conditions on the ground to allow for other initiatives, primarily led by the Pakistani government, to take effect. In June of 2014, the Pakistani military launched Operation Zarb-e-Azb that the Pakistani military reports is aimed at reducing local and international terrorists, “of all hues and colors [without] any discrimination, whether it is Haqqani network or TTP.”⁶⁴ These types of efforts help serve to defeat extremist organizations in Pakistan and in the FATA in the long-term. While a respite from persistent RPA operations could give extremist organizations an opportunity to regroup, it must be noted that RPAs are still flying, monitoring the situation on the ground, and collecting several types of intelligence in support of Coalition and Pakistani efforts.

The transition from direct strikes to more indirect intelligence collection and surveillance for RPA operations in the FATA suggests a positive shift towards other land-based initiatives. Pakistani military engagement in the FATA will further reduce extremist capability and can also address the core grievances of local populations, deny the re-establishment of safehavens, and prevent the return of extremist groups. These ground initiatives build upon the progress that RPAs have made and are needed to counter the spread of extremism. While RPAs are effective at gaining intelligence and setting conditions, RPAs are not sufficient to prevent nor defeat extremist groups by themselves. In areas where supplemental ground operations are non-existent, RPAs can

⁶⁴ Haider, Mateen. “IS Phenomenon Will Not Be Allowed in Pakistan, Afghanistan: General Raheel.” *Dawn*. 20 November, 2014. Accessed 24 April, 2015. <http://www.dawn.com/news/1145750>.

serve to deny and degrade extremist capabilities in order to buy time to coordinate and establish complimentary initiatives. For long-term success, however, RPA operations should only be one facet of a broader strategy to defeat extremist organizations.

Ultimately, the RPA campaign in Pakistan is having a positive strategic effect. Air actions are nested within the larger strategy to defeat violent extremist networks and contain elements of direct, offensive, cumulative and coercive air strategies in support of selective repression. These elements are supported by asymmetric capabilities that allows the United States to strike at violent extremist groups within their supposed safehavens by utilizing raiding tactics with precise firepower and minimal risk. This tactic reduces militants through denial and decapitation over time and contributes to the NSCT goals to disrupt, degrade, dismantle, and defeat violent extremist networks wherever they take root, eliminate safehavens used to train, plot and conduct attacks, and degrading links between core elements and adherents and affiliates. These actions support movement towards a combination of acceptable ends to include decapitation, selective repression, and/or failure.

Summary

RPA operations in the FATA have been critical to the security situation in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. The FATA remains an area that is essentially outside Pakistan's control and difficult to reach. As such, the FATA became the de-facto safehaven for al-Qaeda and Taliban forces as they fled Afghanistan in the winter of 2001. This situation set conditions for the Taliban and remnants of al-Qaeda, with freedom of movement and sanctuary along the Pakistani border, to begin sowing the seeds of an

insurgency. It also allowed extremist groups who disagreed with Pakistan's support of the United States to conduct attacks into Pakistan. As a result, Pakistan began to work with the United States and exert more pressure on extremist groups in the FATA.

As the problem in the FATA grew worse for both Pakistan and the United States, the United States offered to assist with intelligence and the use of RPAs. The two nations struck a deal where the U.S. would operate RPAs over Pakistani airspace to collect intelligence and eliminate key extremist leaders and material capability used to engage Coalition forces in Afghanistan.⁶⁵ With Pakistan's approval and support, the United States conducted its first RPA strike in June of 2004, targeting a Taliban leader responsible for numerous operations to include an assassination attempt against Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf. This event marked the first U.S. RPA strike in Pakistan and eventually led to a much broader effort to reduce extremist activity in FATA.

As the character of the conflict evolved, the use of RPAs was slow to adapt to the need to degrade the operational capabilities of the extremist groups operating in the FATA. At first, there were relatively few strikes as compared to the threat. The use of RPAs did increase in the FATA, however, and eventually became markedly different from the use of RPAs in Yemen and Somalia. This difference is primarily because of the total number of extremists and the fact that the FATA provided safehaven for militants to travel into Afghanistan and conduct attacks and then disappear back over the Pakistan border. The blending of terrorists and insurgents taking refuge in Pakistan eventually led

⁶⁵ Mazzetti, Mark. "Origins of C.I.A.'s Not-So-Secret Drone War in Pakistan." *The New York Times*, April 6, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/07/world/asia/origins-of-cias-not-so-secret-drone-war-in-pakistan.html>.

to greater demand in the FATA and resulted in a significant increase in the number of RPA strikes. These strikes were aimed to degrade and attrit the material capabilities of the Taliban and al-Qaeda and reduce the number of militants over time. These actions reflect the belief that airpower strategies could be pursued to degrade extremist capabilities and expedite a group's progress towards a desirable ends.

In 2008, the number of RPA strikes in Pakistan increased sevenfold over the previous year from five to somewhere between 31 and 35 strikes.⁶⁶ The strikes targeted a more diverse range of extremists than previous years, which were focused almost exclusively on al-Qaeda's key leadership and preempting imminent threats. The expansion in the number and types of targets for strikes suggests an increased emphasis on reducing overall terrorist capability, or a denial strategy, as opposed to merely targeting top leaders, primarily a decapitation strategy. The shift from a decapitation and limited denial strategy to a strategy of general denial, focused on targeted attrition, reflects a belief in the cumulative nature of RPA operations. A further indication of a shift in strategy is the geographic expansion of RPA strikes within the FATA and Pakistan. While RPA strikes were primarily limited to the FATA, as the threat to Pakistan increased, so too did the geographic areas where RPA strikes occurred.

The increased awareness of RPA strikes spurred some protests in Pakistan, but RPA operations continued to expand in frequency and targeted a wider range of extremists. In fact, the Pakistani Government approved, sanctioned, and even encouraged the use of RPAs to assist in securing its border areas with Afghanistan

⁶⁶ Thomas Rogers. "Pakistan Strikes | The Long War Journal." Accessed April 22, 2015. <http://www.longwarjournal.org/pakistan-strikes> and "Get the Data: Drone Wars, The Bush Years: Pakistan Strikes 2004-2009," *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism* August 10, 2011. Accessed 14 April 2015. <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2011/08/10/the-bush-years-2004-2009/>.

unknown to the public.⁶⁷ Reports indicate that Pakistan's involvement in the RPA strikes went much deeper than the Pakistani public realized, and that targets were selected and developed jointly between the Central Intelligence Agency and its Pakistani counterpart, the Inter-Service Intelligence directorate or ISI.⁶⁸ Furthermore, the expansion of RPA strikes served the strategic ends of both the United States and host-nations and the increased number of strikes reflected a strategy of general denial and targeted attrition executed through cumulative selective repression.

RPA operations saw successive increases in 2009 and 2010 and adds further evidence to the expansion of strategy driving RPA use from leadership decapitation and limited denial to general denial and attrition through selective repression. In 2010, the reported number of RPA strikes in Pakistan more than doubled and exceeded all previous years combined. The expansion of strikes was designed to increase the pressure on al-Qaeda, the Taliban, the TTP, and associated extremist groups as part of a strategy to deny groups safehaven in the FATA. Of note, during this surge in RPA operations, the number of alleged civilian casualties decreased dramatically. In spite of the dramatic decrease, protests in Pakistan began to increase in frequency. These protests occurred as the public became more aware of RPA strikes and were led to believe that the United States conducted the strikes without the consent of the Pakistani government. However, Policy makers continued to rely upon RPAs in the FATA from 2011 through 2014.

⁶⁷ Khan, M. Ilyas. "Secret Memos 'Show Pakistan Endorsed US Drone Strikes.'" *BBC News*. 24 October 2013. Accessed April 17, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-24649840>.

⁶⁸ Miller, Greg, and Bob Woodward. "Secret Memos Reveal Explicit Nature of U.S., Pakistan Agreement on Drones." *The Washington Post*, October 23, 2013. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/top-pakistani-leaders-secretly-backed-cia-drone-campaign-secret-documents-show/2013/10/23/15e6b0d8-3beb-11e3-b6a9-da62c264f40e_story.html.

From 2011 through 2014, there was a significant decrease in the number of RPA strikes and an associated decrease in extremist capability originating from the FATA. Likewise, there was another stark reduction in the number of reported civilian casualties. In 2013, the percentage of reported civilian casualties was approximately zero to a maximum of 4% of the total estimated number of militants killed. In 2014, the percentage of reported civilian casualties was approximately zero to 2% of the total militants killed. This reduction in civilian casualties has largely quieted protests in Pakistan and reduced the level of international attention. While there are a number of potential reasons for the reduction of civilian casualties, the result has preserved the option to continue RPA operations in the FATA.

Operations during the 2011 to 2014 time period in the FATA continued to target key leaders in addition to their material and manpower capabilities. This time period reduced the operational capabilities of the targeted groups and maximized the cumulative effects of RPAs when key leaders were removed from the battlespace. Civilian deaths resulting from Taliban attacks in Pakistan were reduced by approximately forty percent.⁶⁹ The combined elimination of key leaders and reduction of material capability imposed significant costs on the extremist organizations operating within the FATA and began to have a significant impact on extremist capabilities.⁷⁰

The reduction of extremist capability is an indication that the RPA strikes served to create favorable conditions on the ground to allow for other initiatives, primarily led by the Pakistani government, to take effect. These types of efforts help serve to defeat

⁶⁹ "Fatalities in Terrorist Violence in Pakistan 2003-2015," *South Asia Terrorism Portal*. Accessed April 26, 2015. <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/database/casualties.htm>

⁷⁰ Thompson, Julia. "A Small Measure of Progress." *Foreign Policy*. December 22, 2014. Accessed April 23, 2015. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/12/22/a-small-measure-of-progress/>.

extremist organizations in Pakistan and the FATA in the long-term. Additionally, the transition from kinetic operations to primarily a non-kinetic role for RPA operations in the FATA highlights a positive shift towards other ground-centric initiatives, and indicates that RPA operations contributed to increased security. It must be noted that RPAs are still flying, monitoring the situation on the ground, and collecting several types of intelligence in support of Coalition and Pakistani efforts. While RPAs are effective at gaining intelligence and setting conditions, RPAs are not sufficient to prevent nor defeat extremist groups by themselves. For long-term success, RPA operations should only be one facet of a broader strategy to defeat extremist organizations.

The degradation of extremist capabilities is an indication that the RPA campaign in Pakistan is having the desired strategic effect. Essentially, RPAs have contributed to disrupting, degrading, and dismantling extremist capabilities. They have also significantly reduced safehaven for groups operating within the FATA and severed or reduced linkages between al-Qaeda core leadership and affiliates. The combined progress towards these identified criteria reinforces the assertion that RPAs are having the desired strategic effect in Pakistan. Ultimately, the cumulative Pakistan's efforts combined with the use of RPAs utilizing airpower strategies will move violent extremist groups towards an acceptable end through selective repression.

CHAPTER 8

Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

The drones have done their job remarkably well: by killing key leaders and denying terrorists sanctuaries in Pakistan, Yemen, and, to a lesser degree, Somalia, drones have devastated al-Qaeda and associated anti-American militant groups. And they have done so at little financial cost, at no risk to U.S. forces, and with fewer civilian casualties than many alternative methods would have caused.

- Daniel L. Byman,

Summary

Strategy, policy, and polity all serve to identify the desired ends and constrain the acceptable ways and means used to confront violent extremist networks. However, it is clear that the United States cannot afford to ignore violent extremism. Successive U.S. strategy documents, from the National Security Strategy down to the National Strategy for Counterterrorism, identify the broad and specific goals of counterterrorism action against violent extremist networks. These documents all serve to shape the actions of the United States, and in turn, are shaped by policy and the will of the American people.

The current policy of the United States towards counterterrorism is communicated through a number of formal and informal means. These range from the broad guidance contained in the Authorized Use of Military Force all the way through the short, two-page unclassified summary of the President's policy guidance published in May 2013. The combination of strategy and policy informs the relevant and preferred US approaches for confronting violent extremist networks. One approach is the continued application of military force but without the requirement for a large ground force conducting security

and stability operations, or large COIN operations.¹ This shift in strategy and policy reflects the will of the polity after almost fourteen years of war.

Domestically, there is no longer an appetite to have thousands of American military personnel risking their lives to provide security and stability in foreign nations. Current strategy and associated policy reflect this change, especially with regard to Syria and Iraq. However, the character of the conflict against violent extremism demands action and policy makers recognize that the United States is engaged in a long-war. In a democracy, the polity gets a vote, and the will of the people is critical to sustaining military campaigns. Any selected course of action will need to be applied over time and must remain within the bounds of domestic will. This reality further limits military options and informs decisions on the type, amount, and frequency of force applied in a given conflict. Within the context of this environment, airpower provides unique capabilities and opportunities to act in accordance with the relevant strategy and policy, in a manner that a polity weary of overseas interventions can tolerate.

Remotely piloted aircraft, or RPAs, provide unique opportunities to apply myriad capabilities because of the character of the fight against violent extremism. As a means of strategy in an irregular war, RPAs increase options for the use of force while at the same time reducing or eliminating risk to U.S. personnel. The ability of the United States to use low-risk means such as RPAs to combat an enemy seeking to exhaust U.S. political will or force an overreaction—in the form of a sizeable military intervention. Their use denies extremists fuel for the strategic narrative they seek by reducing the need for what they see as “infidel” ground forces. RPAs also provide significant capability for

¹ “National Security Strategy 2015.” *National Security Strategy Archive*. Accessed February 7, 2015, p9. http://nssarchive.us/?page_id=8.

intelligence collection, which translates to better target development, more precise operations, and less collateral damage than other means of warfare. For example, recent Saudi airstrikes in Yemen have killed an estimated 551 civilians.² In contrast, U.S. RPA operations in Yemen only killed six civilians throughout 2014.³ Thus, RPAs permit options for U.S. involvement, allow for engagement over a longer period of time, and enable longer-term strategies. Such strategies should reflect known pathways for causing terrorism to end.

As Chapter 3 argued, Audrey Kurth Cronin identifies six primary pathways that cause terrorism to end. These pathways are: success, repression, failure, reorientation, decapitation, and negotiation. Of these six pathways, success, reorientation, and negotiation are not preferable or politically acceptable ways for the U.S. to get extremist networks to end. The remaining pathways are decapitation, repression, and failure. As Chapter 3 suggested, however, Cronin's delineation of these causes may be overly narrow and inadvertently overlook the cooperative advantages of simultaneously pursuing multiple ways to accomplish acceptable ends.

By re-examining Cronin's idea of repression, this thesis argued RPAs offer another acceptable avenue to cause extremist groups to end. Repression is normally thought to require a large ground force. According to Cronin's definition, repression is the use of overwhelming brute force to stamp out terrorism.⁴ She notes that democracies are not likely to have the political will to apply the amount of force required in a

² Zarocostas, John. "Saudi Bombing in Yemen Still Claiming Civilian Casualties, UN Says." *McClatchy DC*. Accessed May 15, 2015. <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2015/04/24/264398/saudi-bombing-in-yemen-still-claiming.html>.

³ "Yemen Strikes | The Long War Journal." Accessed March 19, 2015. <http://www.longwarjournal.org/yemen-strikes>.

⁴ Cronin, Audrey Kurth. *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011.

relatively short timeframe to be effective at repression. The advent of RPAs, however, provides additional options. It may be possible to repress an organization by applying consistent limited force over a longer timeframe. By judiciously utilizing direct action as necessary, RPA operations can repress enemy capabilities while sustaining the will to conduct the length of campaign required to fight the long-war. Thus, the development and use of RPAs presents a greater range of options for repression than Cronin's work recognizes. Working towards repression, utilizing the unique qualities of airpower, may also drive violent extremist networks towards failure.

The culmination of targeted actions over time, using airpower in general and RPAs in specific, can be considered *selective repression*. This concept differs from Audrey Kurth Cronin's definition of repression—the application of overwhelming force—as selective repression is applied over time to deny an organization's imminent actions, reduce their material capabilities, and simultaneously target key leaders to disrupt operational and strategic planning initiatives. Thus, selective repression is part of a long-term strategy that relies on cumulative actions to attrit human and material capability to allow cooperative partner initiatives to take effect. Selective repression can also be considered a viable way for terrorism to end, given enough time and patience, through the failure of violent extremist networks to achieve their goals.

Airpower strategies should be consistent with American grand strategy, policy, and the polity's will in order to force violent extremism to end according to Cronin's pathways. Colin Gray summarizes the range of airpower strategies as a series of pairs. The pairs include: direct or indirect, sequential or cumulative, attritional or maneuverist-annihilating, persisting or raiding, coercive or brute force, offensive or defensive,

symmetrical or asymmetrical, or a complex combination of the aforementioned ways.⁵ These airpower strategies also reflect the range of options where airpower could be used to support or achieve objectives. Furthermore, the relevant airpower strategies that reflect national strategy and policy in which airpower would play a significant role are: direct, cumulative, attritional, persistent-raiding, coercive, offensive, and asymmetrical. These airpower strategies are the primary potential ways in which airpower can significantly contribute to the fight against violent extremist networks.

Within the framework of acceptable or relevant airpower strategies, RPAs enable a broad range of options. RPAs conduct direct and offensive operations in foreign nations given their intelligence collection capability, precision strike capability, and limited footprint. With partner nation approval, RPAs ensure that the United States has the ability to act at a desired time and place. RPA operations can gather intelligence for weeks or months before determining the right target, time, or location to strike. The net effect of these capabilities and attributes enables the U.S. to directly engage violent extremist networks on foreign soil through the air. These types of operations could be considered persistent-raiding strategies because force is used for immediate purpose and short-term gain, while at the same time allowing for the benefits of continuous presence and intelligence collection. RPAs also enable partnering with foreign nations through intelligence exchanges to bolster counterterrorism efforts and help set conditions for success.

The broad range of options that RPAs provide, enable unique advantages that remain relevant and useful over time. Accurate, detailed, and timely intelligence

⁵ Gray, Colin S., *Airpower for Strategic Effect*. Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.: Air University Press, 2012.

products are required at every phase of conflict. Intelligence driven operations allows the U.S. and partner nations to assess a violent extremist network's capabilities and intent, and apply force as required. As kinetic operations degrade a violent extremist group's capabilities, the priority of effort can focus on non-kinetic initiatives that will ultimately have the greatest chance of success. As priorities shift, RPAs are extremely valuable in gathering intelligence to support initiatives, monitoring progress, and conducting strike operations if required. These are critical long-term actions in the fight against terrorism and violent extremist networks.

RPAs provide decision makers and national leaders freedom of action and freedom of maneuver to pursue direct and offensive air strategies. The domestic political environment of foreign nations often limits options within those nations that want to combat violent extremist networks. Political dynamics may cause a populace to reject the notion of a U.S. ground force presence or restrict major air operations. In turn, this limits options for the United States. Based on current operations in Yemen, Somalia, and the FATA, RPAs may fall below the domestic tolerance threshold of some foreign nations and present a viable option agreeable to both the host nation and American public. RPAs provide an effective offensive capability and collect detailed intelligence without the need for a significant U.S. ground presence.

The technological capabilities of RPAs in the fight against violent extremism allows for asymmetric operations in support of a strategy. The lack of enemy ground to air capabilities combined with the inherent character of the conflict allow the United States to capitalize on the asymmetric advantages of RPAs. While violent extremist networks continue to search for ways to counter RPAs, the only limitations from the

perspective of U.S. national leaders are issues of tolerance and political will and the availability of sufficient numbers of RPAs. The net effect of RPA strikes is a cumulative air strategy in which the sum of targeted strikes is much greater than the whole. If RPAs are used for targeting material capability or leadership, the air strategy can be coercive in terms of denial and decapitation. In the same manner, the United States maintains the option to pursue air strategies that seek to exhaust the enemy's physical and morale strength through attrition. Ultimately, RPAs preserve options to utilize one or any combination of the relevant airpower strategies in support of national objectives.

The recognized value of the intelligence gathered by RPAs in Yemen, Somalia, and Pakistan has driven the United States to provide each nation with unarmed RPAs. These tools will assist local counterterrorism initiatives and will provide indigenous forces with a reliable capability to support counterterrorism operations. Ideally, the combination of U.S. and local efforts will provide opportunity to engage violent extremist networks directly. While direct engagement is not intended to be the sole effort against violent extremist networks, it is often necessary to set conditions, such as near-term security or denying an enemy capability, to allow other initiatives to have an effect. Thus, direct engagement, driven by intelligence, becomes a necessary action in the short-term and long-term fight against violent extremist networks.

The capabilities and options that RPAs provide need to be focused in areas that have the greatest chance of success. To be effective, airpower strategies must support and make discernable progress towards national objectives as defined by policy makers. The criteria for evaluation of success must be relevant to the use of RPAs. Progress can be assessed against the objectives outlined in the National Strategy for Counterterrorism

and by ensuring efforts, such as RPA strikes, move violent extremist networks towards an acceptable end. This framework ensures that tactical actions are nested within a broader strategy that can be successful.

Chapters 4 through 6 explored the use of RPAs for the purpose of selective repression in Yemen, Somalia, and Pakistan. The U.S. use of RPAs supports national security goals of taking offensive action against terrorist organizations where they establish safehaven. Yet the use of RPAs in each case was different, based on U.S. goals, the nature of the terrorist threat in the country, the character of the geography, and the tolerance of the host nation population for U.S. action.

RPA operations have differed in Yemen, Somalia, and Pakistan in degree and kind. In Yemen, the subject of Chapter 4, RPA operations have been focused on a combination of limited denial and decapitation. Over time, these selective repression efforts degraded extremist capabilities and prevented AQAP from planning and executing successful external attacks. Political instability, however, prevented Yemeni forces from capitalizing on AQAP's degraded capability. This instability created operating space for AQAP and has complicated internal counterterrorism efforts. With the political situation unresolved, efforts will likely focus on degrading and denying capabilities until such time when other initiatives can be implemented.

In Somalia, RPA strikes by the United States have largely been used in a modest decapitation campaign as Chapter 5 suggested. Engagement from neighboring countries and AMISOM forces limited the need to conduct a large number of strikes. Selective repression contributed to throwing al-Shabaab leaders off balance and bought time for the government of Somalia to reestablish itself with the assistance of neighboring countries

and the international community. The Somali government was able to capitalize on increased security conditions and initiated changes that allowed for a more representative government.

Within Pakistan, and in particular the FATA, the subject of Chapter 6, RPA operations focused on denial, decapitation, and attrition. Over time, the cumulative effects of selective repression reduced the ability of extremist organizations to conduct spectacular attacks. Groups also began striking targets within Pakistan as their reach and ability to conduct external attacks diminished. In a twist of irony, extremist attacks within Pakistan reduced internal opposition to RPAs and focused Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts, further reducing extremist capabilities. In all three case studies, selective repression through relevant airpower strategies degraded and denied enemy capabilities and set conditions for other initiative to have success.

Conclusion

The examination of airpower strategies to drive violent extremist terrorism through the use of RPAs in Yemen, Somalia, and the FATA suggests that RPAs are having a positive strategic effect. Although the effects are primarily short-term in nature, the cumulative application of selective force sets positive conditions for the long-term. AQAP in Yemen, al-Shabaab in Somalia, and al-Qaeda, TTP, and the Taliban in Pakistan, are less capable organizations today than they were five or six years ago. Much of their decline in organizational capability can be tied, in large part, to the persistence, reach, intelligence, and precise strikes afforded by RPAs.

The success of RPAs, and the stated policy of the United States, suggests they will continue to play a primary role in the nation's effort against violent extremism. RPAs have changed the character of war by reducing the both the risk and cost of applying military force in conflict. This makes RPAs uniquely suited to combat non-state actors who use terrorist tactics to expand conflict and draw states into costly prolonged engagements for which support will eventually wane. RPAs provide options against non-state actors that reduce civilian casualties within legitimate nation-states, yet are still able to effectively find, fix, and finish militants. RPAs also preserve the ability for nation-states to apply force over a longer period of time, and are much more palatable to a local population than a combat force that occupies territory. In essence, RPAs provide advantages to pursue selective repression against violent extremist networks and leverage the cumulative effects to set conditions for success. These advantages guarantee that RPAs will continue to occupy an important place among the available means of war.

In spite of the success that RPAs have had, they will not be able to defeat violent extremist organizations on their own. Airpower strategies and RPA operations need to be integrated into larger strategic efforts that address the core issues of extremism. While RPAs can significantly deny and degrade a group's operational capability, they do little to combat the violent ideologies that perpetuate terrorist activities. In the fight against violent extremism, RPAs may be necessary, but are not sufficient. Direct and offensive actions need to support indirect methodologies that can ultimately address underlying grievances. Therefore, defeating violent extremist networks will take a whole of government approach and require meaningful partnerships to build capacity and develop long-term solutions. Clausewitz warned, "There can be no question of a purely military

evaluation of a great strategic issue, nor of a purely military scheme to solve it,” and this is especially true in a limited war the U.S. is conducting against violent extremist networks.⁶ Ultimately, RPAs are a unique means of war that can leverage the relevant ways of airpower and move violent extremist networks towards acceptable ends. Therefore, RPAs are having a positive, if only gradual strategic effect for the United States in the pursuit of its goals.

Recommendations

The freedom of movement and action that RPAs provide policy makers are critical to confronting violent extremism today. These freedoms are likely to remain critical in the future. RPAs provide options for political decision makers that have much less associated risk than other types of military force. To protect the options and capabilities that RPAs provide, senior U.S. policy makers should take action to preserve American ability to act, maintain our asymmetric military advantages, and reinforce established norms for the legal and ethical use of force in areas that are not considered combat zones. Such actions must, for reasons that will become clear, require a greater amount of disclosure about RPA operations. In essence, to maintain our strategic advantage, policy makers will have to find a way to cut the Gordian Knot between transparency and security regarding RPA and targeted killing processes, procedures, and operations. The current policy of silence regarding most RPA operations, in the name of preserving national security, has created an informational vacuum filled by well-meaning

⁶ Citing Paret and Moran in; Peter Paret, Gordon Alexander Craig, and Felix Gilbert, *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 200; Clausewitz et al., *On War*, 607.

media and human rights groups and malicious extremist misinformation. The U.S. runs the risk of ceding the strategic narrative, so important to irregular warfare, to those with agendas that may not align with the United States' security interests and ultimately compromise our ability to act. The author humbly submits the following three recommendations for consideration in order to preserve the advantage the U.S. has with its RPAs for the future.

1. Shape the future environment for the acceptable use of RPAs

As the recognized leader of the international community economically and normatively, the United States should continue to set precedents for other nations to follow. Currently, the U.S. enjoys a near monopoly on the use of armed RPAs. This is likely to change, however, in the near future. The proliferation of RPA technologies, however, is occurring rapidly and many nations are developing or purchasing capabilities similar to those of the United States. The United States should take advantage of its position as establishing normative leader by establishing an international legal framework for the use of armed RPAs in the international system.

Arguably, because of their ability to be persistent, precise, and discriminate, RPAs may be the most ethical means of warfare available. As a normative leader in the international community, the United States is ethically obligated to use RPAs to minimize civilian casualties and collateral damage. The persistence afforded by RPAs enables two critical functions that reduce civilian casualties. First, RPAs often develop information on targets for days, weeks, or months using several different types of intelligence collection. Such information confirms the presence of targeted individual

and current U.S. rules of engagement attempt to reduce the possibility of striking the wrong person to almost zero. Second, developing information on a target for days, weeks, or months establishes what operators term a “pattern of life,” during which an individual can be struck at a given time and place where civilians will not or are less likely to be killed. For example, if a target drives to a village once a week for meetings, operators may determine the best place to strike to prevent collateral damage is along a deserted stretch of road on the way to the village. Persistent observation, patience, and restrictive but still-classified rules of engagement enable the accurate employment of precise weapons in the least damaging and destructive manner possible.

Establishing international policies and norms will require some additional transparency on how the United States selects, develops, and approves RPA operations. Fortunately, much of the framework to support this recommendation is already codified. President Obama’s policy memo on the use of force outside of combat areas contains the basics to establish international policy and norms for RPAs. Specifically, the key components are:

- There is an imminent threat,
- No other reasonable alternatives exist to address the threat,
- The action respects national sovereignty and abides by international law,
- There is near certainty that the target is present,
- There is near certainty that non-combatant will not be injured or killed.

These components could be used as a basic framework for the use of RPAs in the international system, but as with any seemingly simple task, the devil is in the details. To give the above criteria meaning and establish precedent, the United States would have to release information on what qualifies, how it defines each of the above terms, and how it determines each one of the components have been met. For the benefit of shaping the

future RPA environment, a balance can be reached between transparency and security that would inform the international community, yet still protect sensitive sources and methods that provide asymmetric advantage. In some cases the intelligence community could release *what* it looks for when determining the key leaders of extremist groups or militants involved in imminent attack preparations but still protect *how* the information is collected, processed, and disseminated.

2. Minimize the use of signature strikes to the greatest extent possibly

The use of signature strikes, without associated transparency, diminishes the legitimacy of the U.S. and provides fodder for the enemy's strategic narrative through unintentional casualties. Signature strikes are not carried out without valid policy or national security reasons or justification to take action. Signature strikes are based on pattern-of-life behavior from corroborating sources that indicates individuals pose a credible and imminent threat. The killing of individuals posing such a threat may be necessary to save American or friendly lives.

Based on the available data, however, signature strikes increase the likelihood that civilians will get killed. When this occurs, the burden of proof in the court of public opinion shifts to the government to explain or justify actions and government officials often remain silent for security reasons. While this silence may be necessary to protect the intelligence methods that justified a particular strike, it allows the enemy to develop and shape the strategic narrative. In areas outside of designated combat zones, signature strikes should be minimized to the greatest extent possible, or the government should increase the release of information associated with the justification of particular strikes.

Based on the framework in the first recommendation, signature strikes can create the perception internationally that we are not following our own stated policies or take action inconsistent with our values. The amount of detailed and accurate intelligence required to employ RPAs effectively should validate two near-certainties: near-certainty of the intended target and near-certainty that civilians will not be killed. These near-certainties set a high standard for the application of force but such standards are necessary to maintain U.S. credibility to reinforce the moral high ground in the struggle against violent extremists. Signature strikes, however, have the appearance of running contrary to stated American policy and values. While the authors recognizes some circumstances in which signature strikes are justified, prudent, and necessary, such as a fleeting opportunity against a sufficiently important terrorist leader or facilitator, the U.S. can and should offset this against its long-term ability to uphold the rules, values, and norms for which the country and the international system, stand. Preserving our moral legitimacy internationally is necessary if we are to influence future discourse on RPAs and the use of force.

If the combinations of our actions—signature strikes—and our inaction to explain the process by which terrorists were targeting, the U.S. risks ceding the strategic narrative further to violent extremist networks. The U.S. ability to operate armed RPAs in foreign nations is heavily dependent on domestic and international public opinion. More importantly, international opinion may turn on the U.S. to the point where we eliminate our options to combat violent extremism.

3. Do not over-engage

RPAs provide significant advantages against violent extremists but contain disadvantages other than those previously identified. The American public, and its elected officials, accept that RPAs reduce the potential costs of conflict to the country. This acceptance, however, may encourage RPA use as the solution for all national security challenges. The seductive promise of limited cost and risk associated with RPAs may have a more insidious effect: reducing the threshold within the United States and internationally in the use of force. The use of force should be a last resort when other forms of national power, including discourse and diplomacy, have failed. If the U.S. resorts to force because it can and the costs of use are cheap, we create a whole host of other problems, including becoming an international pariah, eroding our international normative and legal frameworks that preserve our economic and political freedom of action, and providing us without recourse should other countries use RPAs in a similar manner.

Just because we can act with RPAs does not always mean we should. RPAs may in fact be the most ethical means of war that the world has ever witnessed. However, *jus in bello* (justice in war) does not equate to or rationalize *jus ad bellum* (justice of war). We must take great care to ensure that we maintain a high threshold for the application of force. Applying force, when required, may indeed be a necessity. Alternatively, applying force when requirements are questionable, may indeed be self-defeating. We must maintain and promote a high standard for the application of force. By doing so, we protect our own legitimacy, and our ability to use this type of force in the future.

When we decide to act with force, we must be aware that it will take all elements of national power to provide the greatest chance of success. As stated in this thesis,

RPA's operations may be necessary but have not proven to be sufficient to defeat violent extremism. The application of force needs to be accompanied by supporting initiatives to take advantage of conditions that can foster success. Ideally, these actions would be led and performed by local host-nation forces who may be better suited to address core grievances or counter extremist ideologies. While selective repression can establish positive conditions for success and put violent extremist network on a pathway towards an acceptable ends, it is the actions of local forces that will ultimately defeat violent extremism.



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