Defence Studies

ISSN: 1470-2436 (Print) 1743-9698 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fdef20

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To cite this article: Keith Patrick Dear (2013) Beheading the Hydra? Does Killing Terrorist or Insurgent Leaders Work?, Defence Studies, 13:3, 293-337, DOI: 10.1080/14702436.2013.845383

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2013.845383

ARTICLE

Beheading the Hydra? Does Killing Terrorist or Insurgent Leaders Work?

KEITH PATRICK DEAR

If Alexander's thoughts had not been set on high emprise … would he not have grown tired and weary of … unnumbered revolts, desertions, and riots of subject peoples … as if he were cutting off the heads of a hydra which ever grew again in renewed wars among these faithless and conspiring peoples?[1]

Plutarch – On Alexander's 4th century BC campaign in Bactria, modern-day Afghanistan.

As Alexander was troubled by the hydra-like nature of his Afghan opponents so today is NATO. The Taliban's leadership has been pursued continuously and ever more intensely since the start of the conflict in 2001, and is now being killed, according to senior American and British commanders, 'on an industrial scale'.[2] Twelve thousand insurgents were reportedly killed or captured by Special Forces in 'night raids' targeting named individuals in the 12 months to May 2011 while there were 350 night raids in the first four months of 2012 alone.[3] Coalition air forces have also increased targeted killing, though statistics are publically unavailable.[4] CIA 'drone strikes' in Pakistan, aimed at the killing of members of Al-Qaeda and related groups, are better documented and have increased significantly since 2008. The US began such strikes in 2004 and conducted only 10 until 2008; there were over 100 in 2010, 72 in 2011 and 43 to date in 2012.[5] Under both programmes, individuals are listed in advance and killed or captured when possible. British Special Forces have been in the forefront of targeted killing campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, and British 'drones' are now deployed in Afghanistan to the same end.[6] Insurgent and terrorist cells are being relentlessly 'decapitated' by targeted strikes, but the hydra-like insurgency is now active over a wider area and the insurgents more numerous than ever.[7] The question then, is does targeted killing work?

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Defence Studies, 2013
Vol. 13, No. 3, 293–337, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2013.845383

Some definitional clarity is required. Attempts to define terrorism have proved elusive; terrorism remains 'an essentially contested concept'.[8] Herein it is a tactic, understood in the modern Maoist sense, after John MacKinlay, as a means among a number by which an insurgent group aims to achieve political ends.[9] Terrorism, then, is 'an arm of the revolution', a tactic used by violent political activists.[10] Violent political activists without popular support are no more than armed thugs. Their use of violence will only increase their unpopularity, increasing their vulnerability to exposure, denouncement, arrest, disruption or punishment.[11] This paper is interested in insurgent groups, many of which use terrorism as their primary tactic, but which are sustained by sympathetic supporters and enjoy a degree of popular legitimacy. Therefore I prefer the term 'insurgent' to 'terrorist'.

The debate surrounding targeted killing's efficacy is often polarised between two extremes: that targeted killing is essential to defeat insurgents and terrorists or that it does not contribute to their defeat and may make their defeat less likely.[12] Regardless of the conclusion, there are three main approaches to judging targeted strikes' efficacy. First, a quantitative, social science approach which relates statistics, such as the number of attacks an insurgent group carries out before a targeted killing, to the number carried out after, and uses a reduction or increase to argue that tactic was effective or ineffective.[13] Second, there is the qualitative approach, wherein specific insurgencies are analysed and the effectiveness of targeted killing judged against the historical record.[14] Third, there is the ideological approach, which holds either that targeted killing is morally indefensible, or that killing 'bad people' is a good thing.[15] My aim is to contribute to the debate on targeted killing's efficacy and therefore the focus is not on the moral dimension. Discussion of targeted killing often focuses on civilian casualties, since the tactic is not always as precise as advocates claim. Some argue that the civilian casualties that result from targeted killing render it ineffective, or exacerbate its counterproductive effects.[16] However, focusing on civilian casualties would distract from and obscure the discussion herein, suggesting that if targeting killing could be conducted with absolute precision, it would be effective. Although examination of the effect of civilian casualties caused by targeted killing would strengthen many of the points made in this paper, this aspect is not explored as it is taken as axiomatic that civilian casualties are counterproductive. The more important point that emerges from this examination is that even if targeted strikes caused no civilian casualties, they may still be ineffective.

I have followed a qualitative approach, using case studies and the historical record to judge targeted killing's effectiveness, drawing on the statistics where necessary. In order to bridge the gap between the academic and military debates, a series of semi-structured interviews with experts from both domains and multiple countries were conducted. These provided a glimpse behind the curtain of secrecy that shrouds much of the justification for targeted killing, as well as giving insight into the current thoughts of practitioners and commentators.

I find that targeted killing, in certain limited and specific circumstances, can have an advantageous tactical effect, as part of a wider strategy. I reject the notion that targeted killing is an effective strategy on its own. This last point is more than just a straw man; there is a growing argument in favour of targeted killing as a counterterrorist strategy both within and beyond Afghanistan.[17] The seductive lure of such arguments to policy-makers requires robust rebuttal if the debate and policy are not to move in a direction that would exacerbate the problem they seek to resolve. It is useful then to describe how the debate has moved to a point where targeted killing is considered a viable strategy for fighting terrorism and insurgency.

For 25 years the US held that assassination in conventional and irregular warfare was immoral, a belief enshrined in 1976 in Executive Order 11905 and upheld until 2001.[18] Ahead of the 1991 Gulf War, US Air Force Chief of Staff General Michael J. Dugan suggested that Saddam Hussein and his senior commanders might be targeted in 'decapitation' strikes against the regime. He was abruptly sacked by Defense Secretary Dick Cheney. Cheney explained that it was 'inappropriate for US officials to talk about targeting specific foreign individuals' which was 'potentially a violation of the standing Presidential executive order' prohibiting assassination.[19] Discussing targeted killing as a part of Israel's counterterrorist strategy in July 2001, the US Ambassador to Israel warned 'The United States government is very clearly on record as against targeted assassinations. …They are extrajudicial killings'.[20] Seven days before 9/11, George Tenet, then CIA director, argued in reference to the use of armed drones that it would be 'a terrible mistake' for 'the Director of Central Intelligence to fire a weapon like this'.[21] Leon Panetta shut down a CIA draft plan developed to respond to 9/11 as Israel had to the murder of its athletes in Munich: by sending assassination teams to hunt and kill suspected Al-Qaeda members. Still the plan caused significant political controversy when knowledge of it became public.[22] Despite the controversy, the US is now the world's foremost practitioner of targeted

killing, a practice institutionalised in doctrine, and likely to be central to US strategy in and beyond the current Afghan campaign.[23]

Britain's tradition contains no explicit ban on assassination, but the British have avoided pursuing leadership targets because experience taught that these were the men with whom an agreement would have to be made when the time to talk arrived. A pertinent example is the late 19th century British policy of 'butcher and bolt' towards the indirectly ruled tribal frontier of India, today's Federal Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Under this policy a military expedition responded to unrest by taking over villages and destroying the homes of the revolt's leaders. The leaders of the revolt were not killed in order to avert a blood feud, which would have escalated the violence.[24] But even the destruction of houses served only to deepen the Pashtuns' hostility towards the British, with each punitive expedition bringing more raiders down from the hills to murder and pillage.[25] In the end, the British turned to a policy of co-option, wherein the fielded forces of the uprising were defeated, following which the leadership was co-opted or bought off to prevent any repetition.[26] This model predominated throughout the years of Britain's retreat from Empire.[27] Its abandonment in recent 21st century conflicts has surprised some retired senior officers, including General Sir the Michael Rose, who recalled his time during the Dhofar War, noting that many of his former adversaries are now active in the Sultan of Oman's government.

Targeted killing is set to dominate the US approach to defeating terrorism and insurgency over the next five years. The military and intelligence agencies will advocate for it, politicians will be a receptive audience, and the academic and media milieu favours it. General David Petraeus and Leon Panetta, former head of the CIA and US Secretary of Defense respectively, pioneered the use of targeted killing as a counterterrorist/insurgent tactic, their appointment and the widespread employment of the approach since Barack Obama's election suggest he favours it.[28] A shrinking British military is increasingly configured for it, having doubled the number of Reaper 'drones' in its inventory, and increased funding for Special Forces.[29] The US Congress has expanded the use of targeted killing to Yemen, and Somalia.[30] In 2009 President Barack Obama accepted Vice-President Joe Biden's advice to pursue a strategy including targeted killing in Afghanistan and in Pakistan's border areas (labelled 'counterterrorism lite' by the media), but also accepted the military's request for a counterinsurgency approach.[31] Obama's pre-election opposition to the 'surge' in US troop numbers in Iraq, which was believed at the time to be responsible for the remarkable improvement in

US fortunes there, made it difficult for him to oppose counterinsurgency advocates. In addition to pressure from the military, the media and academic environment at the time constrained Obama's decision. As a senior Presidential adviser and former aide to Petraeus in Iraq wrote at the time 'counterinsurgency is king...[it]...is on the verge of becoming an unquestioned orthodoxy'.[32] Academics, the military and the media, are no longer in thrall to the ideas of counterinsurgency (COIN) theorists.[33] 'Drone strikes' and night raids have been judged successful while COIN has not achieved the stunning results in Afghanistan that it appeared to have in Iraq.[34] General Petraeus shifted to a more coercive than persuasive policy in Afghanistan, an approach set to continue as COIN forces leave and Special Forces and aircraft remain beyond 2014.[35] Biden's 'counterterrorism lite' is now seen as a viable alternative.[36]

This study measures targeted killing against its aims. Air Marshal Nickols, the UK's former Chief of Defence Intelligence, suggests that counterinsurgent forces kill or arrest key members of insurgent groups, known as High Value Targets or Medium Value Targets (HVTs/MVTs) in order to affect a group's capability and psychology; all the security officials interviewed for this study argued similarly.[37] This provides a useful analytical framework. Therefore, in section 1, I examine the effect of targeted killing on a group's capability, finding that it does make a group less capable in the short term. In section 2, I examine targeted killing's effect on group psychology, concluding that it is unlikely to achieve the psychological effects the counterinsurgent intends. In section 3, I examine targeted killing in cultural context, finding that in pre-modern societies, such as those in Yemen, Somalia and Afghanistan, local culture increases the negative psychological effects of targeted killing. In section 4, I describe the nature of the evolution that targeted killing forces groups to undergo, finding consistent results across the ten conflicts studied: in the long-term it unites insurgents, and brings forward a younger, more radical leadership which makes the group more indiscriminately violent; I then explain why the dangerous effects of targeted killing have been so long ignored. In section 5, I examine the evidence against my argument. In concluding, I argue that targeted killing can be tactically effective but is strategically counterproductive. Finally, I present policy advice based on my findings.

1. Targeted Killing and Insurgent Capability

Capability is demonstrated by how frequently an insurgent group can launch attacks, how many attacks they can launch and how lethal and

damaging their attacks are. This is dependent on the insurgent groups' ability to coordinate and their expertise. Targeted killing aims to remove the coordinators and experts on whom an insurgent group depends.

Turning first to coordinators: targeted killing aims to disrupt insurgent command and control by targeting their leadership to remove key leaders disrupting their attack plans and hindering future plans as those that remain fear attack and hide.3[38] When targeted killing is undertaken for a discrete purpose, targeting a specific individual known to be coordinating a specific attack in a specific location its immediate effect is to disrupt planning and it may prevent an attack. In the short term it disrupts planning by forcing remaining leaders to reduce meetings with others, avoid traceable communication devices, move often, and to trust with caution to avoid detection and reduce their vulnerability.[39] With repeated use targeted killing's effect on insurgent command and control, and more broadly their capability, is subject to a law of diminishing returns and may ultimately be counterproductive.

The immediate disruption caused by killing an individual known to be planning an attack cannot be disputed. There is evidence for the disruption to command and control (C2) and capability caused in the short-term. Western police report that fewer terrorist plots have been discovered since the targeted killing campaign against Al-Qaeda began in Pakistan.[40] Al- Qaeda's changing tactics further evidence its reduced C2. Al-Qaeda had previously rejected the idea of 'lone-wolf terrorism', based on individual initiative, rather than central coordination.[41] Their recent adoption of the approach is testament to their diminished ability to coordinate attacks centrally.[42] Al Qaeda's reduced C2 cannot be attributed entirely to targeted killing. Numerous other factors, such as improved counterterrorist security and greater international counterterrorist cooperation are crucial.

Over the medium to long-term the effects are limited. Al-Qaeda's command and control may relocate, as it did in Pakistan in 2001 on eviction from Afghanistan,[43] and in Yemen following disruption in Saudi Arabia (by arrest, not targeted killing).[44] Recent plots and attacks against the West conceived in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) indicate the limitations of disruptive efforts.[45]

In Afghanistan less effective insurgent C2 would be evidenced by a reduction in the Taliban's ability to conduct tactically complex attacks, and a reduction in their ability to synchronise attacks across a wide geographic area. The Taliban, by contrast, today conduct attacks as complex, if not more so, than ever before, and continue to show the capability to coordinate and conduct attacks across a wide geographic area

simultaneously.[46] Some evidence suggests that killing leaders may not reduce insurgent capability either to coordinate attacks or to sustain levels of violence. When Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was killed in Iraq his death had little effect if we measure this by the ability of his group to conduct attacks: violence increased in the months following his killing.[47] Similarly, a week after Mullah Dadullah Lang was killed in Afghanistan the Taliban in his area of operations overran the town of Ghorak.[48] Despite the limitations and other contributory causes, the logic and the evidence suggest targeted killing can disrupt insurgent C2 in the immediate and short-term.

The repeated use of targeted killing on insurgent capability is, however, subject to a law of diminishing returns and may be counterproductive. Those leaders unable to maintain a sufficiently clandestine profile will be killed leaving only the competent alive.[49] The youthful leadership that emerges, and the older leadership that survives, will know to move regularly, limit their communications, switch off their satellite and mobile phones, and to trust fewer people with information.[50] It is often claimed that this hinders their ability to coordinate large-scale attacks. There is no evidence for this in Afghanistan, fast becoming the test case for targeted killing, where insurgent attacks are today more complex and large scale than ever before. It does however eliminate or reduce the ability of the counterinsurgent to monitor and thwart insurgent plans.

Less centralised C2 and increased operational security requirements mean that a local insurgent commander would receive less micro-management over communications networks, and instead would be given general guidance that he can interpret according to local conditions. This is 'mission command', which is advocated by the British military as the most effective form of leadership. The enforced adoption of Mission Command as the structural foundation of an insurgency will further encourage innovation.[51]

Taliban resilience to leadership targeting may be a product of the decentralisation of C2 in response to leadership targeting, but Afghan society, and particularly Pashtun society, is traditionally fractured and fragmented, and this may be the more important factor. The fragmented nature of the Taliban has been evident to mediators in the conflict. Seeking to bring insurgents into the peace process they have been forced to work on a piecemeal, district-by-district basis, demonstrating that Taliban C2 is not dependent on mid-level commanders.[52] The vast majority of insurgents are known to fight within two to three kilometres

of their homes, further suggesting that the insurgency in Afghanistan is fragmented by nature. [53]

Whatever the cause of the Taliban's 'fragmented', decentralised C2 that very few have reconciled suggests that fragmentation is not the same as disunity.[54] The Taliban can and have maintained unity through 'spectacular' attacks to ensure they continue to be seen as the mouthpiece for the insurgency. Such propaganda of the deed enables them to frame the narrative in such a way as to maintain unity of purpose even as they preside over a highly decentralised network.[55]

Attempts to fragment the insurgency by destroying C2 may be counterproductive. Isolated cells are more innovative than hierarchical bureaucracies. Just as small, well-motivated, egalitarian companies are often more innovative than larger established hierarchical corporations, so social theory suggests unified groups with limited external links will be more innovative than those that are part of a clear hierarchical structure.[56] An insurgent group made more cohesive through the psychological effects of targeted killing, and more cellular by the deliberate destruction of 'links', will probably be more innovative.

Offensive Capability

Targeted killing aims ultimately to reduce the number and lethality of insurgent attacks. This can initially be achieved in cases where an organisation has limited support and vulnerable hierarchical command. Over time the effect of each killing will reduce and in time it may be counter-productive as groups become more resilient, evasive and effective through a process of evolution and adaptation.

Two examples show how targeted killing can reduce insurgent technical capabilities, but they also demonstrate its limitations. In 1996 Israel killed Yahya Ayyash, nicknamed 'the Engineer' for his expertise in creating improvised explosive devices for suicide bombers. Colonel Roni Amir, head of doctrine for the Israeli Air Force, judges that the killing substantially reduced Hamas' capabilities for some time. In July 2008, British forces in Afghanistan killed Mullah Sadiq, a Taliban commander from Sangin, Helmand.[57] Sadiq was believed to be behind a shift in Taliban tactics towards a greater reliance on IEDs. Brigadier Mark Carleton-Smith, Commander Task Force Helmand at the time, states that in the aftermath of Sadiq's death, there was a notable decline in the sophistication, and consequently the lethality, of the Taliban's IEDs around Sangin.[58]

Yahya Ayyash's killing may have temporarily reduced Hamas' capabilities, but there was an immediate backlash, four suicide bombings killed 60 Israelis in the days that followed, and there has been no lasting effect. Suicide bombings against Israelis increased in frequency and sophistication despite his killing.[59] In the month after Mullah Sadiq was killed, British casualties to IEDs in Helmand fell dramatically, but they had returned to similar levels by May the next year and surpassed them two months later.[60] The reduction in lethality of attacks may have been a consequence of the loss of Mullah Sadiq, and with him the loss of some of the Taliban's technical capability, but the effects were shortlived. The effect of killing Sadiq should have been heightened by NATO's killing of close to the entire Taliban leadership in Kandahar and Helmand province in the five months that followed, and the ever-increasing tempo of targeted killings in the area.[61] Instead, the continuing casualties in the south of Afghanistan from IEDs suggest the killing of facilitators had no lasting effect on the Taliban's ability to build bombs.[62] In the case of both Ayyash and Sadiq, targeted killing may have caused a temporary drop in insurgent technical capability, but it did nothing to reverse the tactical and technical trend. Killing 'experts' has limited effects in part because the level of expertise they require to be effective is so low that many can quickly learn the required skills. As Professor Ehud Keinan of the Israeli Institute of Technology has described, the manufacture of suicide vests is an 'embarrassingly easy' process.[63]

A US study of the Afghan conflict shows also that targeted killing of bomb-makers does not significantly reduce insurgent use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) or decrease the lethality of each device.[64] The limited data released by the MOD on British casualty figures shows violence tracking seasonal trends relating more to the harvest, weather and ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) offensive operations than the killing of insurgent bomb-makers or leaders.[65]

The fracturing of finance networks achieved by killing or capturing financiers, and the cutting of finances by freezing financial assets is designed to reduce their capability by denying them funds. Its immediate effect is to force insurgents to raise finances locally and/or clandestinely. The Taliban have done this successfully, raising *Usher,* a tax on locals of 10 per cent, using *Zakat,* alms paid at the Mosque as a religious duty, as well as involvement in, and taxation of, the narcotics trade and funding through informal, difficult to track *hawala* networks.[66] As a consequence the Taliban's local structures are now more autonomous, financially independent and thus resilient than prior to the targeting of the financial

'links and nodes' in their network, a logical adaptation and perhaps standard insurgent response to such targeting.

The killing of arms smugglers is also undertaken to reduce insurgent capability. Lieutenant General Nick Parker claims that the rising cost of fertiliser in Southern Afghanistan, widely used to make explosives, shows a shortage of supplies.[67] Given that this occurred when the Taliban network was being hit harder than ever by the targeted killing campaign, a case could be made that the price increase was a product of the reduced supply caused by a loss of facilitators.[68] It should be noted that the price increase might equally have been caused by rising demand, not a shortage of supply, but the more important counterpoint is that fertiliser was still available, as were alternate sources of explosives. There is no shortage of conventional munitions in most unstable areas and it is easy to make effective IEDs with such materials.[69] Therefore targeted killing will often have little lasting effect on insurgent capability to build bombs.

It has been suggested that the 13 April 2011 killing of Abu Hafs al-Nadji, a senior al Qaeda representative in Afghanistan, may have reduced the flow of foreign fighters into Afghanistan, something that he was involved in facilitating.[70] In this example, targeted killing aimed to remove an individual who was a trusted interlocutor between distrustful elements of an insurgent group – non-Pashtun foreign volunteers and the predominantly Pashtun Taliban. There is no evidence to suggest killing al Nadji has reduced the number of foreign fighters arriving in Afghanistan, but there are a number of reasons to think it will not have done. Al Nadji will have been quickly replaced and recruits to Al-Qaeda continue to arrive in Pakistan hoping to fight in Afghanistan.[71] It seems unlikely that the loss of one man would reduce the flow of foreign fighters into the country given that Jihadi groups across the world, and particularly those in Pakistan, have deep and extensive historical, and often familial and personal, links to Afghanistan.

The effect of targeted killing may be greater on smaller groups, but even then it is limited. Seamus McElwaine, a particularly violent IRA activist, was killed in 1986, setting back the IRA in the area substantially.[72] A year later, the SAS ambushed and killed an entire IRA active service unit as they attempted to destroy a police station at Loughgall.[73] In the years that followed the SAS killed or arrested two generations of IRA leaders in the area, those in control and those in waiting, so bad was the damage that one IRA member commented that after 1992 'that was it; we had nobody left'.[74] But even this increased effect on a smaller group was limited. In 1990 the IRA destroyed the remainder of Loughgall police station, and they continued to operate in South Fermanagh and Armagh

until the end of the troubles.[75] Even today, South Fermanagh remains the area with the highest threat from dissident Republican terrorists.[76]

Groups may become more resilient due to the adaptations they undergo when subjected to targeted killing. Aaron Mannes' statistical assessment of Israeli targeted killing supported this analysis in finding 'The most significant…[statistical result]…an increase in the number of [violent] incidents by religious organizations after they have lost their leader for the second or third time'.[77] This reduced effect is simple to understand. If a role is vital to the functioning of your organisation, and you lose that person, the effect will be significant. If this happens again, you are likely to train two people for the role, in order to have some redundancy. If over time, turnover was very high, you would try to make sure all of your staff were able to cover the role. This would be difficult if the role required in-depth technical knowledge, but few if any insurgent roles do. As such, each targeted killing has less effect than the last, as the insurgency learns to decentralise and disperses responsibilities. Al-Qaeda in Pakistan have shown just such an adaptation, with many senior leaders now having joint responsibilities for areas once assigned to individuals, making a clear hierarchy and individual specialisations difficult to discern.[78]

Targeted killing, when selectively employed for a discrete purpose against a specific individual can reduce the capabilities of insurgent groups, but its effects reduce with each successive use as groups decentralise command and control and disperse capabilities in response.

Targeted Killing and Psychology

Targeted killing aims to have psychological effects on insurgent groups to induce behavioural change. The intended psychological effects aim to deter insurgents from fighting, to cause dissension within groups and to divide groups.[79] This section demonstrates that targeted killing does not achieve its psychological aims, shows why this is the case and demonstrates that the psychological effects are counterproductive.

The basic psychological aim of targeted killing is to make insurgents in key positions so afraid of death that they giving up fighting.[80] Major General Richard P. Mills, former ISAF Commander in Afghanistan's Helmand and Nimruz Provinces, described this in May 2011 when he said that targeted killing aimed to make the Taliban 'go back to their old way of life and put the rifle down and pick up a spade'.[81] Occasionally this works. Taliban commander Eidi Mohammed from Baghdis has said he ceased fighting because 'American operations are very effective: the

night raids, the airstrikes and ground attacks…I was afraid they would kill me too.'[82] More often it does not. Taliban commander Mullah Yunis knows he is near the top of the US Kill/Capture list in his region of Baghlan and knows death is likely to find him soon as many of his predecessors have been killed. Yet still he leads and fights, saying 'if you kill us, we become stronger, and the number of our attacks will just increase as time passes'.[83] The evidence supports his rhetorical claim. If insurgents were dissuaded from taking positions, there should be an extended list of vacancies in the Taliban's shadow governance and military structure. Yet, according to the consensus view of the US intelligence agencies, the Taliban are able to 're-establish and rejuvenate' often within days of a targeted killing, and a US Special Operations Force commander confirms that the insurgency takes only a few days to a few weeks to fill the gap left after a targeted killing.[84] There are now more shadow governors across the country than ever before, the Taliban's military structure contains no vacant posts and covers a wider area than at any point since 2001.[85] Similarly, neither the Palestinian nor the Chechen insurgencies have vacant positions in their leadership, despite the targeted killing of their leaders.[86]

Recruitment and retention of fighters should also be affected if targeted killing deters. This would be evidenced by a reduction in violence; but violence in Afghanistan has sustained or surpassed the high levels of 2009 throughout the stepped up targeted killing campaign in 2010 and 2011.[87] The psychological aims of targeted killing are not met because they are based on a common sense, but unscientific, understanding of psychology. Counterinsurgents employing targeted killing for psychological effect assume that human beings make purely rational decisions based on a cost/benefit analysis of a given action and that they can remotely judge what is rational to the insurgent. They therefore believe they can increase the 'cost' of fighting to a point where it outweighs the benefit of doing so, and thereby induce behavioural changes in the insurgent. This section demonstrates that this is too simplistic. Human decision-making is much more complex. The application of scientific psychological understanding shows that the psychological effects of targeted killing are counterproductive.

The idea that targeted killings deter is based on Rational Choice Theory (RCT) which holds that states and individuals make decisions based on a cost/benefit analysis, according to which they judge the best means to achieve their aims.[88] But, as we have discussed, most are not deterred. Psychologist Ariel Merari notes that:

In a perfectly rational system, the basic idea of deterrence is to deliver a clear, credible message to the opponent that the cost of pursuing a certain course of behavior outweighs its benefits. In reality, however, this simple formula rarely, if ever, works according to expectations.[89]

Some will be deterred but many will not. Rational decision-making in the context of insurgency is impossible to define and dependent on many factors. One cannot predict whether, in his or her mind, the cost, including the risk of being killed, will outweigh the benefit of achieving the objectives for which the insurgent fights.[90] Humans tend to underestimate risks when they actively choose to expose themselves to danger. Thus the motorcyclist never believes he will die in an accident even as he acknowledges the relatively high statistical risk to motorcyclists.[91] Similarly, insurgents may not judge the risks of fighting 'rationally'. Furthermore, if night raids win sympathy and support for the Taliban, as former COMISAF General McChrystal once argued, the more strategically minded and radical of the Taliban might 'rationally' accept martyrdom to advance insurgent aims.[92] Additionally, an RCT based approach assumes that becoming an insurgent is a wholly rational process. It is not. The decision to join the fight is often disadvantageous to the individual, and therefore cannot be adequately explained as a purely 'rational' decision.[93]

Targeted killing will not entirely deter because it fails to address the causes that drive insurgents to fight. Psychological analysis has shown that insurgents fight when they have a grievance that they are unable to address. Often, this grievance is a collective complaint. So, in general terms, Nationalists in Northern Ireland wanted to be governed by Dublin not London, and the Taliban want government by the Sharia, not a democratic system. A few committed individuals will usually seek to address the grievance through local action or political participation. If their moderate action fails, their frustration leads them to adopt more radical, and ultimately violent measures. In this way they might be said to be altruistic, acting on behalf of a group desire which most are too apathetic or self-interested to sacrifice for. Insurgents, at their core, are therefore an activist fringe representing a more widely felt grievance.[94] Once an insurgent group is established, it may attract the psychopathically violent, as with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq or Johnny Adair in Northern Ireland, but in general, insurgents are socially motivated, acting on behalf of a group. Killing leaders will not deter the psychopaths, and will only further frustrate and anger the socially motivated, while winning them greater support from those who sympathise with their aims.

To understand how the targeted killing of insurgents wins sympathy for the group, it is necessary to understand the psychological effect of targeted killing on the wider population from which the insurgents are drawn. This chapter has shown how insurgents fight for a grievance more widely felt, thus it is that General McChrystal explains how many in the population will be angered when they see a leader or insurgent targeted who they 'do not necessarily think…[was]… killed because they were doing something wrong'.[95] Although the Taliban are not universally popular among the Pashtun, their cause attracts wide sympathy. Consequently even those who are not active supporters, or who dislike Taliban methods do not see them as wholly illegitimate actors. Such was the situation in occupied France in World War II. Most French people were simply trying to survive under occupation, many had sympathy with both the Vichy government, which sought to ameliorate the excesses of German occupation, and with the 'extremists' of the day, the Communists, who were generally the more active resistors, but whose maximalist goals were not widely shared. When Communist violence damaged relations with the Germans or targeted Vichy supporters, their support fell, but when the Germans imprisoned, deported or, in particular, when they executed the usually young Communist fighters, sympathy and support for the resistance grew.[96] This example shows the 'psychological effects' of killing and capturing insurgents and the negative ramifications of the approach.

The psychological, deterrent, effect of targeted killing is reduced still further by group loyalty. Once in a group pursuing ends through violent means, the desire to belong leads to a desire to advance group aims ahead of individual ones.[97] As a soldier takes a bullet for his comrades, or a protester lies down before a tank, so an insurgent can desire martyrdom. Targeted killing is unlikely to deter in the face of such socially constructed unity.

If we look to psychological studies of terrorists that have laid down their arms we can see once again that targeted killing is unlikely to deter. Such studies show that most gave up due to a change in their personal lives, such as after marrying or becoming a parent. Of the remainder, most gave up because they saw that their use of violence was losing them support and making achievement of their ends more distant. Few laid down arms out of fear and few lost their passion for the cause that they had fought for. Many that eventually walked away from terrorism claim it was the use of violence by the state that drew them in as recruits and, during their active period, sustained their belief in the need to use violence defensively.[98] Targeted killing may therefore reinforce insurgent

commitment to violence, as it wins them support and sympathy, and justifies their 'defensive' response.

Groups rarely divide, but rather unify under pressure, as danger strengthens social bonds.[99] Group identities are relational, thus the group, defines itself according to characteristics that it regards as different from those who are not in the group, known as the out-group. So the British, for example, are an in-group that define certain characteristics that are different from foreigners, the out-group. Out-group pressure unifies because it allows a clearer delineation of the in-group. So England football supporters are made up of fans of Arsenal, Manchester United, Liverpool, Newcastle etc., but when faced with an opponent, say Brazil, they are united. Targeted killing is a particularly dramatic example of out-group pressure, and its unifying effect will therefore be particularly pronounced. Out-group pressure can make members of an in-group more likely to sacrifice themselves on behalf of their group.[100] Belgrade's citizens, not always supporters of Milosevic, stood on bridges holding up targets during NATO air strikes, unified by attacks during the 1999 Kosovo conflict.[101] Studies have shown how even strangers will risk their lives to save others in situations of danger, because the human response to danger is to unify to face an external threat.[102] Another powerful unifier is shared traumatic experience. General Mills' belief that seeing an insurgent's body tossed in the back of a pickup truck dissuades villagers from joining the Taliban is unconvincing.[103] Experiments have shown that shared traumatic experience bonds people together.[104] Targeted killing often unifies, and psychology suggests it is unlikely to divide.

Pressure on Al-Qaeda's leadership has altered the group's structure so much that Marc Sageman felt able to describe the global movement as a 'leaderless jihad'.[105] The evident isolation in which Osama bin Laden had been living in his hideout in Abbotabad, Pakistan, goes someway to support this. But though Al-Qaeda may be increasingly decentralised, it is by no means less united. In fact, since 2001, disparate Islamist groups have united under Al- Qaeda's banner in, among others, Yemen, North Africa, Central Africa and Indonesia.[106] Germany, Britain and the US all now have radical Islamists, born within their borders, claiming to fight for al Qaeda[107]. Similar effects can be observed in Spain, Northern Ireland, and Israel.[108]

Targeted killing has not split the Taliban, in fact, they are now more unified within, and more unified with other groups. In mid-2008 British commander Brigadier Mark Carleton-Smith claimed that leadership targeting had created 'increasing fissures of stress through the whole [Taliban] organisation…[and] …internecine and fratricidal strife between

competing groups'.[109] By the end of his Helmand command in October 2008 he withdrew this claim.[110] In May 2011 General Mills claimed that targeted killing had brought the Taliban to a 'tipping point'.[111] The evidence suggests he too is wrong. Kandahar residents, writers, and analysts, Alex Strick von Lindschoeten and Felix Kuehn recently confirmed earlier reports that the younger more radical Taliban are becoming ideologically and organisationally fused with Al- Qaeda.[112]

The Haqqani network too is increasingly indistinguishable from the Taliban. Siraj Haqqani, the youthful operational leader of the group said in interview that relations between Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and his group were excellent. Together, he said, they 'resist against the cross worshippers by cooperating with us and us with them in one trench'. He described the organisational relationship between the Haqqani network and the Taliban, claiming that fighters from both groups served under each other's leaders across Afghanistan, and that he sat on Mullah Omar's Shura Council.[113]

In Pakistan, the unifying effect of targeted killing is just as clear. Groups with disparate aims before 2001 have become increasingly unified since, in part in response to targeted killing by US drones, as US Ambassador Anne Patterson has noted.[114] In December 2007 13 factions formally coalesced under the banner of the Pakistani Taliban (TTP).[115] In early August 2008, Baitullah Mehsud, leader of this new coalition, was killed in a drone strike.[116] He was believed to be the TTP's main link to Al-Qaeda.[117] US Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke claimed the TTP was on the verge of splitting, now that Baitullah Mehsud, the group's 'unifying force', was dead.[118] No group has split from the TTP since, but links to groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba have grown, and in January 2011 five more groups merged with the Pakistani Taliban.[119] Most worryingly, Al-Qaeda and the Pakistani Taliban are becoming increasingly inseparable.[120]

Targeted killing aims to create dissension, but psychology shows that out-group pressure increases homogeneity of views within the group, far from causing the dissent that the counterinsurgent/terrorist hopes to provoke.[121] Unity of view accelerates the processes of group think, a process whereby groups come to distorted consensus opinions based on prevailing attitudes and/or the confidence of particularly vociferous individuals within the group.[122] Studies of group think show how opinion positions have social value, and the more committed to a viewpoint an individual is, the more influence they will have within a group. Those with extreme opinions will have disproportionate influence, as holders of such views rarely balance their argument by acknowledging

any weaknesses.[123] In this way, targeted killing can aid insurgent consensus and risks radicalising insurgents further as group think clouds discussion of future tactics under a new leader, whose clarity of purpose, driven by simplistic extremism, may hold great appeal to a group unified under pressure and searching for confident direction.

Psychological studies and experiments, applied to predict the effect of targeted killing on terrorist and insurgent groups, suggest they will not break the will of the targeted group to fight, nor will they increase dissension or encourage groups to fissure. In fact their effect is likely to be to unify, increase commitment, increase radicalisation and reduce the chances of compromise.

Targeted Killing and Culture

In kinship-based societies targeted killing's counterproductive psychological effects are amplified by the need for collective revenge. This is further exacerbated by the nature of such societies in which families place members in rival organisations and institutions, such as the Taliban and the Afghan government, where they serve all the while maintaining their first loyalty to the kinship group. Since targeted killing is employed when counterinsurgents cannot find a government able or willing to arrest those targeted, most areas where the tactic is likely to be used will be in failed or failing states. Such states tend to be little developed and society governed by tribal codes and organised by local power structures based on kinship ties.[124] Afghan, Pakistani, Yemeni and Somali societies are all primarily kinship based. The Afghan Pashtun provide the case study herein, but the lessons have much wider applicability.

The simple point is encapsulated in General McChrystal's COIN mathematics, which holds that killing one insurgent can create many more, because 'each one you killed has a brother, father, son and friends' who may seek revenge.[125] The Pashtun tribal code, the *Pashtunwali*, emphasises the sanctity of the home and family as components of honour, and demands that a violation of honour requires *badal* or revenge.[126] The Pashtun are a kinship based society so the *Pashtunwali* works on a collective level. Damage to the honour of one is damage to the honour of the kinship group, and requires all to work to redress the sleight. Beyond Afghanistan, similar tribal lore is found in many countries.[127] General McChrystal's example could be extended to say that each insurgent killed has a family, a sub-tribe and a tribe, who may be obliged to come seeking revenge.

In a kinship based society a father will seek the best advantage for his family by working to ensure his sons take jobs or roles in all walks of life to ensure familial influence extends as widely as possible.[128] Consequently, if the family find themselves in trouble, they have a family member who can use their influence to assist. Therefore a successful kinship group will have representatives in state institutions, the Taliban, the Police, the Army, etc. While the man's sons take these roles, their loyalty to kin can trump all.[129] Therefore, when a member of the Taliban whose brother is a policeman, soldier, or government official is killed, *badal* will require all to seek revenge for the sake of family honour. It follows then, that destabilising the insurgency destabilises society, as the clan, or kinship group seek revenge. How this works in practice in shown in two examples taken from the Communist period in Afghanistan. In August 1984 a tank in an Afghan regiment operating in Paktia province was attacked with a radio controlled mine. It rolled, killing an officer in the feared KhAD, the KGB trained Afghan Intelligence Agency. His four brothers were fighting on the opposite side, as Mujahidin, but loyalty to kin trumped loyalty to cause. The four Mujahidin brothers visited the tank regiment's Soviet adviser, asked for the name of the local Mujahidin Commander in the area where their brother was killed, and set out to take revenge. Their brother, the KhAD officer, had joined the Communist system after receiving an offer to study in the Soviet Union, which the family had accepted, seeking to extend the influence of their kinship network in both the Mujahidin resistance and the Soviet government.[130] His loyalty also, would have remained first with his kin, not the state. Thus the killing of the KhAD officer, superficially a success for the Mujahidin, actually began a blood feud that destabilised the Mujahidin. Similarly, killing a Taliban member whose brother is in the Afghan police, army or government, would seem a success but would do as much to destabilise the government as the insurgency. The second example shows how cultural understanding can help to mitigate the destabilising effects of kinship loyalty. In the late 1970s, early Mujahidin rebels against Afghanistan's Communist government knew that government troops had relatives in the tribes and Mujahidin. They went to extraordinary lengths when attacking troops to prevent the government being able to invoke the need for vengeance to turn tribes against each other. They would announce attacks in advance to offer a chance of surrender, send representatives into government villages despite the risk of arrest to seek parley, and approach tribes with the dead bodies of their kinsmen, killed while serving as soldiers, to seek mediation and avert a blood-feud.[131]

The *Pashtunwali* places great emphasis not only on revenge, but on hospitality and asylum.[132] This is again common to most kinship-based societies.[133] Since hospitality extends to protecting a guest and seeking revenge on their behalf if they are harmed, killing 'foreign fighters' could widen the insurgency, as those that were hosting them seek revenge. This consequence may be further increased in cases where foreign fighters have married into local society. For example, Al-Qaeda's Egyptian leader Ayman al-Zawahiri is today married into a Pashtun tribe in the NWFP.[134]

In this way targeted killing can increase the overall level of violence not only by unifying and radicalising insurgent groups but also, in kinship societies, by drawing more and more people into the violence. As one analysis of Helmand province argues 'It seems clear that many Helmandis have been alienated through these operations, and have turned to the Taliban as a way to enact revenge for their lost relatives.'[135]

Targeted Killing and Insurgent Evolution

Targeted killing, measured against its aims, can achieve immediate results when undertaken for a discrete purpose against a specific individual and limited short-term success in degrading capability, but is unlikely to achieve the psychological aim of reducing rebels' will to fight. The effects of its repeated use are profoundly counterproductive over the medium to long term. It forces insurgent groups to undergo a rapid evolution to survive. This evolution mitigates the effect of targeted killing, ensuring that it is subject to a law of diminishing returns in which each subsequent killing has less effect than the last on insurgent capability. The nature of this evolution is visible in all conflicts where targeted killing has occurred. Fear and paranoia leads insurgents to develop better operational security. Groups become more unified and less centralised, and thus more resilient; organisational capabilities are less concentrated in individuals. As this sectionr will show, the leadership of the group becomes younger and more radical, less inclined to negotiate, more violent and less discriminate. Groups are displaced and seek safe havens, widening the zone of instability. Frustrated locally, they become more regionally and internationally focused. Often they win support through the sense of injustice targeting killing can engender and the 'martyrs' it creates, figures of sympathy, respect and emulation.

A Younger, More Radical, Less Discriminate Insurgent

Aaron Mannes' and Jenna Jordan's studies of targeting killing found that insurgents, particularly religiously motivated groups, became more radical and violent when their leaders were killed.[136] The effect increased with each subsequent leader killed.[137] Targeted killing's psychological and cultural effects increase radicalisation. These effects can be magnified as targeted killing removes older leaders, who tend to be more pragmatic, promoting a radical youthful leadership no longer restrained by their elders. This youthful leadership will often have grown up fighting the counterinsurgents and should not therefore always be miscategorised as 'inexperienced'.

In two years, the Taliban have lost an entire generation of leaders in many parts of Afghanistan. In 2010 in the north of Afghanistan, night raids reduced the average age of the Taliban leadership from 35 to 25.[138] In the 12 months to May 2011 in Helmand Province, night raids achieved the same effect, reducing the average age of the Taliban leadership from 35 to 23.[139] In 2001 the Taliban contained a few youthful extremists restrained by an elder leadership.[140] The Taliban leadership in 2011 is younger, more radical, more violent and less discriminate than in 2001, because of targeted killing.[141] This new in-country leadership have increasingly adopted Al-Qaeda's terrorist tactics and have deeper links with Al-Qaeda than their predecessors.[142] In the North, Uzbek leaders, linked through the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) to Al-Qaeda, are increasing in prominence.[143] Without targeted killing, the more pragmatic, less indiscriminately violent, leaders would remain as the killing of Mullah Sadiq demonstrates. Al-Jazeera journalist Qais Azimy met with Sadiq several times. He describes the 35-year- old as a pragmatist, noting his anger at the actions of the extremist fringe of the Taliban.[144] Today, that fringe dominates the insurgency. Mullah Abdul Hakim Mujahid, a deputy leader of Hamid Karzai's peace council and former Taliban ambassador to the United Nations says that targeted killing has eliminated older pragmatic commanders and that 'the fanatical ones have come in their place ... In that way we are losing a lot of politically-minded Taliban. The new ones have a more religious mentality. They are only fighters.'[145] Not only are the new leadership more radical and indiscriminately violent, they are also less likely to talk. The French experience in Algeria shows the universality of this counterproductive effect.[146] In Northern Ireland, credible interlocutors were not only kept alive but protected by the British state, not because they were moderates but because they were pragmatists who the British believed they could one day talk to.[147]

Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, has tried to restrain the more radical, youthful, in-country commanders. Suicide bombing was introduced and expanded against his orders.[148] He cannot stop the practice as this would alienate him from his increasingly extreme in-country leadership. Although perhaps convinced of the military utility of suicide bombing, it is Omar and the older, more pragmatic, conservative, Taliban leadership in Quetta, who continue to try to restrain the radicals. It is they that published the *Layha*, on limiting civilian casualties and carefully targeting suicide attacks against high-value military targets.[149] Omar and the older leadership remain alive only because their safe haven prevents their being targeted. Without them, there would be no *Lahya*, no restraining hand on the more extremist fringe of the movement, and perhaps no one to negotiate with when the time comes. In Pakistan, the same evolution of insurgent groups is visible.[150] The recent killing of Ilyas Kashmiri, leader of Harakatul Jihad-e-Islami (HUJI), by a CIA drone strike shows the dangers of removing older leaders. Kashmiri prevented his group from attacking Pakistani targets; now that restraint is gone. One HUJI commander witnessed:

> several occasions when Pakistani militant commanders … have tried to provoke him for not allowing his men to fight against Pakistani security forces, as they were arresting and killing his fighters and then cooperating with the Americans to eliminate him through their unmanned spy planes....Kashmiri Sahib would always turn down their suggestions and would tell them that Pakistan was a fortress of Islam and home of the brave Muslims.[151]

The Northern Irish, Chechen, Palestinian and Basque conflicts show the same evolution. In the late 1980s an entire generation of Loyalist leaders, mostly in their late 30s or early 40s, were killed by the IRA or arrested by the British. They had long feared the effects on Protestant communities of escalating sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, and in this sense, might be described as cautious and moderate. The generation of leaders that succeeded them were younger, more extreme and more violent. They pursued, unrestrained, their aim of 'taking the fight to the IRA', which meant, more often than not, targeting innocent Catholics.[152] Targeted killing of Chechen insurgent leaders has reduced the average age of their commanders to around 40. Simultaneously, the insurgency has become more Islamist, less Nationalist, closer to global jihadi networks, and increasingly indiscriminate. Doku Umarov, who the Russians continue to try to kill, is a restraining hand on his Chechen fighters

whose average age is 18.[153] In Palestine the average age of Hamas activists and leaders, long targeted by Israel, is 30–40 while the average age of the more 'moderate' Palestinian Liberation Organisation leaders is 60–70.[154] In 1960s Spain the Basque Nationalist group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) was formed by young men frustrated by the moderate Basque nationalist stance of their fathers.[155] Their campaign of violence accelerated after their leader Tsabi Etxebarrieta was killed.[156]

General Mills, and many of those interviewed for this study, suggest that reducing the average age of insurgent leaders reduces the leadership's experience and effectiveness.[157] But a 23-year-old leader fighting in Afghanistan, Israel or Chechnya today, may have grown up fighting the counterinsurgents. IRA leader Seamus McElwaine, when he was killed aged 26, had been an effective terrorist for ten years.[158] A Taliban commander aged 23 in 2011 may have been fighting ISAF since 2001, from the age of 16. His experience would all be relevant. He is not wedded to outmoded or ineffective tactics from 'the last war'. His survival is testament to his improved OPSEC (operational security) and adoption of more effective tactics. Such men cannot be described as inexperienced.

Widening the Zone of Instability

Targeted killing displaces insurgents as they seek safe havens, widening the zone of instability. Daniel Byman's studies of targeted killing in both the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and Afghanistan, argue that targeted killing drives insurgents into urban areas, where they hope to be harder to find.[159] Many senior Al-Qaeda leaders have been arrested in Pakistan's urban areas, where they were trying to avoid aerial surveillance by drones.[160] Their movement, along with a similar migration of the Pakistani Taliban, has destabilised large areas of Pakistan.[161] In Chechnya, Russian targeted killing and security force pressure has displaced Chechen insurgents from the cities, to the mountains, forests and sympathetic towns in neighbouring provinces.[162]

Targeted killing often causes insurgent groups to target those they had previously left alone, or to expand the area of conflict. There has never been a Taliban bombing in the West, but for the first time, in 2011, some in the movement have declared their intent to carry out such attacks.[163] Militants did not attack Pakistan before 2001, since then, it has become a target, in part in response to the CIA's target killing.[164] The Pakistani Taliban are showing increasing ambitions to become a global terrorist group.[165] In 2010 Faisal Shezad, linked to the TTP, attempted to detonate a car bomb in Times Square, New York.[166] In 1974, the 'decapitation' of

the IRA as a result of an intense programme of arrests led it to widen the focus for its attacks, carrying the fight to mainland Britain for the first time.[167] After the SAS ambush of the IRA at Loughgall in 1987, the IRA widened its campaign further, attempting an attack on Gibraltar and planning attacks in West Germany on British military bases.[168] In Chechnya, targeted killing has contributed to the insurgency's decision to attack targets across Russia.[169]

Sympathy, Respect, Emulation

Killing leaders creates martyrs who inspire others to emulate them. The concept of martyrdom today is primarily associated with Islamist violence, but is in fact important to all insurgent groups. In 1867, 'Martyrdom' played a key role in launching the Fenian movement, an early Irish nationalist group. Friedrich Engels commented on the execution of the Fenians by the British that there was no heroism associated with the attack until they were executed but: the 'deed ... will now be sung to every Irish babe in the cradle in Ireland, England and America'.[170] It was the killing of Benno Ohnesorg that launched the secular left-wing group the Bader-Meinhof gang in West Germany in the 1970s.[171] Nationalist funerals in 20th century Northern Ireland were key to sustaining the IRA's popularity. Thus it was that the British banned further 'ambushes', the targeted killing of the day, in 1979 to prevent the creation of 'martyrs'. Major-General James Glover, responsible for the decision, described how the killing of IRA members led to funerals becoming 'set-piece demonstrations of solidarity in which the precise circumstances of the person's death are often forgotten as the mourners succumb to emotion'. This logic eventually persuaded many supporters of 'ambushes' to acknowledge that the effects were counterproductive.[172] Nevertheless, the British renewed the 'ambush' campaign in 1983, having persuaded themselves that it was the 'precise circumstances' of the death that made it a recruitment tool for the IRA, which they hoped to mitigate by ensuring all future targeted killings were manifestly fair. It was not until 1997 that they concluded that all targeted killings had a radicalising effect, and banned the tactic.[173] The Taliban too make use of martyrdom as a recruitment tool, attending the funerals of *shahids* (martyrs) to mobilise support.[174]

Islamist extremists are inspired by Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb and Abu al-A'la Mawdudi,[175] as well as the more recent work of Abdullah Azzam.[176] All are long dead, Banna, Qutb and Azzam were killed and Mawdudi long imprisoned but their ideas outlived them and continue to attract adherents around the World. Ed Husain, a former Islamist, writes

of the exhilarating thrill of reading Qutb clandestinely, out of sight of his father, in the UK in the 1990s, 30 years after Qutb was hanged. In fact the death of Islamists as a consequence of their beliefs, their 'martyrdom', heightened their attraction.[177] Bin Laden said 'If I live or die, the war will continue'[178], he 'seeks martyrdom', because, if achieved, it would create another '1,000 Osamas'.[179] It is perhaps too early to tell if he misjudged, but the precedents suggest he may be correct. Targeted killing supports the narrative of Al- Qaeda and militant Islamists, just as it did that of the IRA and militant Catholic nationalists.

Why Do Counterinsurgents Fail to See the Nature of the Evolution?

Insurgencies are bewildering societal phenomena, rooted in local complexity yet increasingly interlinked globally with groups of diverse motivation and composition. To impart understanding of such phenomena counterinsurgent intelligence staff and public commentators construct a reductive narrative of events and actors. Building on the pre-existing knowledge of their audience, they create analogies in order to define by extension and remove distinctions in order to simplify. This imparts a rapid but superficial understanding of the insurgency and general concepts, but more is obscured than revealed.

This imprecision of expression obscures targeted killing's effects by using false analogies. In one example, when targeted killing is described as a strategy of attrition, the assumption is that the insurgency is a rock or a physical thing that can be eroded.[180] This description justifies 'eroding' insurgent groups by killing members to make it smaller. But an insurgency is not finite like a rock. Targeted killing can increase the membership of insurgent groups, rendering the analogy misleading. In a second example, counterinsurgents tend to anthropomorphise insurgent groups. They do so in one of two ways.

First, by subsuming the complex composition and motivation of the group in a caricature of its leader: rather than understand and explain the broad swell of sentiment that launched the insurgency, it becomes embodied in an individual, a bogeyman to be hunted and killed.

Second, the insurgency becomes a human body, and medical analogies proliferate. 'Operations' are 'surgical' and 'precise'; removing 'cancerous cells' – individuals or groups – can cure the problem; or insurgencies can be 'paralysed', 'blinded', or have their 'eyes and ears' removed.[181] However, an insurgency is not a human body. Counterinsurgents cannot 'diagnose' the cause of something so complex, and, in treating the

symptoms they often exacerbate, not cure, the affliction. Targeted killing is, in part, a product of the human desire to categorise and simplify. Understanding by comprehension, not extension is required, which is dependent on exactitude of language.[182]

It might be argued that the language used does not matter, on the basis that the analogies are used by those who have reasoned the problem through coherently to rapidly explain their concept to others. But the way a case is presented affects the interpretation of it, and has dangerous real world effects. Psychologists have shown how inaccurate use of language insidiously alters human comprehension and beliefs, and thus behaviour.[183] A cross-section of voters who supported 'inheritance tax' in one survey were against 'death taxes' in another, despite the detail being the same.[184] Linguists demonstrate how some words can think for us, bypassing the critical examination that would result from a more accurate description.[185] US Major General Timothy McHale, investigating the killing of 23 Afghan civilians by ISAF in February 2010, found the use of inaccurate language to be an important part cause of the tragic, avoidable, error.[186] The abuses at Abu Ghraib were facilitated by the way in which language was used.[187] The military description of the killing of insurgent leaders by bombing as 'kinetic strikes' or KS hides the reality behind pseudo-scientific, politically acceptable and ethically neutral language. The way we describe things affects our attitudes and beliefs, and thus our behaviour, towards them. In the case of targeted killing, language has served to obscure its counterproductive effects through the use of misleading analogies.

The desire for clarity and simplicity is also manifested in an over-reliance on abstract modelling of insurgent groups, primarily Social Network Analysis (SNA).[188] SNA allows relationships to be graphically

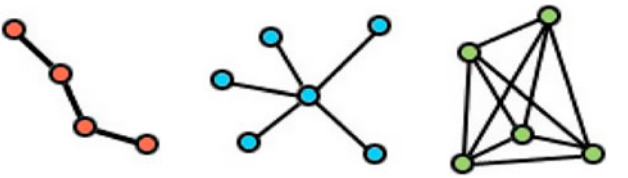

FIGURE 1. CHAIN, HUB AND ALL-CHANNEL NETWORKS
Source: John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt (editors), 'Networks and Netwars: the Future of Terror, Crime and Militancy, RAND 2001. http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1382.html

represented (Figure 1) describing groups in an objective, dispassionate, and scientifically verifiable manner that has intuitive appeal.[189]

Targeted killing is often justified by the display of a social network chart before and after a targeted killing in order to explain how the group fragmented. This conclusion ignores the fact that most insurgent networks are 'all-channel' as above, and so should be able to re-establish immediately. The illusion that they fragment is based on the acceptance of the abstraction as reality. We have noted that targeted killing can improve the OPSEC of insurgent groups. Therefore, in the aftermath of a targeted killing less trust would be exhibited in acquaintances, and insurgents will limit their communication or use other means, such as couriers or clandestine meetings, that are less easy to monitor. A network chart will show only that there are no intercepted communications or no further reports on links between individuals. It does not show the more complex reality, but rather a simplistic and incomplete abstraction. Think of your own 'social network'. Perhaps you have a group of friends with whom you have lost touch. You still hear about them through one friend, who remains in contact with you and them. If this individual were killed, how difficult would you find it to re-establish the link with your old friends? Imagine you alter your behaviour after the killing and do not contact friends via the telephone. Your network has not been fragmented, but it would appear so on a chart. Further, you need not have any pre-existing links to an individual to make contact with them. A study of women seeking an abortionist in the US when abortion was illegal found that the women were able to quickly make contact through making educated guesses as to who to ask, 2.8 being the average number of guesses required.[190] Similarly, insurgents would have no problem establishing, maintaining or re-establishing contacts when a 'link' to another is killed.

It is important to remember that such charts are based on intelligence. The picture presented is at best partially accurate. The abstractions built from such information obscure the uncertainty on which they rest. SNA has proved a poor predictor of behaviour when used to assess peoples' shopping habits online and to send them targeted marketing of items they are likely to buy, running at a predictive error rate of over 90 per cent.[191] If SNA is a poor predictive tool when information is rich and reliable, it is likely to be poorer still when based on intelligence reports. Social network diagrams give a false impression of success that is not supported by more reliable indicators such as levels of violence, the complexity of attacks, levels of support for the insurgency, the geographic spread of

violence, or the attitude of the in-country public and politicians towards the tactic.

The counterproductive effects of targeted killing have been obscured by politicians' desire to reduce the cost of fighting while still being seen to be taking action. Opinion polls in the US and Israel show that popular opinion supports targeted killing, even if they believe it makes them more likely to be attacked.[192] Popularity seeking politicians may therefore support targeted killing, giving insufficient consideration to its counterproductive effects. The killing of Osama bin Laden boosted President Obama's popularity in the US considerably, though whether it contributes to making America safer is unclear.[193]

Targeted killing appeals to the military, because, as Stephen Grey has argued, the military has an instinctive preference for action.[194] It took years of fighting militants on the North-West Frontier of British India, before Britain abandoned its preference for action in favour of 'masterly inactivity', acknowledging that co-option, bribes and defending territory, were more effective than the punitive action of 'Butcher & Bolt'.[195] Similarly, in Northern Ireland, every policy prescription, from killing terrorists to mass imprisonment, was tried before a policy of defensive policing was adopted and Britain declared that there was 'nothing weak about deliberate inactivity'.[196] Institutional memories are short, and there is no evidence that these past examples have been considered in developing current policy.

The military also finds targeted killing appealing because it provides a metric of success in conflicts that are otherwise full of intangibles. Individuals can be listed in advance and killed or captured Consider the US's pursuit of former Baathist officials pictured on the playing cards handed out in Iraq. In a swirling insurgency to which they were largely irrelevant their death or capture did little or nothing to reduce the growing violence, yet their killing or capture became a focus of media, military and political attention, because it gave the appearance of measurable, tangible, progress.[197] The same effect is apparent in the periodic announcement of the killing of 'key' insurgents in Afghanistan and Pakistan.[198] The problem, as this study makes clear, is that in fact the success is limited, short-term and largely illusory, obscuring the tactic's counterproductive effects. More individuals will be added to bottom of the kill/capture list than will be removed from the top, as targeted killing draws more people into the insurgency.

Periods of financial austerity and public and political casualty aversion lead to the utility of military intervention as a foreign policy tool being questioned. In such periods, institutional interests lead the military to

find a politically appealing alternative to large-scale intervention. Under such conditions in the late 20th century, the military advocated for the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), which, as with previous panacea, promised rapid and inexpensive victory through the application of technology. Targeted Killing's parallels with the RMA are illuminating. The RMA's 'Neo-Cortical Warfare' claimed that precision and 'information dominance' would allow the military to win with minimal bloodshed and financial cost, by manipulating the psychology of an adversary's leaders. The Neo-Cortical Warrior would use exemplary violence to induce fear and paralyse their adversaries' decision-making or cause them to behave as the Neo-Cortical Warrior desired.[199] Kosovo and the 21st century conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have discredited such notions, and led to their being formally abandoned.[200] Ironically, as the West withdraws from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, advocates of targeted killing claim that their cheap, bloodless solution has exemplary, fear-inducing psychological effects. Targeted killing's appeal as a cheap way of fighting, that wins politicians popularity, provides the military with a basis for demanding continued funding, and keeps the military at the forefront of foreign policy, obscures the nature of the counterproductive effects the policy has in practice.

Counterarguments

In this final section I examine the case studies used in the counter-argument to the suggestion that targeted killing is of limited utility. I then consider the conclusions and suggestions of other critics of targeted killing.

When successful 'decapitation strategies' are cited, they consistently focus on Guzman, of Peru's Shining Path, and Abdullah Ocalan, of the Kurdish PKK.[201] In both these cases, decapitation was by arrest, not targeted killing. In both examples, the leader called on his followers to put down their arms, leading to a dramatic collapse in the group's effectiveness. In both examples, the underlying causes of the violence went unresolved, and the groups eventually returned to violence.

Occasionally cited are the decapitation of the Philippine Abu Sayyaf splinter of the Moro Liberation Front, the Angolan UNITA, and the Sri Lankan LTTE.[202] When Abdurajik Abubakar Janjalani, leader of the Abu Sayyaf group was killed, the network became a vast criminal enterprise. The group is still active, and seems to be moving back to its ideological struggle.[203] The LTTE lost internal support from many Tamils for its human rights abuses and forced conscription of children. This, and the

Sri Lankan government's ability to take and hold land the LTTE had controlled, led to their defeat; yet even now the grievances that led to conflict remain unaddressed, and without a political solution, reports suggest the Tamils may well adopt terrorist tactics once more. Leadership targeting played a peripheral role, if any, in bringing the LTTE to defeat.[204] UNITA was already on a path to peace, had handed over territory to the government, negotiated a gradual return to parliamentary democracy and, as with many case studies, had been more weakened by political engagement than it ever had been by military pressure. The killing of Jonas Savimbi and his deputy allowed the government to agree a political solution based on accords previously signed with Savimbi but never fully implemented. Thus his killing *did* contribute to peace, but not by deterring UNITA from fighting, but because the Government was unwilling to address the underlying causes until his death due to their personalisation of the conflict.[205]

Three other examples receive occasional citations: that of the Red Army Faction in Germany, Rohanna Vijeweera, of the Sri Lankan Janathā Vimukthi Peramuṇa (JVP), and Fathi Shikaki, of Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ).[206] The Red Army Faction's leaders were imprisoned, not killed, and committed suicide, which would clearly have different effects on the remaining members of the group than their being 'martyred.' The group nevertheless continued until 1998.[207] Rohanna Vijeweera's killing was not the end of the JVP, though there were many premature predictions that it would be. Today the JVP is 'perhaps the most resilient, dynamic and deeply-rooted political force in contemporary Sri Lanka'.[208] PIJ retaliated following Fathi Shikaki's killing with a double suicide bombing against Israeli settlers in Gaza, and another a year later in Tel Aviv. The fall in support for PIJ after Shikaki was killed was caused largely by the growth of the peace process, the Palestinian Authority's clamp-down on other militant groups, and the growth of Hamas as the main rivals to the PA. By 2002, however, as the Peace Process collapsed, PIJ had fully recovered.[209]

In a review of 89 insurgencies, RAND found that targeted killing was not among the factors leading to insurgent defeat, while RAND's study of 648 terrorist groups found that military force rarely brought an end to them.[210] In two thorough studies of 'How Terrorism Ends', neither Audrey Cronin nor Martha Crenshaw finds an example of targeted killing ending a terrorist or insurgent group.[211] Concerned with a lack of balance in my study in its later stages, I turned to respected terrorism expert the late Professor Wilkinson of the University of St Andrew's Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence in search of a counterexample.

He suggested the French group Action Directe, but noted that their entire leadership were arrested in an audacious raid rather than killed. Had they been killed, he said, the radicalising effect would probably have prolonged the organisation's existence.[212] There is no example of a 'decapitation' strategy by targeted killing ending a conflict, or providing the tipping point for the conflict's end.

Learning from Others

UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary and Arbitrary Executions, Philip Alston's primary criticism of targeted killing is the opaqueness of the process whereby people are designated as targets, judged deserving of death, and killed.[213] If there is one action that would serve to add much needed legitimacy to the tactic, it would be to respond to this criticism by making the process open and transparent. The Israeli experience shows that this is achievable, and perhaps, desirable. The Israeli Supreme Court verdict on the legality of targeted killings in 2005 found the tactic to be legal, but insisted on regulating the processes surrounding it.[214] The court insisted that targeted killing must be a highly selective operation, which, applied to the British and US militaries, would rule out their participation in ISAF-style 'industrial scale' leadership targeting; in light of the findings regarding targeted killing's diminishing effects with each repetition, this would also ensure the tactic is used to its maximum utility.

The court also insisted that the selection of the target must be transparent, the justice of the killing immediately apparent and that a full and open investigation should be carried out immediately after the operation to ensure it was conducted appropriately.[215] Israel usually seeks arrest before carrying out a targeting killing, and has often handed a list of wanted militants to the Palestinian Authority before proceeding.[216] Many militants handed themselves in to the Palestinian Authority when informed that the choice was arrest, being killed or going on the run.[217] This transparency aids in showing targeted killing to be just. If practised in Afghanistan, it would also help to avoid errors, allowing those targeted to give themselves up or to challenge the suggestion that they are involved in the insurgency. Perhaps the killing of Afghan notable Zabet Amanullah, which may have been a case of mistaken identity, could have been avoided if the intention to target him had been announced. Amanullah was a well-known former Taliban member (prior to 2001) who had been living peaceably in Kabul. If his name had been released before the attack, this well-known figure could have handed himself in to

prove his innocence, had his name cleared quickly by those that knew him, or gone into hiding. In the latter case, the desired effect of targeted killing would have been achieved: the individual would have been effectively removed from the insurgency. If the effects desired by the counterinsurgent who would undertake targeted killing are to induce behavioural changes in the insurgent, they can be achieved non-kinetically, while enhancing the legitimacy of the targeted killing if the insurgent in question is found.

When the justice of targeted killings is immediately apparent, its radicalising effect is reduced. This was a lesson learned by the British in Northern Ireland, where 'ambushes', where everyone involved knew the targeted insurgents would die, had to meet the standard of the 'clean kill', to which the SAS always aspired.[218] A clean kill was one achieved when the terrorists were armed and on the way to an operation. In legal terms, they would be 'Directly Participating in Hostilities', and the fact that they were armed meant they constituted a direct and imminent threat to life. It was not necessary to issue a challenge, namely to give them a chance to surrender, as doing so would increase the risk to life of the SAS soldiers and others in the area. The clean kill was a concept recognised implicitly by the IRA, and the natural justice involved would be instantly recognisable to all observers, regardless of their sympathies for the participants in the conflict. The 8 May 1987 killing of an entire IRA cell at Loughall is a good example, said to be 'the apotheosis of the clean kill', having met all the above criteria, even IRA leader Gerry Adams acknowledged in his instant reaction 'I believe that the IRA volunteers would understand the risk they were taking.'[219] When targeted killing takes place, ensuring the immediate and readily apparent legitimacy of the operation limits its radicalising effect.

Conclusion

Shisha ke maida shod, tiztar misha
(Broken Glass Becomes Sharper)

Hazara Proverb

Targeted killing, used highly selectively and with a transparent targeting process, can be of tactical use, temporarily reducing insurgents' capability, and disrupting facilitation networks and leadership structure. It does not follow that a repeated use of targeted killing will cause a greater reduction in insurgent capability. Insurgent networks adapt in response to targeted killing, changing structure and dispersing capability to ensure their

resilience. Furthermore, targeted killing radicalises. Its effect on insurgent groups is to unify and reduce dissent, precisely the opposite of the psychological effects the counterinsurgent intends. Some will be deterred, but a greater number will seek revenge and in kinship-based societies this will destabilise government and security structures. Overall, the evolution that targeted killing forces insurgent groups to undergo is profoundly counterproductive. It often draws in recruits in search of revenge resulting in larger groups, consolidates alliances between disparate radicals, widens the zone of instability as the groups seek new safe havens, and risks regionalising or internationalising previously local conflicts. It brings to the fore a younger leadership, who are usually more radical, indiscriminate and violent than those they replace. They preside over groups that are both more resilient and united as a result of targeted killing.

Counterinsurgents have failed to fully appreciate the counterproductive effects of targeted killing because they offer political and bureaucratic utility to politicians and the military alike. The true effects are further obscured by a lack of true comprehension of the situation among intelligence staff, the use of simplistic analogies and the misuse of, and reliance on, SNA as a means for judging success or failure.

In an insurgency being driven by short political timescales, as in Afghanistan, targeted killing may serve policy, used as a line of operation in support of others. As it accelerates the insurgency's radicalisation and use of more indiscriminate violence, the population may seek the government's protection, while the senior leadership in exile may be encouraged to negotiate for fear of losing support from the population and losing control of the insurgency to the radical in-country operational leadership. The great risk of this tactic is that if it fails it will leave a more radical, more indiscriminate insurgency, with wider regional and global aims, and deeper links to Al-Qaeda than ever before. In Afghanistan, given that the coalition's 2001 aim was to expel Al-Qaeda from Afghanistan, leaving Afghanistan with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda indistinguishable would be a very visible failure of targeted killing specifically and coalition policy in Afghanistan more broadly.

Several clear policy recommendations emerge from the analysis: Targeted killing must be the exception not the rule; it becomes less effective with each successive use. The process behind the identification of individuals for killing must be transparent and accountable. The list of names should be published in order to enable objections to be raised, avoiding errors, and to give the insurgent the chance to surrender to arrest. If this results in the individual going into hiding, so much the better, the desired effect, rendering the insurgent ineffective, has been

achieved without the counter-productive effects associated with killing key insurgents. The watchwords must be transparency, accountability and selectivity. The burden is on those killing to demonstrate the legitimacy and fairness of their procedures, and the efficacy of the tactic. Analysts must be careful in their use of language and conscious of the limits of their knowledge and analytical tools. Finally, the military must recognise that 'masterly inactivity' is not weak, and may bring more advantage than actions designed to remedy symptoms, the cause of which is little understood.

This study finds targeted killing is a largely ineffective, and worse, often actively counterproductive tactic in COIN. This is because, as the then Air Marshal Charles Portal argued in relation to the punitive use of airpower in Aden in 1934–35:

This method of 'bomb and scuttle' fails because its user has given too little thought to the vital question 'what is the *object* of the operation?' Surely the object of all coercive police action is to bring about a change in the temper or intention of the person or body of persons disturbing the peace. I would ask you to dismiss once and for all from your minds any idea that Air Force police work consists in immediate bombing as a mere punishment for misbehaviour.[220]

Herein lies the crux of the matter: targeted killing aims to cause insurgents or terrorists to refuse leadership positions, and ultimately to give up through fear of being killed, while also discouraging support for their cause, which will be shown to be hopeless by a ruthless and unrelenting strategy of killing leadership figures and effective facilitators. The object of the operation is to alter the 'temper or intention of the person or body of persons disturbing the peace'. It fails because it is based on frozen abstract representations of the society and groups it targets, assuming that the removal of a 'node' will fragment a group significantly, a false assumption, as I have shown. It fails because it assumes that a terrorist or insurgent group can be simply terrorised into submission, when the evidence shows that humans respond to fear by innovating, seeking revenge and uniting. It fails because psychology is not wholly based on rational calculations of survival and personal advantage. Fundamentally, it fails, in Portal's words, because 'success, and the absence of subsequent ill-will, must depend on there being no sense of injustice.'[221] As Alexander's armies in Afghanistan struggled to defeat the Afghan 'Hydra', so NATO today finds itself facing an enemy that grows new heads every time one is removed. As the Hazara proverb holds 'broken glass becomes sharper'. It cannot be ground into dust unless a policy of extermination is pursued; the current policy fragments

insurgents into smaller, sharper fragments, ever harder to detect. In doing so, it is demonstrating that targeted killing, unless used highly selectively and transparently, with awareness of its counterproductive side effects and diminishing returns, does not work.

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