



ACTIVE MEASURES



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Spring 2018 – Volume III

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Growing Challenges in the Republic of Serbia Towards European Union Accession

Kelly Zug

This essay will analyze the accession steps of the Republic of Serbia towards European Union membership and the emerging challenges that may undermine Serbia's commitment to this objective. These emerging challenges include the Serbian leadership's blatant disrespect for certain common values of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the increased use of Russian soft power efforts in Serbian affairs, and Serbia's resistance to a shared European identity. In reaction to these emerging problems, the EU should undertake initiatives to promote support for EU accession in the country while maintaining its standards of good governance and accession criteria.

The Republic of Serbia has faced several hurdles on its path towards accession to the European Union (EU) since it first applied for membership in 2009. These challenges have centered on the country's relations with Kosovo, its wavering cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), and its balancing act between its Western aspirations and its historical ties with the Russian

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Federation. One example of how these hindrances have affected the country's accession is the EU's decision in 2006 to call off its initial membership negotiations, formalized by the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA). This was done because of Serbia's refusal to cooperate in capturing a prominent war criminal, General Ratko Mladić, for the ICTY. The granting of EU candidate status to Serbia in 2012 and the initiation of the SAA in 2013 occurred in conjunction with the country's major efforts towards normalizing relations with Kosovo under the Brussels Agreements. EU accession talks have continued since that time with the first negotiation chapters opening in 2014. However, emerging challenges threaten to weaken Serbia's internal commitment towards EU membership. These developments include the wavering commitment of Serbian leadership to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the increased use of Russian soft power to offset EU support, and Serbia's resistance to a shared European identity.

The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights defines the common values of the EU. Written in 2000, the document became legally binding for all members through the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009. The Charter defines and merges the rights and values of various European institutions, including the Court of Justice of the EU and the European Convention on Human Rights, thus consolidating the common values of the EU into a single document.¹ With this attempt to formalize the values of the EU, adherence to the Charter may demonstrate a country's commitment towards Europeanization and EU accession. As the EU continues to open chapters with Serbia, the actions of Serbian leadership in undermining fundamental democratic values and the rise of Russian influence in the country threaten the country's commitment to key components of the Charter. These developments are most evident in the areas of freedom of expression, free and fair elections, and the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Serbia.

¹ "EU Charter of Fundamental Rights," European Commission, accessed November 17, 2017, http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/charter/index_en.htm.

Serbia's Wavering Commitment to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights

With the creation of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the EU proclaimed that its internal cooperation as an intergovernmental organization ran deeper than economics; the Union came to represent certain shared identity politics and values. As the EU continues to open accession chapters with Serbia, there have been specific developments in the actions of Serbian leadership that illustrate the country's wavering commitment to these defined European values. For example, the amplified harassment of media and journalism in the country reveals the disregard of Serbian leadership for the protection of freedom of expression, defined in Article 11 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Article 11 consists of two components. Firstly, it states that, "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, [including the] freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers." Secondly, it states that, "The freedom and pluralism of the media shall be respected."² These growing challenges over freedom of expression not only pose a threat to the country's commitment to aligning itself with the common values of the EU, but also to the active role of civil society.

One way to measure the change of freedom of expression in Serbia is to assess the protection of press freedom, since the media serves as one means through which citizens can critique and keep the government accountable. The *Political Freedom of the Press* report, published by Freedom House since 1980, is a useful resource to assess how press freedom has changed in Serbia during its steps towards EU membership. For the report, Freedom House assesses press freedom in each country by using a rating scale from 0 (best) to 100 (worst) and based on these scores, designates the country

² "Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union 2012/C 326/02." EUR-Lex Access to European Union law. 2000, accessed November 17, 2017, <http://eurlex.europa.eu/legalcontent/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12012P%2FTXT>.

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status as *free*, *partly free*, or *not free*. This analysis is conducted based off 23 methodology questions assessing the legal, political, and economic environment of each country. Serbia's freedom of press rating improved between 2007 and 2012 from a score of 39 to a score of 36, both considered *partly free*. However, since being granted EU candidate status in 2012, Serbia's score has significantly deteriorated, reaching its worst score in the last decade in 2017 of 49, also considered *partly free*.³ Most significantly, since the initiation of EU accession talks in 2014, Freedom House has deemed Serbia as one of the countries with the most significant declines in press freedom scores in the world for three years in a row.⁴ Serbia was not the only country with significant declines in press freedom scores in the region, joined by both Hungary and Poland during this period. However, the continual decline in the country while proceeding towards EU membership blatantly contradicts its commitment to this common value in the EU Charter.

Freedom House reports further identify some common issues affecting press freedom in Serbia, including the threats and harassment against journalists, the poor implementation of legislation affecting the media, and the reliance of media outlets on government subsidies.⁵ In looking at these assessments, the environment for press freedom began declining in 2012, during the same time that the Serbian Progressive Party and Alexander Vučić took leadership roles in the country. During this period, there was also a noted increase in harassment of journalists, the use of smear campaigns by pro-government media, and the escalation of soft-power censorship, especially in favor of Russian influence.⁶ For example, President Vučić, when serving as prime minister in 2016, accused two prominent newspapers,

³ Freedom House, "Freedom of the press 2017," 2017, accessed November 20, 2017, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/freedom-press-2017>.

⁴ Freedom House, "Freedom of the press 2017," "Freedom of the press 2016," "Freedom of the press 2015," accessed November 20, 2017.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Freedom House, "Country report | Freedom in the world 2014: Serbia."

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BIRN and *CINS*, of being liars, contending that the EU was financing these groups to slander his government.⁷ Moreover, certain public media outlets, like the *Informer*, have continued to use smear campaigns to paint investigative media outlets as working for foreign intelligence agents or mafia groups.⁸ In November 2017, *The Informer* published a front-page article entitled “America and the EU paying liars and racketeers,” which accused certain media organizations, such as *BIRN*, of acting as Western agents to weaken the country.⁹ These emerging challenges of harassment and smear campaigns have strongly contributed to the declines in press freedom in the country.

The growing hostilities towards journalism have led both the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and Human Rights Watch to openly express concerns over the state of press freedom in Serbia.¹⁰ The OSCE 2016 report stated that freedom of expression had not improved in the country and underlined the “need to maintain and foster space for political dialogue, critical discussion and debate and expression of different opinions both in mainstream media and in social networks.”¹¹ The report also noted concerns over how political influence in media affairs had often led to self-censorship in the country. Furthermore, a 2008 study on media freedom in Central and Eastern Europe in American Economic Association’s *Journal of Economic Perspectives* concluded that there is a strong association between high levels of government control over media outlets and low levels of political participation and voter turnout.¹² These are

⁷ Freedom House, “Freedom of the press 2016: Serbia.”

⁸ Freedom House, “Freedom of the Press 2017.”

⁹ “BIRN under fire: Serbia tabloid targets BIRN, other media, as ‘mercenaries’,” *BIRN*, accessed December 28, 2017, <http://birn.eu.com/birn-under-fire/>.

¹⁰ Freedom House, “Freedom of the Press 2015: Serbia.”

¹¹ “Commission staff working document: Serbia 2016 report,” European Commission. 2016, 61, accessed November 18, 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhoodenlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2016/20161109_report_serbia.pdf.

¹² Peter R. Leeson, “Media freedom, political knowledge, and participation,” *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 22, no. 2 (2008): 167.

important components to a functional democracy. Thus, these threats to the press freedom and the increase of political influence in the media not only threaten Serbia's commitment to the values of the EU Charter, but also may hurt the engagement of civil society, a particularly important area in post-communist countries.

As freedom of expression has declined in Serbia, Russia has worked to capitalize on this weakness by increasing its soft-power initiatives in the country. Two state-owned Russian news sources, *RT* and *Sputnik*, began broadcasting in Serbia in 2015 and received an extensive welcome from the parties in power.¹³ Since that time, many state-sponsored media outlets in the country have matched their reporting to the discourse of *Sputnik*. These Russian efforts in the Serbian media may also have influenced the irregularities the following year, during the 2016 parliamentary election in the country. The 2016 European Commission Staff Working Document expressed concerns over how political influence in media outlets had led to self-censorship during the election; this may demonstrate the success of Russian initiatives to undermine Serbia's commitment to EU democratic values.¹⁴ Furthermore, Freedom House's *Freedom of the Press* 2017 report notes that with the EU preoccupied with internal issues, Russia has increasingly utilized Balkan and Serbian media outlets to promote a shared Slavic history and culture and develop anti-EU and anti-NATO sentiments.¹⁵ The increase of anti-EU sentiments will further hinder the country's steps towards EU accession and maintain its conflicting balancing act between its Western aspirations and historical ties with Russia.

Additionally, the events of the 2016 election demonstrate the lack of commitment of Serbian leadership to another important right in the EU Charter of Fundamental

¹³ "Eyes wide shut: Strengthening of Russian soft power in Serbia: goals, instruments, and effects," *Study of the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies*, May 2016, 57, accessed October 18, 2017, https://www.ceas-serbia.org/images/publikacije/CEAS_Studija_-_%C5%A0irom_zatvorenih_o%C4%8Diju__ENG.pdf.

¹⁴ "Commission staff working document: Serbia 2016 report," 61.

¹⁵ Freedom House, "Freedom of the Press 2017."

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Rights. The Charter states that the EU is based on the “the principles of democracy and the rule of law,” protecting the rights of citizens to vote in free and fair elections.¹⁶ The reelection of Prime Minister Vučić in 2016 led to questionable aspects of the free and fair nature of elections, which was emphasized in the reports of multiple international observers monitoring the election. Freedom Barometer, a project that assesses free and fair elections in measuring political freedom around the world, noted the abuse of state resources for campaigning and the prevalence of voter intimidation and distorted media coverage in the election.¹⁷ Furthermore, the 2016 European Commission Staff Working Document stressed the need for Serbia to follow up on the concerns noted by the OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.¹⁸ This report indicated concerns over the election’s biased media coverage and the inappropriate use of funding sources of the incumbent, Prime Minister Vučić. These reports paired with Freedom House’s *Freedom in the World* report illustrate the decline of free and fair elections in the country. The *Freedom in the World* report measures political liberties by assessing free and fair elections, political pluralism, and the functionality of government. Each country receives a score between 1 (best) and 7 (worst). Since 2009, Serbia’s rating in political liberties was 2. However, the 2017 report explicitly stated that the worsening of Serbia’s rating from a 2 to a 3 was directly due to the irregularities of the parliamentary elections in 2016.¹⁹ This decline in free and fair elections and democratic processes illustrates Serbia’s wavering commitment to this aspect of the EU Charter.

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN SERBIA

Apart from the growing divergence from aspects of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the further weakening

¹⁶ “Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union 2012/C 326/02.”

¹⁷ Freedom Barometer, “Serbia 2016,” accessed November 20, 2017, <http://freedombarometer.org/country/serbia/208/2016/>.

¹⁸ “Commission staff working document: Serbia 2016 report,” 6.

¹⁹ Freedom House, “Country report | Freedom in the World 2017: Serbia.”

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role of CSOs in the country may further compromise Serbia's commitment to joining the EU. USAID's *CSO Sustainability Index* is a useful resource in assessing the environment for CSOs in Serbia in comparison to other countries in the region. The study measures different dimensions affecting CSO sustainability including the legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, and service provision, infrastructure, and public image.²⁰ The study provides a score for each dimension, ranging from 1 (most developed) to 7 (most challenged) and then averages these scores for an overall country analysis. As of 2016, Serbia, along with neighboring Montenegro, continues to have the poorest scores for CSO sustainability compared to others in Southeastern Europe. Serbia's CSO sustainability score improved from 4.5 in 2007 to 4.1 in 2013. Although its overall score stayed the same between 2014 and 2016, the report notes deteriorating scores in CSO advocacy and public image during this period. CSO advocacy involves the ability of CSOs to communicate to the public through the media and to monitor activities of government for accountability. The dimension of the public image involves the government's willingness to work with CSOs and the public's perception of their role in society.

It is evident that CSOs in Serbia have yet to reach their full potential in promoting civil engagement in the country. A major factor that influences the role of CSOs in Serbia includes the lack of public trust. A recent USAID report assessing the country between 2013 and 2017 underlined the widespread lack of trust among the population towards non-governmental organizations (NGOs), another term often used synonymously with CSOs. It highlighted the prominent results of a 2009 survey, which revealed that almost half of the Serbian population had no or little confidence in NGOs, while 29% held no opinion on the matter.²¹ This lack of trust is a

²⁰ USAID, "2016 CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia 20th Edition, July, 2017, accessed February 21, 2018, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/CSOSI_Report_7-28-17.pdf.

²¹ *Ibid*, 15-16.

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prominent challenge in enabling the role of CSOs to check government power and offer solutions to societal issues.

Furthermore, prominent leaders in Serbian NGOs have continued to express since 2007 that many politicians fail to understand their role in society.²² The French political theorist Alexis de Tocqueville argued that associations are important for society since they bring individuals together to solve common issues without relying on extensive government policies.²³ This role of minimizing government power is particularly important in post-communist countries, where easing public ownership and control has often led to corruption, cronyism, and other transitional challenges. Thus, finding more ways to empower CSOs in Serbia would strengthen civil participation and democracy.

The weak role of CSOs in Serbia has paved the way for another method of Russian soft power. Russian influence in Serbian associations and organizations not only threatens to undermine the strength of civil society, but also has been detrimental to public support for EU accession. Starting in 2015 and 2016, over 100 new organizations appeared in Serbia that promoted Russian-Serbian relations and pressured Serbians to stop pursuing aspirations of joining NATO and the EU. These organizations have obtained an unusual amount of media attention and significantly increased their activities in 2015, when it was apparent that Serbia would in fact begin formal negotiations to join the EU and start discussions with NATO.²⁴

These Russian initiatives in civil society have likely been successful in influencing the negative perceptions within the country towards EU membership. Highlighted in a recent policy paper by the Directorate-General for External Policies in the European Parliament, polls conducted by the Belgrade Center for Security Policy revealed a decrease in Serbian

²² Freedom House, "Freedom of the press 2008."

²³ Alexis De Tocqueville, Henry Reeve, and John C. Spencer, *Democracy in America* (New York: Walker, 1847).

²⁴ "Basic instinct the case for more NATO in the Western Balkans," *Study of the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies from Serbia*, September 2017, 47, accessed October 18, 2017, https://www.ceas-serbia.org/images/publikacije/CEAS_Basic_Instinct_WEB.pdf.

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support for EU membership from 67% in 2009 to 43% in 2017.²⁵ Further investigating this support, a 2015 study conducted by the Center for Insights for Survey Research asked Serbian citizens, “If a referendum on Serbia’s membership in the European Union were held this Sunday, how would you vote?” The study looked at results between 2009 and 2015. In April 2011, 64% of those surveyed answered they would vote for membership, yet only 44% answered the same in November 2015.²⁶ Most significant was the decrease between February 2014 and July 2015 of those who claimed they would vote for membership – a drop from 60% to 46%. Although other factors surely affected this change of perception for EU membership, Russian soft power initiatives in the media and in CSOs increased during the 2015 period and most likely affected the wavering support for EU membership. Two major developments have influenced Serbia’s commitment to EU common values, defined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, and thus have weakened its commitment to EU accession. These include the increasing disregard of Serbian leadership to some of the fundamental EU values in the Charter and the rise of Russian soft power initiatives in internal affairs in the country. These developments have been evident in the areas of freedom of expression, free and fair elections, and the weakening role of CSOs within the country. Most concerning, the increase of Russian involvement in civil society may continue to weaken the role of CSOs to hold the government accountable and to solve societal problems without the need of increasing government policies.²⁷

²⁵ European Parliament, Directorate-General for External Policies: “Policy department, Serbia’s cooperation with China, the European Union, Russia and the United States of America,” 6, accessed November 28, 2017, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/603854/E_XPO_STU\(2017\)603854_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/603854/E_XPO_STU(2017)603854_EN.pdf).

²⁶ International Republic Institute, “Survey of Serbian Public Opinion,” 2015, accessed December 20, 2017, 6, http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/serbia_november_2015_poll_public_release.pdf.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

SERBIAN RESISTANCE TO A SHARED EUROPEAN IDENTITY

Apart from concerns over adherence to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, Serbia seems particularly resistant to accepting a shared European identity, threatening its commitment towards EU accession. The research of Jelena Subotic on the initiatives of Serbia towards EU membership in 2011 concluded that this resistance, which she calls *identity divergence*, was Serbia's main obstacle to Europeanization. A contemporary understanding of Europeanization constitutes membership in the EU and respecting European common values, laid out in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Subotic identifies three factors that lead to Serbia's identity divergence. Although written in 2011, the factors identified are still present as Serbia continues to face similar hindrances in joining the EU.

The first factor of identity divergence is evident when the idea of Europeanization is not universally shared throughout the country. The wavering support for EU membership in Serbia exemplifies the presence of this first factor. As previously mentioned, support for EU membership has decreased to less than 50% according to polls conducted by the Belgrade Center for Security Policy.²⁸ This poll illustrates the growing divide in support for EU membership within the country and reveals this first factor of identity divergence.

The second factor of identity divergence is the existence of another compromising identity narrative competing with Europeanization. In the case of Serbia, this alternative narrative is its historical connection with Russia. The increase of Russian soft power initiatives in the country through media outlets and civil society has helped to strengthen this identity association as an alternative narrative competing with Europeanization. The results of a 2015 survey by the International Republic Institute (IRI) demonstrate how perceptions in Serbia towards Russia have become increasingly

²⁸ European Parliament, Directorate-General for External Policies: "Policy Department, Serbia's cooperation with China, the European Union, Russia and the United States of America," 6.

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positive.²⁹ In the 2015 survey, 94% of respondents concluded that Serbian interests would best be served by maintaining strong relations with Russia. This was a significant increase from the 81% of respondents who selected Russia in the same survey just one year earlier. In the same 2015 survey, 71% of respondents concluded that Serbian interests would best be served by maintaining strong relations with EU, revealing a decrease from the 2009 survey whose results totaled 82%. These results present substantial challenges to the EU, given the extensive amount of financial assistance it has and continues to provide to Serbia.

The third factor leading to identity divergence occurs when a country has had a negative experience with the alleged group in the past, which in turn leads to low projections of success. Serbia has had a tumultuous history with European powers and NATO, which seems to have led it to internalize a strong sense of victimhood and a strong objection to foreign influence. Specifically, political elites have expressed resentment over the perception of ICTY actions that seem to target Serbia as the primary perpetrators of war crimes during the Yugoslavia wars.³⁰ Although all countries prioritize their sovereignty, Serbia's recent history under foreign powers and tumultuous history with Western organizations, such as NATO, exacerbate the negative perceptions towards joining the Union. Serbia was under direct rule of the Ottoman Empire until the middle of the 19th century. The extended influence of the Austro-Hungarian Empire over the country led to the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, sparking World War I. Most recently, NATO's bombing of Belgrade during the Yugoslav Wars further hurt the perception of the West and strengthened feelings of victimhood and injustice in the country.³¹ This tumultuous history with other actors in the region may further strengthen this third factor of identity

²⁹ International Republic Institute, "Survey of Serbian public opinion," 2015, 21, accessed December 20, 2017, http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/wysiwyg/serbia_november_2015_poll_public_release.pdf.

³⁰ Subotic, 323.

³¹ *Ibid*, 320.

divergence, since the expectations of success and benefits of EU membership may be low. Subotic concludes that although the explicit intent of Serbia is to join the EU, these factors of identity divergence show the internal lack of commitment towards Europeanization.³² In these ways, identity divergence in Serbia has and may continue to influence its steps towards Europeanization and its commitment to EU accession.

STEPS MOVING FORWARD

Three main factors threaten Serbia's commitment to EU accession: the wavering commitment of Serbian leadership to the values in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the increased use of Russian soft-power initiatives, and an internal resistance to the shared European identity. The weakening internal support for membership is concerning given the significant efforts and investment of the EU to progress Serbian's accession towards membership. The EU has allocated 1.5 billion Euros of financial assistance to the country for the period between 2014 and 2020, prioritizing various sectors including "democracy and governance" and "rule of law and fundamental rights."³³ The EU should not simply admit Serbia into the Union because it seems the next logical stop for EU expansion, filling the perceived hole in the middle of Europe that doesn't form part of the Union. The EU must address these developments in the country that are inconsistent with EU values in order to protect its investment in the country and to uphold its values and expectations for membership criteria.

Firstly, the EU should more publicly put pressure on the Serbian government to respect freedom of the press in the country. One way the EU could do this would be to vocalize support for media groups and journalists, who have acted in solidarity to emphasize the importance of the freedom of the press in society. For example, in September 2017, over a 100

³² *Ibid*, 311.

³³ "Serbia - financial assistance under IPA II - European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations - European Commission," European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, June 12, 2016, accessed November 29, 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/instruments/funding-by-country/serbia_en.

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Serbian NGOs and media groups blacked out their websites to illustrate the significance of media freedom to the population and protest the increasing hostility of the Serbian leadership.³⁴ EU support for these internal initiatives may further pressure the Serbian leadership to respect freedom of expression, a crucial component of a functioning democracy. Furthermore, this action could possibly expose or weaken Russian initiatives at infiltrating the media to influence perceptions of EU and NATO.

Secondly, the EU should further train CSOs in the country in public relations and local fundraising, in order to strengthen the importance of their role in society. This focus on public relations would slowly help facilitate more trust for CSOs, as trust remains a major hurdle to the success of these initiatives. Reflecting the observations of Tocqueville, the strengthening of the role of CSOs will encourage individuals to come together to solve common issues, minimizing the ratcheting effect of government policies. Moreover, increasing the public presence of CSOs would help strengthen civil involvement and democracy in Serbia, which provides the best opportunity to increase the country's internal commitment to the EU Charter. Because of the sensitivity of foreign influence, it would behoove the EU to empower CSOs to be proactive members in society and in doing so minimize its encroachment on the country's sovereignty.

Lastly, the EU needs to maintain its standards of membership and values by explicitly addressing Serbia's wavering commitment and pivot towards Russia. A report by the Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies from Serbia and the National Endowment for Democracy noted that, "the more the official Belgrade government flirts with the Kremlin, the more the political West lowers its standards in the hopes of attracting Serbia into its orbit."³⁵ The report shows how Serbia's abuse of playing both sides of the East and West has left the door open

³⁴ Maja Zivanovic, "Serbian media stage blackout in defense of freedom," *Balkan Insight*, September 17, 2017, accessed November 20, 2017, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/serbian-media-black-their-website-and-stop-airing-in-protest-against-media-darkness-09-27-2017>.

³⁵ "Basic instinct the case for more NATO in the Western Balkans," 46-47.

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to Russian soft power in the region. U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary Hoyt Brian Yee recently vocalized this concern over Serbia's commitment, stating that "countries that want to enter the EU have to show this decision clearly. [Serbia] cannot sit on two chairs, especially if they are so far apart."³⁶

Despite its initiation as an economic union, the EU has developed into an international organization that promotes and upholds certain values. These values are outlined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The EU must take active steps to uphold its values in membership criteria, if it will continue to expand. In the 2015 IRI survey, 35% of those surveyed in Serbia associated the EU with promoting the wrong values, while 23% of respondents associated it with promoting the right values.³⁷ As accession steps continue, the EU must assess if Serbia is ready to accept, at least at a basic level, the common values in the EU Charter. This is especially important for those values that affect civil society and the functionality of democracy. As EU attention is diverted to financial debt crises, internal elections, and Brexit, it needs to remain committed to upholding its claimed values in accepting new members.

³⁶ "US official's statements - worst pressure on Serbia yet," B92.net, October 24, 2017, accessed November 21, 2017, https://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2017&mm=10&dd=24&nav_id=102627.

³⁷ International Republic Institute, "Survey of Serbian Public Opinion," 8.

Beijing's Hegemonic Inhibition: Asia's Foreboding Geopolitics and China's Grand Strategy

David Stoffey

Contemporary scholarship of international relations commonly promotes the idea of Chinese power ascendancy and the subsequent erosion of U.S. primacy. These analyses regularly ignore geography in great-power calculations. Where the United States is blessed with abundant geographic benefits and distance from powerful competitors, China suffers from its adjacency to three great-power rivals. These relationships stand to inhibit Beijing's aspirations of regional hegemony. While China's rise will likely continue for many years, this growth will cause greater consternation among its powerful neighbors. This paper details China's geographic relationship with Russia, India, and Japan and how geopolitics may be a strong catalyst for Beijing's containment.

China's geographic location is particularly inhibitive of hegemonic ascendancy. To its north lies Russia, a great power with which China has skirmished, received threats of nuclear annihilation, and remains locked in an unspoken war for influence in Central Asia. To the south lies India, a "nearly-

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power” who competes directly with Beijing’s attempts to swoon Asian states and with whom China has warred over disputed territory that has disrupted its expansion in the Indian Ocean Region.¹ To the east lies Japan, an age-old rival state, who slaughtered 15 to 20 million Chinese throughout World War II, occupied swathes of Chinese dynastic territory for nearly half a century, acted as one of the primary antagonists during the ‘Century of Humiliation,’ and remains defiantly anti-Chinese to this day. Beyond China’s immediate periphery lies its greatest competitor, the United States. Washington has constructed a barrier of containment around China, locking Beijing within the First Island Chain. The U.S. Navy’s Seventh Fleet and local allies are stronger than the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). The United States regularly denounces Chinese initiatives of territorial expansion in the South China Sea via the use of freedom of navigation operations, which aim to condemn Chinese disputed claims.

These relationships are not destined for eternal tension and belligerence. Chinese President Xi Jinping has gone to great lengths to partner with Russia on a variety of fronts. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, formed in 2001, continues to emphasize mutual Russian and Chinese economic interests in Central Asia.² The PLAN and Russian Navy underwent inaugural joint military exercises in the Baltic Sea in 2017.³ Beijing and India’s relationship remains rocky, but dialogue continues with President Xi declaring the existence of “healthy and stable” ties between the two states in the aftermath of the 2017 Doklam Incident.⁴ The Sino-Japanese

¹ “Can India Become a Great Power?” *The Economist*, published 30 March 2013, accessed October 27, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21574511-indias-lack-strategic-culture-hobbles-its-ambition-be-force-world-can-india>.

² Robert Savic, “Behind China and Russia’s ‘Special Relationship,’” *The Diplomat*, published 7 December 2017, accessed October 21, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/12/behind-china-and-russias-special-relationship/>.

³ Richard Weitz, “Assessing the Sino-Russian Baltic Sea Drill,” *Jamestown Foundation China Brief* 17, no. 12 (September 2017): 24-28.

⁴ “BRICS Summit Highlights: Held Fruitful Talks on Bilateral Relations Between India, China: PM Modi,” *Hindustan Times*, published 5 September

relationship has shown improvement with Council on Foreign Relations fellow, Berkshire Miller, stating that President Xi and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe “have taken some incremental steps to stabilize their troubled relations,” despite the uncertain security tensions between the two states.⁵ And although many prominent foreign policy pundits and scholars have prophesied coming conflict between China and the United States since the end of the Cold War, bilateral relations remain cordial even in the face of many diplomatic crises, such as the 1999 U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade or China’s continued defiance of North Korean sanctions.⁶ This indicates that Beijing inhabits a dangerous neighborhood, surrounded by opposing nuclear powers, but is looking to maintain peace in support of its hegemonic goals. Ultimately, China will be constrained by its neighboring powers. U.S. efforts will only exasperate that containment.

Based on the assumption of a ‘rising China,’ Beijing’s neighbors continue to react to its regional development. Although many experts and the Chinese Foreign Ministry are proclaiming the beginning of a ‘Chinese Century,’ the Middle Kingdom’s geographical location leaves many peripheral powers that do not directly benefit from a rising China worried

2017, accessed 12 October 2017, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/brics-summit-live-pm-narendra-modi-chinese-president-xi-jinping-to-hold-bilateral-meeting-in-xiamen/story-ZwD36LPmYrEaRBmw3wys0K.html>.

⁵ J. Berkshire Miler, “Japan Warms to China: Why Abe and Xi are Slowly Mending Ties,” *Foreign Affairs*, published July 17, 2017, accessed 12 October 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2017-07-17/japan-warms-china>.

⁶ Examples of pundits and scholars indicating great concern of future Sino-American conflict include: John Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, (New York and London: Norton Publishing; second edition, 2014), 360-411; Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’ Trap?*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017); Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China’s Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower*, (New York: Macmillan, 2015); David Ignacious, “China Has a Plan to Rule the World,” *Washington Post*, November 28, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/china-has-a-plan-to-rule-the-world/2017/11/28/214299aa-d472-11e7-a986-d0a9770d9a3e_story.html?utm_term=.fc9a06be4f11.

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about Beijing's expansionism. It is highly unlikely that these peripheral states will form any cohesive balancing coalition, but they will likely, separately and unofficially, work towards hedging the forthcoming hegemonic power in their midst. Russia, India, and Japan all stand to lose in the shadow of a dominant China and are making moves to prevent its Asian hegemony.

THE BEAR AND THE DRAGON

Russia and China appear to be wholly divergent nation-states. Russia developed out of Byzantine historical roots—China rose from a uniquely Asian system. The former includes many diverse and populated ethnic groups and the latter, while encompassing a large population, is primarily one ethnicity. The Russian cultural and national identity is very young in comparison to its Sino-neighbor, whose dynasties have existed for more than two millennia. Russia's economic power is driven, to a large extent, by oil and natural gas—China's economy is much more diverse. Furthermore, Russia's economy continues to flounder while China's moves at breakneck speed. Central Asia, the battleground of influence between the two powers, remains firmly entrenched in Russian culture, but continues to receive an overwhelming amount of Chinese financial capital.

Nonetheless, China and Russia share striking similarities. Adda Bozeman's assessment of the unitary leadership of the 'Mandate of Heaven' and her explanation of Byzantium's marriage of state and religious power drive the modern leadership of both nations' strongmen.⁷ Both appear to be interested in controlling Halford John Mackinder's *Heartland*. This region, comprising Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Russian steppe, according to Mackinder, "commands the world."⁸ However, considering the twenty-first century advancements in transportation and China's proclamation of the 'Eurasian century,' the concept of 'who

⁷ Adda Bozeman, *Politics & Culture in International History*, (New York: Routledge; second edition, 1994).

⁸ John Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press; 1942), 150.

rules East Europe commands the Heartland,' should be revised to 'who rules Central Asia commands the Heartland,' which correctly codifies both powers' silent war of influence in Central Asia. Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping also share a willingness to employ military forces over the expansion of territory. Crimea, Ukraine, and Syria are Russian contemporary examples. The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, the South China Sea, and Doklam are Chinese examples, although international criticism has been limited when compared to equitable Russian actions.⁹ This is not due to a lack of China's desire for expansion. It is likely rooted in the People's Republic of China's (PRC) lack of military experience beyond its borders since its founding in 1949.

Geography also inhibits future Russo-Sino cooperation. With 4,200 kilometers of shared border, China and Russia share the sixth longest border in the world. Making matters worse, the border mostly comprises open steppe and rivers. Continental powers have historically shown greater proclivity to conflict, especially with great power neighbors.¹⁰ This geography has betrayed relations between Moscow and Beijing in the past. In 1969, skirmishes along the Ussuri River led to open military conflict between the two states. During several months of fighting, both sides tallied up more than 300 casualties. Furthermore, during the crisis, Russia was prepared to launch nuclear weapons against China.¹¹ Nuclear war would have likely broken out between the two powers had Henry Kissinger not intervened. In a critical phone call, the former U.S. Secretary of State informed the Soviet ambassador in Washington, D.C. that the United States would retaliate to the

⁹ This archipelago shares two names due to the Chinese/Japanese claims. Given the legal uncertainty over ownership, this paper uses both.

¹⁰ Sarah C. M. Paine, *The Japanese Empire: Grand Strategy from the Meiji Restoration to the Pacific War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹¹ Mark O'Neill, "Nixon Intervention Saved China from Soviet Nuclear Attack," *South China Morning Post*, published 12 May 2010, accessed February 22, 2018, <http://www.scmp.com/article/714064/nixon-intervention-saved-china-soviet-nuclear-attack>.

use of Soviet nuclear weapons by annihilating 130 Soviet cities.¹² As a result, the Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev backed down, but the Sino-Soviet relationship was so strained that a nuclear apocalypse was a realistic possibility. This reality has remained in the recesses of the minds of Russian and Chinese leaders. The two neighboring states, while striving for regional hegemony, share one of the largest, most open borders in the world. This open geography will continue to prevent a closer allegiance between both powers.

Although there are clear geographic and imperial reasons that China and Russia will remain hostile towards one another, the Communist Party of China (CPC) continues to promote growing ties between both states. The Russian-Chinese relationship is now “as close as lips and teeth,” according to China’s ambassador in Moscow.¹³ This same phrase was used by Mao Zedong to describe China and North Korea’s relationship during the 1950s.¹⁴ There is, however, good reason to remain skeptical about this propaganda. The United States remains the largest offshore threat to both China and Russia. Over the past two decades, the United States has overextended itself in Middle Eastern wars and suffered from the Great Recession. These realities have presented ample opportunities for rival states to coalesce against the unipolar power and pursue the basic tenets of balance of power theory—but they did not. There were no effective attempts from both states to bilaterally eject the United States and its influence from the peripheral regions of Eurasia. This demonstrates that China and Russia fear a greater threat to their domestic security and global influence from each other than a distant enemy across the Pacific.

¹² Mark O’Neill, “Nixon Intervention Saved China from Soviet Nuclear Attack,” *South China Morning Post*, published 12 May 2010, accessed 14 October 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/article/714064/nixon-intervention-saved-china-soviet-nuclear-attack>.

¹³ Mira Milosevich, “Russia and China” FAES, published 17 September 2014, accessed 15 October 2017, <http://www.fundacionfaes.org/en/analysis/127/rusia-y-china>.

¹⁴ Cheng Xiaohu, “The Evolution of the Lips and Teeth Relationship: China-North Korea Relations in the 1960s,” *International Relations and Comparisons in Northeast Asia*, 119-137.

Lastly, Russia and China share membership in many regional organizations focusing on Eurasian issues—the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the BRICS, the Eurasia Economic Union (EEU), the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and others. These organizations strive to align or unite member economic and military interests in the region and around the world. For example, the SCO is mainly an anti-terrorism union focused on combatting Islamic and nationalist terrorists in Central Asia and Western China, although it was founded to resolve Central Asian border disputes. There have been bilateral and multilateral military exercises in the regions between China, Russia, and other SCO member states. Furthermore, there have been lengthy conversations about counterinsurgency strategy and economic and infrastructure projects in the region under SCO direction. Nonetheless, terrorism in the region has not diminished, and in some ways, has been exacerbated.¹⁵ Furthermore, economic unions like the BRI and the EEU have worked to align economic interests in the region. Both focus on economic development and improving standards of living, but despite the inordinate influx of capital into the region over the past several years, little has changed. These organizations, although touted as successful operations, have made little impact in Central Asia. The pervasiveness of Russian culture and Chinese investment has barely benefited the Central Asian states. Beyond this region, the BRICS, which aligns developing countries to counter the strong arm of the West, has failed to challenge liberal economic hegemony. The BRICS botched this objective due to the constant jockeying over influential leadership of the organization. China, Russia, and India, to a certain extent, have been vying to lead the group at the cost of sabotaging the influential development of their rival partners.

Ultimately, China and Russia are economically, demographically, socially, and militarily different. Their

¹⁵ Jozef Lang, “Exporting Jihad—Islamic Terrorism from Central Asia,” *Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich (Center for Eastern Studies)*, published 12 April 2017, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2017-04-12/exporting-jihad-islamic-terrorism-central-asia>.

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disparate goals continue to hinder the opportunities for a potential partnership. Although Chinese diplomats claim Russia and China have deeper relations, history since the collapse of the Soviet Union proves otherwise. China's hegemonic challenge against the American unipolarity remains unachievable due to Russia's geopolitical proximity, difference, and competition.

HIMALAYAN HEGEMONY

Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is causing great consternation in New Delhi. The last decade has seen China's influence circumscribe India. Bhutan remains India's only close ally in the region. Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka have all moved into China's sphere of influence, primarily due to the influx of capital investment into these states through BRI. These investments are alarming not only because of the accompanying pervasiveness of Chinese influence, but also because of the increase in clandestine military infrastructure. In 2014, a Chinese submarine underwent a routine stopover in Hambantota, Sri Lanka. This marked the first time China used a wholly commercial harbor to restock and refuel a PLAN ship. Indian military analysts were extremely concerned with a top Indian naval commander opining, "If the Chinese military can use a civilian facility, then is that facility still civilian or military?"¹⁶ This was a valid question and reveals how similar Chinese actions have continued to upend the security dynamic of South Asia. Hambantota is not the only port near India within China's 'String of Pearls.'¹⁷ Chittagong, Bangladesh; Gwadar, Pakistan; and Colombo, Sri Lanka are three major ports within India's immediate circumference currently undergoing major reformation from Chinese capital and influence. This

¹⁶ Tom Miller, *China's Asian Dream* (London: Zed Books, 2017), 170.

¹⁷ In 2004, Booz Allen Hamilton published "Energy Futures in Asia" which discussed China's investment strategy in energy sources around the world. This energy infrastructure was supplemented with the purchasing of major ports in many states in the Asian periphery. The report nicknamed these ports the 'String of Pearls.'

geographic noose is rapidly eroding the already weak Sino-Indian relations.

From India's perspective, China-Pakistan relations remain the most threatening. China initially promised to invest USD 46 billion in infrastructure throughout the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) with a recent expansion to USD 62 billion in early 2017.¹⁸ To date, this is not only the largest amount of financial assistance that China has promised to any of India's neighbors, but also the largest nation-level investments in the BRI. For China, CPEC is a promising geopolitical region because better infrastructure will minimize Chinese dependence on natural resource transportation through the Malacca Straits, which remains a salient security concern to the CPC. For Delhi, the project is alarming, since it crosses partly through Kashmir, a hotly contested region between India and Pakistan. This new Chinese-constructed, yet Pakistani-owned infrastructure will cement Islamabad's claims over the contested region. Not only does this move weaken India's geopolitical position, but it also distances Delhi from the Central Asian states where Indian influence attempts to hedge Chinese expansionism.¹⁹ India is not idling patiently during CPEC construction. Pakistani intelligence authorities allege that New Delhi funded insurgents to cross into Baluchistan in 2016 with the intent of disrupting and sabotaging CPEC construction.²⁰ If such allegations are true, India, a nation not known for clandestine activity, will have actively attempted to counteract Pakistani strength and expanding Chinese influence. Given the Indo-Pakistani rivalry over the past several decades and New Delhi's growing fear of Chinese dominance, India

¹⁸ Salman Siddiqui, "CPEC Investment Pushed from \$55b to \$62b," *The Express Tribune*, published 12 April 2017, accessed 15 October 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1381733/cpec-investment-pushed-55b-62b/>.

¹⁹ Alexander Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) 146-182.

²⁰ Saleem Shahid, "India out to Sabotage CPEC: Raheel," *Dawn*, published 13 April 2016, accessed 15 October 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1251784>.

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continues to harbor growing concerns over the expanding Beijing-Islamabad relations.

India's concern over China's growing influence and belligerence is not without cause. Over the past 60 years, Beijing and New Delhi have had numerous confrontations over disputed territory encompassing 100,000 square kilometers. From the Nathu La and Cho La clashes in 1967 to multiple Sino-Indian skirmishes over the Sumdorong Chu Valley to the Doklam incident in mid-2017, China and India have not come to a mutual agreement over border delineation.²¹ Although the PLA outclasses the Indian Armed Forces (IAF) in nearly every measure, New Delhi has been able to maintain border positions and deter Chinese adventurism. Recently, during the Doklam incident, China and India mutually decided to disengage from the confrontation that consisted of hand-to-hand brawling and stone-throwing. Although there were reasons for both nations to disengage, the mutuality of the agreement profited India, given its military disadvantage. For most of Sino-Indian history, conflicts between the two nations have occurred in the untenable, mountainous terrain of the Himalayas. This hostile geographic region deterred army movements and assisted in maintaining peace. Over the past several years, however, Chinese naval ambitions in the Indian Ocean have prompted another theater of rivalry and potential area for combat, further threatening Indian security. India remains concerned over the northern Sino-Indian Himalayan border, but now must also face Chinese influence on its other cardinal peripheries, which are not as easily restricted by impregnable geography.

Indian cultural history emphasizes New Delhi's potential strategy and strong reasoning for combatting Chinese hegemony. Chanakaya, an ancient Indian philosopher, argued that a concentric policy was the best means of defending the state in his treatise, *Arthashastra*. The theory recommended pitting distant enemies against adjacent foes. In this way, they

²¹ Additional information on the Doklam Incident and its relevance to Sino-Indian relations, see: "Conflict Between Giants: The Doklam Incident," *Charged Affairs*, published 9 October 2017, <https://chargedaffairs.org/doklam-incident/>.

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would destroy one another and leave India to pursue its peaceful interests. Culturally and historically, India has not considered war as an honorable course of action, but markedly an act of self-preservation. In modern application, this would require pitting distant powers against adjacent enemies to deter conflict. During the Cold War, New Delhi was a leader in the Non-Aligned Movement and maintained positive bilateral relations with the Soviet Union, which further deterred Chinese aggression, especially after the 1967 border war between India and China. Although New Delhi cannot take credit for the fracturing relationship between Moscow and Beijing during that period, the Ussuri River skirmishes and threats of nuclear annihilation between the two great powers certainly played to India's advantage. Since Russia's political and military power has comparatively diminished since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States now plays the deterrent role to Chinese bellicosity. Beijing cannot deploy sufficient military capabilities to wholly overpower the Indian Armed Forces (IAF) because the United States remains militarily engaged with China over issues like Taiwan and the South China Sea. India is heavily incentivized to pit China against its strong, distant neighbor, and in doing so passes the buck of great power balancing to slow Chinese hegemonic development. That is exactly what New Delhi is trying to accomplish.

JAPAN AND THE EAST ASIAN WATERWAYS

China's rocky relations with Russia and India pale in comparison to its nationalistic rivalry with Japan. The history of Sino-Japanese relations is fraught with violence. Due to this history, nationalistic and ethnic tensions have remained high and have often culminated in bilateral crises. Luckily, geographic factors have inhibited the aggressive behavior between the two nations. Nonetheless, Japan and China are only separated by a brief stretch of sea, and both continue to contest the other's great-power ambitions.

Early 20th century Chinese history is saturated with Japanese invasion, occupation, and atrocities. From the First Sino-Japanese War in 1894 and 1895 to the expulsion of

Japanese forces after Imperial Japan's defeat in 1945, the frequent conflicts totaled more than 25 million Chinese civilian and military deaths.²² The Japanese utilized Chinese resources to continue their war efforts, which increased the number of Chinese casualties. This era of 50 years of war and occupation coupled with the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in the late nineteenth century became known as the 'Century of Humiliation,' during which the Western powers manipulated a fledgling China and kept it in political and economic dormancy. These formative years have shaped the Chinese perspective of Japan. According to a 2016 survey, 81% of Chinese citizens viewed Japan unfavorably or with hostility.²³ Although this opinion has fluctuated since the founding of Communist China in 1949, China has remained firmly anti-Japanese. Japanese views of China are even worse. The same survey revealed that 86% of Japanese citizens view the Chinese negatively.²⁴ Interestingly, in contrast to Capitalist Peace Theory, which argues a positive correlation between growing trade relationships and peace between states, nationalistic tendencies have heightened in both Japan and China as the countries have further integrated their economies.²⁵ While peace between the Asian behemoths has prevailed during the past 70 years since the conclusion of World War II, crises have continued to plague the Sino-Japanese relationship. Prime Minister Abe and the Diet, Japan's bicameral legislature, are working to strengthen Japanese military capabilities in the face

²² This conservative casualty estimates targets Chinese deaths from the First Sino-Japanese War, the occupation of Manchukuo and mainland China, and the Second Sino-Japanese War.

²³ Bruce Stokes, "Hostile Neighbors: China vs. Japan," *Pew Global*, published 13 September 2016, accessed 17 October 2017, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/09/13/hostile-neighbors-china-vs-japan/>.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Won Bae Kim, "The Rise of Coastal China and Inter-Regional Relations Among Core Economic Regions of East Asia," *Annual Regional Science*, 48 (2012), 283-299.

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of a rising China.²⁶ The tenuous peace between China and Japan is weakening.

Heightening tensions between both great powers boiled over in the early 2010s with the dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Although the crisis remained bloodless and merely resulted in water cannon shots and verbal accusations, global observers feared an outbreak of war. Riots broke out across China denouncing Japan and its traded goods. These riots resulted in the destruction of Japanese-made vehicles, the vandalism of Japanese consulates, and Chinese police forces outlawing public protest for the duration of the crisis. The dispute derived from two major public issues. First, nationalist sentiment in China and Japan had continued to intensify and the competing claims for ownership over territory presented a prime opportunity for these tensions to flare. Second, since the discovery of oil in the East China Sea in 1971, surrounding states have diplomatically jockeyed over maritime rights in the region and ownership of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands to gain access to the area's natural resources. Additionally, the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands hold particular relevance for Chinese grand strategy, although Beijing rarely mentions the islands' strategic military purpose.

Chinese naval expansionism is currently trapped behind the First Island Chain, which inhibits Chinese blue water hegemonic ambition. The First Island Chain geographically comprises Sakhalin to the far north and continues south through Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia. These archipelagic states effectively block China from access to the Pacific Ocean. This limitation to China's deep-sea ambitions contests its global ambitions of military and strategic influence. Furthermore, in the extremely unlikely circumstance that China finds a reliable passage through the First Island Chain, such as with a reunited Taiwan or amicable Philippine leadership, Beijing would remain inhibited by the

²⁶ Linda Sieg, "PM Abe's Party Eyes Revision of Japan Pacifist Constitution by Late 2018," *Reuters*, published 27 April 2015, accessed 15 October 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-japan-constitution/pm-abes-party-eyes-revision-of-japan-pacifist-constitution-by-late-2018-idUSKBN0N10KB20150427>.

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‘second island chain,’ which is further east and encompasses the Ogasawara, Volcano, and Mariana Islands. There is even talk of a ‘third island chain’ which includes the Aleutians, Hawaii, and parts of Oceania, as a final defensive line if China ever found access through the first two. These consecutive geographic barriers portray one key detail about Chinese naval ambitions: multiple states are interested in deterring Chinese expansion. This de facto coalition of nations, united by an interest in rolling back Chinese expansion, is led by the United States. And China is heavily outgunned and outspent by them.

Considering the compounding Chinese geographic limitations of the various island chains, Japanese and U.S. anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities will deter Chinese engagement beyond its immediate periphery. Japan and the United States are developing and deploying capabilities that will deter Chinese naval, air, and missile assets from full utility in the region. The deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) and the Aegis Ashore Ballistic Missile Defense System on the First Island Chain serve as a deterrent against the PLA, minimizing the offense capability of Beijing’s rapidly expanding rocket force. With the pivot to Asia and the bolstering of the Seventh Fleet stationed in Japan, the U.S. and Japanese naval capabilities could easily dispatch aggressive PLAN forces in Japan’s littoral.²⁷ Chinese aircraft carrier and air force technology is intensifying rapidly but remains behind the development of U.S. and Japanese air force capabilities. While China is pursuing comparable arms, the PLA will remain unable to challenge the regional status quo. If conflict broke out in East Asia, U.S.-Japanese forces could effectively contain China to its coastal regions and destroy considerable Chinese offensive threats.

²⁷ William Lowhter, “Japanese Navy is a Match for People’s Liberation Army Navy: US Professor,” *Taipei Times*, published 23 August 2012, accessed 15 October 2017, <http://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2012/08/23/2003540982>.

CONCLUSION

Scholarship considering the hegemonic rise of China in relation to historical hegemonic bids often misses a key component – geography. China is located in a particularly troubled spot. Russia is coy but engages with China in silent wars of influence in their peripheries. Additionally, Russia longs for its hegemonic role lost with the collapse of the Soviet Union. A rising China challenges that resurrection. India remains an adjacent, weaker neighbor who regularly fights against Chinese expansion in South Asia. With India's interest in becoming another great power, geographic adjacency threatens both hegemonic bids. Even though China's history with India is considerably less aggressive than its history with other neighbors, both countries are threatened by one another's rise. Lastly, Japan attempted to conquer China, slaughtered countless Chinese, and remains proactive against Chinese expansion. China has been unable to repair the Sino-Japanese relationship diplomatically, and Japan shows little interest in pursuing rapprochement. Geography has pre-ordained three adjacent challengers to China's rise, and that does not include the greatest preventative power located thousands of miles across the Pacific Ocean – the United States.

The United States' role in the current international liberal order dictates the prevention of rising powers that can challenge the status quo. China, as the most likely upset in the global balance of power, is the largest concern of the United States. A few points must be made to fully encapsulate how the United States is deterring China's rise. The United States has a ring around China's mainland and perpetually maintains military capabilities throughout. From heavily armed bases in Central Asia to various allies in South Asia to the Seventh Fleet and committed U.S. partners in East Asia, China is surrounded by U.S. power. Washington naturally wants to maintain the favorable status quo that keeps the United States in charge and China as a contained member of the regional community. There is nothing China can currently do to upset this reality. Without reciprocal forward-basing capabilities like those of the United States, China cannot threaten the continental United

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States and its immense latent influence. Additionally, whereas the United States has many island groups where it can station forces to deter China, there exist no similar geographic features off the United States that could support a Chinese attempt of foreign basing. The geographic balance is not equal and will perpetually favor the U.S. position. Washington knows this and will continue to devote many resources to maintain China's containment.

China will continue to grow economically and militarily. It may even gain some victories in its periphery, such as with those nations that continue to align with Beijing's interests or in its initiatives at island-building in the South China Sea. However, the foreseeable future remains staunchly against Chinese regional hegemony. Geography has trapped and deterred China's rise. Future technological, political, economic, or cultural developments could upend this reality, but there is no way Beijing or its peripheral rivals could anticipate such events. In the meantime, the hegemonic ambitions of China continue to be contained and Beijing's ambitions stifled. Ultimately, geography matters

The Successes of the Islamic State in Comparison to Al Qaeda: Near Enemy Focus and Social Media Persuasion

Brooke Kuminski

The Islamic State is currently the most successful jihadist group in the Middle East because, unlike Al Qaeda (AQ) that focuses on anti-Westernism, they present themselves as religious crusaders. This is important because by not expressing an anti-Western goal, the group is opening up its ideological target audience to include Westerners. By not focusing on the far enemy and instead embracing the near enemy, the Islamic State has achieved the ability to recruit a wider and more diverse audience. This is because the demographic interested in the establishment of a religious caliphate is much broader, and more inclusive of Westerners, than an exclusively anti-Western goal. Through the medium of online propaganda, the Islamic State is able to convey its

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message to a global audience at virtually no cost. Its videos, social media, and blog posts reach untold thousands of fellow travelers or jihad-curious men, women, and children, creating an unprecedented problem for those wishing to stifle its activities. The result is new, often unpredictable, forms of attack, such as the so-called 'lone wolf' incidents as witnessed in downtown New York and London in 2017.

In contrast to AQ's use of social media, by providing transparency of goals through social media, ISIS is able to promote Islamist views around the globe and recruit Westerners into their ranks like never seen before. In contrast, AQ relies upon hidden forums and other secretive online media platforms. On these sites, AQ's ideological adherents debate issues of concern both to the organization and the broader jihadist movement. The result is, perhaps, a more focused ideological message, but one with limited popular purchase and, consequently, public adherence. Put differently, AQ influences a far more selective audience than ISIS, and the results are evident in the relative exposure of these groups' activities. It is difficult to think of recent AQ successes, whereas multiple ISIS exploits come to mind, such as the recent vehicle attacks in Barcelona, London, and New York.

Where AQ was known for massive, set-piece attacks such as embassy bombings, the attack on the USS Cole, and the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks, ISIS, following its initial successes in Syria and Iraq, diffused its influence into true 'sleeper' cells or even individual converts. When an attacker pledges allegiance to ISIS, the world listens. AQ, on the other hand, has been relatively silent—at least as far as global media coverage is concerned. ISIS' public 'successes' (if one may use such a term for these heinous acts) build its influence, foster converts, and propel its organization to spread both its message and influence. Al Qaeda uses minimal, controlled media outlets to discuss goals, and major ideological debates are behind password-protected forums. Hence, the near enemy focus has allowed ISIS to access and exploit the Western social networks and utilize social media tactics to publish their successes more persuasively and to a larger audience than AQ. Ideologically, the broadcasting of their

success leads to more success as their message is spread. The Islamic State smartly creates a domino effect as they encourage Western recruits to continue to broadcast the successes of ISIS from a true Westerner's perspective on the inside, proliferating their recruitment. Overall, this is why the Islamic State has become the leading force in the global jihad.

SHORT HISTORY ON DERIVATION OF JIHAD

While jihad constitutes only a small part of the teachings of the Quran, it is a largely contested topic amongst Islamic scholars because of the radical interpretation taken by groups like ISIS and Al Qaeda. Jihad is literally translated to mean "struggle" and is supposed to symbolize a Muslim's struggle to remain in the path of God. This concept of struggle is described as "pertain[ing] to the difficulty and complexity of living a good life: struggling against the evil in oneself in order to be virtuous and moral, making a serious effort to do good work and to help reform society."¹

When Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina, he wrote about Mecca's "unbridled materialism, avarice, and corruption, a condition of ignorance and unbelief called *jahiliyyah*."² This is the part of Muhammad's teachings that terrorist groups use to condemn the West by describing them as being in a state of ignorance and materialism. In this time, Muhammad and his followers were fighting for their lives to reform the community to lead good, religious lives.

It seems that the *jahiliyyah* at this time was directed towards the corrupt elites, but the broadness of the term allows it to be exploited by groups such as AQ and the Islamic State to call Muslims to a fight against a greater enemy to cleanse the faith of impurities. In conclusion, "Islamic law stipulates that it is a Muslim's duty to wage war not only against those who attack Muslim territory, but also against polytheists, apostates, and People of the Book who refuse Muslim rule."³ It is easy to see from this explanation how the

¹ John Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 27-28.

² Esposito, 30.

³ Esposito, 34.

ancient call to protect the Muslim community can be manipulated to represent the struggle for a global jihad and fight against those who put down Muslims globally.

SHORT HISTORY OF ISIS' SPLIT FROM AQ

While jihadist groups may seem similarly radical on the surface, they have different nuances in interpretations and priorities that have caused fractures to the global network and created multiple unique jihadist movements. These movements' ideologies, however, evolved over time and continue to evolve as these groups strategically compete internally for supremacy and externally to accomplish their greater goals.

At the beginning, two separate leaders formed two distinct groups that would become, in modern times, the Islamic State and AQ. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi founded *Jamaat al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad (JTWJ)* in 1999 as a distant precursor to the Islamic State. AQ was founded by Osama bin Laden in the 1980s during the Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union.⁴ The two groups did not formally unite until 2004, when Zarqawi finally pledged an oath of baya to Bin Laden and became an official AQ affiliate.

It is important to understand, for this context, that the oath of baya cannot be pledged by an organization but only by the leader. When Zarqawi died in 2006, his branch ties to AQ died with him. His successor, Abu Ayyub al-Masri, decided to change the name of the organization to reflect their separation from Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and established the Islamic State of Iraq "to increase the group's local appeal and embody its territorial ambitions."⁵ The name was later changed in 2011 to include the broadened conquests into Syria. Thus, the modern Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) emerged and began its expansion of power and legitimacy in the global jihad.

⁴ Aaron Y. Zelin, "The War between ISIS and Al-Qaeda for Supremacy of the Global Jihadist Movement," *Research Notes* (2015): 2.

⁵ Zachary Laub, "Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria," *Council on Foreign Relations* (2014): 2.

The division between these two groups has a lot to do with their growing ideological foundations. A place to begin the analysis would be at the surface of how the group prioritizes their goals to the world. The argument in ideologies between the Islamic State and AQ begins at their interpretations of the takfir, or the process of removing a Muslim from the Islamic community because they have deviated in some way. While both groups exploit this concept to justify their jihad against non-Muslims and Muslims alike, the “takfir doctrine as practiced by ISIS is so extreme that even Al-Qaeda theorists have questioned its legitimacy.”⁶

Al Qaeda has vocally spoke out against the Islamic state’s use of brutality to all they deem apostates, even fellow Muslims, on the grounds of the “sanctity of Muslim blood.”⁷ They claim that “Al Qaeda considers Shi’a Muslims to be apostates but sees their killing to be too extreme, a waste of resources, and detrimental to the broader jihadist project.”⁸ Another reason why Al Qaeda has vocally condemned ISIS is because of their migration into Syria from Iraq. Al Qaeda sanctioned the Islamic State’s actions as the Al Qaeda of Iraq, but when they moved into Syria they were running in contradiction and against another Al Qaeda affiliate. When told to return to Iraq, the group instead severed all ties with Al Qaeda and continued their ideological quest for an Islamic state in the region of both Iraq and Syria, in competition to their former allies.

Andrew Zelin notes that social media exacerbates this competition and that “it is likely that social media, especially Twitter, has amplified mutual hatred, with supporters of each camp refusing to back down rhetorically, likely signaling their steadfastness to their respective leaders.”⁹ Overall, the fracture in the groups came down to the prioritization of goals, and the

⁶ Davis S. Sorenson, “Priming Strategic Communications: Countering the Appeal of ISIS,” *Parameters* 44(2014): 30.

⁷ Zelin, 3.

⁸ Daniel Byman, “Terrorism in Africa: The Imminent Threat to the United States,” Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence of the House Committee on Homeland Security (2015): 4.

⁹ Zelin, 5.

Islamic State emerged as a reaction to ideological ruptures within Al-Qaeda. ISIS's recruitment techniques and global outreach have exploited tools of propaganda and the Western network of social media in a way that perpetuates their successes and attracts recruits remotely using the internet.

AL QAEDA: IDEOLOGY AND STRATEGIES

Ideologically, the focus of Al Qaeda has always been the West. Daniel Byman explained in a testimony before the House Committee on Homeland Security that although the “ultimate goal of Al Qaeda is to overthrow the corrupt ‘apostate’ regimes in the Middle East and replace them with ‘true’ Islamic governments, Al Qaeda’s primary enemy is the United States, which it sees as the root cause of all the Middle East’s problems.”¹⁰ Al Qaeda targets the far enemy of the West because they believe that targeting them will make them tired of being involved in the Middle Eastern struggle and, therefore, retreat to leave the region weak and open for them to take over from within. Al Qaeda believes that, in contrast, the struggle internally with the near enemy “is a great mistake, no matter what reasons are there for it [because] the presence of the occupier [American] forces will control the outcome of the battle for the benefit of the international kufr.”¹¹ Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden considers apostate Muslims and Muslim governments to be on the same level as the Americans in terms of evilness but does not believe in attacking Muslim countries because he values the sanctity of Muslim blood. In his 1996 *Declaration of Jihad Against Americans*, bin Laden states that “the purpose of this document was to persuade Muslims that the United States is the primary enemy of Muslims, responsible for oppressing them in numerous lands, and that Muslims therefore have a duty to wage jihad against America.”¹² He then ends the document claiming Muslim unity and states that “the

¹⁰ Byman, 4.

¹¹ Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 144.

¹² Briand Bonhomme and Cathleen Boivin, “Osama bin Laden’s Declaration of Jihad Against Americans, *Milestone Documents in World History: Exploring Primary Sources That Shaped the World* (2010): 4.

division of the world into believers and nonbelievers”¹³ is at the heart of their argument to try to recruit people to fight against Muslim oppressors and, in turn, cooperate with the goals of Al Qaeda.

Strategically, Al Qaeda is known for plotting global terrorist attacks. Al-Qaeda and its founders believed in the same goal of cleansing the Muslim territories and targeting “apostate Arab regimes,” but “to achieve these goals, it first had to cut off the head of the snake – the United States and the West.”¹⁴ Their focus on the West includes large terrorist attacks, such as the events orchestrated against United States embassies in Africa in the late 1990s and the World Trade Center in New York on September 11, 2001. The leaders of AQ believe that Western influence has tarnished and modernized life in the Middle East, and that the people will be cleansed for the coming of the Caliphate. This focus on the West creates an atmosphere of a global terrorism network around members of AQ, instead of a focus on the regional religious end goals of their crusade.

THE ISLAMIC STATE: IDEOLOGY AND STRATEGIES

Ideologically, the Islamic State shares some similarities with Al Qaeda, which is a trait of being a splinter group of the larger terrorist organization. Instead of focusing on the far enemy overtly in the way that Al Qaeda does, ISIS’s primary target “has not been the United States, but rather ‘apostate’ regimes in the Arab world – namely, the Asad regime in Syria and the Abadi regime in Iraq.”¹⁵ The irony behind this is that the fight against the near enemy is not a foreign concept to high-ranking members of Al Qaeda. Zawahiri’s jihad was primarily focused on the near enemy before he joined with bin Laden, and the Islamic State embraces this old tactic as a reaction to the failures of Al Qaeda to promote a successful global jihad.

¹³ Bonhomme and Boivin, 6.

¹⁴ Zelin, 2.

¹⁵ Byman, 4.

In contrast to Al Qaeda, “ISIS’s portrayal of its own goals...seeks to establish an Islamic state that can become the core of a new Caliphate that will eventually strive to dominate the rest of the world.”¹⁶ They have no specific focus on the West as their enemy within their tactics, but instead have focused attention on the regional conquests of Syria and Iraq. The Islamic State is brutal towards anyone that opposes them or their ideologies, including other religious groups within Islam. Therefore, their harsh and consistent violence towards everyone does not single out Westerners as specific targets. Scott Shane and Ben Hubbard describe how the idea that ISIS has anti-western priorities is a common misconception amongst Americans, since the “most notorious [ISIS] video...showed a beheading of the American journalist James Foley.”¹⁷

This public beheading diverged from the norms of ISIS’s plan and does not prove that ISIS intends violence against Westerners in particular. Instead, one should interpret the widespread violence the organization shows to regional populations and foreigners alike and violence that coincides with their near enemy strategy. They do not, however, have a priority goal of attacking Westerners, yet this “could change overnight, for now it sharply distinguishes ISIS from al-Qaeda.”¹⁸ It is explained that the “Islamic State uses mass executions, public beheadings, rape, and symbolic crucifixion displays to terrorize population into submission and ‘purify’ the community, and at the same time provides basic (if minimal) services: the mix earns them support, or at least acquiescence due to fear, from the population.”¹⁹ In addition, ISIS has demonstrated an ability of utilizing the Western-created social networks to infiltrate and recruit Westerners into their ranks.

¹⁶ Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, “The Dawn of the Islamic State of Iraq and Ash-Sham,” *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 16(2014): 11.

¹⁷ Scott Shane and Ben Hubbard, “ISIS Displaying a Deft Command of Varied Media,” *The New York Times*, 30 Aug 2014: 1.

¹⁸ Shane and Hubbard, 1.

¹⁹ Byman, 6.

Strategically, the Islamic State is trying to set themselves apart from the failures of Al Qaeda in Iraq and “to demonstrate in Syria that it has somehow ‘learned the lessons’ of AQ’s failures to hold onto power in the Anbar province and its ultimate defeat in the Iraq War.”²⁰ Instead of trying to cooperate and win over the local organizations within Iraq and Syria the way Al Qaeda does, “ISIS has carefully crafted and implemented a political strategy that calls for the establishment of its own political institutions.”²¹ Hence, they are reassuring their goal of an autonomous Islamic State by establishing their own rule of law over the region and either stripping the old rule or ruling via strict coalition. They do this through the process of *da’wah* meetings that provide outreach to locals and have “sought to recruit children” in “a bid to ensure that their political rule lasts.”²²

Another strategy ISIS uses is to institute sectarian struggle and chaos to destabilize the region in order to take over the apostate regimes. This is something that Al Qaeda was always vocally against; instead, they focused on the far enemy and relied on them to destabilize the region. Another parallel in their strategies can be drawn in the way the Islamic State proudly proclaims responsibility for attacks and violence. Daniel Byman notes that “Al Qaeda has historically been fairly quiet for a terrorist group when it comes to claiming and boasting of attacks, while the Islamic State often exaggerates its own prowess and role to the point of absurdity.”²³ This quick response to claim responsibility for violence and attacks is perpetuated via social media accounts and official newspapers for the group. By perpetuating successes online, ISIS has demonstrated the ability of utilizing social networks to spread information both locally and, more importantly, abroad.

²⁰ Al-Tamimi, 8.

²¹ Al-Tamimi, 8.

²² Al-Tamimi, 10.

²³ Byman, 7.

HOW AL QAEDA USES PROPAGANDA/SOCIAL MEDIA

Al Qaeda's technique of focusing on the far enemy allows them to have a recruitment strategy that targets the passive believer, not the active traveling believer that ISIS targets. Instead, "AQ propaganda, like *Inspire* magazine, seeks to recruit individuals passively through indoctrination,"²⁴ and "perhaps more importantly, *Inspire* often encourages Westerners who desire to fight in foreign wars to consider the 'jihadist next door' and attack their own countries."²⁵ By recognizing online jihadism as a contribution to the global jihadist campaign from behind the screen of your computer, they are more focused on indoctrination than traveling to take place in physical jihad.²⁶ In their strategy, Al Qaeda uses themes such as uncertainty and consumerism found in Western societies to turn people against Western ideals and radicalize them for the cause. While "AQ tells its followers, and those it hopes to recruit, that there will need to be a "violent struggle to remake the world,"²⁷ they do not nearly employ violence in the way that we see the Islamic State doing. For example, the Tsarnev brothers responsible for the Boston Marathon bombings in April 2013 were inspired by Al Qaeda members online to plan their attack. While not directly influenced or guided by a single member of the organization to carry out the attack, the brothers were instead inspired by trips to the region and Salafi Islam information read online on semi-private internet forums.²⁸

The communication structure online is a three-tiered system. At the top, official sites carry messages to leaders behind password protected firewalls. In the middle, reasonably

²⁴ Therese Postel, "The Young and the Normless: Al Qaeda's Ideological Recruitment of Western Extremists," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 12 (2013): 101.

²⁵ Postel, 115.

²⁶ Brian Michael Jenkins, "Is Al Qaeda's Internet Strategy Working?" Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence of the House Committee on Homeland Security (2011): 2.

²⁷ Postel, 108.

²⁸ Postel, 107.

well-known and recognizable jihadi figures discuss issues of strategy. These forums may also be protected behind password firewalls but are more open to interested recruits than the top tier. At the bottom, chat-rooms and independent websites dominate the scene where non-radicals and radicals alike can engage and fantasize about the jihadi cause.²⁹ While their structure is closed off behind firewalls with the upper and lower tiers not interacting directly, Al Qaeda is smart occasionally to allow the lower tier to see a personal face of the organization. Leaders recognize that “terrorism doesn’t work if no one is watching, and in the days before YouTube and Twitter, AQ needed Western journalists to bring its message to its target audience” and therefore, decided “on multiple occasions to grant Western journalists safe passage in AQ safe havens and allow them to interview Bin Laden face to face.”³⁰ They also rely heavily on their *Inspire* magazine, which featured a dedicated narrative and praise of the brothers in the May 2013 edition. Overall, the recruitment tactics of Al Qaeda online have not produced many significant cases of real recruitment to jihadism.³¹ This is exemplified by the lack of domestic terrorist activity and proves that a majority of the Muslim community has both rejected their ideology and indicates a breakdown in their social media tactics for recruitment.

HOW THE ISLAMIC STATE USES PROPAGANDA/SOCIAL MEDIA

A foundational pillar of the Islamic State’s success is its focus on social media outreach to formulate a controlled global perception that is readily available to people both locally and globally. Instead of closing themselves off to the West, ISIS adopted clearer religious goals with widespread violence to appeal to Muslims outside their immediate sphere of geographical influence: “ISIS’s ‘forcing it down people’s throats’ style is more popular with its foreign fighter

²⁹ Jenkins, 1.

³⁰ Byman, 5.

³¹ Postel, 9.

contingent, which makes up 50 percent of its fighting force and provides support for its out-of-theater power projection.”³² This legitimizes them as a radical religious force, as opposed to the overtly anti-Western force like Al Qaeda and opens the organization to recruits from all over the world. This widespread popularity of ISIS combined with their successes in the region of conflict prove that “ISIS is not only talking the talk about establishing an Islamic state, it is walking the walk,” which has “attracted many foreign fighters to its side.”³³ In comparison to Al Qaeda, the Islamic State is very vocal about broadcasting their successes and claiming responsibility for attacks, “exaggerating its own prowess and role to the point of absurdity.”³⁴ This success breeds more success and positive public relations between the headquarters fighters and people around the world.

The organization utilizes a bottom-up social media strategy that allows both low and upper-level militants to define the group’s goals and image on the internet. While this strategy allows for a variety in the firsthand material on the Islamic State for people to interact with, it also “risks allowing the most foolish and horrific low-level member to define the group.”³⁵ Houda Abadi describes that the Islamic State has seven themes that are most prevalent in their social media postings, some being “Western humiliation and transgression of the Ummah,” “Military jihad,” and “hypocrisy of Muslim and MENA leaders.”³⁶ He also describes that the propaganda coming out of the Islamic State and onto social media are “of high production value and share stylistic similarities to Hollywood action movies.”³⁷ For example, Aqsa Mahmood, a twenty-year-old from Glasgow, left for Syria in November 2013 to join the cause. Aqsa is described as “a prolific social-media user” who “writes a blog in which she advises other

³² Zelin, 6.

³³ Zelin, 7.

³⁴ Byman, 7.

³⁵ Byman, 8.

³⁶ Houda Abadi, “ISIS Media Strategies: The Role of Our Community Leaders,” *The Carter Center* (2013): 1.

³⁷ Abadi, 1.

young women about the best way to travel to Syria and marry a fighter.”³⁸ Through her social media blog, readers get a glimpse into her supposed “life” as a wife of ISIS. University educated, Aqsa is a strong force on social media because, to people who are interested in joining the cause, she is credible. Instead of a radical, readers of her blog see a smart, young woman who made the religious decision to join the fighters in Syria, and this personalizes the recruitment narrative. By creating an example out of educated, Western women like Aqsa, “ISIS wages a slick social media campaign offering all the advantages of jihad.”³⁹ This is a huge source of success for the Islamic State because it is proving that there is not only a global outreach, but that this outreach is not just among jihadi radicals. The parents of Aqsa describe the phenomenon and the implications of their social media outreach by stating, “if our daughter, who had all the chances and freedom in life, could become a bedroom radical then it’s possible for this to happen to any family.”⁴⁰ Throughout their social media tactics, their end goal for viewers is ultimately to persuade them to travel to the Caliphate and join them. This is another strategy the Islamic State learned as a reaction to failures that they saw in Al Qaeda management of the jihadi next door.

CONCLUSION

What sets the Islamic State ahead of Al Qaeda is not only their successes, but the perpetuation of successes on social media. By focusing on the near enemy, the Islamic State has opened their ideology to demographics that may have originally been deterred by a far enemy ideal that Al Qaeda preaches. By perpetuating their goals on social media and through propaganda, the Islamic State is successful in creating an open forum and an inclusive environment for people of all ranks and backgrounds to discuss topics related to their cause. One may come to the final conclusion that the Islamic State emerged as a

³⁸ Harriet Sherwood, Sandra Laville, Kim Willsher, Ben Knight, Maddy French, and Lauren Gambino, "Schoolgirl Jihadis: The Female Islamists Leaving Home to Join ISIS Fighters," *The Guardian* (2014): 7.

³⁹ Sorenson, 26.

⁴⁰ Sherwood, 8.

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commentary and reaction to the things that Al Qaeda was considered to be doing incorrectly in terms of a global jihad.

The United States' Response to Corruption in Afghanistan

Samuel Read

This paper offers an analysis of how systemic corruption impacted U.S. nation building efforts in Afghanistan, and briefly overviews how corruption has grown in and impacted Afghan politics since the days of the Soviet invasion. The paper then looks at anti-corruption efforts by the U.S. and allies, and the various agencies and organizations that are now dedicated to identifying and preventing corruption, fraud, and waste in the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. There are also some ways in which the U.S. has not prevented corruption, ways in which a lack of proper oversight has contributed to corruption, and instances wherein local actors in Afghanistan have worked with both U.S. and criminal elements, taking U.S. money while assisting criminal or insurgent forces. The paper ends with a brief conclusion and offers some policy recommendations to build on and replicate the successes of U.S. anti-corruption efforts in Afghanistan.

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When the U.S. military invaded Afghanistan immediately after 9/11, many officials were optimistic about U.S. efforts in the country, and what they were sure would be a quick victory. Sixteen years later, that optimism is long gone, and the American people have become almost inured to the ongoing conflict and violence in Afghanistan. To be sure, the military victory over the Taliban was decisive – CIA and U.S. Special Forces, with the help of local Afghan partners, decimated the Taliban and al Qaeda forces in less than three months.¹

However, the military victory that sent the Taliban running for the border of Pakistan has been followed by over a decade of nation-building efforts with limited success. What some hoped would be a new Marshall Plan has instead been sixteen years of sacrificing resources, and more importantly, human lives, for very limited gains. Afghanistan today is still mired in conflict between International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), U.S. and Afghan forces, and insurgent troops. The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) still need more training before they become self-reliant. It is uncertain whether ANSF troops, particularly the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP), are capable of maintaining order and resisting the Taliban without international help.

This paper does not seek to identify every misstep or issue with American efforts in Afghanistan – indeed, no single article or book could cover every aspect of a war. This paper will look at how corruption at various levels in Afghanistan has undermined U.S. nation-building efforts, prolonged the conflict, and has led to limited success in America's longest war. This paper is not intended as a critique of any unit, branch, department, or administration, but an analysis of how the issue of corruption has impacted efforts in Afghanistan, and what the United States has done, both beneficial and counter-productive, about corruption.

¹ Crumpton, Henry A. *Art of intelligence: lessons from a life in the CIAs Clandestine Service*. New York: Penguin Books, 2013.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE ROLE OF CORRUPTION ON AFGHANISTAN CONFLICT

After U.S. military and intelligence operations in 2002 forced the Taliban to flee from seats of power in cities like Khandahar and Kabul into mountain hideouts near the border of Pakistan, it quickly became apparent that infrastructure and rule of law in Afghanistan were severely lacking. The Taliban had seized control of much of Afghanistan in 1996 after several years of devastating civil war between various militant and religious groups, known as the Mujahidin. That civil war was preceded by over a decade of insurgent resistance to occupation by the Soviet Union, whose military forces invaded in 1979. Decades of insurgency and war, followed by a few years of strict Taliban rule, had caused widespread devastation to the nation's infrastructure and society. Millions had been killed, millions more had fled the country, large portions of the population were living in poverty, and entire districts in many major cities were in rubble. When the United States entered the country in late 2001, the nation-building efforts had almost no pre-existing infrastructure upon which to build.²

It was in this environment that U.S. and ISAF personnel began trying to build Afghanistan into a stable democracy. Knowing they needed domestic partners and allies, both for operational success against the Taliban and to create a stable government, U.S. personnel began forming partnerships with powerful Afghan groups and individuals. Some of the allies were committed to helping and developing the country; others were more interested in serving their own interests. For example, when U.S. military forces first entered the country to fight the Taliban in the days after 9/11, they allied with a group of anti-Taliban military leaders called the Northern Alliance. The Northern Alliance proved a useful ally in the initial operations that pushed the Taliban out of power.

² Saeed, Huma and Stephan Parmentier. "When Rabbits are in Charge of Carrots: Land Grabbing, Transitional Justice and Economic-State Crime in Afghanistan". *State Crime Journal*. 6, no. 1. (2017).

However, some of these leaders, who would soon be appointed to positions of authority in the new U.S.-backed government, were the same warlords that had devastated the country and committed atrocities in the civil wars during the 1990s. These leaders would now be operating from positions of authority and power *with* U.S. support.³ This eroded the population's trust in both their new government and in the United States, which undermined nation-building efforts.

The political arena was another area where initial optimism soured as a result of a lack of progress. Initially, the creation of a stable, functional democracy in Afghanistan seemed possible. In 2004, Afghanistan held elections resulting in the selection of Hamid Karzai, the first freely elected president of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) in the nation's history. The next year, the GIROA formed a bicameral Parliament. Over time, however, faith of both the Afghan people and the international community in this new administration faded, and trust waned. There were two serious causes for this occurrence: the lack of progress in development, which contributed to the ongoing conflict and danger that imperiled Afghans' lives, and the perception of wide-spread corruption in the government.

As basic government services remained severely lacking in many parts of the nation, many Afghans found that their basic needs – like food, security, education, legal services, policing, etc. – could only be acquired by paying bribes, known as *baksheesh*. *Baksheesh* are payments demanded by civil servants and government officials such as police officers, judges, etc., that Afghan citizens are told to pay before the official will provide whatever services the citizen needs. This is not to be confused with an official salary; a *baksheesh* is an off the record payment to convince an official to assist the citizen in need. According to the United Nations, Afghans pay \$3.9 billion per year in bribes and similar

³ Holdren, Richard et al. "Dealing with Corruption: Hard Lessons Learned in Afghanistan". *Joint Force Quarterly*. 75, no. 4. (2014).

‘gratuities.’⁴ This practice occurred in the early days of the GIRoA and continues today.

Stories abounded of city officials demanding bribes and payments before doing their jobs and of police stopping citizens at checkpoints to demand payments.⁵ Police, judges, utility providers, and other government services demanded baksheesh payments of Afghan citizens, as well as charging the normal fee for the service provided. U.S. Army officer T.S. Allen summarized the problem in *Small Wars Journal* in 2013: “Afghans say it is impossible to obtain a public service without paying a bribe... a quarter of Afghan people pay bribes and more than a third go without desired public services because they cannot afford bribe prices.”⁶ Afghan citizens were being extorted, and to many Afghan citizens it seemed to be growing more prevalent as time passed. Perceptions are an important part of politics, and Afghan citizens’ perceptions of their government were worsening as baksheesh payments became more common. This weakened the influence of the government and thus lessened the pressure on the Taliban.

Bribery was rampant, not just at the local level but at the highest levels of government. Warlords, such as the Northern Alliance and others, were operating throughout the country with the permission and sanction of the Afghan government. Many were using their position and closeness with the government and U.S. military to control roads, secure lucrative contracts, establish themselves as regional powers,⁷ and sometimes serve both sides, cooperating with both international and Taliban forces to maximize profits.⁸

The re-emergence of the Mujahidin and their inclusion in the political and security apparatus was a surprise

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Chayes, Sarah. *Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security*. New York, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 2015.

⁶ Allen, T.S. “Addressing an Ignored Imperative: Rural Corruption in Afghanistan.” *Small Wars Journal*. 9, no. 2. (2013).

⁷ Dexter Filkins. “With U.S. Aid, Warlord Builds Afghan Empire.” *The New York Times*, June 2010.

⁸ U.S. Congress. House. 2010. “Warlord, Inc. Extortion and Corruption Along the U.S. Supply Chain in Afghanistan.” 111th Cong. 3-4, 24.

to many Afghan government officials. One village elder recounted, “The major issue was that those who were part of the previous regimes came back to power... They (the warlords) did not expect this. They thought they would be sidelined... But to the contrary, they were brought back to power, giving them authority.”⁹ Again, perceptions of corruption negatively affected how the Afghan people viewed the government. The new government, supported by the United States, was expected by many to be different than rulers of the past, but some of the same individuals who caused devastation and death in recent decades were included in the U.S.-supported GIRoA. The people of Afghanistan saw war criminals from the 1990s making money, going into business, receiving millions of dollars in contracts, and growing closer and closer to the Karzai administration.¹⁰ To many Afghan citizens, it seemed they had a front row seat to watch a ruling elite make money off the war and conceal the profits overseas.¹¹ As baksheesh bribes and corrupt officials became more common, a growing portion of the population became disenchanted with the GIRoA, and the Karzai government lost legitimacy in the eyes of the Afghan people.

A Gallup survey conducted in 2010 indicated that while exact numbers varied slightly by region, overall, many of the polled Afghan citizens were less trusting of national politicians than of local leaders, believed the court system needed improvement, and agreed that elections should be more transparent in the future.¹² Another survey that took place in Afghanistan in 2014 found a direct correlation between how many Afghan citizens perceived the fairness of elections and whether or not they viewed the GIRoA as legitimate or

⁹ Saeed, Huma and Stephan Parmentier. “When Rabbits are in Charge of Carrots: Land Grabbing, Transitional Justice and Economic-State Crime in Afghanistan.” *State Crime Journal*. 6, no. 1. (2017).

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Murtazashvili, Jennifer. “Gaming the state: consequences of contracting out state building in Afghanistan.” *Central Asian Survey*. 34, no. 1. (2015).

¹² “Afghanistan: How Afghans Would Negotiate Their Own Peace.” Gallup News. <http://news.gallup.com/poll/157040/afghanistan-afghans-negotiate-own-peace.aspx>.

illegitimate. The more trustworthy or fair the surveyed citizens said a recent election had been, the more likely they were to describe the government as legitimate.¹³ By this same logic, if citizens viewed an election as unfair or scandalous, they would be less likely to trust the politicians in power and would be more likely to view the government as illegitimate. Thus, seeing the closeness of the Mujahidin and the Karzai government would have discredited the election process and the elected officials in the eyes of many Afghan voters.

Perceptions of the Karzai government worsened, and, with it, approval of the United States also fell. Numerous factors contributed to the lower approval ratings and wavering trust in the Afghan government, such as: the prolonged violence and lack of security, the increase of bribes demanded from citizens, and the appointment of warlords to government positions. These warlords often used their official positions of authority to enrich themselves personally with both international contracts and low-level bribery. Bribery, baksheesh, and other forms of corruption were a growing part of the economy in Afghanistan. Government positions often were given to family members or to whomever paid the most for them. Many police, army, and Ministry of Internal Affairs positions were auctioned off for amounts several times greater than the *official* annual salary of the position, because it was widely known that those positions were in reality very lucrative due to bribes, contracts, and access to government funds. The Afghan people were aware that many in government were buying their way into power and were using that power to make money at the expense of the population.

Trust in the GIRoA continued to decrease, and an increasing number of citizens and villages cooperated with the Taliban to get security, legal arbitration, and other services. This decreasing trust in GIRoA institutions and the increased reliance on and cooperation with the Taliban was extremely counter-productive to U.S. counter-insurgency efforts in

¹³ Berman, Eli, et al. "Election Fairness and Government Legitimacy in Afghanistan." *National Bureau of Economic Research*. NBER Working Paper 19949. (2014).

Afghanistan. Improved relations with citizens gave the Taliban more recruits, supplies, physical territory, and hiding places throughout Afghanistan. Efforts to establish rule of law require a level of public trust in the government, and public trust in the GIRoA was very low due to the pervasive corruption and bribery that seemed so prevalent to the Afghan people. The U.S. mission in Afghanistan was severely hampered by the GIRoA struggle to gain legitimacy with its own people.

Since the United States was seen as the supporter and financier of the GIRoA, public opinion concerning the United States was closely tied to the approval rating of the Afghan government. Abuses by the Karzai government were seen as allowed by the United States, such as this complaint from a former police officer of Kandahar to U.S. anti-corruption expert, Sarah Chayes: “My neighbors pointed to the abusive behavior of the Afghan government. Given the U.S. role in ushering its officials into power and financing and protecting them, Afghans held the international community, and the United States in particular, responsible.¹⁴ The baksheesh payments, and the auctioning of government positions, were seen by many Afghan citizens as either ignored or explicitly allowed by the United States.

As many citizens’ faith in the government deteriorated and a corrupt, self-serving elite was perceived to be the status quo in Afghanistan, many Afghan people became more likely to tolerate, or even join, the Taliban.¹⁵ Afghan citizens needed services such as policing and legal courts, and those could only be acquired from the government by paying baksheesh. Due to this, many people looked for alternative providers, such as the Taliban. Interviews with Taliban fighters and commanders illustrate that the perception of corruption and criminal activity in the government was a constant element in their recruitment. One captured Taliban fighter from Helmand Province told his interrogator about witnessing daily extortion, theft, and murder, oftentimes committed by

¹⁴ Chayes, Sarah. *Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security*. New York, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 2015.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

members of the GIRoA.¹⁶ Witnessing abuses and theft by government personnel pushed some Afghan citizens to turn to the Taliban as an alternative provider of security, legal services, and infrastructure.

Interviewers, after 140 interviews with captured Taliban fighters and commanders, wrote in 2013, “There is widespread consensus among [village] elders interviewed that abusive governance was a major factor driving villagers towards the Taliban.”¹⁷ The Taliban took advantage of worsening perceptions of the government, and used it to present themselves as the party of law and order, as a more reliable alternative to the government which many Afghan citizens saw as corrupt and only interested in self-enrichment. The ability to provide public services the GIRoA struggled to provide gave the Taliban increased legitimacy in many communities, allowing the insurgents more of a foothold in the nation.

Another interview with an Afghan elder revealed that the Taliban social and legal systems, and specifically their courts, were a draw for people disenfranchised with GIRoA courts, which often demanded bribes before hearing a dispute. Taliban court judgments were harsh, but reached verdicts within a few hours, and were much less likely to demand a bribe before reaching a decision.¹⁸ Taliban justice, although strict and severe, was seen as a favorable alternative to the slow and corrupt courts of the government. As the perception grew that the Karzai government was more interested in personal enrichment than the fate of the country, it became more common for Afghan people in some provinces to turn to the Taliban for issues of administration, justice, and other public services, giving the Taliban amplified influence and legitimacy.¹⁹ The Taliban used this perception to portray

¹⁶ Farrell, Theo and Antonio Giustozzi. “The Taliban at War: Inside the Helmand insurgency, 2004-2012”. *International Affairs*. 89, no. 4. (2013).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Saeed, Huma and Stephan Parmentier. “When Rabbits are in Charge of Carrots: Land Grabbing, Transitional Justice and Economic-State Crime in Afghanistan”. *State Crime Journal*. 6, no. 1. (2017).

themselves as a more moral, more legal, and less corrupt alternative in many of their recruitment efforts. U.S. anti-corruption expert Chayes observed the impact of the perception of corruption while interviewing Khandahar citizens.

“No one would dirty his clothes getting near this government’ a Khandahar-area farmer exclaimed to me once...Many Afghans were swayed by the argument that government integrity could be achieved only through religious rectitude. Some appreciated the outlet that militancy provided for their anger. Still others just laid low, unwilling to take risks on behalf of a government that treated them almost as badly as the Taliban did. And it was all U.S. troops could do to keep that insurgency at bay.”²⁰

That insurgency would plague the U.S. mission for the rest of the war and to this day. Even if they did not join the Taliban and take up arms against the ANSF or ISAF forces, many Afghan people were willing to tolerate Taliban activities in their communities. The more influence and control the Taliban had in a province, the more dangerous and chaotic the environment became for U.S. personnel. The corruption and self-serving acts of the U.S.-backed government in Afghanistan were helping the Taliban recruit fighters and exercise control over parts of the country, which in turn made the U.S. mission an increasingly uphill battle.

POSITIVE U.S. IMPACT

Despite the severity of government corruption and how it contributed to perceptions that allowed the Taliban to return to many parts of the country, there have been some

²⁰ Chayes, Sarah. *Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security*. New York, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 2015.

positive, effective anti-corruption efforts as well. U.S. anti-corruption efforts in Afghanistan have become a higher priority for U.S. leadership, and subsequently received increased resources and scholarly focus. This section will detail some of the steps of the U.S. military and civilian personnel aimed at reducing the impact of corrupt practices and systems in the country during its involvement in Afghan affairs.

Although slow to recognize the impact of corruption at first, the U.S. mission in Afghanistan came to recognize corruption as a serious threat that impacted the overall security situation. Upon realizing how often money for contracting projects was skimmed off for personal gains, the United States sought to more carefully limit and monitor U.S. money for various projects to verify its proper use. U.S. officials also tried reporting instances of theft and fraud to Afghan counterparts, with limited success.²¹

Unfortunately, U.S. officials soon came to the realization that their oversight abilities were limited. Once the aid was given to the Afghan government, U.S. personnel lost all legal ownership of the aid. Financial aid was deposited into the treasury of the Afghan government, and physical materials and supplies were distributed by various elements of the Afghan government. After the aid was given, the United States had no authority over how it was used or who in the GIRoA could claim it.²² Despite the good intentions that motivated the United States to provide aid, there was little that U.S. personnel could do to guarantee the aid reached the people of Afghanistan after it was given to the GIRoA.

Despite these limitations, U.S. officials did work to encourage integrity and proper use of aid coming from the United States. Officials from the FBI, DEA, and U.S. Treasury developed a Threat Finance Cell in Afghanistan to trace money going to the Taliban. U.S. and ISAF personnel created an “Anti-Corruption Task Force” in 2009, which studied high-level government corruption, made policy recommendations,

²¹ Holdren, Richard et al. “Dealing with Corruption: Hard Lessons Learned in Afghanistan”. *Joint Force Quarterly*.75, no. 4. (2014).

²² *Ibid.*

and identified GIRoA leadership who were engaged in corrupt practices. They also advised Afghan special investigators on rule of law, arrests, and legal issues.²³

U.S. and ISAF officials also worked to incentivize integrity and rule of law, such as with the Performance-Based Governors' Fund, which offered incentives to regional leaders who chose not to cooperate with the Taliban and opium traffickers, nor misuse international funds.²⁴ Furthermore, U.S. Army General David Petraeus, who took command of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan in 2010, paid special attention to combatting corruption in the contracting sector.²⁵ All of these efforts limited the effects of corruption in the GIRoA, thus contributing to U.S. efforts and degrading Taliban influence in the country.

An important anti-corruption development in 2008 was the creation of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), a special task group created to – according to their website – “provide independent and objective oversight of Afghanistan reconstruction projects and activities,” much of which entails monitoring projects for fraud, waste, and mismanagement. SIGAR used audits, investigations, and special project teams to investigate various contractor projects and reconstruction funds managed by U.S. organizations, such as the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), the U.S. Department of State (DOS), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). SIGAR has regularly made and continues to make recommendations to Congress, and more recently to the government of Afghanistan, concerning anti-corruption efforts. This has helped coordinate U.S. and allied anti-corruption efforts throughout the nation.

²³ Chayes, Sarah. *Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security*. New York, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 2015.

²⁴ Marquette, Heather. “Donors, State Building and Corruption: Lessons from Afghanistan and the implications for aid policy.” *Third World Quarterly*. 32, no. 10. (2011).

²⁵ Allen, T.S. “Addressing an Ignored Imperative: Rural Corruption in Afghanistan.” *Small Wars Journal*. 9, no. 2. (2013).

SIGAR continues to issue quarterly reports to Congress, DOD, DOS, and other agencies to convey the findings of its audits and investigations. These reports often identify areas where money or resources were lost or wasted and include recommendations on how to reduce fraud and waste of taxpayer money on projects in Afghanistan. SIGAR also develops investigative reports for audits and special projects, such as in cases of fraud or misused resources. For example, in late 2012, SIGAR submitted an investigative report to the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform concerning the results of an investigation entitled “\$201 Million in DoD Fuel Purchases Still Unaccounted for Because Records Were Shredded.”²⁶ SIGAR recently released its 37th quarterly report, as well as a second special report entitled, “Lessons from the U.S. Experiences in Afghanistan.”

SIGAR audits and investigations have helped uncover and prevent waste and fraud and identify GIRoA officials with financial relations with the Taliban and individuals using U.S. aid to enrich themselves. These efforts have reduced government corruption and resource waste in Afghanistan, which deprives Taliban forces of a source of income and improves public opinion of the United States. In addition to U.S. efforts, the Afghan government also enacted some reforms, primarily in the government and health sectors. GIRoA attempted policies such as increased government salaries to de-incentivize bribery (to little effect), performance-based pay, increased oversight of nongovernment organizations, and technical training, all with varying levels of success.²⁷

There has also been a push to improve coordination between different anti-corruption efforts, and to empower locals to combat corruption. In 2010, ISAF personnel established the Combined Joint Interagency Task Force

²⁶ “Afghan National Army: \$201 Million in DOD Fuel Purchases Still Unaccounted for Because Records Were Shredded.” Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. December 2012.

²⁷ Colaco, Nita. “Crooked Progress: Afghanistan Tackles Corruption.” *Harvard International Review*. 2008.

(CJIATF) Shafafiyat, an organization developed to coordinate anti-corruption efforts between various groups within ISAF. These groups included: Task Force 2010, which focused on contracting and counter-insurgency; Task Force Spotlight, whose focus was private security companies operating in Afghanistan; and CJIATF-Nexus, which was created to study criminal networks and drug trafficking. CJIATF-Shafafiyat was created to oversee and help coordinate the efforts of these organizations (including intelligence sharing) and develop ISAF's understanding of corruption and how it impacted the overall U.S. nation-building mission. There was also a personal element to CJIATF-Shafafiyat's work, which involves working with and empowering locals and encouraging transparency, which, in turn, further weakened Taliban influence by challenging the Taliban rhetoric that the United States was allowing corruption in the GIROA.²⁸

By combatting government corruption and addressing Afghan citizens' perceptions of corruption, the United States developed and improved the legitimacy of the GIROA. Government legitimacy is a crucial aspect of counter-insurgency because as public perceptions of the government improve and citizens' faith in government institutions increases, citizens are more likely to cooperate with the government, participate in civil society, and rely on the state for protection, law enforcement, legal redress, etc. As a growing percentage of the population looks to the government for their needs, they rely less on insurgent groups to provide and protect, denying insurgents a means of control over the populace and communities from which to recruit new members.

Anti-corruption efforts were not a high priority for U.S. and ISAF personnel when they first entered Afghanistan, but anti-corruption has since grown in importance as policy makers and military leaders recognized its impact on how the Afghan people viewed both the GIROA and the United States.

²⁸ Allen, T.S. "Addressing an Ignored Imperative: Rural Corruption in Afghanistan." *Small Wars Journal*. 9, no. 2. (2013).

More resources and personnel have been dedicated to anti-corruption work such as SIGAR and CJIAF, which not only has had a cumulative effect of reducing fraud, waste, and theft by government officials, but has also challenged the perception that the Taliban is the party of law and order. Challenging this perception degrades the Taliban's ability to operate openly and recruit Afghan citizens who view the GIRoA as illegitimate. These anti-corruption efforts have contributed to the U.S. mission in Afghanistan and made the nation more stable as a result.

NEGATIVE U.S. IMPACT

Unfortunately, there have also been a number of missteps on the part of the United States and ISAF in its efforts to destroy the Taliban and build Afghanistan into a stable democracy. As mentioned in earlier sections, the United States partnered with a number of individuals and organizations, like the Northern Alliance, who, while often helpful on the battlefield, also pursued their own goals. As stated above, seeing warlords like the Mujahidin return to power, prosper, gain political influence, and become incorporated into the GIRoA system – seemingly with the blessing of the United States – caused many Afghans to join, support, or tolerate the Taliban. As the former police officer argued above, the United States was seen as the financial backer of the GIRoA, and any action undertaken by the GIRoA was perceived to hold U.S. approval. Therefore, when the GIRoA extorted citizens or otherwise acted corruptly, Afghans often blamed the United States.²⁹ This made some Afghan citizens more sympathetic to the Taliban and less likely to help the United States.

Regrettably, the United States for many years seemed unaware or uninterested in how these “semiofficial warlords” were perceived by the Afghan population. A *New York Times* investigation detailed how the United States had partnered with a former police commander in Tirin Kot and paid him

²⁹ Chayes, Sarah. *Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security*. New York, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 2015.

millions of dollars for intelligence and private security work, despite reports that he was heavily involved in drug trafficking and the Taliban insurgency.³⁰ This relates to both warlords and contracting corruption. This police commander in Tirin Kot was one of many warlords who secured security contracts with U.S. or ISAF forces, despite reports that these warlords were often engaged in bribery, extortion, drug trafficking, and/or covertly supporting the Taliban.³¹ The security force in a region, comprised of warlords, militia leaders, and police chiefs, would charge U.S. and ISAF forces large sums of money for safe passage of goods and supplies through their territory, and would become very wealthy doing so. This extortion, also known as *gaming the state*, seemed to many U.S. officials an inescapable reality.³² Often, U.S. and NATO forces were aware that the regional security providers they paid for protection were often involved with the Taliban and drug trafficking but saw no alternative and continued to pay for the protection upon which they were dependent.³³

There are many reports that these security providers assured safe passage *via payments to the Taliban* in the region. Not only would this result in U.S. money indirectly financing the Taliban, but it would also give these private security contractors a strong incentive to prolong the conflict to maintain profits. Also concerning, many of these private security leaders were reported to be involved with corruption, bribery, insurgency financing, and other criminal activity.³⁴

Another facet of corruption in the contracting industry that the United States was slow to counter was the

³⁰ Dexter Filkins. "With U.S. Aid, Warlord Builds Afghan Empire." *The New York Times*, June 2010. & U.S. Congress. House. 2010. "Warlord, Inc. Extortion and Corruption Along the U.S. Supply Chain in Afghanistan." 111th Cong. 3-4, 24.

³¹ U.S. Congress. House. 2010. "Warlord, Inc. Extortion and Corruption Along the U.S. Supply Chain in Afghanistan." 111th Cong. 3-4, 24.

³² Murtazashvili, Jennifer. "Gaming the state: consequences of contracting out state building in Afghanistan." *Central Asian Survey*. 34, no. 1. (2015).

³³ U.S. Congress. House. 2010. "Warlord, Inc. Extortion and Corruption Along the U.S. Supply Chain in Afghanistan." 111th Cong. 3-4, 24.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

issue of sub-contracting. Sub-contracting is a practice in which a contract for a project (a school, a road, etc.) would be sold and re-sold, always to the lowest bidder, and money would often be skimmed off the project every time. The United States would award a contract (with a sizeable amount of money) to a company, which would then subcontract the project to a smaller company, while keeping some of the money from the United States, either by channeling it overseas or in some cases, using it in political initiatives. That subcontractor would then sell the contract to a sub-subcontractor, while again pocketing some of the money.³⁵ This system not only cost the U.S. massive amounts of money, but also led to construction projects with little-to-no oversight, which wasted aid money. This often resulted in projects that could not be used, which degraded the U.S. military's ability to protect its troops in dangerous regions and project power throughout the country. The lack of oversight over these construction projects hampered the war effort.

For example, a road construction project financed by the USAID in 2011 was issued to a large U.S. company, which was then subcontracted to a South African private military corporation. This corporation then sold the contract "to an Afghan who did not even have a registered firm and simply went by the name Arafat," who U.S. officials believe channeled money to the Taliban.³⁶ Often, when one of these projects was completed, it was usually done with little to no oversight from U.S. government or military personnel, who would often only see a project when contractors reported it complete. This lack of oversight on multimillion-dollar contracts led to colossal waste. For example, a dining hall was built without a kitchen, and a five-building compound was accidentally built *outside* its protective base walls.³⁷

³⁵ Murtazashvili, Jennifer. "Gaming the state: consequences of contracting out state building in Afghanistan." *Central Asian Survey*. 34, no. 1. (2015).

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Brinkley, Joel. "Money Pit: The Monstrous Failure of US Aid to Afghanistan." *World Affairs*. January/February 2013.

Lack of oversight on these projects led to the waste of millions of dollars. Afghan citizens saw this entire system, with large amounts of waste and failed or unusable projects, and public opinion of the United States suffered as a result. The United States was not seen as successful, careful, dynamic, or producing high-quality work, but sloppy and mistake prone. This made many Afghan citizens less likely to rely on or trust U.S. forces, or put themselves at risk to help the U.S. mission, because they were not convinced the United States could protect them from the Taliban.

CONCLUSION

Corruption is obviously not the only problem the United States has faced in Afghanistan, but one of many. There have been many different facets to this conflict. However, corruption and bribery have been perennial issues in Afghanistan, issues that the United States and its allies were painfully slow to acknowledge and address. As illustrated in the last section, U.S. and ISAF personnel sometimes worked with groups or pursued policies that were counterproductive to their goals in Afghanistan. These inadvertent *force multipliers* had the effect of bolstering the Taliban, funding corrupt practices in Afghan politics, disenfranchising the populace, and prolonging the conflict.³⁸ These were painful mistakes, but if these lessons from Afghanistan can be taken to heart and studied, perhaps the next time the United States engages in nation-building, it can avoid mistakes like this that bolster U.S. adversaries and put more U.S. personnel in danger.

The U.S. military should study the Afghanistan conflict and the negative impacts that an over-reliance on contracting has had on U.S. efforts. U.S. governmental departments and agencies involved in foreign aid should carefully study how aid money given with benevolent intentions by the United States was acquired by actors in the Afghanistan conflict for personal enrichment, and not used for

³⁸ Chayes, Sarah. *Thieves of State: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security*. New York, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 2015.

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nation-building efforts. Learning from the mistakes made in Afghanistan will enable the United States to avoid making the same mistakes in future nation-building efforts.

The anti-corruption gains made in Afghanistan, such as SIGAR and CJIATF-Shafafiyat, should be studied as well, so their methods and tools are not forgotten, and the successes of these organizations are not lost but built upon and replicated in other nations. Special attention should be paid to the successes of anti-corruption efforts as they pertain to drug trafficking, to determine if the means and tools used in Afghanistan could be instructive in other counter-insurgency and counter-narcotics missions, e.g., Mexico or Bolivia.

This analysis illustrates how unreliable allies and misguided policies can inadvertently prolong conflict, put troops and personnel in more danger, and cost the United States in not only resources but also lives. The longer the conflict in Afghanistan endures, the more evident this truth will become.