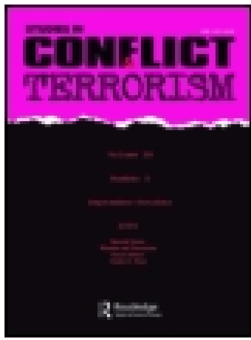

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Alex S. Wilner

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# Targeted Killings in Afghanistan: Measuring Coercion and Deterrence in Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency

ALEX S. WILNER

Center for Security Studies
ETH Zurich (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology)
Zurich, Switzerland

*This article examines the coercive and deterrent utility of targeting the leaders of violent, non-state organizations with precision force. Building on the literatures on targeted killings and deterrence theory, this article provides a case study analysis of targeted killings in Afghanistan. Relying on publicly available and semi-private sources, the article presents a comparative analysis of four targeted killings conducted against Taliban leaders. Findings suggest that the eliminations degraded Taliban professionalism, diminished the group's success rates, influenced their selection of targets, and weakened morale. These findings speak to the efficacy of targeted killings in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency and to their value as both counter-capability and counter-motivation operations.*

On 5 March 2007, Italian journalist Daniele Mastrogiacomo was abducted while reporting from southern Afghanistan. His abduction was carried out by men associated with Mullah Dadullah Akhund, the Taliban's most high-ranking leader active in the country. In an unprecedented development, the Government of Afghanistan (GoA) agreed to a controversial prisoner swap. Mastrogiacomo was released on 19 March in exchange for five Taliban leaders, including Dadullah's younger brother, Mullah Shah Mansoor Ahmad (aka Mansoor Dadullah).[1] The trade was met with ferocious disapproval. The U.S. embassy in Kabul reiterated that "it is U.S. policy not to make concessions to terrorists' demands."[2] Italian newspapers called the swap "straight-out repugnant."[3] And in Kabul, a beleaguered spokesperson for Afghan President Hamid Karzai called the exchange "an exceptional case [that] would not happen again."[4] Indeed, the release of such a high-ranking Taliban leader as Dadullah's brother seemed to contradict American, NATO, and Afghan policy. How could any of them have agreed to the trade?

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Address correspondence to Alex S. Wilner, Ph.D., Postdoctoral Fellow, ETH—Zurich, Center for Security Studies, Weinbergstrasse 11, WEC E-28, 8092 Zurich, Switzerland. E-mail: wilner@sipo.gess.ethz.ch

The answer came a few weeks later. Unbeknownst to almost everyone, Mansoor had been placed under covert surveillance the moment he had stepped out of prison and was leading Coalition and Afghan forces directly to his brother's hideout. Using sophisticated signals technology, American forces working with Task Force Orange (TF-Orange), a clandestine unit dispatched by the Pentagon after 9/11 to collect signals intelligence (SIGINT) overseas, tracked Mansoor to a Taliban facility in Quetta, Pakistan. Once there, he rejoined Dadullah. Weeks later, TF-Orange tracked the brothers as they led a group of fighters over the border into Afghanistan's southern province of Helmand. Upon entering Afghan soil, a precision strike was organized for Dadullah's removal. Using SIGNIT, his exact location was identified to a compound in Bahram Chah, Helmand, a mere 20 miles from the Pakistani border. Instead of conducting an air strike—a common tactic of precision warfare in Afghanistan—Special Operations forces with the Britain's Special Boat Service (SBS) launched a complex strike using a helicopter-borne and ground-based assault. On 12 May 2007, the SBS, along with a number of Afghan Special Forces, stormed the compound and killed Dadullah, along with two other men released in the Mastrogiacomo trade.[5] Over the following days, Dadullah's body was recovered and its image was broadcast to the world. At the time, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) commented that while Dadullah would "most certainly be replaced . . . the insurgency ha[d] received a serious blow."[6] The former governor of Kandahar Province, Asadullah Khalid, concurred, suggesting that Dadullah's elimination was "a huge loss for the Taliban; it will certainly weaken their activities."[7] Rahimullah Yusufzai, an editor for a Pakistani newspaper and a Taliban expert, went further: "I think [Dadullah's killing] is the biggest loss for the Taliban in the last six years. I don't think they can find someone as daring and important as Dadullah."[8]

Mullah Dadullah's elimination illustrates an important yet relatively under-explored feature of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency. Over the past decade, targeted killings have become a tactic of preeminent choice for combating violent, non-state organizations. While the elimination of major leaders (like Dadullah, Al Qaeda's Abu Laith al-Libi, Al Qaeda in Iraq's (AQI) Abu Musab Zarqawi, Hezbollah's Imad Mughniyeh, the Shabaab's Aden Ayro, Chechnyan Shamil Basayev, or the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia's (FARC) Raul Reyes) is reported widely, the tactic is being utilized far more often and far more widely than is generally appreciated. Open sources suggest that since 2006 over 200 targeted strikes have taken place in Afghanistan. Another 80 were launched against Pakistan's lawless North-Western region in 2008 alone, while dozens of strikes have been carried out against Al Qaeda elements in Somalia, Iraq, and Yemen since 2002.[9] Russian forces have eliminated the leaders of violent, non-state organizations in Chechnya and Qatar; Turkey launched precision strikes against Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) leaders in Northern Iraq; and Israel, perhaps more than most, has long relied on the tactic to counter Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, and other organizations over the past decade. For the most part, those targeted have not been high-ranking leaders but operators, facilitators, bombmakers, recruiters, commanders, and other mid-level organizers.

The purpose of this article is to examine the effect targeted killings have on the capability and motivation of violent, non-state, terrorist organizations.[10] Doing so is important for two principle reasons. First, the increasing prevalence of targeted killings in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency suggests that an operational evaluation is long overdue. To date, few studies have gone beyond addressing the theory (and/or legality or morality) of targeted killings in order to rigorously and systematically explore their tactical significance. Those that have evaluated targeted killings focus almost exclusively on the Israeli

case study and the Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000–2005).[11] Both trends suggest that a broader research agenda is long overdue. Second, the literature on targeted killings suggests that their use diminishes an organization's motivation to carry on coordinating campaigns of violence. If so, targeted killings offer a practical case study for evaluating whether and how deterrence theory might be applied to counterterrorism. Targeted killings represent a cost to planning and participating in terrorism, a cost that should, theoretically speaking, influence behavior. That a large subset of the nascent literature on deterring terrorism is descriptive rather than evaluative suggests that the next step in constructing a cumulative research program is to test and refine theoretical propositions.[12] Targeted killings, by diminishing the motivation and influencing the behavior of violent, non-state organizations, offer one way to investigate how the logic of deterrence by punishment might be applied to terrorism.

This article illustrates how targeted killings in Afghanistan have had a short-term effect on the coercive and professional capabilities of Taliban forces. It further demonstrates how precision eliminations have influenced Taliban behavior. Both findings speak to distinct elements outlined in the literatures on targeted killings and deterring terrorism. The arguments are presented in four sections. The first lays out the literature on targeted killings and details how the strategy diminishes an adversary's coercive capability. The second section describes how the tenets of deterrence by punishment apply to counterterrorism with relations to targeted killings as a countermotivation strategy. The third section offers a qualitative and quantitative cross-case comparative analysis of Afghan targeted killings. The concluding section draws out the study's theoretical and practical implications and suggests avenues for future research.

## Targeted Killings in Theory and Practice

Targeted killings are the "intentional slaying" of individual terrorist leaders and facilitators "undertaken with explicit governmental approval."[13] In his authoritative work evaluating their international legality, Nils Melzer suggests five definitional elements: targeted killings involve the use of lethal force; are designed to target specifically identified individuals (as opposed to collective or random punishment); are carried out with the deliberate intent to kill the individual in question; are used against individuals not "in the physical custody" of the targeting actor (distinguishing it from judicial or extrajudicial execution); and are carried out by states.[14] A number of scholars further differentiate between targeted killings and assassination. Steven David argues that the two are not equivalent, noting that the latter has a "pejorative connotation" of murder and treachery, which he suggests should not be assumed a priori when evaluating counterterrorism strategies.[15] And yet the definitional distinction between assassination and targeted killing is less than clear. Consider comments offered by former U.S. Secretary of Defense, Casper Weinberger: "It is considered lawful in warfare for a skilled and daring soldier ... to steal into the enemy's camp and enter the general's tent and kill him. But it would be a forbidden assassination if someone disguised as the general's doctor was admitted to his tent, and then killed him."[16] In both of Weinberger's cases, the general is killed, although only in the former process, he illustrates, is his death usually considered lawful and just. Consider further Brian Jenkins' 1986 revelation:

> Sometimes blood must be spilled for one's country. Military force may be a necessary response to terrorism, at times requiring ... assaults on terrorist training camps. The death of a terrorist leader during an attack causes no

> qualms. There is still a crucial difference between ... military operation and assassination—the cold-blooded selection and murder of a specific individual. *Assassination is a slogan, not a solution*.[17]

The definitional distinction between targeted killings and assassination is further clouded because the latter is usually associated with politically motivated murders of government officials and dissidents involving "secret and treacherous means."[18] The history of the Cold War is chalk full of cloak and dagger assassinations involving everything from exploding cigars to poisoned cocktails.

Today's campaigns of targeted killings, however, are distinct from those carried out in eras past: targets are usually mid- to high-level facilitators of terrorism with few existing political inclinations;[19] the eliminations are often carried out in the open with the use of conventional weaponry; individual strikes constitute a much larger and iterated campaign and are not, as had been the case, singular events; and importantly, selected individuals know in advance that they are wanted fugitives. These last two characteristics are not trivial points. Recent targeted killings are more akin to ongoing military campaigns than the clandestine assassinations carried out in the 1960s and 1970s. It is the repeated nature of their use that provides a cumulative effect on the capability and motivation of violent, non-state organizations. Furthermore, states often go out of their way to ensure that their targets are clearly informed that they are marked for death or capture. As an illustration, consider that during the Al-Aqsa Intifada Israel compiled regular lists of suspects known to be facilitating terrorism against Israelis. Security officials passed these lists to the Palestinian Authority (PA) so that arrests could be made. If the PA did not act, which was usually the case, it was understood that Israel would. For its part, the PA regularly distributed the lists to suspected targets, warning them in advance of Israel's intent.[20] Oftentimes, fugitives voluntarily placed themselves in PA custody to avoid being slain by the Israelis.

Notwithstanding their increasing prevalence in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency, the legality of targeted killings remains uncertain. On the surface, international law prohibits their use. The 1974 *UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes Against Internationally Protracted Persons, including Diplomatic Agents*, bans attacks on state leaders, representatives, and officials, arguing that such acts "create a serious threat to the maintenance of normal international relations ... necessary for cooperation."[21] The idea is to ensure that even states at war retain the diplomatic ability to negotiate with one another.[22] Gal Luft explains further that targeted killings are also considered an "infringement on the sovereignty" of states because they involve the "imposition of extrajudicial punishment" on non-citizens.[23] In July 2001, in response to Israel's unrelenting campaign of targeted strikes in Gaza and the West Bank, former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan called Israel's action an affront to "international law, in particular human rights law, but also to general principles of law."[24] Even after 9/11, a UN report, published in the wake of a 2002 U.S. Predator drone strike in Yemen that killed Abu Ali al-Harithi—Al Qaeda's mastermind behind the 2000 U.S.S. *Cole* bombing and the 2002 suicide attack on the *Limburg*, a French oil tanker—called the American strike "truly disturbing" labeling it "a clear case of extrajudicial killing" and an "alarming precedent."[25]

And yet, international law also forbids the use of a state's territory as a safe-haven for terrorist training and planning. Further, it is unlawful for governments to willfully tolerate, even through negligence, terrorist activity on their territory. As Daniel Byman writes, "a regime can be said to be guilty of passive support [of terrorism] if it knowingly allows a terrorist group to raise money, enjoy a sanctuary, recruit or otherwise flourish without interference."[26] The strike in Yemen was justified, advocates might suggest, because the

Yemeni government was either unwilling or unable to stop al-Harithi from planning acts of international terrorism. Furthermore, the *United Nations Charter*, in Article 51, recognizes the inherent right of all states to self-defense: "Nothing . . . shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations."[27] The use of lethal force is an internationally recognized legal right, no matter if used against an individual or a state. "Since killing the enemy is legal," suggests John Tinetti of the U.S. Naval War College, "and all military members, including the military leadership, are valid targets, their deaths cannot be construed as assassination."[28] In Canada, the legal debate pivots precisely on this assumption, clearly and carefully demarcating between the assassination of non-combatants and the targeting of combatants.

The Canadian *Law of Armed Conflict at the Operational and Tactical Level* reads: "Assassination is prohibited. It is not forbidden, however, to send a detachment or individual members of the armed forces to kill, by sudden attack, a person who is a combatant."[29] It is in this definition where the specter of legally eliminating individuals, even by "sudden attack," is made evident. The *Law of Armed Conflict* touches upon a broader debate concerning the legal characterization of terrorists. If they are considered "enemy combatants" actively engaged in preparation for conflict and warfare against particular states, then selectively targeting and killing them is permissible under traditional conceptions of war. At issue, however, is the fact that unlike soldiers past, a terrorist wears no discernable military uniform, uses violence devoid of government sanction, is usually active in a civilian setting, prepares acts of warfare in unconventional manners, and generally rejects normative and historical conventions guiding modern conflict (like distinguishing between civilian and military "targets," by employing human shields, and purposefully seeking urban cover to invite humanitarian devastation).[30] John Norton Moore concludes that if "one is lawfully engaged in armed hostility, it is not 'assassination' to target individuals who are combatants."[31] In all but name, terrorists are combatants.

Besides these legal concerns, substantial *normative* issues also exist. Is it just, ethical, or moral for states to employ coercive punishment against individuals? For democracies, the question is not an academic one. Alan Dershowitz, for instance, suggests that the "vice of targeted assassination is that it is essentially law-less. Those who authorize the hit are prosecutor, judge, and jury—and there is no appeal."[32] As a result, targeted killings seem to rest outside the realm of acceptable behavior for democratic states that enshrine civil liberties, due process, and constitutional limitation. As Justice Aharon Barak, a former President of the Supreme Court of Israel, has argued, "the struggle against terror has turned [Israeli] democracy into a 'defensive democracy' . . . however, this struggle must not overturn the democratic nature of our regime."[33] Even in cases where legal and civilian oversight is given over the planning and use of targeted strikes, normative dilemmas persist. Naomi Chazan suggests that targeted killings are "morally indefensible," regardless of whether or not they work; "the sanctity of human life," she asserts, "is an essential pillar of . . . the civilized world." The danger, she concludes, is that in sanctioning their use states sacrifice their "moral compass" in the process.[34] Other ethical questions persist as well. How wide should the United States and its allies draw the circle around Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawarihi, and other members of Al Qaeda's central leadership? Should states target only the "ticking bombs"—those actively planning acts of violence—or are individuals who help prepare terrorist attacks—the "ticking infrastructure"—also legitimate targets? What about mid-level commanders? Financiers? State supporters? Religious legitimizers? Community leaders? These queries rest outside the immediate scope of this article, although they represent pertinent and difficult philosophical questions that need to be more fully addressed.[35]

## Why Targeted Killings Work

The literature on targeted killings suggests that their use diminishes the coercive and operational capability of violent, non-state groups in a number of ways.[36] The constant removal of leadership leaves an organization in general disarray—replacement takes time and command and control mechanisms are weakened as a result.[37] Ariel Sharon, Israel's prime minister at the height of the Al Aqsa Intifada, explained his country's use of targeted killing as such: "the goal . . . is to place the terrorists in varying situations every day and to 'unbalance' them so that they will be busy protecting themselves."[38] By removing particular individuals that fill critical positions within organizations and forcing others to seek refuge, a group's ability to coordinate acts of violence is substantially disrupted. In the meantime, communication between leaders and operators breaks down, complicating both short-term tactical planning and long-term strategic planning.

For smaller terrorist groups and cells, where leadership, knowledge, and power are centralized, eliminations can have the dramatic effect of completely destroying a specific threat. Groups with particularly charismatic leaders are especially prone to decapitating strikes.[39] Both assumptions rest on the notion that terrorist organizations depend on the work of a few key individuals. Isaac Ben-Israel and colleagues note, for instance, that the number of "key activists in the Hamas,"—those that are actively "engaged in preparing an act of terror"—number in the low hundreds. A state only needs "to neutralize 20–30 percent of them," they suggest, "for the organization's 'production' of acts of terror to drop significantly."[40] The argument suggests that terrorism is a process that requires a "production line" of activity—from scouting targets to preparing bombers—if coordinated acts of violence are to take place.[41] All along this process, individuals play important roles, fulfilling particular jobs and functions. As such, violent, non-state groups are perhaps best thought of as coercive *systems*, dependent on the interaction of a variety of semi-autonomous parts and processes.[42] Paul Davis and Brian Jenkins reiterate: "the terrorist problem occurs in a rich context with many interacting entities and processes."[43] While eliminating particular individuals with functional roles will not wholly eradicate the threat of terrorism, the selective removal of central players does restrict the terrorism process and degrades an organization's overall capability to plan, coordinate, and carryout acts of violence.

The very threat of coercion forces leaders to worry about their safety, hinders their freedom of movement, and requires that they spend time and resources in avoiding their own death rather than planning the death of others. In a 2004 letter to bin Laden, AQI's al-Zarqawi stresses this persistent dilemma. "What is preventing us from making a general call to arms," he protests, "is the fact that the country of Iraq has no mountains in which to seek refuge, or forest in which to hide. Our presence is apparent and our movement is out in the open. Eyes are everywhere."[44] Leaders in hiding face the related problem of motivating and leading their followers; championing a cause from the frontline is far more effective than doing so from the safety of a bunker or villa in a neighboring region. Likewise, by eliminating skilled facilitators, organizations become de-professionalized. Finding individuals that are able and willing to replace eliminated bomb makers and tactical planners, for instance, takes time, notwithstanding the fact that not just any substitute will do. Few individuals have the skill sets needed to design and build effective bombs that do not prematurely detonate or the leadership characteristics required to successfully manage a military organization. While reports suggest that many of today's top terrorist leaders are highly educated individuals, holding graduate, legal, and medical degrees, this does not necessarily translate into solid military and strategic know-how. Furthermore, attracting and recruiting the right people to a life of violent hardship that invariable comes with joining a

terrorist organization can be difficult. Even in the case of suicide bombings, it is not enough to simply equip and send out a great many operatives on suicide missions—the individuals need to have the intellect and training to know where to go, who to target, how and when to detonate their bombs, and what to do in case of mishap.[45] They must also be trained not to renege on their decision to die and to know, too, never to get caught. In fact, there is very real danger in sending out poorly trained or intellectually unstable suicide operatives. "Dud bombers"—those that fail in their attempt to detonate their explosives—get caught and can crack under interrogation, causing irreparable damage to their group, cell, or operator.

Failing to replace fallen leaders expeditiously can also lead to defections, infighting, and purges. Likewise, if there is doubt regarding the perpetrators of a targeted elimination or uncertainty over how intelligence on a target was collected, speculation over traitors and informants might further deteriorate camaraderie.[46] Infighting should not be taken lightly. A number of organizations have met their end after purges were carried out among and between members.[47] A recent example of an internal feud instigated, in part, by a targeted killing, comes from the Afghan–Pakistan theater. In 2007, a gulf emerged between various Islamist factions active in Pakistan's tribal zone of South Waziristan; foreign fighters associated with Al Qaeda's *Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan* fought local Pakistani Taliban. Reports suggest that up to several hundred local and foreign militants were killed.[48] Syed Saleem Shahzad of *Asia Times* recounts that ideological differences between local and foreign fighters was primarily to blame. "Many of the foreign volunteers," he writes, "are Takfirists, who regard 'bad Muslims' as the real enemy." The result was that trained fighters of Arab, Chechen, and Uzbek origin persuaded Pakistani militants to carry out attacks against "apostate" Pakistan rather than Coalition forces in Afghanistan. Indigenous Pakistani Islamists did not always accept *takfiri* practices, however. Shahzad suggests that many local organizations "reacted uncomfortably to the growth of this near-heresy within al Qaeda," which in relentlessly targeting Muslims, "brought chaos to the populations it claim[ed] to defend."[49] This elicited an unfavorable reaction from a number of Afghan and Pakistani Taliban, whose primary objective was to target NATO personnel and Westerners. While on the surface the spat seems to have had little to do with a specific case of targeted killing, closer examination of the case does reveal that it had everything to do with the *absence* of strong leadership.

Mullah Omar, the Taliban's fugitive leader, reportedly sent Mullah Dadullah from Afghanistan to Pakistan in order to help mend the divisions that emerged between the local and foreign fighters.[50] As Omar's envoy, he was able to do so for a short period of time in 2006. Yet his targeted elimination cut short his mediating efforts. Dadullah's removal might not have been all that damaging had Mullah Omar or another leading Taliban figure been able to carry on with his intervention, but no one was able or willing to do so. The feud, left unchecked, eventually erupted violently. It could not have helped that Mullah Omar chose to remain in hiding rather than risk getting caught or killed himself. Thus, while Dadullah's killing and Omar's trepidation were not the cause for the Islamist bloodbath in Pakistan, their absence was certainly felt and their removals detrimental to uniting diverging movements. Very similar arguments were offered in the leaked (and later declassified) 2006 U.S. National Intelligence Estimate (NIE). Although most media concentrated on the NIE's finding that the "Iraq 'jihad'" had become a "cause celebre" for violent Islamists and a training ground for tomorrow's international terrorists, the report offered other, perhaps more important suggestions as well. "The loss of key leaders," the NIE notes, "particularly Usama Bin Ladin, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and al-Zarqawi, in rapid succession, probably would cause the group to fracture into smaller groups. Although like-minded individuals would endeavor to carry on the mission, *the loss of these key leaders would exacerbate strains*

*and disagreements*."[51] Organizing a violent movement requires solid and robust leadership. Repeatedly targeting and eliminating this leadership impedes the process.

In the next section, the deterrent effects of targeted killings are investigated. The basic assumption holds that the recurring threat of elimination diminishes the motivation of individual leaders involved in planning acts of violence and influences their behavior accordingly. Targeted killings, these arguments suggest, represent a cost to taking part in terrorism and produce an individualized psychological effect that provide deterrent results.

## Deterrence by Punishment in Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency

To appreciate how and why targeted killings have a deterrent effect on the behavior of violent, non-state organizations, it is necessary to first briefly recount the logic inherent to the theory. Deterrence is an old concept. Ancient tribes, from the Hebrews to the Macedonians, used deterrence logic regularly in their relations with others. Indeed, threats of punishment are common to nearly all human interactions, from parental discipline to crime prevention. Yet it was nuclear proliferation and the Cold War that spurred its theoretical development within the study of International Relations. Today, deterrence theory represents a nuanced, expansive, and cumulative research program.[52] Its tenets shape state policy and inform strategic interactions at the international level. At its core, deterrence involves influencing an actor's behavior by manipulating his cost-benefit calculus.[53] It is a dynamic "game of strategic interaction" in which rational actors assess the benefits and costs of their actions on expectations of the likely reaction of their adversaries.[54] Nobel laureate Thomas Schelling defines deterrence as "persuading a potential enemy that he should in his own interest avoid certain courses of activity."[55] There are two primary forces at work: deterrence—inducing another *not to* do something—and compellence—inducing another *to* do something.[56] While the former tries to dissuade an action contemplated but not yet taken, compellence attempts to change current behavior. In either case, the objective is to prevent undesired behavior by persuading an adversary to comply with one's preferences.[57]

A number of prerequisites inform the application of deterrence in international contests. For deterrence to work, a defender must (i) clearly *define* the behaviour considered unacceptable, (ii) *communicate* a willingness to punish violations; (iii) retain the coercive capability to do so; and (iv) demonstrate *resolve* to punish another if and when compliance is not met.[58] Each prerequisite serves as a crucial element of *communication* and *credibility*. Deterrence is ineffective if kept secret. For it to work, a target must appreciate that a threat has been issued, accurately interpret the implications of its decisions, recognize what action(s) in particular is being challenged, and be influenced by cost-benefit calculations.

Over the decades, deterrence has been refined into a number of theoretical and practical delineations. Patrick Morgan differentiates between *immediate deterrence*, which occurs when one side of a contest contemplates attacking the other so that the defender mounts a retaliatory threat to persuade otherwise, and *general deterrence*, which develops when adversaries maintain coercive positions "to regulate their relations" even though violence is unlikely.[59] Another division distinguishes between *direct deterrence*, which prevents an attack on one's own territory, and *extended deterrence,* which attempts to deter attacks on an allied third party.[60] A third delineation, advanced by Glen Snyder, distinguishes between *deterrence by punishment*, which relies on threatening to harm something an adversary values, and *deterrence by denial*, which functions by reducing the perceived benefit an action is expected to provide an actor.[61] Both processes attempt to manipulate an adversary's behavior but they do so from distinct starting points. Punishment threatens pain while denial induces "hopelessness" by creating a perception that an adversary's objectives, desires, or

goals will not easily be achieved.[62] For the purpose of gauging the effects of targeted killings, deterrence by punishment, of all of these demarcations, is of greatest interest.

The literature on targeted killings suggests that they effect the motivation of individuals involved in perpetrating acts of violence and organizing terrorism.[63] The reason rests primarily on the psychological consequences of being targeted; fear can be paralyzing. As Brad Roberts posits, "the leaders of al Qaeda . . . are inspired by martyrdom—but not their own."[64] They may dispatch suicide bombers to their death, but few leaders volunteer their own services. Their desire to live can be exploited. A string of successful targeted killings—especially when they involve inventive measures like booby-trapped cars, exploding cell phones and phone booths, or guided missiles—can lead to despair among surviving leaders. No place is safe for long. The consequence, Luft argues, is that "those next in line for succession take a long time to step into their predecessors' shoes. They know that by choosing to take the lead, they add their names to [a] target list, where life is Hobbsian: nasty, brutish, and short."[65] Over time, widespread anguish can influence not only active members of the group, but more generally, how well the group itself can attract and retain new members and followers. Targeted killings may be enough to deter some individuals from joining a movement altogether.

Successful targeted eliminations further remind terrorists of the long arm of the state's coercive abilities and of the very real power asymmetries that exist. They also reiterate that death and capture is often sudden and unanticipated. Both can help lower a group's morale. Living as a fugitive can also lead to a severance of ties with friends and loved ones. Indeed, in an age of sophisticated SIGINT, contact with family can prove lethal, as Dadullah's experience shows. E-mail correspondence and phone conversations can be intercepted, informing security officials as to the location of wanted individuals. Finally, life on the run, while appealing for some, can get tiring. Fatigue can set in and with that, a change in motivation and behavior.

Translating targeted killings into deterrents requires that the threat is perceived as credible and its use clearly communicated (the theoretical prerequisites of the theory). Credibility is perhaps most easily performed through demonstrations of coercive capability: locating, pursuing, and attacking wanted individuals. Doing so repeatedly creates credibility through iterated action.[66] Unlike traditional interstate deterrence, in which credibility is communicated through declarations and the signaling of capabilities, deterrence in counterterrorism derives from the repeated use of particular capabilities. Each targeted killing signals the state's technological ability, superiority in intelligence, and willingness to do as it threatens.[67]

Communicating targeted killings can be done by informing wanted individuals that they are marked for death or capture. The easiest way to do that is to publish wanted lists and disseminate them within the community in which a target is suspected of hiding. Israel, as the aforementioned example illustrates, did so often. When it proved able to target individuals with precision force (capability), illustrated its resolve to do so repeatedly (credibility), and ensured that individuals appreciated that they were wanted (communication), Israel managed to change the behavior of some would-be terrorists. In an enlightening story published in Israel's national newspaper *Haaretz* in 2007, Avi Issacharoff follows a group of Fatah-affiliated Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade militants known to be wanted by Israel. Issacharoff relates that the men each have "social problems" due to their status as wanted individuals. They are unwelcome even in their own communities: when the men visit coffee shops, patrons are quick to leave, lest they get inadvertently caught up in an Israeli raid; taxis refuse to give them lifts; barbers and shop owners shut their doors when the men

approach. "The most difficult problem the wanted men face," Issacharoff writes, "is that they have become ineligible for marriage." Fathers refuse to allow their daughters to marry the blacklisted men so as to protect their families from the dangers association with known terrorists might entail. In the West Bank, Israel has capitalized on the despondency by offering amnesty to wanted men if and when they hand over their weapons, "swear off terror," and agree to some form of surveillance on a probationary period. So long as wanted individuals refrain from terrorism, Israel will refrain from targeting them. To date, hundreds of individuals have joined the program. Issacharoff concludes that "the 'glory days' of Raed al-Karmi the legendary Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade leader who sowed terror in [Israel] until he was killed," by Israeli commandos who planted a bomb next to his home in 2002, "are over."[68] The message, repeated among once-active terrorists in the West Bank, is that terrorism simply does not pay.

## Targeted Killings in Afghanistan

The elimination of individual leaders and operators active in planning acts of violence in Afghanistan is taking place at an increasing tempo. The Taliban's *Shura Council* has been heavily attrited: Akhtar Usmani, Mullah Obaidullah, Mullah Dadullah, and Mullah Berader have all either been captured or killed since 2006.[69] Mullah Omar has also been attacked repeatedly.[70] In October 2007, American and Afghan forces began a formal "most-wanted" campaign, offering cash rewards for information leading to the capture or death of a dozen insurgent leaders from various groups (including the Taliban, Al Qaeda, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Haqqani Network, Tehrik-i-Taliban, and the Tora Bora Military Front).[71] These were not the top-rung leaders, like bin Laden, Mullah Omar, or al-Zawahiri, but rather mid-level planners and operators active in the region. All over Afghanistan, up to 300,000 posters and hundreds of billboards with the names and pictures of the wanted individuals were posted. Rewards ranged from US$ 20,000 to US$ 200,000 (Figure 1).

Like the Taliban's *Shura Council*, these fugitives have been targeted repeatedly. Open sources suggest that Siraj Haqqani and Qari Baryal survived targeted attacks; Mohammad Rahim, Amin al-Haq, Anwar ul-Haq, and Mullah Sadiq were captured; and Baitullah Mehsud, Tahir Yuldash, Abu Laith al-Libi and Darim Sedgai were killed.[72] These successes have communicated the Coalition's willingness, capability, and "intelligence dominance" to target, kill, and capture terrorist leaders active in Afghanistan with near impunity. The assumption driving the Afghan campaign is twofold: (i) a sustained attack on the operational leadership of the Taliban and associated groups eliminates the functional echelons of the insurgency, disrupts day-to-day planning, and diminishes coercive capabilities and levels of violence; and (ii) eliminating leaders and operators challenges the organizations' existing cost-benefit calculations and influences individual and group behavior accordingly by increasing the cost of participating in violence. The first assumption speaks to the counter-capability notion of targeted killings while the second relates to the logic inherent to deterrence theory.

What follows is a measurement of both. The underlining methodological assumption is that a *with-in* and *cross-case* comparison of various Afghan targeted killings will reveal behavioral patterns on the part of the Taliban that ultimately informs and tests particular aspects outlined in both the targeted killing and deterrence literature. Four cases of targeted killings from the Afghan theater are analyzed; Mullah Dadullah (killed 12 May 2007), Mullah Mahmud Baluch (killed 9 June 2007), Qari Faiz Mohammad (killed 23 July 2007), and Mullah Abdul Matin (killed 18 February 2008). Data on Taliban behavior were

**Figure 1.** Afghanistan's "Most Wanted" poster. Source: Bill Roggio, "US Places Bounty on Senior Taliban and al Qaeda Leaders" *The Long War Journal*, 26 January 2008.

collected and meticulously tabulated by relying on both publicly available documents (from NATO, various governments, and media sources) and "semi"-private security assessments and "daily situation/intelligence reports" compiled by private security firms (*Strategic Security Solutions International* (SSSI), Afghanistan NGO Safety Office (ANSO), and *GardaWorld*).[73] With these sources, every act of violence in the weeks before and after each of the four targeted killings was compiled in a dataset. Violence was organized by day and location. A great number of behavioral variables were measured, including: the type of violence organized (from kidnappings and beheadings to vehicle-borne suicide bombings); the intended target of each attack (from civilians to coalition forces); the outcome of the attack (from failure to success and death/injury ratios); and the number of casualties (from insurgent to security personnel).

With the dataset, two sets of comparisons were made. The first was a with-in case comparison. Using a *before–after approach*, each targeted killing was divided into two halves: the period before and the period after the elimination. Each half represented either a two or three week period, depending on the importance of the individual eliminated (the higher the rank, the longer the timeframe). In essence, the eliminations introduced a break (or control) on the longitudinal behavior of the Taliban. In so doing, behavioral changes, attributable to the targeted killing, could be measured in the period following each strike. Importantly, using the before–after approach allowed for the creation of *most-similar cases* for comparison. That is, each half-case resembles the other in all (or most) ways but one—the elimination of a leader. Changes in violent behavior, then, could be safely attributed to the targeted killing. The second comparison was a cross-case assessment of each targeted killing. An intra-national investigation (comparing Afghan targeted killings), as opposed to *inter*-national investigation (comparing Afghan to Iraqi eliminations, for instance), was used in order to further control for sociopolitical variation within the analysis. By limiting the

research to Afghanistan alone, national characteristics helped standardize the cases. Both the within-in and cross-case evaluations relied on *congruence methods*, which mapped out how similar the investigative outcome was to theoretical expectations, and *process tracing*, which assessed the causal significance of congruent findings by locating the causal pathways that exist between the independent and dependent variables.

Finally, two behavioral characteristics were measured in particular: (i) the overall professionalism of the organization (i.e., success rates vs. failure rates vs. foiled rates, along with changes in kill ratios); and (ii) the type and/or nature of attacks carried out by the group (i.e., level of sophistication (small arms fire vs. complex suicide bombings) and target selection (soft vs. hard)). Changes in Taliban professionalism in the period after the eliminations would suggest that the targeted strikes diminished the organization's coercive capability. Shifts in the nature, sophistication, and type of Taliban attack, on the other hand, would suggest that the targeted killings influenced the motivation and behavior of surviving forces. A number of particularly interesting findings are presented below.

Generally, overall violence increased following the targeted eliminations (Figure 2). This was especially so with the Dadullah case. On the surface, these are unanticipated developments.[74] The literature on targeted killings suggests that eliminations should result in a general diminishment of violence. In their quantitative analysis of Israel's campaign of targeted killings between 2000 and 2004, Mohammed Hafez and Joseph Hatfield provide similar findings. They conclude that "targeted assassinations have no significant impact on rates of Palestinian violence."[75] That both this and the Hafez/Hatfield study find trends that contradict theoretical expectations would suggest that certain components of the literature on targeted killings need to be substantially revised. However, a closer examination of the Afghan data does corroborate the literature's most basic theoretical principle: targeted killings influence the *type* of violence terrorists are capable of planning effectively and forces them to conduct less-preferred forms of activity.

Violent, non-state organizations have coercive preferences. The Taliban is no exception. The type of violence they engage in rests as much on the impact they are trying to have as it does on their capacity and capability to muster efforts toward particular goals. To that end, suicide attacks are the Taliban's preferred tactic—they are the most effective form of violence, provide the greatest consequence (both in kill ratios and psychological effect), can be directed against hard targets, are difficult to detect, stop, and mitigate, and have a proven track record of killing Coalition and Afghan soldiers. Suicide bombings are also the most

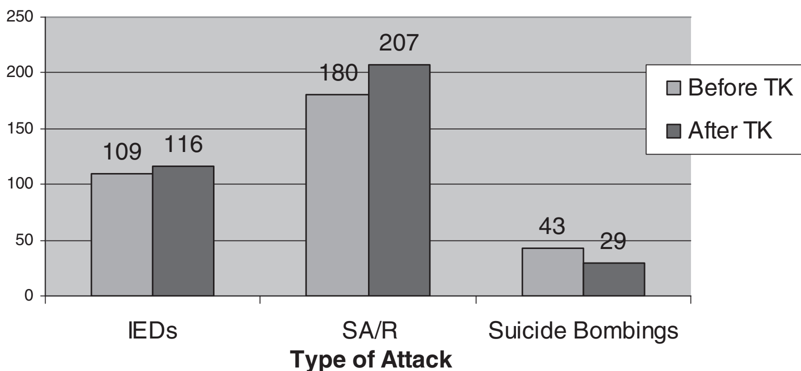


**Figure 2.** All attacks (aggregate data).

sophisticated type of violence to plan, the most difficult to organize effectively, and take a considerable amount of time, energy, and expertise to mount successfully. Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) are the Taliban's second most preferred tactic—they have proven deadly against Afghan National Police (ANP) and other lightly armored ISAF/NATO and Afghan National Army (ANA) personnel carriers, they are cheaply constructed, and provide a deadly concentrated explosive blast. IEDs are also less sophisticated than suicide bombs and are easier to organize effectively. They offer less control, however, cannot be consistently directed against particular targets, can be detected and diffused more easily than suicide bombs, their detonation can be mitigated with proper armor, and they are all too often triggered by civilians. Small arms and rocket fire (SA/R) is the Taliban's least preferred tactic—it is most effective against soft targets, Afghan and international officials, lightly armed ANP forces, and when used in complex ambushes. However, SA/R attacks against security forces can be easily mitigated and usually result in a disproportionately high rate of Taliban casualties. Likewise, Taliban SA/R attacks are usually successfully repelled and the heavy concentration of gunmen in one location can be easily attacked with aerial support. Furthermore, Taliban rocket fire is crude, uncontrolled, and ineffective. In sum, SA/R attacks are the least sophisticated type of violence and the easiest to organize yet provide the worst results.

With these Taliban preferences in mind, the aggregate data on overall levels of violence reveal a number of expected findings. After the targeted killings, for instance, suicide bombings dropped by over 30 percent, from a total of 43 before, to 29 after, the targeted eliminations. This is in keeping with the degree of difficulty, amount of time and expertise, and level of leadership that is required to coordinate effective suicide bombings. It is also plausible that the decrease in suicide attacks spurred a rise in less-sophisticated forms of violence, with IEDs increasing by 6 percent and SA/R attacks by roughly 15 percent following the four targeted attacks.[76] As leaders and facilitators were eliminated, the Taliban began using less-sophisticated forms of violence that required less energy, expertise, and time to organize effectively. This shift resonates with elements outlined in the literature on targeted killings: as organizations succumb to the effects of a protracted campaign of elimination, their overall ability to operate at a high level of sophistication decreases and the selection and use of less formidable forms of violence increases.

Overall levels of violence, however, are only a minor part of the analysis. The data also reveal changes in Taliban professionalism following the targeted killings. For the two most sophisticated forms of violence (IEDs and suicide attacks), the aggregate data suggest a decrease in professionalism and an increase in failure rates. After the eliminations, IED failure rates rose precipitously from 20 to roughly 35 percent. This is a considerable change in proficiency. Suicide bombing success rates also dropped (by a less impressive though no less important five percentage points) following the strikes. Both are theoretically expected findings (Figure 3). Finally, the data also suggest that the targeted killings influenced the selection of targets. For instance, in terms of known target selection for suicide bombers, the aggregate data reveal that following the eliminations, soft targets were more often selected (as a percentage of all target selection) after the leadership strikes (Figure 4). As leaders where killed, remaining forces selected less formidable targets to attack, like Afghan government officials, civil-society actors, and off-duty police commanders, rather than hardened, military actors.

Target selection of small arms fire taken from the Dadullah case in particular illustrates a similar shift in target selection: SA/R attacks against Afghan National Police forces jumped from 24 percent of total recorded attacks before Dadullah's elimination, to roughly 40 percent afterward (Figure 5). Part of the reason may rest with the fact that of all armed

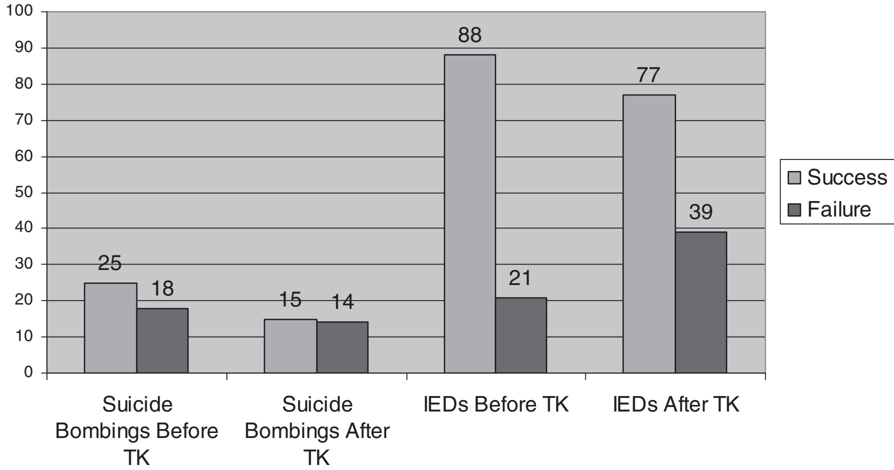


**Figure 3.** Suicide bombing and IED professionalism (aggregate data).

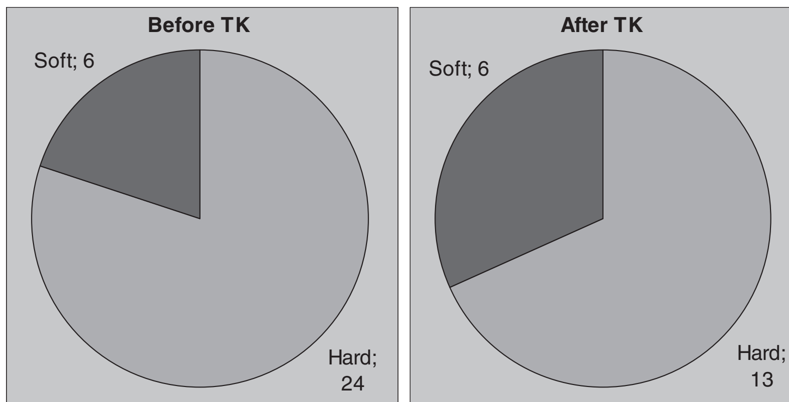


**Figure 4.** Known suicide bombing targets (aggregate data).

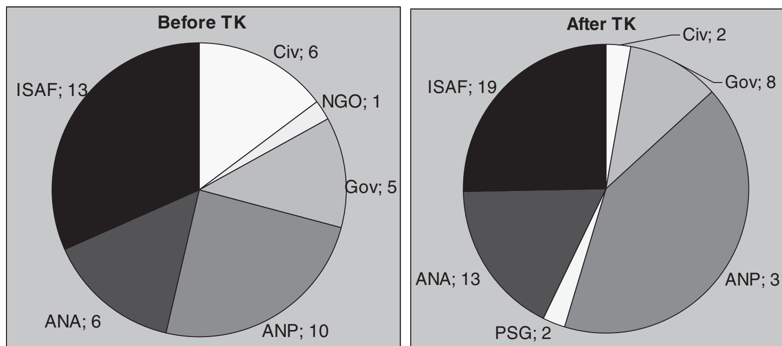


**Figure 5.** Small arms and rocket fire target selection (Dadullah).

groups working in Afghanistan, ANP forces are the easiest to attack successfully. Although armed and numbering in the tens of thousands, ANP forces lack the sophistication and training to properly contend with heavily armed insurgents. What is more, lightly manned and far-flung ANP checkpoints dot the Afghan landscape and offer a fixed (and under-protected) position for Taliban fire. For militants, attacking the ANP is easy to do and allows them to reaffirm their continued antagonism against the GoA and ISAF while suffering fewer losses. This would have been a particularly important message to demonstrate after their fiercest leader was slain.

Accordingly, accurately interpreting success rates requires a better appreciation for what type of actor is targeted specifically and with what particular form of violence. As a general rule, the softer the target the more success a group is likely to have. Following Dadullah's elimination, for example, more suicide attacks took place after his death than before, and their overall success rate seemed to augment considerably. Before his death, over half of all suicide attacks failed, while after his elimination, only one-third did (see Figure 6). On the surface, this is a momentous increase in professionalism and might lead one to conclude that Dadullah's removal had a positive rather than negative effect on suicide bombing rates and successes. What these figures fail to reveal, however, is that much of the post-targeted killing success stemmed from a substantial increase in the rate of suicide attacks directed against soft (as opposed to hard) targets (see Figure 7). Consider that 11 of the 13 known targets of suicide bombers before Dadullah's elimination were hard targets (ISAF/NATO, ANA, ANP, and Private Security Guards (PSG)). After his killing, known hard target selection dropped sharply. In fact, no suicide bomber targeted ANA or ANP forces specifically following Dadullah's elimination (although these forces had been the favored target before his death). Instead, after Dadullah's killing, well over half of all known targets of suicide bombings were soft targets (international governments, Afghan officials, nongovernmental organizations (NGO), and civilians).[77] In all likelihood, it is this shift in target selection that accounts for changing rates in suicide bombing success and professionalism.

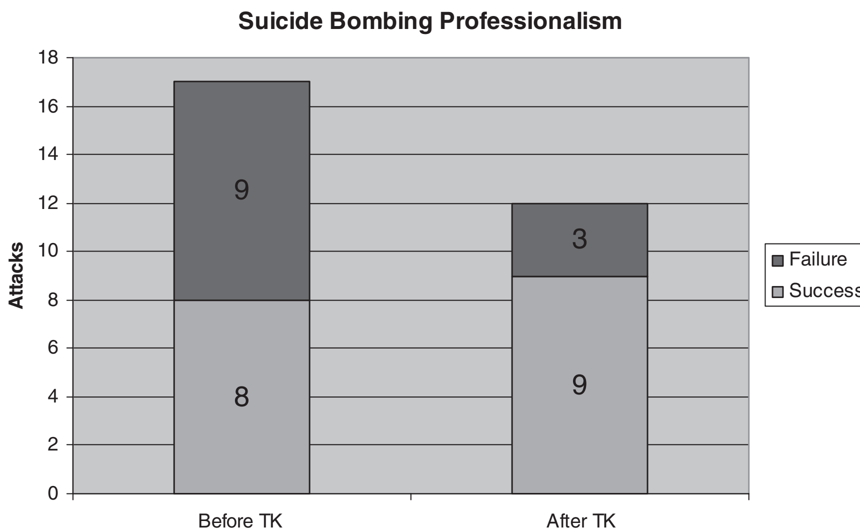


**Figure 6.** Suicide bombing professionalism (Dadullah).

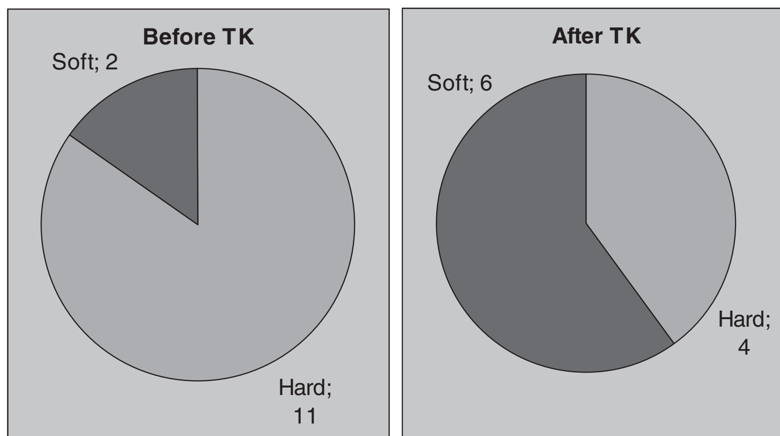


**Figure 7.** Known suicide bombing targets (Dadullah).

Besides these findings, other developments not easily quantifiable but nonetheless evident in the historical record help corroborate elements outlined in the deterrence literature. Three events are particularly informative.

The first example attests to the effect Dadullah's elimination had on Taliban morale and motivation. *Asia Times*'s Shahzad explains that "amid the demoralization" that followed Dadullah's targeted killing, "the entire Taliban leadership left Helmand, Uruzgan, Zabul and Kandahar [provinces] and sat idle in . . . Quetta, Pakistan, for several weeks."[78] The author suggests that Dadullah's elimination "set in motion a major change within the Taliban's command structure." The loss of the charismatic commander was a blow to the Taliban because he was a symbol of brutal success and no replacement of equal stature was evident. In fact, one month following Dadullah's elimination, Mullah Omar established new guidelines for his field commanders, suggesting that Dadullah's targeted killing had a near immediate and identifiable effect on Taliban motivation and behavior. Consider Mullah Omar's new rules of engagement: (i) no member of the Taliban's central command will be allowed to work in Southern Afghanistan because of the high risk of death; (ii) control over military strategy would be decentralized and passed down to lower-level district commanders; (iii) individual district strategies would be relayed to the Taliban's appointed "shadow governor" who would then communicate the strategies to central command. From there, the central leadership would patch together a broader strategy for the country as a whole; (iv) personality cults like Dadullah's would be discouraged because the death of a hero "demoralizes followers"; (v) the Taliban's media wing would be centralized, with four spokesmen appointed to specific conflict zones, so that in the event of an arrest, the individual could only divulge a limited amount of intelligence. Interestingly, all four were to use the same name when contacting media—Qari Yousuf Ahmadi (or Ahmedi).[79] Each of these developments represents a shift in Taliban behavior in keeping with deterrent expectations concerning the psychological consequences of targeted killings (demoralization, confusion, fear, and diminishment of morale).

The second example speaks to the psychological effect Dadullah's elimination had on the trust once shared among Taliban members. His elimination was reported to have caused a substantial degree of "spy mania" within Taliban ranks. According to Rahimullah Yusufzai, a Pakistani journalist, after Dadullah's death, "suspicion [was] falling even on

trusted men and [was] creating tension in Taliban ranks."[80] Suspected spies were rounded up, tortured, and beheaded, although most were reportedly little more than local chiefs and individuals who had had some contact with ISAF or the GoA. Yusufzai has also reported that a lack of trust among the Taliban forced some leaders to become "extra careful in selecting fighters to serve as their bodyguards."[81] To a certain extent diminishment of trust and corresponding shifts in behavior help corroborate some theoretical elements associated with deterrence by punishment.

The third example speaks to a bevy of assumptions related to the deterrent impact of targeted killings. Mullah Mansoor Dadullah was tapped by Mullah Omar to replace his brother after his death. He did so until he was captured in Pakistan in February 2008. At the time of his capture, however, it was reported that Mullah Omer had in fact sacked Mansoor, firing him from his post as top commander.[82] Taliban statements to that effect suggest that Mansoor had "not obey[ed] the rules of the Islamic emirate [of Afghanistan] and violate[d] it. Therefore it was decided not to appoint any post in the emirate to him."[83] His demotion speaks volumes. It signaled, first and foremost, that the Taliban was having difficulty finding a suitable replacement for Dadullah, as the theory on targeted killings suggests. It also reveals a potential lack of morale (Mansoor was not willing to lead as his brother had); a lack of strategic depth in the Taliban's leadership pool (elite positions were offered on the basis of familial ties rather than merit and ability); and general difficulty in attracting and retaining the best quality leaders (Mansoor, although a weak leader, was nonetheless the best available option).

## Targeted Killings: The Lessons of Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, targeted killings are considered the coercive half of a two-pronged strategy. As ISAF spokesperson for Kandahar David Marsh reveals, "there's a mixture going on of bringing out the less committed [Taliban]" with various amnesty, development, and make-work programs, "and getting rid of . . . the tier one" leaders.[84] The strategy is supported by the Government of Afghanistan, whose spokesperson General Mohammad Zahir Azimi reiterates that "we can't kill all the Taliban." "What's best," Azimi asserts, "is to get rid of the Taliban leadership and reconcile the rest of them who are just ordinary people that have joined the Taliban under certain situations."[85] This study offers a comparative evaluation of the coercive half of this broader strategy. In the analysis, a number of patterns become evident that informs the literature on targeted killings and helps shed some light on the feasibility of applying deterrence by punishment to counterterrorism and counterinsurgency.

First, overall levels of violence do not, on their own, offer robust measurements on the effects of targeted killings. In all the individual cases, some form of violence increased in the period after a targeted strike. After Dadullah's killing, for instance, both IED and SA/R attacks nearly doubled. Arguably, moving beyond an assessment of only the most easily accessible measurement of a group's behavior—overall levels of violence—is critical. Measuring successes solely on the amount of violence an organization carries out can lead to serious misinterpretations of data. It is not enough to simply state that "violence is up"—as countless journalists and politicians are apt to do when it comes to the Afghan conflict. A more nuanced way to measure the impact of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency in Afghanistan and elsewhere is to offer an assessment of the type and nature of the violence itself and to track how (and why) it changes over time.

A second lesson for measuring the successes and failures of targeted killings is offered in gauging changes in professionalism. Doing so can offer ways to augment analysis of overall terrorism trends. Again, in the Dadullah case while IED attempts increased

significantly, their success rates nonetheless dropped by over 10 percentage points. In Matin's case too, suicide bombing rates fell, overall, but their effectiveness also decreased to zero. In both cases, superficial measurements associated with overall rates of violence were strengthened by going beyond the easiest of observations. What is critical is that changes in levels of success and professionalism can reveal a deteriorating organization that is unable to attract or retain the best leaders and facilitators. De-professionalism speaks to the literature on targeted killings while difficulties in recruitment relates to deterrence by punishment.

But even then, measuring professionalism by itself (or in relation to overall levels of violence) says nothing as to *why* success rates rise or fall. To do that effectively, a closer examination of specific target selection is required. Thus, a third lesson borne of this analysis is the necessity of evaluating what type of actor is targeted with what particular form of violence.

In sum, targeted killings in Afghanistan have resulted in a short-term change to the Taliban's effectiveness, professionalism, and motivation. The analysis informs both the literature on targeted killings and countercapability and deterrence theory and countermotivation. That targeted killings are today being employed by over a dozen countries involved in ongoing conflicts with a variety of non-state adversaries suggests that the next step is to broaden the research base and provide inter-national cross-case comparisons of various targeted killings from distinct conflict environments. Doing so will generalize this study's findings, further refine existing research on the coercive effects of targeting killings, and offer an important addition to the nascent literature evaluating the practicality of applying deterrence theory to counterterrorism and counterinsurgency.

## Notes

1. The others included Ustad Yasir and Mufti Latifullah Hamkimi, both one-time Taliban spokespersons, and two regional commanders, believed to have been Hafiz Hamdullad and Abdul Ghaffar.

2. Richard Owen and Tim Albone, "Protests over Taliban Exchange for Journalist," *The Times*, 21 March 2007.

3. Declan Walsh, "Afghans Admit Doing Deal with Taliban to Free Italian Hostage," *The Guardian*, 21 March 2007.

4. *The Australian*, "Anger at Taliban Exchange for Journalist," 22 March 2007.

5. Michael Smith, "SBS behind Taliban Leader's Death," *The Sunday Times*, 27 May 2007; "Special Boat Service Operations—Hunting Mullah Dadullah," Special Boat Services, 12 May 2007; "Raid Kills Taliban Exchanged for Italian," *Reuters*, 16 May 2007; and Matthias Gebauer, "Taliban Leader Mullah Dadullah: The Star of Afghanistan's Jihad," *Der Spiegel Online*, 1 March 2007.

6. *International Security Assistance Force* (ISAF), Press Release # 2007–370, "Mullah Dadullah Lang Killed in Security Operation," 13 May 2007.

7. Taimoor Shah and Carlotta Gall, "Key Taliban Leader is Killed in Afghanistan in Joint Operation," *New York Times*, 14 May 2007.

8. *Associated Press*, "Taliban Military Commander Mullah Dadullah Killed," 13 May 2007.

9. Eric Schmitt and Davaid Sanger, "US Sees New Turf for Qaeda Fighters," *New York Times,* 12 June 2009; Alisa Tang, "Gen.: Attacks Down Sharply in E. Afghanistan," *Associated Press*, 24 February 2008; Graham Turbiville, "Hunting Leadership Targets in Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorist Operations: Selected Perspectives and Experience," Joint Special Operations University, Report 07–6 (June 2007), pp. 52–73; Peter Cullen, "The Role of Targeted Killing in the Campaign against Terror," *Joint Force Quarterly*, 48 (2008).

10. Terrorism, for the purpose of this article, is the use of indiscriminate violence against non-combatants by non-state actors with the purpose of generating fear in order to "signal," communicate,

and advance particular sociopolitical objectives. This definition implies that terrorism, as Bruce Hoffman notes, creates "psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim." Non-state terrorist organizations act independently from states and lack sovereign territorial control. Concise definitions are muddied due to the considerable overlap that exists between terrorism and other forms of political violence, like insurgency, guerrilla warfare, and civil war. Daniel Byman, for instance, finds parallels between "insurgency" and "terrorism," noting that nearly all insurgent groups rely on terrorism at some point. Austin Long divides "regional armed groups" (militias, guerrillas, and civil-war belligerents) from "transnational" groups and "spontaneous terror cells." And John Arquilla, among others, utilizes the concept of "networks" to describe some, but not all, of these violent non-state groups. Recent research even equates the Global War on Terrorism as a "global counterinsurgency" against an international assemblage of like-minded, *jihad*-inspired groups and individuals. Furthermore, violent non-state organizations diverge greatly in terms of coercive strength, decision-making structures, financing mechanisms, ideological constructions, and state association. See Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia, 2006), p. 40; Daniel Byman, "Understanding Proto-Insurgencies," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31(2) (2008), pp. 167–170; Frank Douglas, "Waging the Inchoate War: Defining, Fighting, and Second-Guessing the 'Long War,'" *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30(3) (2007); Bruce Hoffman and Gordon McCormick, "Terrorism, Signaling, and Suicide Attack," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 27 (2004), pp. 248–251; Austin Long, *Deterrence: From Cold War to Long War* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2008); John Arquilla, "The End of War as We Knew it?" *Third World Quarterly* 28(2) (2007); and David Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28(4) (2005).

11. See Mohammed Hafez and Joseph Hatfield, "Do Targeted Killings Work? A Multivariate Analysis of Israel's Controversial Tactic during Al-Aqsa Uprising," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29 (2006); Edward Kaplan et al., "What Happened to Suicide Bombings in Israel?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28 (2005); Or Honig, "Explaining Israel's Misuse of Strategic Assassinations," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30 (2007); Asaf Zussman and Noam Zussman, "Assassinations: Evaluating the Effectiveness of an Israeli Counterterrorism Policy Using Stock Market Data," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 20(2) (2006); Hillel Frisch, "Motivation or Capabilities? Israeli Counterterrorism against Palestinian Suicide Bombings and Violence," *Mideast Security and Policy Studies* no. 70 (Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies) (2006); Sergio Catignani, "The Strategic Impasse in Low-Intensity Conflicts: The Gap Between Israeli Counter-Insurgency Strategy and Tactics During the al-Aqsa Intifada," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28(1) (2005); and Isaac Ben-Israel et al., "R & D and the War on Terrorism: Generalizing the Israeli Experience," in A. James, ed., *Science and Technology Policies for the Anti-Terrorism Era* (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2006).

12. For theoretical research on deterring terrorism, see, among others: Alex S. Wilner, "Deterring the Undeterrable: Coercion, Denial, and Delegitimization in Counterterrorism," *Journal of Strategic Studies* (Forthcoming, 2010). Robert R. Trager and Dessislava P. Zagorcheva, "Deterring Terrorism: It can be Done," *International Security* 30(3) (2005/2006); Doron Almog, "Cumulative Deterrence and the War on Terrorism," *Parameters* 34 (2004/5); Steve Simon and Jeff Martini, "Terrorism: Denying Al Qaeda its Popular Support," *Washington Quarterly* 28(1) (2004); Paul K. Davis and Brian Michael Jenkins, *Deterrence and Influence in Counterterrorism: A Component in the War on al Qaeda* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2002); Paul K. Davis and Brian Michael Jenkins, "A System Approach to Deterring and Influencing Terrorists," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 21(1) (2004); Jeffrey Knopf, "The Fourth Wave in Deterrence Research: An Appraisal," APSA 2008 (Boston, USA); Jeffrey Knopf, "Wrestling with Deterrence: Bush Administration Strategy after 9/11," *Contemporary Security Policy* 29(2) (2008); Wyn Q. Bowen, "Deterrence and Asymmetry: Non-State Actors and Mass Casualty Terrorism," *Contemporary Security Policy* 25(1) (2004); Lewis Dunn, "Influencing Terrorists' Acquisition and Use of Weapons of Mass Destruction," *Workshop on NATO and 21st Century Deterrence*, NATO Defence College (2008); Lewis Dunn, "Deterrence Today: Roles, Challenges, and Responses," Proliferation Papers, IFRI (Summer 2007); Ian Shapiro, *Containment: Rebuilding a Strategy against Global Terror* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Elbridge Colby, "Expanded Deterrence: Broadening the Threat of Retaliation," *Policy Review* 149 (2008); Colin S. Gray, "Thinking Asymmetrically in Times of Terror," *Parameters* 32 (2002);

James Smith and Brent Talbot, "Terrorism and Deterrence by Denial," in Paul Viotti, Michael Opheim, and Nicholas Bown, eds., *Terrorism and Homeland Security* (New York: CRC Press, 2008); Kim Cragin and Scott Gerwehr, *Dissuading Terror: Strategic Influence and the Struggle against Terrorism* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2005); and Emmanuel Adler, "Complex Deterrence in the Asymmetric-Warfare Era," in T. V. Paul, Patrick Morgan, James Wirtz, eds., *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2009). For the literature testing deterrence in counterterrorism, see Shmuel Bar, "Deterring Nonstate Terrorist Groups: The Case of Hizballah," *Comparative Strategy* 26(5) (2007); Shmuel Bar, "Deterring Terrorists: What Israel has Learned," *Policy Review* no. 149 (June/July 2008); Robert Anthony, "Deterrence and the 9–11 Terrorist," Document D-2802 (IDA) (2003); Amos Malka, "Israel and Asymmetrical Deterrence," *Comparative Strategy* 27(1) (2008); Gary Geipel, "Urban Terrorists in Continental Europe after 1970: Implications for Deterrence and Defeat of Violent Nonstate Actors," *Comparative Strategy* 26(5) (2007); and Alexandre S. Wilner, *Deterring the Undeterrable: The Theory and Practice of Coercing Terrorists*, Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Political Science, Dalhousie University, Canada, December 2008.

13. David, "Fatal Choices," p. 2.

14. Nils Melzer, *Targeted Killing in International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 3–6.

15. David, "Fatal Choices," p. 2.

16. Casper Weinberger, quoted in David, "Fatal Choices," pp. 15–16.

17. Jenkins does conclude, however, that "being at war . . . would make a difference." See, Brian Jenkins, "Assassination: Should We Stay the Good Guys?" *Los Angeles Times*, 16 November 1986 (emphasis added).

18. David Silverstein, "Reviving the Assassination Option," *The American Enterprise*, December 2002, p. 36.

19. Honig contends otherwise, suggesting that targeted individuals may have political aspirations that might help foster future negotiation. See Honig, "Explaining Israel's Misuse of Strategic Assassinations," pp. 564–565.

20. Samantha Shapiro, "The Year in Ideas: A to Z; Announced Assassinations," *The New York Times Magazine*, 9 December 2001.

21. *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes Against Internationally Protracted Persons, including Diplomatic Agents*, United Nations Treaty, 14 December 1973, p. 168.

22. Bruce Berkowtiz, "Is Assassination an Option?" *Hoover Digest* no. 1 (2002).

23. Gal Luft, "The Logic of Israel's Targeted Killing," *The Middle East Quarterly* 10(1) (2003) and George Stephanopoulos, "Why We Should Kill Saddam," *Newsweek*, 1 December 1999.

24. Tim Weiner, "The Nation: Terminator; Making Rules in the World Between War and Peace," *The New York Times*, 19 August 2001.

25. Extrajudicial, Summary, or Arbitrary Executions: Report of the Special Rapporteur, UN Doc. E/CN.4/2003/3 (13 January 2003), p. 16.

26. Daniel Byman, "Passive Sponsors of Terrorism," *Survival* 47(4) (2005/6), p. 118.

27. *Charter of the United Nations and Statue of the International Court of Justice* (26 June 1945), Chapter VII, Article 51.

28. John Tinetti, "Lawful Targeted Killing or Assassination: A Roadmap for Operators in the Global War on Terror," Naval War College, 2004.

29. *Law of Armed Conflict at the Operational and Tactical Levels*, Department of National Defence, Government of Canada (2001), Sections 6–4, 6–5.

30. Robert M. Cassidy, *Counterinsurgency and the Global War on Terror: Military Culture and Irregular War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), pp. 9–11; and David Tucker, "Fighting Barbarians," *Parameters* 28 (1998).

31. John Norton Moore, quoted in David, "Israel's policy of Targeted Killing."

32. Alan M. Dershowitz, *Why Terrorism Works: Understanding the Threat, Responding to the Challenge* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 120.

33. Quoted in Uri Blau, "License to Kill," *Haaretz*, 27 November 2008.

34. Naomi Chazan, "Assassinations as Weapons of War," *The Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 2(2) (2008), p. 87.

35. For research on the normative and philosophical aspects concerning targeted killings, see Asa Kasher and Amos Yadlin, "Military Ethics of Fighting Terror: Principles," *Philosophia* 34 (2006); Asa Kasher and Amos Yadlin, "Assassination and Preventive Killing," *SAIS Review* 25(1) (2005); Paul Robinson, "The Ethics of the Strong against the Tactics of the Weak," *Philosophia* 36 (2008); Yael Stein, "By Any Name Illegal and Immoral: Response to 'Israel's Policy of Targeted Killing,'" *Ethics and International Affairs* 17(1) (2003); Nina Tannenwald, "Targeted Killings: The Decline of the Norm Against Assassination?" Watson Institute for International Studies (*Unpublished Draft Paper*, 2008).

36. It is important to note that targeted captures are also effective. Indeed, many states are quick to point out that they would rather capture than eliminate individual terrorist adversaries. The apprehension of leaders provides the state with invaluable operational, tactical, and strategic intelligence that can lead to further detentions and other successes. Pictures and videos of captured leaders also retain propaganda value. Think of the unflattering pictures associated with Khalid Sheikh Mohammed's (KSM) 2003 capture (see George Tenet's enlightening account in *At the Center of the Storm*, pp. 250–253) or the embarrassing tirade Abimael Guzman, onetime leader of Peru's Shining Path, shouted from his prison cell. Captured leaders can also be put on trial, providing their victims with some form of justice. The obvious drawback is that targeted captures are difficult to carry out successfully. As Tamil Tiger leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran recently illustrated in his desperate bid to escape encroaching Sri Lankan forces, few leaders willingly give themselves up. That they often fight to the death suggests that targeted captures place military personnel in positions of unwarranted danger. Finally, there is the related risk of operational failure; a wanted individual is more likely to elude his/her captors than survive a pinpoint precision strike.

37. See Alex Wilner, "The Best Defence is a Terrific Offence: Four Approaches to Countering Modern Terrorism," *AIMS Commentary* (2007), pp. 5–7; Silverstein, "Reviving the Assassination Option" (2002); Peter Cullen, "The Role of Targeted Killing in the Campaign against Terror," *Joint Force Quarterly* 48 (2008).

38. Ari Shavit, "Sharon is Sharon is Sharon," *Haaretz*, 12 April 2001.

39. Consider the regression of the Shinning Path following the 1992 capture of Guzman, the PKK's demise, from a 30,000 strong army under Abdullah Ocalan to today's much less formidable organization after his arrest in Kenya in 1999, the decade long setback for Palestinian Islamic Jihad following Israel's 1995 strike against its leader, Fathi Shikaki, in Malta, and the complete collapse of a-Saika, a Syrian controlled faction of the PLO, after the mysterious death of its leader Zuheir Mohsein in France in 1979. See Harmon, "The Myth of the Invincible Terrorist" and Yossi Melman, "Targeted Killings—A Retro Fashion very much in Vogue," *Haaretz*, 24 March 2004.

40. Ben-Israel et al., "R & D and the War on Terrorism." For counterarguments, see Honig, "Explaining Israel's Misuse of Strategic Assassinations," pp. 571–572.

41. Ariel Merari, for instance, portrays terrorism as an "organizational phenomenon." Ariel Merari, "Terrorism and Threats to U.S. Interests in the Middle East," Testimony, U.S. House of Representatives, 13 July 2000.

42. See Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2004), pp. 137–139; Rohan Gunaratna, "The Post-Madrid Face of Al Qaeda," *The Washington Quarterly* 27(3) (2004), pp. 92–94; John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, eds., *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001), esp. chapter II; and Seth Jones, "Fighting Networked Terrorist Groups: Lessons from Israel," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30 (2007), pp. 282–283, 294–298.

43. Davis and Jenkins, "A System Approach to Deterring and Influencing Terrorists," 7.

44. *National Review Online*, "Zarkawi's Cry," 12 February 2004.

45. For a discussion of the Taliban's use of "mentally unsound" and physically disabled individuals, drug addicts, and children in suicide operations, see Brian Glyn Williams, "Mullah Omar's Missiles: A Field Report on Suicide Bombers in Afghanistan," *Middle East Policy* 15(4) (2008), pp. 38–42.

46. Catherine Lotrionte, "When to Target Leaders," *The Washington Quarterly* 26(3) (2003), p. 81.

47. The Japanese Red Army in the 1970s, the Abu Nidal Organization in the 1980s, and the Tamil Tigers today are but a few examples. See Harmon, "The Myth of the Invincible Terrorist."

48. *BBC*, "Pakistan Rebel Clash 'Kills 100,'" 21 March 2007.

49. Syed Saleem Shahzad (Trans. Donald Hounam), "Al-Qaida: The Unwanted Guests," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, July 2007.

50. Ibid.

51. National Intelligence Estimate, *Trends in Global Terrorism: Implications for the United States* (September 2006), pp. 2–4 (emphasis added).

52. For overviews of deterrence theory, see Austin Long, *Deterrence: From Cold War to Long War* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2008), chapters 5 and 7; Derek Smith, *Deterring America: Rogue States and the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), chapter 2; and T. V. Paul, "Complex Deterrence: An Introduction," in T. V. Paul, Patrick Morgan, James Wirtz, eds., *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2009).

53. Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), pp. 11–13.

54. Paul Huth and Bruce Russett, "What Makes Deterrence Work? Cases from 1900 to 1980," *World Politics* 36(4) (1984), p. 499.

55. Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 9.

56. Thomas Schelling, "Thinking about Nuclear Terrorism," *International Security* 6(4) (1982), p. 72.

57. Paul Huth and Bruce Russett, "Testing Deterrence theory: Rigor Makes a Difference," *World Politics* 42 (July 1990), p. 471.

58. See Frank Harvey, "Practicing Coercion," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 43(6), (December 1999), pp. 840–843; and Frank P. Harvey, "Rigor Mortis or Rigor, More Test: Necessity, Sufficiency, and Deterrence," *International Studies Quarterly* 42 (1998).

59. See Patrick Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1977) and Patrick Morgan, *Deterrence Now* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

60. Huth and Russett, "What Makes Deterrence Work?" pp. 497–499; David Johnson, Karl Mueller, and William Taft, *Conventional Coercion across the Spectrum of Conventional Operations* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2002), p. 12.

61. Glen Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 13–19 and Smith and Talbot, "Terrorism and Deterrence by Denial," 54–59.

62. Johnson et al., *Conventional Coercion across the Spectrum of Conventional Operations*, p. 17.

63. See Frisch, "Motivation or Capabilities?" pp. 10–12; Zussman and Zussman, "Assassinations," p. 196; Hafez and Hatfield, "Do Targeted Assassinations Work?" pp. 364–366; Byman, "Do Targeted Killings Work?"; Luft, "The Logic of Israel's Targeted Killing"; Eisenstadt, "Pre-Emptive Targeted Killings as a Counter-Terror Tool"; Harmon, "The Myth of the Invincible Terrorist."

64. Roberts, "Deterrence and WMD Terrorism," p. 13.

65. Luft, "The Logic of Israel's Targeted Killing."

66. William Casebeer and Troy Thomas, "Deterring Violent Non-State Actors in the New Millennium," *Strategic Insight* 2(12) (2003), p. 4. Melman argues instead that overusing targeted killings "dissipates" the mystery and fear they produce if used sparingly. See Melman, "Targeted Killings," 2004.

67. Bar, "Israeli Experience in Deterring Terrorist Organizations," pp. 11–16.

68. Avi Issacharoff, "In the West Bank, Wanted Militants are Made to Feel Unwanted," *Haaretz*, 13 November 2007. See also, James Bennett, "Key Militia Leader Dies in Bomb Blast in the West Bank," *New York Times*, 15 January 2002.

69. See, Sami Yousafzai and Ron Moreau, "While Pakistan Burns," *Newsweek*, 9 November 2007; *Radio Free Europe*, "Top Taliban Commander Killed In Southern Afghanistan," 30 August 2007; *The News International*, "Taliban Commander Says Reports of Death Premature," 14 September 2007.

70. Patrick Cockburn, "Mullah Omar's Son 'was Killed in First Air Strike,'" *The Independent*, 22 October 2001; *BBC*, "US Strike kills Taleban Leader," 27 October 2008.

71. *Associated Press*, "U.S. Offers $200,000 to Catch "Most Wanted" Taliban," 1 October 2007.

72. *BBC*, "US Issues Afghan Most Wanted List," 1 October 2007; Syed Shahzad, "Revolution in the Mountains (Part III): Through the Eyes of the Taliban," *Asia Times*, 5 May 2004; Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Taliban Welcome Back an Old Friend," *Asia Times*, 4 April 2008; Bill Roggio, "Report: Strike Targets Baitullah Mehsud's Hideout in Pakistan," *The Long War Journal*, 15 June 2008; *International Security Assistance Force* (ISAF), Press Release # 2008-020, 12 January 2008; Bill Roggio, "US Captures Senior al Qaeda Leader Mohammad Rahim," *The Long War Journal*, 14 March 2008; U.S. Department of Defense, Press Release 205–08, "Defense Department Takes Custody of a High-Value Detainee," 14 March 2008; Bill Roggio "Siraj Haqqani's Deputy Killed in Afghanistan," *The Weekly Standard*, 14 December 2007; *Combined Joint Task Force—101*, Press Release, "Coalition Forces Confirm Darim Sedgai Death," 26 January 2008.

73. These reports are "semi" private in that they are not usually made available to the general public, although the author was able, with a little cajoling and academic pleading, to acquire them, free of charge, for the periods under review.

74. Sudden increases in violence immediately following the eliminations might be based on the Pashtun tribal code of *badal* (revenge). Badal is the "means of enforcement by which an individual seeks personal justice for wrongs done against him or his kin group." Although a complicated social institution, retaliation does play a prominent role in Afghan society. Other custumary laws related to dispute resolution, like *nanwati* (forgiveness), *melmastia* (hospitality), and *jirga* (consensus building), are also inherent to Pashtun society. The author is indebted to an anonymous reviewer for these suggestions. See Thomas Barfield, *Afghan Customary Law and Its Relationship to Formal Judicial Institutions*, United States Institute for Peace (Washington, DC), 26 June 2003.

75. See Hafez and Hatfield, "Do Targeted Assassinations Work?" pp. 361–363, 367–377.

76. Hafez and Hatfield label a shift in activity the "substitution effect," where less costly activities are carried out in response to counterterrorism campaigns. Ibid., p. 365.

77. Three separate suicide bombers attacked members of the GoA. On 17 May, a suicide bomber wounded cultural minister Karim Khurram. On 18 May, a bomber attempted to assassinate Asadullah Khalid, the governor of Kandahar by ramming his explosive-laden car into the governor's SUV. And on 26 May, a bomber attacked the governor's official residency.

78. Syed Saleem Shahzad, "Taliban a Step Ahead of US assault," *Asia Times*, 11 August 2007.

79. Ibid.

80. Rahimullah Yusufzai "Spies in Their Ranks Worry Taliban," *The News International*, 18 May 2007.

81. Ibid.

82. *BBC*, "Taliban Sack Military Commander," 29 December 2007; Bill Roggio, "Mullah Omar Confirms Firing of Mullah Mansoor Dadullah," *The Long War Journal*, 2 January 2008; Bill Roggio, "Taliban Dismisses Senior Afghan Commander [Update]," *The Long War Journal*, 29 December 2007.

83. *BBC*, "Taliban Sack Military Commander," 2007.

84. Separating or isolating terrorist leaders from their followers and the broader community is an important facet of counterinsurgency doctrine. Sardar Ahmad, "Forces in Afghanistan Shift Focus to Taliban Leaders," *Agence France-Presse*, 2 January 2007.

85. Ibid.