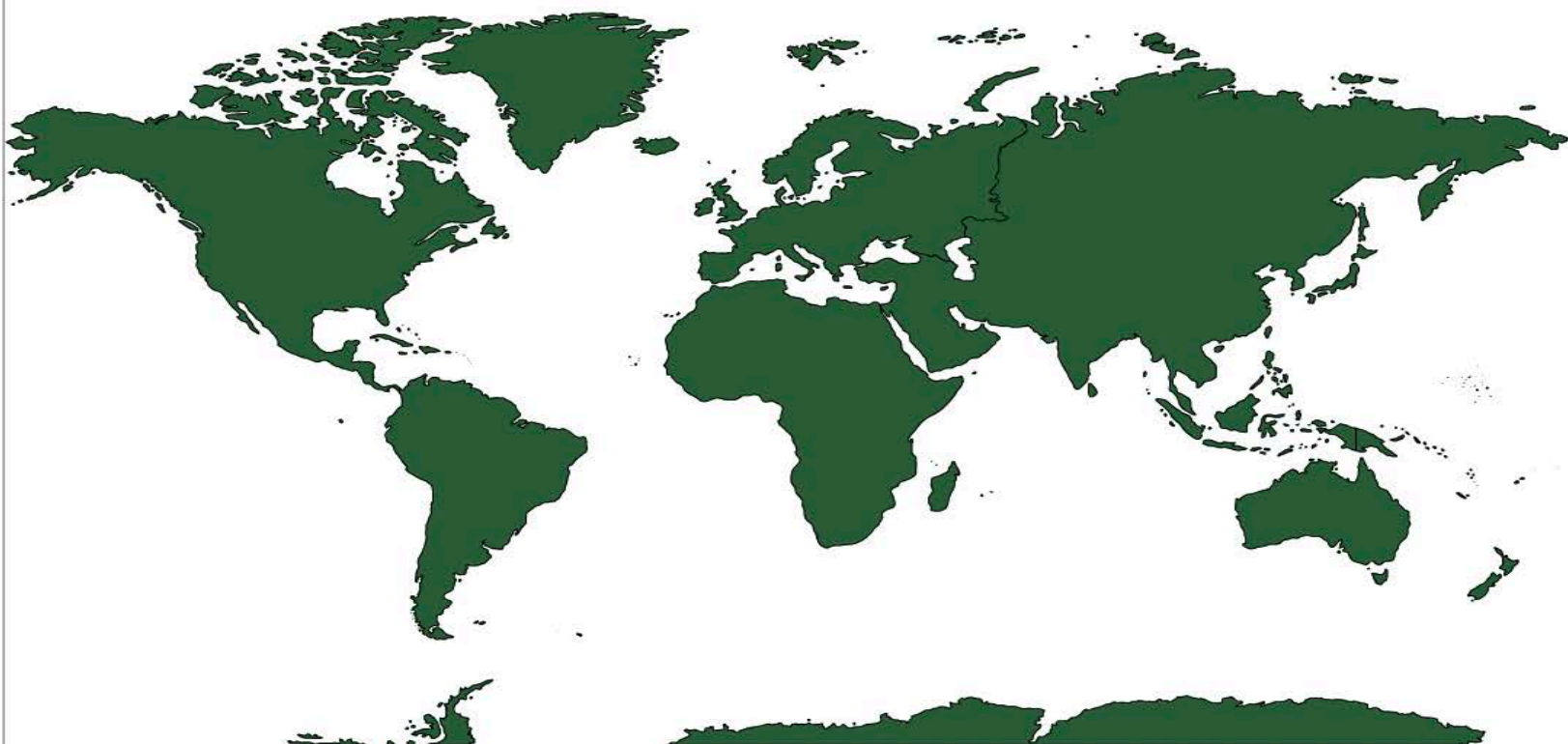


UTAH VALLEY UNIVERSITY
CENTER FOR NATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES

THE JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL SECURITY & STRATEGIC STUDIES

VOLUME 7 - ISSUE 1
SPRING 2024



The Journal of International Security and Strategic Studies

Volume 7
Issue 1
Spring 2024

The Journal of International Security and Strategic Studies

The Journal of International Security
and Strategic Studies

Center for National Security Studies
Utah Valley University
800 West University Parkway
Orem, UT 84058

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-journal-of-international-security-strategic-studies/>

The Journal of International Security and Strategic Studies

Volume 7

Spring 2024

Issue 1

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A Note from the Editor-in-Chief

Dear Readers,

I am thrilled to present to you the spring 2024 edition of the *Journal of International Security & Strategic Studies*. In this edition, we are excited to present a diverse array of scholarly contributions that illuminate various facets of international security. Each article encapsulates the dedication and intellect of our esteemed contributors. These articles highlight the pressing issues shaping our global landscape.

I would also like to thank my faculty advisor, Roberto Flores, and my dedicated staff. Their tireless efforts, professionalism, and attention to detail made this publication possible. Their contributions to the publication were invaluable.

We hope you find this issue as engaging and thought-provoking as we did. We look forward to your continued feedback, contributions, and support.

Sincerely,
Editor-in-Chief
Michelle Stanley



Ethiopia, from Stability to Civil War: A Multiple Streams Explanation of the United States Policies on Ethiopia

Mahemud Tekuya, Ph.D. / J.SD

Abstract

In April 2018, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power following a protracted popular uprising against the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF)-dominated regime in Ethiopia. Abiy, consolidating his power with the blessing of the United States, undertook political “reforms” that sidelined the TPLF. By November 2020, a power struggle between the Abiy administration and the TPLF turned into a catastrophic armed conflict, and Ethiopia became one of the hotspots of humanitarian crises in the world. The US, which considered the conflict an existential threat to its national security, imposed sanctions on the warring parties and delisted Ethiopia from the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). This article critically scrutinizes recent US policies on Ethiopia. Drawing on the Multiple Streams Approach (MSA), the article answers why the US changed its pro-Abiy policy and imposed sanctions on Ethiopia. In doing so, the article contributes to the scholarly discourse regarding the “reform” in Ethiopia by providing a detailed and nuanced explanation for why the US initially supported Abiy’s administration. Moreover, studying the United States’s rapid policy change from the MSA perspective, the article also provides an enormous contribution to the debate surrounding the conflict in Ethiopia. Finally, the article contributes to the growing scholarship on the policy process by empirically testing the MSA in the context of foreign policy and the conflict in Ethiopia.

Keywords: Multiple Streams Approach; Ethiopia; Civil War; Tigray; US Foreign Policy; Horn of Africa

Introduction

The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power in Ethiopia after overthrowing a military regime in 1991.¹ Since then, the EPRDF, a coalition of parties created and dominated by the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF), held an iron grip of power on the people of Ethiopia,² until a series of widespread protests in Oromia and Amhara brought Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed into power in April 2018.³ In a bid to monopolize power, Abiy presented himself as a "reformer" and implemented unprecedented changes, including releasing political prisoners,⁴ lifting media restrictions,⁵ welcoming exiled rebel groups back into Ethiopia,⁶ and making "peace" with neighboring Eritrea.⁷ These changes and corruption charges largely targeting former Tigrayan leaders exacerbated the tension between Abiy's administration and the TPLF. In November 2020, the TPLF attacked the northern command of the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF), and Ethiopia descended into a catastrophic civil war.⁸

1. David H. Shinn, "US–Ethiopia Relations from Roosevelt to Trump," *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 12, no. 2 (2018): 65, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27026555>; International Crisis Group, "Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism and its Discontents," September 4, 2009, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/ethiopia-ethnic-federalism-and-its-discontents>.

2. Shinn, "US–Ethiopia Relations," 65.

3. Harry Verhoeven & Michael Woldemariam, "Who Lost Ethiopia? The Unmaking of an African Anchor State and U.S. Foreign Policy," *Contemporary Security Policy*, 43, no. 4 (2022): 623. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2022.2091580>; "Ethiopia's Abiy Ahmed: The Nobel Prize Winner Who Went to War," *BBC*, October 11, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-43567007>.

4. Hamza Mohamed, "Ethiopia: Ex-Political Prisoners Revel in New-Found Freedom," *Al Jazeera*, July 4, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/7/4/ethiopia-ex-political-prisoners-revel-in-new-found-freedom>.

5. Jason Burke, "'These Changes Are Unprecedented': How Abiy Is Upending Ethiopian Politics," *The Guardian*, July 8, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/08/abiy-ahmed-upending-ethiopian-politics>.

6. Burke, "These Changes Are Unprecedented"; Aaron Maasho, "Exiled Leader of Ethiopian Rebel Group Returns Home Amid Reforms," *Reuters*, September 15, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKCN1LV0GL/>.

7. *BBC*, "Ethiopia's Abiy Ahmed"; Adam Taylor, "Why Eritrea Didn't Win a Nobel for Its Peace Accord When Ethiopia Did," *Washington Post*, October 11, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/10/11/why-eritrea-didnt-win-nobel-its-peace-accord-when-ethiopia-did/>.

8. Jon Abbink, "The Ethiopia Conflict in International Relations and Global Media Discourse," *E-International Relations*, November 21, 2021, <https://www>

The civil war has been marked by widespread humanitarian crises, including reports of massacres and sexual violence by all warring parties.⁹

In the beginning, Abiy was wholeheartedly embraced by the United States (US).¹⁰ The Trump administration condemned the TPLF when it attacked the northern command of the ENDF.¹¹ However, following the change in administration, President Biden changed the US's pro-Abiy policy, imposed sanctions on the warring parties,¹² and delisted Ethiopia from the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).¹³

Diverse views have been reflected as to why the Biden administration changed the pro-Abiy policy. For some, in imposing the sanctions, the US was seen to be “actively back[ing] the [TPLF] insurgency,” and “seeking a Libya-Iraq-Somalia-style intervention to shatter Ethiopia.”¹⁴ Others attributed the sanctions to “Abiy Ahmed’s refusal to obey US imperial orders” in three areas, including “reducing Ethiopia’s strong economic ties with China.”¹⁵ A third view associates the sanctions with

[e-ir.info/2021/11/21/the-ethiopia-conflict-in-international-relations-and-global-media-discourse/](https://www.e-ir.info/2021/11/21/the-ethiopia-conflict-in-international-relations-and-global-media-discourse/).

9. Lauren Ploch Blanchard, “Ethiopia’s Transition and the Tigray Conflict,” Congressional Research Service, September 9, 2021, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46905/4>.

10. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, “Who Lost Ethiopia?,” 633–36.

11. U.S. Department of State, “Briefing with Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Tibor P. Nagy and U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia Michael A. Raynor on the Situation in Ethiopia’s Tigray Region,” U.S. Department of State, November 19, 2020, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/briefing-with-assistant-secretary-for-african-affairs-tibor-p-nagy-and-u-s-ambassador-to-ethiopia-michael-a-raynor-on-the-situation-in-ethiopias-tigray-region/index.html>.

12. The White House, “Executive Order on Imposing Sanctions on Certain Persons with Respect to the Humanitarian and Human Rights Crisis in Ethiopia,” The White House, September 17, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/09/17/executive-order-on-imposing-sanctions-on-certain-persons-with-respect-to-the-humanitarian-and-human-rights-crisis-in-ethiopia/>.

13. Office of U.S. Trade Representative, “U.S. Terminates AGOA Trade Preference Program for Ethiopia, Mali and Guinea,” January 1, 2022, <https://ustr.gov/about-us/policy-offices/press-office/press-releases/2022/january/us-terminates-agoa-trade-preference-program-ethiopia-mali-and-guinea>.

14. Bronwyn Bruton and Ann Fitz-Gerald, “To End Ethiopia’s War, Biden Needs to Correct Course,” *Foreign Policy*, December 28, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/12/28/ethiopia-tigray-abiy-tplf-war-biden-needs-to-correct-course/>.

15. Worku Abera, “Opinion: Biden’s Blunder on Ethiopia,” E-International Relations, November 17, 2021, <https://www.e-ir.info/2021/11/17/opinion-bidens-blunder-on-ethiopia/>.

the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) and submits that the US changed its pro-Abiy policy due to Ethiopia's refusal to sign a US-brokered deal governing the filling and operation of the GERD.¹⁶ Yet another perspective claims that the US imposed the sanctions for "upholding universal rights" and "pushing for peace in Ethiopia."¹⁷

To take on these arguments, the first is logically unreasonable and factually inaccurate: neither the geopolitical and security interests of the United States justify "a Libya-Iraq-Somalia-style intervention" in Ethiopia, nor is there any evidence supporting that the US worked for the disintegration of Ethiopia. Quite the contrary. The statements issued by the US Department of State,¹⁸ various special envoys,¹⁹ and the President himself²⁰ show the United States's commitment to the continuity of the Ethiopian state. Moreover, the US, arguably fearing the possible disintegration of Ethiopia, explicitly warned the TPLF not to advance into Addis Ababa.²¹

16. Abera, "Opinion: Biden's Blunder on Ethiopia."

17. Mulugeta Gebregziabher, "The US Is Pushing for Peace in Ethiopia, But It Needs to Do More," *Ethiopia Insight*, January 22, 2022, <https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2022/01/22/the-us-is-pushing-for-peace-in-ethiopia-but-it-needs-to-do-more/>.

18. "The United States has deepening concerns about the ongoing crisis in Ethiopia's Tigray region as well as other threats to the sovereignty, national unity, and territorial integrity of Ethiopia." Anthony J. Blinken, "United States' Actions to Press for the Resolution of the Crisis in the Tigray Region of Ethiopia," U.S. Department of State, May 23, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/united-states-actions-to-press-for-the-resolution-of-the-crisis-in-the-tigray-region-of-ethiopia/>.

19. "The United States seeks a relationship with all people in Ethiopia; we want to see stability and prosperity restored to the entire country and for Ethiopia to regain its position as a regional and global leader." Jeffrey Feltman, "A Perspective on the Ethiopian–U.S. Relationship after a Year of Conflict," U.S. Department of State, November 1, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/a-perspective-on-the-ethiopian-u-s-relationship-after-a-year-of-conflict/>.

20. "The situation in and in relation to northern Ethiopia, which has been marked by activities that threaten the peace, security, and stability of Ethiopia and the greater Horn of Africa region [. . .] constitutes an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States." The White House, "Executive Order on Imposing Sanctions on Certain Persons with Respect to the Humanitarian and Human Rights Crisis in Ethiopia," September 17, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/09/17/executive-order-on-imposing-sanctions-on-certain-persons-with-respect-to-the-humanitarian-and-human-rights-crisis-in-ethiopia/>.

21. Feltman, "A Perspective on the Ethiopian–U.S. Relationship."

The second argument fails to stand on Abiy Ahmed's practice. Compared to the EPRDF regime, Abiy's administration followed pro-US policy and undertook several pro-American initiatives, including, liberalizing the state-led economy and distancing Ethiopia from China.²² Instead of facing sanctions, Abiy was, in fact, wholeheartedly embraced by the US due to such initiatives as demonstrated below.²³

The third view, the import of Ethiopia's refusal to sign a deal on the GERD, is misleading. While it is true that the US did pressure Ethiopia to sign a deal on the GERD, it happened during the Trump administration²⁴ and has nothing to do with the sanctions. Unlike the Trump administration, the Biden administration followed a relatively neutral policy on the GERD and even lifted the sanction imposed by President Donald Trump since Ethiopia filled the GERD without an agreement with Sudan and Egypt.²⁵

Finally, the fourth argument, which justifies the sanctions based on human rights values, does not provide a nuanced explanation of why the conflict in Ethiopia became the focus of the policy development in the US. It does not answer why the human rights violations in northern Ethiopia attracted the attention of US policymakers, while several other massive human rights violations across the world, including other parts of Ethiopia, did not. Moreover, the argument does not explain how the conflict in northern Ethiopia became agenda and in what circumstances it was changed into formal action by policymakers.

This paper intends to answer these questions and provide nuanced expansions to the recent US policies on Ethiopia in light of the Multiple Streams Approach (MSA). The MSA, a powerful conceptual framework for understanding the policymaking process, provides important explanations for the entire agenda-setting process and the Biden administration's rapid policy change concerning the conflict in northern Ethiopia. Section II provides a detailed description of the US's policy on Ethiopia: It begins by introducing the pre-2018 US policy on Ethiopia, and then it provides a detailed account of the 2018 reform and the conflict in northern Ethiopia. Finally, the section provides a brief

22. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, "Who Lost Ethiopia?," 634–35.

23. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, "Who Lost Ethiopia?," 633–36.

24. See Mahemud Eshtu Tekuya, "Sink or Swim: Alternatives for Unlocking the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam Dispute," *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*, (February 5, 2021): 59.

25. Feltman, "A Perspective on the Ethiopian–U.S. Relationship."

overview of the post-2018 US policies on Ethiopia. Section III reviews the literature associated with the MSA, which sets the background for section IV, which provides multiple streams of explanations for the recent US policies on Ethiopia. Section IV specifically analyzes two policies: (1) the US policy on the 2018 reform, and (2) the US policy on the war in Ethiopia.

The United States Foreign Policy on Ethiopia

Overview of Pre-2018 US Policy on Ethiopia

Although Ethiopia has had foreign relations with Middle Eastern, Asian, and European countries since the dawn of history,²⁶ in 1903 it established its first diplomatic relations with the US.²⁷ In 1903, Ethiopia signed a Treaty of Amity and Commerce with delegates of the US,²⁸ who opened a consulate in Addis Ababa in 1906.²⁹ Ethiopia sent its official delegation to the US in 1919 and in 1943 established a consulate in Washington DC.³⁰ During the Cold War, Ethiopia was a strategic ally of the Western bloc.³¹ Emperor Haile Selassie allowed the United States to establish a US Army radio station at Kagnew in the province of Eritrea.³² The US, in return, provided significant financial and military support to Ethiopia.³³

26. Getachew Metaferia, *Ethiopia and the United States: History, Diplomacy, and Analysis* (New York: Agora Publishing, 2009), 3.

27. Metaferia, *Ethiopia and the United States*, 3; Shinn, "US–Ethiopia Relations," 62.

28. Metaferia, *Ethiopia and the United States*, 3, 26.

29. Melaku Mulualem, "Foreign Policy Convergence between Ethiopia and America," Africa Portal, January 1, 2014, <https://www.africaportal.org/publications/foreign-policy-convergence-between-ethiopia-and-america/>.

30. Mulualem, "Foreign Policy Convergence."

31. Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia: 1885–1991*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: UK, 2001), 185–86.

32. The station, which hosted thousands of American soldiers, as well as marine research and National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) observation centers, gave the United States a foothold on the Red Sea during the height of the Cold War. Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, 185–86. See also Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians: A History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 258–59.

33. Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, 186, states: "US military aid in the period between 1946 and 1972 came to over \$US 180 million. Over 2,500 Ethiopians underwent diverse forms of military training in the United States between 1953 and 1968. The jet aircraft, anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons, naval craft, infantry weapons and sometimes even uniform were of American origin. In both equipment and training, the air force remained the most prestigious show-piece of American

This strong bilateral relationship would continue until Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown by Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, leader of the Dergue, or military junta, in 1974.³⁴ Following a “bloody path to power,” Mengistu “liquidate[d] all [his] contenders” and established a communist regime in Ethiopia.³⁵ This took Ethiopia into the Soviet camp and significantly compromised the US–Ethiopia relationship.³⁶ By 1977, the United States was forced to close the Kagnaw station.³⁷ The Ethiopia–US diplomatic relationship deteriorated until 1991, when the EPRDF came to power, overthrowing the military regime.³⁸

Following the downfall of Dergue, the Ethiopia–US diplomatic relation was rebuilt instantly, and the US began playing an important role in legitimizing the new EPRDF-led Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE).³⁹ Although Ethiopia’s strategic importance for the US had decreased due to the independence of Eritrea in 1993,⁴⁰ the US continued providing humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia.⁴¹ After September 11, 2001, the relationship between the two countries was taken to new heights, and Ethiopia became “the lynchpin of Washington’s counter-terrorism ambitions in the region.”⁴² The US 2002 National Security Strategy identified Ethiopia among the states that would serve as “anchors for regional engagement.”⁴³ This meant that Ethiopia’s extremely frustrating human rights records and its unwillingness to implement “neoliberal reforms have been frequently overlooked, as long as Addis governments were willing to lead in confronting socialist and military aid in Ethiopia.”

34. Haggai Erlich, *The Cross and the River: Ethiopia, Egypt, and the Nile* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 164.

35. Erlich, *The Cross and the River*, 165.

36. Shinn, “US–Ethiopia Relations,” 64–65; Verhoeven & Woldemariam, “Who Lost Ethiopia?,” 629; Mululem, “Foreign Policy Convergence.”

37. Shinn, “US–Ethiopia Relations,” 65.

38. Metaferia, *Ethiopia and the United States*, 4; Verhoeven & Woldemariam, “Who Lost Ethiopia?,” 629; Mululem, “Foreign Policy Convergence; Shinn, “US–Ethiopia Relations,” 65–66.

39. Shinn, “US–Ethiopia Relations,” 66.

40. Shinn, “US–Ethiopia Relations,” 66.

41. Mululem, “Foreign Policy Convergence.

42. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, “Who Lost Ethiopia?,” 629.

43. The White House, “The U.S. National Security Strategy,” The White House, May 23, 2002, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/africa/index2.html>.

Islamist enemies and help safeguard Western regional interests.”⁴⁴

As an anchor state, Ethiopia has fought with Al-Shabab in Somalia, and eventually became “the largest troop contributor to UN peacekeeping with over 8,300 uniformed personnel, the vast majority of them serving in Darfur (UNAMID), Abyei (UNISFA), and South Sudan (UNMISS).”⁴⁵ In recognition of its astonishing contributions to the Global War on Terror (GWOT) and the hosting of hundreds of thousands of refugees, “Ethiopia received soaring levels of official development assistance—US\$3 billion in 2011, rising to circa US\$5 billion in 2020.”⁴⁶ Because of Ethiopia’s role “as the net exporter of stability” in the region, the US continued tolerating problems of “moral hazard” that led the country into full-fledged civil war.⁴⁷

The 2018 Reform and the Conflict in Northern Ethiopia

Since the downfall of the military regime in 1991, the EPRDF held an iron grip of power on the people of Ethiopia.⁴⁸ It committed grave human rights violations including, inter alia, torture, extrajudicial killings, rape, and systemic persecution of journalists, politicians, and civil society organizations.⁴⁹ In 2015 and 2016, protests erupted across Ethiopia: the two largest ethnic groups—the Oromo and the Amhara⁵⁰—took to the streets opposing the human rights violations.⁵¹ In response,

44. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, “Who Lost Ethiopia?” 629.

45. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, “Who Lost Ethiopia?” 629. See also “Ethiopia: A Leading Contributor to UN Peacekeeping Efforts,” *UN News*, <https://news.un.org/en/gallery/1128322>.

46. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, “Who Lost Ethiopia?” 629.

47. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, “Who Lost Ethiopia?” 630. See Endalcachew Bayeh, “Post-2018 Ethiopia: State Fragility, Failure, or Collapse?,” *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 9, no. 1 (2022): 463, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01490-0>.

48. International Crisis Group, “Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism and its Discontents.”

49. Human Rights Watch, *Collective Punishment: War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity in the Ogaden Area of Ethiopia’s Somali Region*, Human Rights Watch, June 12, 2008, 63–64, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/ethiopia0608_1.pdf; United Nations Committee against Torture, “Concluding Observations of the Committee against Torture: Ethiopia,” U.N. Doc. CAT/C/ETH/CO/1, January 20, 2011, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g11/403/99/pdf/g1140399.pdf>.

50. US Central Intelligence Agency, *Ethiopia: The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/ethiopia/>.

51. René Lefort, “Ethiopia’s Crisis,” *Opendemocracy*, November 19, 2016, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/ethiopia-s-crisis/>.

the government arrested more than eleven (11) thousand protestors⁵² and killed an estimated 800 people.⁵³

Meanwhile, “Back in Washington, Ethiopian diaspora mobilization had prompted both the US House and Senate to table resolutions condemning the EPRDF’s human rights record and urging the executive branch to recalibrate the relationship.”⁵⁴ The US diplomats eventually became concerned about the stability of Ethiopia and began pushing for reform around 2017.⁵⁵ At the height of the crisis, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn suddenly declared his resignation.⁵⁶ In April 2018, Ahmed Abiy was appointed as a Chairman of the EPRDF and was eventually sworn in as Ethiopia’s new prime minister.⁵⁷ In a few months, Abiy implemented unprecedented measures, including releasing political prisoners,⁵⁸ lifting media restrictions,⁵⁹ welcoming exiled rebel groups back into Ethiopia,⁶⁰ appointing women to half of his cabinet posts,⁶¹ making “peace” with neighboring Eritrea,⁶² and promising to liberalize Ethiopia’s state-led economy.⁶³

By June 2018, Abiy sparked euphoria within the country and in the diaspora: Ethiopians from all walks of life began rallying in support of his message of forgiveness, love, reconciliation, and unity.⁶⁴ On June

52. Amnesty International, “Ethiopia Offline: Evidence of Social Media Blocking and Internet Censorship in Ethiopia,” December 14, 2016, 13, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR2553122016ENGLISH.pdf>

53. Amnesty International, “Ethiopia Offline,” 10.

54. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, “Who Lost Ethiopia?,” 632.

55. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, “Who Lost Ethiopia?,” 632.

56. “Ethiopian Prime Minister Resigns after Mass Protests,” *The Guardian*, February 15, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/15/ethiopia-prime-minister-hailemariam-desalegn-resigns-after-mass-protests>.

57. “Abiy Ahmed Sworn In as Ethiopia’s Prime Minister,” *Al Jazeera*, April 2, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/4/2/abiy-ahmed-sworn-in-as-ethiopia-prime-minister>.

58. Mohamed, “Ethiopia: Ex-Political Prisoners Revel.”

59. Burke, “These Changes Are Unprecedented.”

60. Burke, “These Changes Are Unprecedented”; Maasho, “Exiled Leader.”

61. Jason Burke, “Women Win Half of Ethiopia’s Cabinet Roles in Reshuffle,” *The Guardian*, October 15, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/16/women-win-half-of-ethiopia-cabinet-roles-in-reshuffle>.

62. BBC, “Ethiopia’s Abiy Ahmed”; see also Taylor, “Why Eritrea Didn’t Win.”

63. Claire Klobucista, “Ethiopia: East Africa’s Emerging Giant,” Council on Foreign Relations, November 4, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/ethiopia-east-africas-emerging-giant>.

64. Hannah Giorgis, “Abiy Ahmed Meets the Ethiopian Diaspora,” *The Atlan-*

23, 2018, one of these rallies was disrupted by deadly grenade attacks that killed one and injured more than 150 persons.⁶⁵ Abiy swiftly characterized the action as an assassination attempt on his life, and an investigation by the Ethiopian government “attributed the explosions to the former head of the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA), Getachew Assefa, and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF).”⁶⁶ The federal government issued an arrest warrant for Getachew Assefa.⁶⁷ The TPLF refused to hand over Getachew and eventually appointed him as its central committee member.⁶⁸ This and corruption charges largely targeting former Tigrayan leaders exacerbated the tension between the federal government and the TPLF.

In December 2019, the ruling parties of all regional states, except the TPLF, agreed to dismantle the EPRDF and form the new Prosperity Party (PP).⁶⁹ The TPLF considered the formation of PP as an attempt to destroy ethnic-based federalism and return to the unilateral politics of pre-1991.⁷⁰ To make matters worse, the Ethiopian Election Commission announced, around March 2020, that it could not organize the elections scheduled for August 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷¹ Then the House of Federation (HoF), which was mandated to interpret the Ethiopian constitution, decided to postpone the election throughout Ethiopia.⁷²

tic, August 4, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/08/abiy-ahmed-meets-the-ethiopian-diaspora/566591/>.

65. Paul Schemm, “At Least 1 Dead, Over 150 Hurt in Ethiopia after Grenade Attack at Massive Rally for New Reformist Leader,” *Washington Post*, June 23, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/grenade-attack-kills-a-few-people-at-massive-rally-for-ethiopias-new-reformist-leader/2018/06/23/db30febe-76c1-11e8-b4b7-308400242c2e_story.html.

66. Moses Tofa, Alagaw Ababu Kifle, and Hubert Kinkoh, *Political and Media Analysis on The Tigray Conflict in Ethiopia*, European Institute of Peace, January/February, 2022, 8, https://www.eip.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Political-and-media-analysis-on-the-Tigray-conflict-in-Ethiopia_-finalised.pdf.

67. Tofa, et al., 8.

68. Tofa, et al., 8.

69. Tofa, et al., 8.

70. Tofa, et al., 8.

71. Dawit Endeshaw, “Ethiopia Postpones August Election Due to Coronavirus,” *Reuters/Firstpost*, March 31, 2020/April 1, 2020, <https://www.firstpost.com/world/ethiopia-postpones-august-election-due-to-coronavirus-8212271.html>.

72. See, generally, Legesse Tigabu Mengie, “COVID-19 and Elections in Ethiopia: Exploring Constitutional Interpretation by the House of the Federation as an Exit Strategy,” *Law, Democracy and Development* 25 (2021), <https://ssrn.com>

Defying the decision of the HoF, the TPLF held an election in Tigray and won more than 98% of the vote.⁷³ The federal government instantly rejected the legitimacy of the election.⁷⁴ For its part, the TPLF announced it would not recognize the legitimacy of the federal government after the end of its constitutional mandate on October 5, 2020.⁷⁵ In response, the federal government decided to “cut ties” with the TPLF and directly “work with local institutions in Tigray to provide ‘basic services’ to the region.”⁷⁶ The mutual delegitimization exacerbated the tensions and eventually led to the outbreak of a full-fledged civil war.⁷⁷

On November 3, 2020, the TPLF assaulted and took control of the assets of the northern command of the ENDF.⁷⁸ In response, the federal government issued a six-month state of emergency in Tigray, and Abiy Ahmed announced what he called “a law enforcement operation” against the TPLF.⁷⁹ At the beginning of the war, the TPLF had “a large paramilitary force and a well-drilled local militia, thought to number perhaps 250,000 troops combined.”⁸⁰ However, the ENDF, supported by Amhara and Afar militias, and Eritrean Defense Force (EDF) (hereinafter “allied forces”) were able to control significant parts of Tigray, forcing the TPLF out of Mekelle, the capital city of Tigray, around December 2020.⁸¹

/abstract=3824490

73. Medihane Ekubamichael, “TPLF Wins Regional Election by Landslide,” *Addis Standard*, September 11, 2020, <https://addisstandard.com/news-tplf-wins-regional-election-by-landslide/>.

74. “Ethiopian Parliament Votes to Cut Ties with Tigray Region Leaders,” *Al Jazeera*, October 7, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/7/ethiopia-parliament-votes-to-cut-ties-with-tigray-region-leaders>.

75. Siyanne Mekonnen and Medihane Ekubamichael, “Tigray Region Says It Will Defy Federal Laws Enacted as of Oct. 05; EDP Calls for Transitional Gov’t, Inclusive Dialogue & Reconciliation,” *Addis Standard*, September 29, 2020, <https://addisstandard.com/news-tigray-region-says-it-will-defy-federal-laws-enacted-as-of-oct-05-edp-calls-for-transitional-govt-inclusive-dialogue-reconciliation/>.

76. “Ethiopian Parliament Votes to Cut Ties.”

77. Tofa et al., 10–11.

78. Tofa et al., 11.

79. Tofa et al., 14.

80. International Crisis Group, “Clashes over Ethiopia’s Tigray Region: Getting to a Ceasefire and National Dialogue,” International Crisis Group, November 5, 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/ethiopias-clash-tigray-getting-ceasefire-and-national-dialogue>.

81. Tofa et al., 20.

After controlling Mekelle, Prime Minister Abiy promptly declared the end of the military confrontation.⁸² Yet, the war was far from over as the TPLF was fighting guerrilla warfare from the mountainous parts of Tigray.⁸³ While the parties engaged in the protracted military confrontation, the Ethiopian government labeled the TPLF as a terrorist organization on May 8, 2021.⁸⁴ By June, the TPLF started what it called the “Alula operation,” a counter-offensive against the allied forces.⁸⁵ In an astonishing turn of events, the TPLF began regaining grounds in Tigray and eventually recaptured Mekelle on June 28, 2021.⁸⁶ That day, the federal “government declared a unilateral ceasefire.”⁸⁷ Thereafter, the war expanded to the neighboring Amhara and Afar regions.

By the end of November 2021, the Tigrayan rebel forces occupied significant parts of the Amhara and Afar regional states and threatened to control Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia.⁸⁸ At this point, Abiy Ahmed decided to lead the ENDF from the battleground,⁸⁹ announcing the beginning of counteroffensive operations in various parts of Amhara and Afar. The TPLF subsequently faced devastating defeats at the battle of Kasagita (Afar), and Gashena (Amhara).⁹⁰ Following the liberation of most of the Amhara and Afar territories, the federal government decided not to advance into Tigray for the second time.⁹¹ However, around August 2022, another round of war erupted, and the allied forces again controlled about 70 percent of Tigray.⁹² While the allied forces were advancing to Mekelle, the warring parties signed a Permanent Cessation Hostility Agreement (PCHA) in Preto-

82. Tofa et al., 20.

83. Tofa et al., 20–21.

84. Tofa et al., 21.

85. Asayehgn Desta, “A Reflection on Tigray’s Maneuver Action Plan that Routed Abiy’s Allied Forces,” Aigaforum, July 21, 2021, <http://aigaforum.com/article2021/TDF-Alula-Operation.htm>.

86. Tofa et al., 21.

87. Tofa et al., 21.

88. Tofa et al., 27.

89. “Ethiopia’s PM Abiy Ahmed Vows to Lead Army ‘From the Battlefield,’” *Al Jazeera*, November 23, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/23/ethiopia-abiy-vows-to-lead-army-from-the-battlefront>.

90. Tofa et al., 33.

91. Tofa et al., 33.

92. “Ethiopia Asserts 70% of Tigray Now under Military Control,” AP News, November 11, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/africa-kenya-nairobi-ethiopia-government-and-politics-d0a71dd66f8fdcd0ad545e1b341bde1b>.

ria, South Africa.⁹³ The PCHA, brokered by the African Union and the US, inter alia, required the TPLF to disarm its heavy weapons, declare the election in Tigray was void, and call for a new transitional government in Tigray.⁹⁴

Brief Overview of Post-2018 United States Policies on Ethiopia

As noted previously, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power following a series of nationwide protests in Ethiopia. Before he became the Prime Minister, Abiy was not known to the American diplomats, but his ethnic identity and position in Oromia's government were encouraging.⁹⁵ As one US senior official remarked, "Because of all the protests and the growing anarchy, there was an expectation that whoever came next had to be an Oromo. . . . Some said only an Oromo could save ethnic federalism and return Ethiopia to stability."⁹⁶ Immediately, Abiy was wholeheartedly embraced by the US.⁹⁷ Abiy's messages about unity and reform impressed many US officials: "Some people at the embassy called him an Ethiopian JFK. [. . .] He clearly loved America. We felt that would allow us to connect."⁹⁸ After almost three decades of partnership characterized by massive human rights violations, a real opportunity for deepening the relationship occurred: "US staff on the ground took the lead in endorsing Abiy wholeheartedly and selling the policy to the most influential people in the Trump Administration, who generally regarded Africa as a low priority."⁹⁹

Following the change in US administration, President Biden changed the US's pro-Abiy policy and called for an immediate cessation of hos-

93. Bethlehem Feleke, "Warring Parties in Ethiopia Agree on 'Permanent Cessation of Hostilities,'" *CNN*, November 3, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/02/africa/ethiopia-cessation-hostilities-intl/index.html>.

94. African Union, "Agreement for Lasting Peace through a Permanent Cessation of Hostilities between the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (Federal Government) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)," <https://igad.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Download-the-signed-agreement-here.pdf>.

95. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, "Who Lost Ethiopia?," 632.

96. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, "Who Lost Ethiopia?," 632.

97. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, "Who Lost Ethiopia?," 632.

98. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, "Who Lost Ethiopia?," 633 (internal citation omitted).

99. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, "Who Lost Ethiopia?," 633 (internal citation omitted).

tilities and unfettered access to humanitarian aid.¹⁰⁰ As the warring parties continued committing gross human rights violations, the Biden administration declared “the situation in [. . .] northern Ethiopia [as] an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States.”¹⁰¹ In addition to imposing sanctions on the warring parties,¹⁰² the Biden administration also terminated Ethiopia from the AGOA due to alleged human rights violations in northern Ethiopia.¹⁰³ The next section provides a multiple streams explanation of the United States’s post-2018 policies, after briefly overviewing the Multiple Streams Approach (MSA).

Brief Overview of The Multiple Streams Approach

Drawing on the “garbage can model,”¹⁰⁴ the MSA provides a powerful conceptual framework for understanding the policy process—more specifically agenda-setting and rapid policy change—through three separate and independent streams: problems, policies, and politics.¹⁰⁵ First, as the name implies, problem stream refers to the issue or the crisis that policymakers consider problematic and deserving of their intervention. It has four subcomponents: (1) indicators, (2) focusing events, (3) load, and (4) feedback.¹⁰⁶ While indicators show “how actors identify and monitor potential problems,”¹⁰⁷ sudden focusing events, often attached to particular problems, provide a “powerful impetus for action or change.”¹⁰⁸ Load is “the capacity of institutions to deal with problems.”¹⁰⁹ Feedback refers to “information provided by

100. The White House, “Executive Order on Imposing Sanctions.”

101. The White House, “Executive Order on Imposing Sanctions.”

102. The White House, “Executive Order on Imposing Sanctions.”

103. Office of U.S. Trade Representative, “U.S. Terminates AGOA.”

104. Nicole Herweg, Nikolaos Zahariadis, and Reimut Zohlnhöfer, “The Multiple Streams Framework: Foundations, Refinements, and Empirical Applications,” *Theories of the Policy Process*, Christopher M. Weible and Paul A. Sabatier, eds., 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018).

105. Michael Jones, Holly Peterson, Jonathan Pierce, Nicole Herweg, Amiel Bernal, Holly Lamberta Raney, and Nikolaos Zahariadis “A River Runs Through It: A Multiple Streams Meta-Review,” *Policy Studies Journal* 44, no. 1 (2016): 14. and John Kingdon, “Agendas Alternatives & Public Policies” (2ed, 2003). Longman.

106. Jones et al., 15.

107. Jones et al., 15.

108. Jones et al., 15.

109. Jones et al., 15.

analogous programs related to the problem of interest.”¹¹⁰

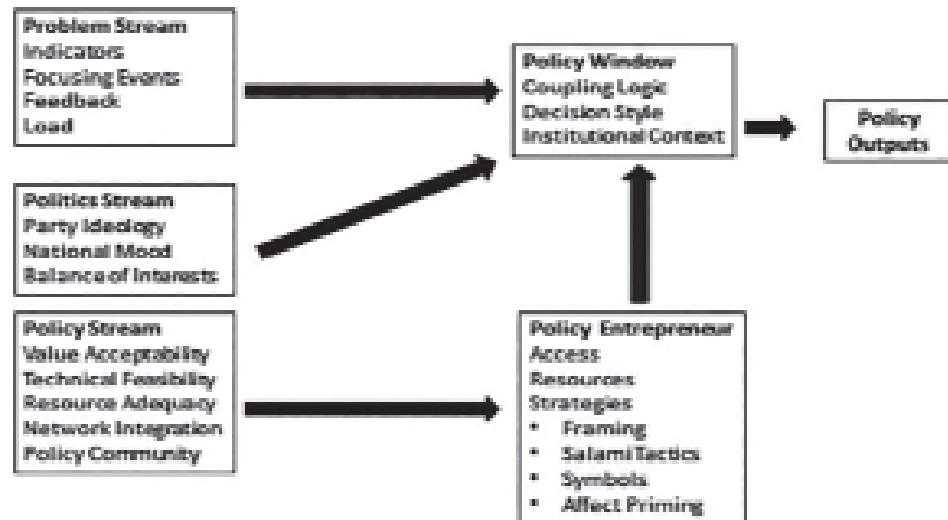


Figure 1. The Multiple Streams Approach.¹¹¹

The second stream, the policy stream, refers to the range of policy ideas and proposals for addressing the given societal problem.¹¹² Within the policy stream, the survival of ideas or proposals would be determined by various factors including, inter alia, value acceptability, technical feasibility, and resource adequacy.¹¹³ The third stream, the political stream, is about “the institutional and cultural context of the agenda or output of concern.”¹¹⁴ The political stream is determined by three sub-components: (1) national mood, (2) party ideology, and (3) balance of interests.¹¹⁵ While the national mood refers to “the general orientation of the public toward issues, values, or solutions relevant to the policy problem,” party ideology is about “the aggregate orientation of the political parties within relevant institutions.”¹¹⁶ The third subcomponent, the balance of interests, focuses on “the aggregate position of relevant interests, including arrayed advocacy groups and other actors interested in a particular problem.”¹¹⁷

110. Jones et al., 15.

111. Jones et al., 15.

112. Jones et al., 15–16; Herweg et al.

113. Jones et al., 16.

114. Jones et al., 16.

115. Jones et al., 16; Herweg et al.

116. Jones et al., 16.

117. Jones et al., 16.

The MSA assumes that the three streams operate independently. In a temporal period, often called the policy window, however, the three streams—policy, politics, and problems—can be combined to create a conducive environment for policymaking or change.¹¹⁸ The policy window has two important subcomponents: (1) coupling logic, the logic or arguments used to couple streams, and (2) decision style, the “amount of information needed before a decision can be made.”¹¹⁹ Policy entrepreneurs help to seize the policy window of opportunity, providing “the necessary dose of agency required to couple the streams and shape policy outputs.”¹²⁰ Key factors such as resources (e.g., time and money), access to policymakers, and strategies (e.g., manipulating, bargaining, etc.) determine the success of policy entrepreneurs.¹²¹

MSA Explanations of US Policies on Ethiopia

Having briefly introduced the MSA, this section now provides the MSA explanation for the recent US policies on Ethiopia. It first demystifies the United States policy on the 2018 reform in Ethiopia, and thereafter it takes on the war in northern Ethiopia.

A. Demystifying the US Policy on the 2018 Reform

1. Three Streams: Problem, Policy, and Politics

The Problem Stream. As noted previously, factors such as indicators, focusing events, and policy feedback significantly shape the problem stream. When Abiy Ahmed came to power in 2018, all of these factors were present in Ethiopia. With regard to indicators, the reports of various human rights institutions, which exposed egregious human rights abuses, have played an enormous role in influencing the problem stream. The US Department of State, for instance, documented gross human rights violations in Ethiopia including, *inter alia*, “arbitrary deprivation of life, disappearances, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment by security forces [as well as] lack of accountability in cases involving rape and violence against women”¹²²

118. Jones et al., 14–16.

119. Jones et al., 16.

120. Jones et al., 16.

121. Jones et al., 16.

122. U.S. Department of State, “2017 Country Reports On Human Rights Practices: Ethiopia,” 2017, 1, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Ethiopia.pdf>.

The protests that made Ethiopia ungovernable; the state of emergency issued to crack down on the protestors;¹²³ and the Irrecha massacre, in which the government claimed 55 people died, but “opposition groups estimate nearly 700 died” by security forces,¹²⁴ were shocking focusing events that directed public attention (both at home and in the US) toward the human rights violations and instability in Ethiopia. Moreover, the defiant protest by Feyisa Lilesa, a silver medalist athlete from Ethiopia, at the Rio Olympics brought the wave of protests in Ethiopia to the world’s attention¹²⁵ and significantly shaped public opinion.

Policy feedback elements also influenced the problem streams. As noted above, the pre-2018 US policy on Ethiopia was geared toward counterterrorism and regional stability. This policy had two implications. First—devastating to the people of Ethiopia—the US had to tolerate the massive human rights violations to protect its security interests in the Horn of Africa. Second—detrimental to Western interests—the US had to accept China’s growing economic influence in Ethiopia. Ultimately, the desire to contain China’s influence in Africa forced the Trump administration to adopt a pro-Abiy policy, as discussed below.

The Policy Stream. For policy solutions or proposals to have legitimacy, they must be morally acceptable, economically affordable, and technically feasible. As has been noted previously, Abiy took unprecedented measures, including, *inter alia*, releasing political prisoners, lifting restrictions on the independent media, making peace with neighboring Eritrea, liberalizing the economy, and distancing Ethiopia from China.¹²⁶ For the US, supporting these measures meant addressing the human rights problems of Ethiopia while protecting its security interests in the Horn of Africa. Moreover, it also meant “a major ideological

123. “State of Emergency Proclamation for the Maintenance of Public Peace and Security Council of Ministers Proclamation No.1/2016” [State of Emergency Proclamation No. 1/2016], Ethiopia, October 8, 2016.

124. Human Rights Watch, “Fuel on the Fire,” Security Force Response to the 2016 Irreecha Cultural Festival,” September 19, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/09/20/fuel-fire/security-force-response-2016-irreecha-cultural-festival>.

125. Alastair Jamieson, “Feyisa Lilesa, Ethiopian Runner, Makes Defiant Protest Gesture at Rio Olympics,” *NBC News*, August 22, 2016, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/2016-rio-summer-olympics/feyisa-lilesa-ethiopian-runner-makes-defiant-protest-gesture-rio-olympics-n635761>.

126. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, “Who Lost Ethiopia?,” 632–34.

and strategic shift that, from a US standpoint, would bolster Ethiopia's role as a regional anchor: pulling the country away from Beijing's orbit."¹²⁷ It can, therefore, be concluded that the US found supporting Abiy to be morally acceptable, economically affordable, and technically feasible.

The Political Stream. Factors such as national mood, party ideology, and balance of interests shape the political stream. When Abiy Ahmed came to power in 2018, Ethiopia was in euphoria. Abiy's message about unity and reform also impressed many US officials. As one diplomat remarked: "Abiy was a disruptor and we liked that. . . . He was changing everything, all the time. It was a period of mania. Ethiopians could not keep up, we could not keep up."¹²⁸ Regarding party ideology, the US administrations were always unhappy about the growing influence of China in the Horn of Africa.¹²⁹ "But the centrality of China in US foreign policy was taken to an entirely different level by the Trump administration, which strongly subscribed to the idea of a New Cold War."¹³⁰ As for the balance of interests, Abiy's reform agenda was overwhelmingly supported by almost all advocacy groups and think tanks, often calling him "Africa's new talisman."¹³¹ This signaled the opening of the policy window.

2. Policy Window and Policy Entrepreneurs

As noted above, policy widow happens when three streams (problem, policy, and politics) are combined and create a conducive environment for policymaking or change. From the US perspective, supporting Abiy meant resolving the multifaceted problems facing Ethiopia, and addressing the constraints associated with the country's "illiberal state-building" model.¹³² It was a widely acceptable, economically affordable, and technically feasible policy. It was also politically helpful to the US in its Cold War against China. The three streams are henceforth com-

127. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, "Who Lost Ethiopia?," 633.

128. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, "Who Lost Ethiopia?," 632–33 (internal citation omitted).

129. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, "Who Lost Ethiopia?," 634.

130. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, "Who Lost Ethiopia?," 634 (internal citation omitted).

131. David Pilling and Lionel Barber, "Ethiopia's Abiy Ahmed: Africa's New Talisman," *Financial Times*, February 20, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/abc678b6-346f-11e9-bb0c-42459962a812>.

132. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, "Who Lost Ethiopia?," 634.

bined, creating the policy window of opportunity.

Policy entrepreneurs immediately seized the policy opportunity, and various advocacy groups and think tanks started expressing their support to Prime Minister Abiy.¹³³ The US embassy in Addis Ababa started selling Abiy's reform agenda to the decision makers in the Trump administration. As a diplomat close to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo revealed:

Ambassador [Michael] Raynor [US Ambassador to Ethiopia] immediately moved to support the transition. That was brave, he took a lot of initiative. . . . He never waited for Washington to make statements, signal his support, help him [Abiy] get access to the administration. We knew that was crucial to help make possible fundamental changes in the party and in the country.¹³⁴

The United States subsequently issued the following policy strategy statement:

Ethiopia's reform agenda, if properly executed, will greatly strengthen its capacity to be a strong partner to the United States in areas of US strategic priority: promoting Horn of Africa stability, countering terrorism, countering Chinese and Russian influence in the region, and promoting US commercial opportunity via the fastest-growing economy in Africa. Second, our role in supporting Ethiopia's pivot toward reform, and the resulting ascendance of Prime Minister Abiy, gives us access, influence, and goodwill with the Ethiopian government that is exponentially greater than it has ever been.¹³⁵

Although a detailed analysis of the socioeconomic and political impacts of the US pro-Abiy policy is beyond the purview of this paper, the following remarks can be made regarding the ramifications of the policy for Ethiopia. First, instead of crafting a careful strategy for transitioning Ethiopia into democracy, particularly through national reconciliation and a transitional roadmap, the US policy effectively enabled Abiy to consolidate power through unconditional financial support.

133. See, e.g., *BBC*, "Ethiopia's Abiy Ahmed."

134. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, "Who Lost Ethiopia?," 633 (internal citation omitted).

135. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, "Who Lost Ethiopia?," 636 (internal citation omitted).

Second, in lieu of promoting consensus through dialogue and elite bargaining, the policy strongly incentivized Abiy to undertake an uncompromising position against his rivals, and eventually Ethiopia descended into civil war.¹³⁶ As discussed, the US ultimately changed its pro-Abiy policy after witnessing the devastating impacts of the war. The next section investigates this change in policy in light of the MSA.

B. Demystifying the US Policy on the War in Northern Ethiopia

1. Three Streams: Problems, Policy, and Politics

Problem Streams. According to MSA, factors such as indicators, focusing events, and policy feedback significantly shape the problem stream. When the Biden administration characterized the situation in northern Ethiopia as an “extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States,”¹³⁷ imposed sanctions on the warring parties,¹³⁸ and delisted Ethiopia from AGOA,¹³⁹ all these factors were present in Ethiopia. Concerning indicators, experts who testified before Congress in December 2020 underlined the devastating impacts of the war calling for, inter alia, cession of hostilities, withdrawal of Eritrean troops from Ethiopia, unfettered access to humanitarian aid, and United Nations (UN)-sanctioned investigation on the atrocities committed in and around Tigray.¹⁴⁰ Various human rights institutions and think tanks followed suit throughout 2021 and issued reports, often exposing the massive human rights violations committed in northern Ethiopia. Later, a joint investigation by the UN and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission concluded that all parties to the conflict had committed “gross violations and abuses of international human rights law, and serious violations of international humanitarian law, and international refugee law.”¹⁴¹

136. Verhoeven & Woldemariam, “Who Lost Ethiopia?” 640–42.

137. The White House, “Executive Order on Imposing Sanctions.”

138. The White House, “Executive Order on Imposing Sanctions.”

139. Office of U.S. Trade Representative, “U.S. Terminates AGOA.”

140. See, e.g., Lauren Ploch Blanchard, “The Unfolding Conflict in Ethiopia” U.S. House of Representatives, House Foreign Affairs Committees Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations, Congressional Research Service, December 1, 2020, <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/TE10058.html>; Yoseph Badwaza, “Ethiopia: Restoring Peace and Democratic Reforms,” December 3, 2020, <https://freedomhouse.org/article/ethiopia-restoring-peace-and-democratic-reforms>.

141. United Nations, *Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Joint Inves-*

Reports of several shocking events emerged in November 2020. Nima Elbagir of CNN reported from the war-torn Tigray Region about Eritrean troops “killing, raping and blocking humanitarian aid to starving populations,”¹⁴² and other reports about the massacre in Axum,¹⁴³ and “ethnic cleansing”¹⁴⁴ are among events that directed public attention all over the world toward the devastating consequences of the civil war in Ethiopia. Moreover, the falling of two strategic towns—Dessie and Kombolcha—to TPLF forces around August 2021¹⁴⁵ is another shocking event that drew extreme concern from the public about the security and continuity of Ethiopia. Regarding policy feedback, the US pro-Abiy policy had negative feedback that influenced the problem streams. As discussed, the policy contributed its share to the civil war by, for instance, incentivizing Abiy to take an uncompromising position against his rivals.

Policy Streams. According to MSA, policy solutions or proposals should be acceptable, economically affordable, and technically feasible. As discussed, the policy proposals that imposed sanctions and delisted Ethiopia from AGOA faced resistance from Ethiopians living both at home and in the diaspora.¹⁴⁶ However, given the severity of the humanitarian crisis, it is likely that the American public may have found them morally acceptable. The policies, despite their unintended economic

tigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by all Parties to the Conflict in the Tigray Region of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 11, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3947207>.

142. Nima Elbagir, Barbara Arvanitdis, and Eliza Mackintosh. “Eritrean Troops Disguised as Ethiopian Military Are Blocking Critical Aid in Tigray,” *CNN*, May 13, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/12/africa/tigray-axum-aid-blockade-cmd-intl/index.html>.

143. Amnesty International, “Ethiopia: Eritrean Troops’ Massacre of Hundreds of Axum Civilians May Amount to Crime Against Humanity,” February 26, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/02/ethiopia-eritrean-troops-massacre-of-hundreds-of-axum-civilians-may-amount-to-crime-against-humanity/>.

144. Agnès Callamard and Kenneth Roth, “Ethiopia’s Invisible Ethnic Cleansing: The World Can’t Afford to Ignore Tigray,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 2, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ethiopia/2022-06-02/ethiopias-invisible-ethnic-cleansing>.

145. “Ethiopia: Tigrayan Forces ‘Seize Strategic Town in Amhara Region,’” *The Guardian*, October 30, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/30/ethiopia-tigrayan-forces-seize-strategic-town-in-amhara-region>.

146. Mamo Mihretu, “Don’t Remove Ethiopia’s AGOA Trade Privileges,” *Foreign Policy*, October, 13, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/10/13/ethiopia-agoa-trade-biden-abiy-dont-remove-eligibility/>.

consequences for the people of Ethiopia, were economically affordable for the US. They were also technically feasible.

Political Streams. According to MSA, factors such as national mood, party ideology, and balance of interests shape the political stream. International mainstream media, such as CNN, BBC, *Al Jazeera*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, Associated Press, and Reuters, had been reporting about the impacts of the war, often with titles such as “torture and extrajudicial killings,” “rape as a weapon of war,” and “hunger as a political weapon.”¹⁴⁷ This may have effectively shaped the national mood in the US toward supporting the sanctions.

The change in the US administration also created a conducive environment for policy change. As discussed, the Trump administration, which ran against a US foreign policy of liberal hegemony and followed the “America-first” ideology rather than human rights values, was more concerned about containing the influence of China in the Horn of Africa. However, the Biden administration, which follows a liberal hegemonic foreign policy, was more concerned about human rights and regaining the United States’s role as the global leader than containing China in the Horn of Africa. More importantly, the change in administration brought politicians close to the TPLF into office with key decision-making positions. For instance, Susan Rice, a close friend of Meles Zenawi, the late TPLF chairman and Ethiopia’s prime minister, was an advisor to President Biden and Director of the Domestic Policy Council of the United States from 2021–2023. Rice, who had once called Zenawi “brilliant,” and “a son of Ethiopia and a father to its rebirth,”¹⁴⁸ accused the Ethiopian government, on Twitter, of committing “war crimes” before taking office.¹⁴⁹ The US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken also tweeted condemning the Ethiopian government for “ethnic cleansing.”¹⁵⁰

147. See, generally, Tofa et al.

148. Fromothermedia, “Text of Amb. Susan Rice Speech at the Funeral of Meles Zenawi,” *Horn Affairs*, September 15, 2012, <https://hornaffairs.com/2012/09/15/text-of-amb-susan-rice-speech-at-the-funeral-of-meles-zenawi/>.

149. Susan Rice (@AmbassadorRice), “In other words, war crimes,” Twitter, November 22, 2020, 8:42 a.m. <https://twitter.com/AmbassadorRice/status/1330537213373927425>.

150. Jennifer Hansler, “Blinken: Acts of ‘Ethnic Cleansing’ Committed in Western Tigray,” *CNN*, March 10, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/10/politics/blinken-tigray-ethnic-cleansing/index.html>.

As for the balance of interests, several advocacy groups organized by the Ethiopian diaspora community opposed the sanctions. Both the Ethiopian government and TPLF-affiliated advocacy groups hired lobbying firms for advancing their respective interests.¹⁵¹ However, since TPLF advocates had more access to the decision makers in Washington DC, the anti-sanction advocate groups managed only to have the TPLF included among those groups sanctioned.

2. Policy Windows and Policy Entrepreneurs

As discussed, policy window happens when three streams (problem, policy, and politics) are converge and create a conducive environment for policymaking or change. From the US perspective, the policy proposals that imposed sanctions and delisted Ethiopia from AGOA were meant for resolving the humanitarian catastrophe in Ethiopia, thereby protecting its national security interests in the Horn of Africa (policy stream). Although Ethiopians living at home and diaspora resisted the policy, it was widely accepted in the US and other Western countries. It was an economically affordable and technically feasible policy. The policy was also politically helpful for the Biden Administration to advance human rights values and regain the United States's leadership role in the eyes of the international community. The circumstances brought the three streams together, creating the policy window of opportunity.

Policy entrepreneurs immediately seize the policy opportunity. According to MSA, key factors such as resources (e.g., time and money), access to policymakers, and strategies (e.g., manipulating, bargaining, etc.) determine the success of policy entrepreneurs. Compared to the anti-sanction advocacy groups, the human rights institutions and think tanks that advocated for the sanctions as well as the advocacy groups affiliated with the TPLF had more resources and access to the policymakers. In addition to their access to the officials mentioned above, the Director-General of the World Health Organization, and a former TPLF leader, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, also allegedly opened opportunities for the Tigrayan advocate groups to meet decision mak-

151. Caitlin Oprysko, "Who Is Lobbying in the Ethiopia Conflict as Coons Heads to Addis Ababa," *POLITICO*, March 19, 2021, <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-influence/2021/03/19/who-is-lobbying-in-the-ethiopia-conflict-as-coons-heads-to-addis-ababa-794124>.

ers.¹⁵² The Tigrayan diaspora also undertook continuous rallies across the US and posted more effective advocacies through various social media. Moreover, Tigrayan advocacy groups had powerful communication strategies that convinced US officials to impose sanctions on Ethiopia.

Conclusion

This article studies the recent U.S. foreign policies of Ethiopia in light of the MSA. In doing so, it provides three important contributions to the study of public policy, U.S. foreign policy, and the conflict in Ethiopia. First, it sheds light on the scholarly discourse regarding the “reform” in Ethiopia by providing a detailed and nuanced explanation for why the U.S. initially supported Abiy’s administration. Second, it also contributes to the debate surrounding the conflict in Ethiopia by analyzing the U.S.’s rapid policy change from the MSA perspective. Third, it contributes to the growing scholarship on the policy process by testing the MSA in the context of foreign policy and the conflict in Ethiopia.

Beyond its academic contributions, the article also offers insights for practically shaping the future U.S. policy toward Ethiopia. First, gross human rights violations (problem stream) alone do not immediately prompt policymaking or change in the U.S. At the time of writing the last version of this article, Abiy’s administration is committing gross human rights violations including, *inter alia*, indiscriminate attacks on civilians, extrajudicial killing, mass arrest, and rape in Amhara.¹⁵³ Despite these violations, the Biden administration appears to be normalizing its relationship with the Abiy administration, rather than taking decisive policy actions.¹⁵⁴

Second, for the U.S. officials to take policy actions, the Ethiopian diaspora and other policy entrepreneurs need to create a policy window

152. Ethiopia Accuses WHO Chief Tedros of Backing Tigray Rebels,” *Reuters*, November 19, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN27Z13Z/>.

153. Adane Tadesse, “AReflection on the Conflict in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia” *Wilson Center* (Sept. 29, 2023), <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/reflection-conflict-amhara-region-ethiopia>.

154. Although the Biden Administration did not relist Ethiopia into AGOA, it “lifted human rights-related legal restrictions for development assistance to Ethiopia,” “U.S-Ethiopia Relations,” U.S. Department of State (Nov. 20, 2023), <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-ethiopia/>

by influencing both the political, and policy streams. More specifically, the Ethiopian diaphora living in states such as Virginia, Maryland, and Georgia, where their vote could sway election outcomes, need to actively engage in political processes to shape the political stream.

Finally, for any alternative policy proposal to gain traction with U.S. policymakers, it must garner support from an alternative political force or coalition of forces that guarantee the continuity of the Ethiopian state. Additionally, the proposed policy should address the U.S. security interests in the region, while addressing the country's human rights issues.



The Evolving Character of Warfare

Michael Donofrio

Introduction

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine bears witness to important and previously unseen changes in the character of war. However, and more critically, many changes suggest that war is regressing to forms not experienced in recent decades. This article analyzes these changes in the context of Carl von Clausewitz's central themes in *On War*. The paper concludes by identifying elements of warfare that have remained consistent over time. Implications for US strategy and policy are presented throughout the paper.

Businesses and Individuals Canceled Moscow

Although the nation-state remains the dominant actor in the world and conflict, the war in Ukraine demonstrates the increasing power and influence of other entities (e.g., large corporations and hyper-empowered individuals). Hundreds of companies across multiple economic sectors and millions of individuals stopped economic discourse with Russia following Moscow's invasion. Moscow lost revenue and access to goods and services—some of which supported the Russian military. This spontaneous protest highlights non-state actors' influence, the value of gaining information advantage, and the limitations governments have in channeling the “passions” of the people.¹

Domain Dominance Is Dead

The war in Ukraine has demonstrated immense difficulty in establishing domain control—and by extension, the ability to set the tempo

1. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 89.

of conflict. For example, neither Russia nor Ukraine has established general air or maritime dominance. All domains are highly contested, and the combatants have focused on establishing relative advantage at specific places and times. In addition, new operational concepts such as Ukraine's air defense density approach (e.g., layered air defenses that are "thicker" closer to the ground and closer to Kyiv's forces) represent a novel way to contest a stronger adversary which does not rely on domain dominance.² US forces will need to undertake significant cultural, doctrinal, material, and operational changes to adapt to an operating environment in which the Joint Force cannot establish persistent domain control.³ US efforts must also assume that Washington cannot fully dictate the tempo of future wars—a break from recent experience.⁴

Payloads Beat Platforms

Ukraine's use of its domestically produced, low-cost anti-ship missile to sink the Russian flagship *Moskva* illustrates the risks and cost asymmetries associated with platform-centric operational approaches. The war provides numerous cases in which a relatively large number of inexpensive systems (e.g., Stinger missiles and Bayraktar TB2 UAV) have partially negated the value of major force elements (e.g., helicopters and tanks). The effectiveness of these systems has been heightened by Ukraine's creative operational employment and Russia's operational and tactical incompetence. The conflict in Ukraine suggests the propriety of shifting to inexpensive, non-exquisite, high-mass capabilities and away from a small number of niche platforms.⁵ This trend also highlights the efficacy of employing cost-imposing approaches on competitors while guarding against being the victim of highly disadvantageous

2. Kelly A. Grieco, "In Denial about Denial: Learning from Ukraine's Success," (lecture, National Defense University, Washington, DC, October 18, 2022), slide 10.

3. For example, US forces have not suffered an air-to-ground casualty since April 15, 1953, during the Korean War. Peter Grier, "April 15, 1953," *Air Force Magazine* (June 2011), 55.

4. This assertion has profound implications. For example, the United States may not be able to capitalize on fleeting opportunities or delay actions to allow logistical or industrial production to meet operational needs. This suggests that policy approaches, like improving munition stockpiles, will be increasingly important.

5. Mackenzie Eaglen, "The Bias for Capability Over Capacity Has Created a Brittle Force," Commentary, *War on the Rocks*, November 17, 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/11/the-bias-for-capability-over-capacity-has-created-a-brittle-force/>.

cost exchanges.⁶ There are immense implications for US operational concepts, the “center of gravity” US forces seek to exploit and defend, and future capability and capacity decisions.⁷

Attrition And Counter-value Targeting Returns

Clausewitz contends that violence is inherent to the nature of war, and combatants tend to move to the extreme as conflict persists.⁸ However, recent limited conflicts (e.g., wars against Iraq and the Islamic State), advances in technology (e.g., conventional precision munitions), and US practices to reduce collateral damage (e.g., extensive ISR “soaks”) provided a false sense that war was now highly discriminating and that intentionally targeting civilian populations was relegated to history. Russia mainly uses unguided weapons and intentionally targets civilians in Ukraine to decrease their will to fight—Clausewitz’s second targeting priority.⁹ The humanitarian crisis resulting from Russia’s actions stresses the cohesion of the US-led coalition and presents challenges on multiple fronts—from the law of armed conflict norms to combat medicine. Thus far, Russia’s efforts have not caused Ukraine to circumscribe its political aim—to restore Kyiv’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.¹⁰

It Takes a Village to Protract Conflict

Russia and Ukraine have suffered immense losses and used vast amounts of military material (e.g., 100K casualties, major combat platforms, munitions) during the war. Material expenditure rates and limited industrial capacity has stressed Moscow and Kyiv’s ability to sustain high-tempo combat operations. Ukraine’s ability to protract the fight is primarily predicated on continued support from external actors. This trend highlights the importance of coalition management, industrial

6. Owen R. Coté Jr., “Assessing the Undersea Balance between the United States and China,” in *Competitive Strategies for the 21st Century: Theory, History, and Practice*, ed. Thomas G. Mahnken (Stanford: Stanford University Press: 2012), 198–99.

7. Clausewitz, *On War*, 595–96; Eaglen, “The Bias for Capability over Capacity.”

8. Clausewitz, *On War*, 76, 89.

9. Robert A. Pape, “Bombing to Lose: Why Airpower Cannot Salvage Russia’s Doomed War in Ukraine,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 20, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/bombing-to-lose-airpower-cannot-salvage-russia-doomed-war-in-ukraine>; Clausewitz, *On War*, 596.

10. Pape, “Bombing to Lose.”

policies, and the value of advanced preparations (e.g., stockpiling critical supplies).¹¹ Failure to account for the demands of protraction could result in US forces reaching a culminating point before they attain the prescribed political objective in future conflict scenarios that are vital to US national security (e.g., defense of NATO and Taiwan).

Escalation [Mis]management

The war in Ukraine has reinforced the importance of managing complex escalation dynamics under the shadow of nuclear weapons. The belligerents must balance choices related to operational imperatives (e.g., targeting and weapons selection) and the need to manage vertical escalation pressures. Russia's decision calculus is likely shifting as Moscow's ability to advance its strategic and operational objectives is constrained by the loss of its conventional forces.¹² Moscow's new circumstances raise critical questions regarding its nuclear calculus in Ukraine and NATO-centered conflict scenarios. US policy should aim to improve the clarity of its signaling and bolster crisis communications channels to help ensure Moscow and Washington do not approach Clausewitz's theoretical concept of absolute war [via a large-scale nuclear exchange].¹³

Individual Targeting Lives

At least 12 Russian generals have already been killed during the Ukraine war.¹⁴ Intentionally targeting leadership is not new, but battlefield realities (e.g., lack of secure communications) and DoD's now well-honed approach to targeting individuals that was developed during the last 20 years of counterterrorism operations illustrates a trend where leaders are increasingly at risk. An increased ability to remove the

11. David Barno and Nora Bensahel, "Preparing for the Next Big War," *War on the Rocks*, January 26, 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/01/preparing-for-the-next-big-war/>.

12. Andrea Kendall-Taylor and Michael Koffman, "Russia's Dangerous Decline: The Kremlin Won't Go Down without a Fight," *Foreign Affairs* 101, no. 6 (November/December 2022), 24, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/russia-dangerous-decline>.

13. Clausewitz, *On War*, 580, 584.

14. Julian E. Barnes, Helene Cooper, and Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Intelligence Is Helping Ukraine Kill Russian Generals, Officials Say," *New York Times*, May 4, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/04/us/politics/russia-generals-killed-ukraine.html>.

“military genius” from the battlefield presents the United States with the potential to paralyze fielded forces through leadership-focused strikes, particularly in militaries that centralize command and control (e.g., China and Russia).

Consistency

Despite these changes, the conflict in Ukraine has reinforced Clausewitz’s assertions regarding the nature of war. Ukraine’s conduct of war is directed by the ultimate political end—existence.¹⁵ Arguably, Russia’s failings are partly due to a disconnect between its maximalist political end and the limited means and ways Moscow devoted to the war. The conflict is also interactive and defined by “chance.”¹⁶ Attacking Ukraine was a choice, and Moscow’s unexpected failures highlight the risks inherent in conflict.¹⁷ Finally, the war reinforced Clausewitz’s assertion that conflict is violent.¹⁸ The loss of military personnel, the death and suffering of the civilian population, the societal devastation, and the destruction of Ukraine’s infrastructure are profoundly damaging. These lessons from Ukraine highlight the importance of respecting war’s enduring nature while responding to conflict’s ever-shifting character.

15. Clausewitz, *On War*, 77, 89.

16. Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.

17. Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.

18. Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.



The Dangers of One-Dimensional Thinking: Irregular Warfare and Conventional Warfare in the South China Sea

Alec Heitzmann

Introduction

In the United States, the term “Irregular Warfare” did not become widely prevalent throughout the national security framework until after 9/11. After the attacks, counterterrorism became the top priority for all decision makers across the departments and intelligence community and would continue to be for the next two decades. As a result of bolstering US counterterrorism capabilities came a more nuanced approach to irregular warfare, looked at as entirely separate from conventional warfare tactics. The model breaks down a multi-faceted, integrated diagram to help decision makers and war planners understand their options.

The model has served its purpose well in combating foreign terrorist organizations and state sponsors of terrorism. However, counterterrorism has lowered in priority over the last five years, and great power competition has taken its place in military strategy. Moreover, because the US irregular warfare model sees conventional warfare as exclusive to irregular warfare, some decision makers and military strategists have adopted the model as truth instead of a guideline in proper decision making.

This one-dimensional thinking could prove dangerous in future conflicts with great powers like China. The Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) are utilizing irregular tactics, specifically in the South China Sea, to garner a significant advantage in their pursuit of reclaiming Taiwan. For example, the PLA uses its maritime militia to reinforce its claims in the South China Sea. But when countries like the Philippines and Malaysia ask them to leave, the PLA claims they are fishing vessels, justifying their presence in those countries’ territorial waters.

But Chinese irregular tactics are even more sophisticated than disguising naval vessels as commercial. A doctrine the CCP has implemented in the South China Sea is known as the “Three Warfares” doctrine. This doctrine uses three types of irregular tactics that do not require the involvement of conventional forces. Henceforth, the PLA already carries out irregular warfare tactics against other states, even though a war has not started.

This paper will briefly explain irregular warfare and its multiple dimensions. Second, it will identify the doctrine’s origin, break down each component, and explore its presence in Chinese operations in the South China Sea. Lastly, it will discuss why the United States must integrate counter-tactics to Chinese irregular warfare in its military strategy, even in a conventional war.

What Is Irregular Warfare?

The actions taken in irregular warfare are generally of lower intensity and sometimes do not require using a state military as conventional warfare does. According to the Department of Defense’s *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, irregular warfare is “a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s).”¹ The model that the United States has created in the twenty-first century is an integrated, five-pronged approach consisting of Counterterrorism (CT), Counterinsurgency (COIN), Unconventional Warfare (UW), Stability Operations (STABops), and Foreign Internal Defense (FID).² Each tactic’s definition comes from the *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*.

- *Counterterrorism*: Activities and operations taken to neutralize terrorists and their organizations and networks to render them incapable of using violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies to achieve their goals.³
- *Counterinsurgency*: Comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency

1. Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 2021, 111, <https://irp.fas.org/doddir/dod/dictionary.pdf>.

2. Department of Defense, “Summary of the Irregular Warfare Annex to the National Defense Strategy,” 2020, 2, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Oct/02/2002510472/-1/-1/0/Irregular-Warfare-Annex-to-the-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.PDF>.

3. Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *DOD Dictionary*, 52.

and address its root causes.⁴

- *Unconventional Warfare*: Activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area.⁵
- *Stability Operations*: Various military missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside the United States in coordination with other instruments of national power to maintain or re-establish a safe and secure environment and provide essential governmental services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief.⁶
- *Foreign Internal Defense*: Participation by civilian agencies and military forces of a government or international organizations in any of the programs and activities undertaken by a host nation government to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, terrorism, and other threats to its security.⁷

China's "Three Warfares" doctrine falls mainly under the unconventional warfare category, as each component attempts to cause unrest, disrupt government operations, and reestablish the CCP's sovereignty in the South China Sea. They do so by direct and indirect participation and through special operations forces. In other words, they either use their own military to include special operations forces (direct), or they use militias and private military contractors (indirect).⁸

China's "Three Warfares"

Origin

The "Three Warfares" doctrine, *Sān zhàn*, combines public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare that "constitutes a perceptual preparation of the battlefield that is seen as critical to ad-

4. Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *DOD Dictionary*, 51.

5. Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *DOD Dictionary*, 223.

6. Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *DOD Dictionary*, 201.

7. Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *DOD Dictionary*, 87.

8. David Knoll, Kevin Pollpeter, and Sam Plapinger, "China's Irregular Approach to War: The Myth of a Purely Conventional Future Fight," Modern War Institute, April 27, 2021, <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/chinas-irregular-approach-to-war-the-myth-of-a-purely-conventional-future-fight/>.

vancing [the PRC's] interests during both peace and war.”⁹ The doctrine is a form of political warfare that is not new to the Chinese Communist Party. Sun Tzu preaches political warfare throughout *The Art of War*, saying, “To subdue an enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.” However, the ideas that make up the “Three Warfares” approach are found in China’s 1999 *Unrestricted Warfare* manual. The authors of the manual—Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui—say that unrestricted warfare “means that all weapons and technology can be superimposed at will, it means that all the boundaries lying between the two worlds of war and non-war, of military and non-military, will be totally destroyed, and it also means that many of the current principles of combat will be modified, and even that the rules of war may need to be rewritten.”¹⁰

Essentially, all forms of conflict are now an option, and there is zero distinction on the battlefield in peacetime and war, military and non-military. Legal warfare, economic warfare, biological and chemical warfare, cyberattacks, and even terrorism were among the options that Qiao and Wang proposed in their writings.¹¹ Hence, the term ‘unrestricted.’ As CCP decision makers and PLA military planners observed world events and learned what was effective, they crafted the “Three Warfares” doctrine—a more refined approach to unrestricted warfare. China first introduced the doctrine into its national security framework in its 2003 *Political Work Guidelines of the People’s Liberation Army*.¹² The idea of this integrated approach is purposely chronological. Dean Cheng, in his article titled, “Winning Without Fighting: Chinese Legal Warfare,” states, “Public opinion/media warfare is the struggle to gain dominance over the venue for implementing psychological and legal warfare.” Cheng further states, “Psychological warfare provides the underpinning for both public opinion/media warfare and legal warfare,” and “Legal warfare is one of the key instruments of psychological and

9. Kerry K. Gershaneck, “To Win Without Fighting: Defining China’s Political Warfare,” *Expeditions with MCUP*, June 17, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.36304/ExpwMCUP.2020.04>.

10. Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, “Unrestricted Warfare,” PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, 1999, 12, <https://www.oodaloop.com/documents/unrestricted.pdf>.

11. Gershaneck, “To Win Without Fighting,” 6–7.

12. Peter Mattis, “China’s ‘Three Warfares’ in Perspective,” War on the Rocks, January 30, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/01/chinas-three-warfares-perspective/>.

public opinion/media warfare.”¹³ In other words, all three occur in an integrated fashion. If one fails, it will significantly decrease the effectiveness of the other two.

Components

Public Opinion and Media Warfare:

Public opinion and media warfare, Yúlùn zhàn, is carried out as a medium for executing more legitimate persuasion tools like legal and psychological warfare. It serves as the first step in winning over citizens’ perceptions. Public opinion and media warfare use print, broadcast, online, and television sources to first infiltrate smaller forums of media to persuade small groups of people. The Chinese Communist Party uses this not just internationally but also domestically. They believe that nationalist sentiment supporting their policies assists their foreign policy endeavors. In his article titled, “Three Warfares in Perspective,” Peter Mattis says, “the PLA believes energizing or mobilizing the Chinese public is useful for signaling resolve and deterring foreign incursions on Chinese interests.”¹⁴

Public Opinion/Media Warfare Activity in the South China Sea

One prominent example of Chinese information operations in the United States came in a children’s movie, showing that nothing is off limits for the Chinese Communist Party. *Abominable*, a computer-animated film, shows one of the main characters plotting her travel plans on a map of Southeast Asia. The northern land areas are covered with pictures, drawing the viewer’s attention to the more exposed South China Sea. In the South China Sea is China’s infamous “Nine-Dash Line.”¹⁵

The Nine-Dash Line is a boundary first drawn by Chinese geographer Yang Huai ren during the World Wars that claims Chinese control over ninety percent of the South China Sea.¹⁶ In Huai ren’s first draft,

13. Dean Cheng, “Winning Without Fighting: Chinese Legal Warfare,” The Heritage Foundation, May 21, 2012, https://www.heritage.org/asia/report/winning-without-fighting-chinese-legal-warfare#_ftn3.

14. Mattis, “China’s ‘Three Warfares’ in Perspective.”

15. BBC, “Abominable: A Dreamworks Movie, a Map, and a Huge Regional Row,” December 18, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-50093028>.

16. Srijan Shukla, “What Is Nine-Dash Line? The Basis of China’s Claim to Sovereignty over South China Sea,” *The Print*, July 28, 2020, <https://theprint.in/theprint-essential/what-is-nine-dash-line-the-basis-of-chinas-claim-to-sovereignty-over-south-china-sea/469403/>.

his original Eleven-Dash Line encompassed 286 islands, reefs, and rock features that came to be known collectively as the ‘South China Sea Islands.’¹⁷ Even when the communist regime took power and removed Yang during the Cultural Revolution, the Nine-Dash Line remained. Through this practice, China reinforces what they believe to be their national sovereignty claims and historical right to the rest of the world. In this case, they show the world what is theirs—even in American media—and achieve relatively similar results as they would in military swaggering operations.

Psychological Warfare

Upon successful public opinion tactics that spread propaganda throughout a population, the Chinese execute psychological warfare—*Xīnlǐ zhàn*—that intensifies media information to sway the public’s perception in their direction. Psychological warfare includes “diplomatic pressure, rumors, false narratives, and harassment to express displeasure, assert hegemony, and convey threats.”¹⁸ The Chinese view psychological warfare as an offensive and defensive weapon but focus more on the offensive end.¹⁹

Psychological Warfare in the South China Sea

China is known to capitalize on international events or tragedies, to be more precise. They use that negative sentiment that has accumulated on behalf of other state actors to assert their agenda or gaslight populations to instill fear. One example is the parallels seen between the Russia and Ukraine conflict and the Chinese and Taiwanese tensions. In a recent Center for Strategic and International Studies panel, Bonnie Glaser said,

The consistent message here is that the United States did not come to the defense of Ukraine militarily, and therefore will not defend Taiwan. It will instead abandon Taiwan. So by implication, therefore, you know, the message is the people in Taiwan should negotiate with Beijing now before they face that outcome of abandonment.¹⁹

17. Shukla, “What Is Nine-Dash Line?”

18. Gershaneck, “To Win without Fighting,” 8.

19. Center for Strategic & International Studies, “Ukraine and Taiwan: Parallels and Early Lessons Learned,” March 22, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/ukraine-and-taiwan-parallels-and-early-lessons-learned>

In other words, the Chinese Communist Party uses the fact that the United States did not come to Ukraine's defense after the Russian invasion as leverage over Taiwan to instill fear and hopelessness in the event of a Chinese invasion.

Legal Warfare

To the Chinese Communist Party, legal warfare (or Falu zhàn) is seen as a form of combat, keeping in mind the doctrine of merged battlegrounds found in the *Unrestricted Warfare* manual. While they may not use their kinetic forces, they see it as a way of justifying actions that they plan to take. Legal warfare, in the eyes of the Chinese, can be defined as “arguing that one's own side is obeying the law, criticizing the other side for violating the law, and making arguments for one's side in cases where there are also violations of the law.”²⁰ It is the end goal of the Three Warfares Doctrine.

Legal warfare not only attempts to justify one's own doing but has the potential to gain an international governmental advantage that bleeds into psychological and public opinion warfare tactics. This advantage shows the world that they have legitimate reasoning within the international community for their actions, even though they may not.

One important consideration to note is the view of the rule of law by the Chinese Communist Party. Legal parameters in the eyes of the Chinese government since the Mao Zedong era has primarily only applied to the people of China, not the governing authority.²¹ Even in Confucian teachings, China sees the rule of law as secondary to morality and ethics, and that view only got weaker when Mao first chaired the CCP in 1949.²² In other words, the CCP believes the law does not apply to them on the mainland but applies to its people. That same principle will apply to their views in the international arena. They will see the law as relative to their interests: the law will apply to those impeding their own interests but will not apply to them when committing those same violations.

Legal Warfare Activity in the South China Sea

This exact cultural understanding of the rule of law is seen in Chinese-passed and international legal authorities. For example, the

20. Gershaneck, “To Win without Fighting,” 8.

21. Gershaneck, “To Win without Fighting,” 8.

22. Gershaneck, “To Win without Fighting,” 8.

Anti-Secession Law passed by the Chinese Communist Party in 2005 essentially justifies any action taken against Taiwan in the name of reunification. Article One states:

This law is formulated, in accordance with the Constitution, for the purpose of opposing and checking Taiwan's secession from China by secessionists in the name of "Taiwan independence," promoting peaceful national reunification, maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Straits, preserving China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and safeguarding the fundamental interests of the Chinese nation.²³

The law goes on to justify non-peaceful resolutions that the CCP may deem necessary in the event of resistance to reunification. Article Eight states:

In the event that the "Taiwan independence" secessionist forces should act under any name or by any means to cause the fact of Taiwan's secession from China, or that major incidents entailing Taiwan's secession from China should occur, or that possibilities for a peaceful reunification should be completely exhausted, the state shall employ non-peaceful means and other necessary measures to protect China's sovereignty and territorial integrity.²⁴

Even though the international community does not acknowledge this law, the CCP still views this as international law and expects cooperation from Taiwan. In contrast, China does not consider itself as constrained by the United Nations Conventions of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which the international community does recognize.²⁵ In some cases, China may try to leverage UNCLOS over United States naval operations in the South China Sea, even though they are not a part of it.

United States Approach: Combining Conventional and Irregular Warfare

In a simplified chronological view, the patterns of warfare throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are relatively straightfor-

23. The United Nations Refugee Agency, "China: Law No. 34 of 2005, Anti-Secession Law," March 14, 2005, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/474403752.html>.

24. The United Nations Refugee Agency, "China: Law No. 34 of 2005, Anti-Secession Law."

25. Cheng, "Winning Without Fighting: Chinese Legal Warfare."

ward in the eyes of the United States. In the early to mid-1900s, America primarily performed conventional warfare tactics during World War One, World War Two, and the Korean War. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the United States primarily utilized conventional tactics against an unconventional force during the Vietnam War. It wasn't until al-Qaeda attacked New York City at the turn of the century that everything changed.

Counterterrorism spending rose from sixteen billion dollars to sixty-eight billion from 2001 to 2002 and grew to nearly 300 billion in 2008.²⁶ Irregular warfare tactics were refined to fit the needs of US national security, and the world shifted from great power competition to asymmetric warfare. Insurgency and terrorist groups became the primary threat, and the American public wanted revenge. For the majority of the twenty-first century, counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, and nation-building were at the forefront of US foreign policy.

With the United States' attention placed elsewhere, China used the "behind-the-scenes" approach that they have consistently capitalized on throughout history—otherwise known as "hide our capacity to bide more time." As a result, they made friends, significantly bolstered their economy, and established influence operations masked as infrastructure plans, such as the Belt and Road Initiative. Through this, they have gained world power status, and their number one adversary is the United States.

Now that the United States is facing another world power with hostile intentions, many say that the world is shifting back to great power competition, suggesting a shift from irregular warfare to conventional warfare. Some even say irregular warfare will not be relevant in the future. Some Department of Defense strategists say that "irregular warfare is a relic of the last two decades, and that future war will be conventional."²⁷ Essentially, they are looking at the scope of history mentioned earlier and are 'sticking to the script' of patterns. This is the wrong approach. Strategists must look at warfare as ever-evolving, not only as patterns of history.

26. Amy Belasco, Mackenzie Eaglen, Luke Hartig, Tina Jones, Mike McCord, and John Mueller, *Counterterrorism Spending: Protecting America While Promoting Efficiencies and Accountability*, Stimson Study Group on Counterterrorism Spending, 2018, 12, https://www.stimson.org/wp-content/files/file-attachments/CT_Spending_Report_0.pdf.

27. Mattis, "China's 'Three Warfares' in Perspective."

The Chinese openly said in the *Unrestricted Warfare* manual that they view the battlefield as all-encompassing. Non-military and military tactics are always on the table. The battlefield is not subject to where conflict occurs; it is everywhere. The authors even recommended terrorism as an option, though they have not utilized this. The critical question that decision makers and defense strategists need to ask themselves is: if the PLA is already using irregular tactics before a conventional confrontation occurs, why would they stop using them after a conventional conflict takes place if they are proving effective?

Strategists should consider this model as a conglomeration of both irregular and conventional warfare, not as a shift from one to the other. It will not simply be a sole conventional war with irregular characteristics. Instead, it will be a state-on-state conflict with conventional and irregular tactics.

The United States learned its lesson in the Vietnam War, fighting guerilla warfare with conventional means. A state with far less fire-power used guerilla tactics to weaken US forces piece-by-piece. They played the long game, holding out until their enemy could not take anymore. Instead of trying to adapt to the environment that the US military was dealt, it continued to utilize what it knew how to do. Poor adaption led to thousands of lives lost and no progress made towards the initial intent to get involved.

Conclusion

The US military must consider irregular warfare as an option in future conflicts, at the training level at the very least. Not only will it be crucial in potential conflicts with other world powers, but it is also necessary to maintain in order to avoid another 9/11. Terrorist organizations tend to attack when their target least expects it to cause the maximum amount of psychological damage. Suppose the US national security apparatus starts to dwindle its counterterrorism efforts as a result of seeing irregular warfare as a relic of the past. In that case, terrorist groups could see this as an opportunity to start planning another attack while the United States focuses on China.

This cycle shows how one-dimensional thinking results in a snowball effect on issues pertaining to national security: terrorism dwindles in priority, so decision makers start to believe that the practices in place are no longer relevant. They put the irregular warfare book on the shelf

and wait for it to become relevant again. Then, they fail to see that our primary adversary utilizes those same tactics. Instead of learning from our mistakes after a catastrophe, the US should be proactive in preventing them. Strategic multi-dimensional thinking in critical areas of national security is crucial to that goal.



Fighting the Next War: Strategies and Adaptations for Drones in Conventional Warfare with Near-Peer Competitors

Kaden Smart

Introduction

Airpower has become predominant, both as a deterrent to war, and—in the eventuality of war—as the devastating force to destroy an enemy’s potential and fatally undermine his will to wage war.

—Omar Bradley

Military drones have been developed and deployed by the United States military for use in nonconventional warfare, first being contracted and implemented in the 1980s. While first being utilized in the Balkans and the First Gulf War, it was during the Global War on Terror that military drones were fully integrated into military operations. Platforms such as the iconic Predator drone have seen vast success in these nonconventional operations and have proliferated worldwide as a result. These systems were highly effective in identifying targets and conducting strikes against hostile compounds, combatants, and fighters, particularly on the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq. While these systems are veterans of nonconventional operations, they are only recently entering service in conventional conflicts. There are two primary examples of these systems being utilized in conventional warfare: the Nagorno–Karabakh conflict and the Russian–Ukrainian war. These conflicts serve as excellent case studies for analyzing how well these systems can perform in the non-permissive nature of conventional warfare. This paper argues that military drones will need to adapt from their previous roles in nonconventional operations to meet the challenges and pressures of a conventional armed conflict with near-peer adversaries. These adaptations include the use of stealth technology,

enhanced strike capabilities, and cost-effective manufacturing.

To substantiate this claim, this paper will present three sections. The first section will provide context on the historical developments of drones in nonconventional warfare. It will include strategy, weapon systems, and accomplishments these systems encountered in previous roles. The second section will analyze the current state of drones in conflicts through the analysis of the aforementioned case studies: the Russian–Ukrainian war and the war in the Nagorno–Karabakh region. These case studies will highlight how well these systems are performing and where they are seeing the most success on a strategic level. This section will also analyze ongoing drone projects within the United States military, focusing on mission and capabilities that these new platforms can provide in future conventional conflicts. The third section will assess the findings from the analysis of the case studies and consider how these systems could most effectively be used in conventional wars to come. It will also provide recommendations on acquisitions, implementation, and strategy. These recommendations will be based on lessons learned from relevant case studies and trends in technological advancements. Creating a comprehensive strategic policy on utilizing these systems in a conventional conflict will allow the US military and its partners to be better prepared for any future, conventional conflict and potentially provide the US a strategic advantage against global competitors.

Section I: Historical Developments

The development of drones can be traced back to the United States Army, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the development of the CIA's Counterterrorist Center (CTC).¹ The development of drones by the US government was a direct response to counterterrorism efforts started in the 1980s under President Ronald Reagan. Drone usage by the United States military was exacerbated by the Obama administration in its efforts in the War on Terror.² This section will briefly explore the history of drone development and implementa-

1. Christopher J. Fuller, "The Eagle Comes Home to Roost: The Historical Origins of the CIA's Lethal Drone Program," *Intelligence and National Security*, 30 no. 6 (2015): 769–92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2014.895569>.

2. Brian Michael Jenkins, "President Obama's Controversial Legacy as Counterterrorism-in-Chief," RAND Corporation, August 22, 2016, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2016/08/president-obamas-controversial-legacy-as-counterterrorism.html>.

tion of drones in the United States military. It will outline the operations these systems serve in and associated policies that the United States uses to guide drone use. This section will conclude with current US drone policy existing from before Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The context for the creation of the drone program was directly in response to a rise in the threat of terrorism and stemmed from early counterterrorism policy decisions made in the U.S. National Security Council.³ In April 1984, President Ronald Reagan signed National Security Decision Directive 138 (NSDD138), which set out to create a formalized counterterrorism policy for the United States.⁴ This policy, written by Oliver North,⁵ stated several critical themes that still stand in US policy today, primarily, that terrorism in any practice is a direct threat to US national security, and veered US policy towards a more active approach to countering terrorism. This active approach was elaborated on as stating:

Whenever we have evidence that a state is mounting or intends to conduct an act of terrorism against us, we have a responsibility to take measures to protect our citizens, property, and interests.⁶

This statement set precedent for policy makers to adopt a pre-emptive action policy against terrorism.⁷ A crucial component of this directive was that it required the Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State, Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), and the Attorney General to create a defense strategy to combat state-sponsored terrorism. It also directed the CIA to take the lead on counterterrorism, and the DCI to coordinate with other agencies to develop "capabilities for pre-emptive neutralization of anti-American terrorist groups."⁸ This call for increased pre-emptive capabilities paved the way for the development

3. Jenkins, "President Obama's Controversial Legacy."

4. NSDD - Reagan Administration (The White House), "National Security Decision Directive 138, Combatting Terrorism," April 3, 1984, <https://irp.fas.org/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-138.pdf>.

5. Luca Trenta, "Death by Reinterpretation: Dynamics of Norm Contestation and the US Ban on Assassination in the Reagan Years," *Journal of Global Security Studies* 6, no. 4 (December 2021), ogab012, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogab012>.

6. NSDD - Reagan Administration (The White House), "National Security Decision Directive 138," 2.

7. Fuller, "The Eagle Comes Home to Roost," 769–92.

8. Fuller, "The Eagle Comes Home to Roost," 769–92.

and integration of armed drones.

While NSDD138 revolutionized policy thinking regarding counterterrorism and pre-emptive strikes, it was largely ignored in policy action and was never implemented.⁹ The directive simply required too much interagency cooperation among departments that did not historically cooperate well on the subject. While it was supported by the DCI, William Casey, and Secretary of State, George Schultz, it was not supported by the Secretary of Defense, Casper Weinberger. The Pentagon's hesitation in committing to counterterrorism operations reflected the "Vietnam syndrome" still present in the Department of Defense after the political strife and domestic hardships of the Vietnam War.¹⁰ The bureaucratic difficulty of getting the Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State, Director of Central Intelligence, and Attorney General to form a counterterrorism strategy stopped this directive in its tracks. However, it did signal a growing movement, by numerous powerful figures in Washington, to create an asset that could facilitate pre-emptive strike capabilities against terrorist threats.

In 1986, Director of Central Intelligence William Casey created the Counterterrorism Center (CTC) in the CIA, led by Duane Clarridge. The CTC acted as a fusion center for the CIA's regional offices to have jurisdiction in combatting international terrorism.¹¹ It combined resources from the CIA's Directorate of Science and Technology (DST) and Special Operations Group (SOG).¹² Both Casey and Clarridge were supportive of the preemptive strike capabilities outlined in NSDD138 and used the CTC to investigate these capabilities. In 1985, the CTC came under scrutiny during the Iran–Contra scandal, which forced Clarridge to retire on 1 June 1987.¹³ At the same time, Oliver North was dismissed by President Reagan, and William Casey discovered he had a brain tumor. As a result of this significant shift in personnel and supporters of the pre-emptive strike program, codenamed the Eagle Program, the program lost momentum and was ultimately shelved. Much of the original Eagle Program has been kept secret from the public "to this day, the CIA will 'neither confirm nor deny' the existence or non-

9. Fuller, "The Eagle Comes Home to Roost," 778.

10. Fuller, "The Eagle Comes Home to Roost," 774.

11. Fuller, "The Eagle Comes Home to Roost," 780.

12. Fuller, "The Eagle Comes Home to Roost," 781.

13. Fuller, "The Eagle Comes Home to Roost," 783.

existence of the Eagle Program.”¹⁴

We do know that during the Eagle Program’s existence, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) and the US Army developed a drone called the Amber 1, “a propeller driven remote controlled aircraft equipped with a camera and infrared system” for surveillance and intelligence gathering.¹⁵ It could also fit a warhead in its nose, acting as a make-shift cruise missile.¹⁶ This drone program started in 1986 and ended in 1990 due to budget constraints.¹⁷ The Amber 1 program was originally developed by Leading Systems. After turbulent government support for the Amber 1 drone, Leading Systems Incorporated went bankrupt and was acquired by General Atomics.¹⁸ General Atomics held onto the drone project and, with government support, would develop the RQ-1 Predator drone, arguably the most prolific drone in existence, in 1995. The Predator used a similar propeller design and implemented more advanced ISR capabilities than its predecessor. The Predator drone was first acquired and operated by the CIA in 1995 over Serbia.¹⁹ The successes of the Eagle Program are shrouded in mystery, but it is easy to speculate the hand the CIA’s CTC had on the creation of our first armed drone, the Predator.

After the Predator’s maiden voyage providing ISR over Serbia, defense and national security officials took note of its unique and flexible capabilities for providing surveillance. In 1998, Al Qaeda attacked American Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, bringing increased US attention to Islamic terrorism.²⁰ In response, US President Bill Clinton authorized the use of drones to search for the terrorists responsible for the attacks, and Operation “Afghan Eyes” was launched to target the suspected mastermind of the attack, Osama bin Laden. “Afghan Eyes” was a joint operation run between the Department of Defense and the CIA.²¹ The Predator first flew over Afghanistan in September of 2000, with the mission of locating Osama bin Laden, who would then be

14. Fuller, “The Eagle Comes Home to Roost,” 784.

15. Fuller, “The Eagle Comes Home to Roost,” 784.

16. Fuller, “The Eagle Comes Home to Roost,” 784.

17. Fuller, “The Eagle Comes Home to Roost,” 784.

18. Fuller, “The Eagle Comes Home to Roost,” 784–85.

19. Fuller, “The Eagle Comes Home to Roost,” 785.

20. Fuller, “The Eagle Comes Home to Roost,” 785.

21. U.S. Government Publishing Office, “9/11 Commission Report,” GovInfo, July 22, 2004, 189, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-911REPORT/pdf/GPO-911REPORT.pdf>.

targeted by cruise missiles if found.²² This system of using the Predator drone to locate high-value targets, which would then be neutralized by cruise missiles, meant more interagency cooperation and communication to coordinate these strikes. To streamline this process, the Department of Defense and CIA were ordered to develop “an armed version of the Predator drone.”²³ Development started in 1999,²⁴ and gained further support from the White House via Presidential Directive in 2001.²⁵ The order to develop an armed drone highlights that the Clinton Administration recognized the versatility of armed drones from an early stage of their implementation in intelligence and counterterrorism operations. While this was certainly not the first plan for creating an armed drone (highlighted by the Amber 1 program stated above), it was the first time this concept had the support and momentum to be developed and integrated into regular military and counterterrorism operations.

In October of 2001, a month after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the US launched its first drone strikes against terrorist targets in Afghanistan. The US military and intelligence officials located the whereabouts of Taliban Supreme Leader, Mullah Omar, and decided to strike his convoy via Predator drone. Ultimately, the Predator’s payload missed Mullah Omar, but succeeded in terminating several other enemy fighters in the caravan.²⁶ This operation initiated the beginning of the use of drones in the Global War on Terror. Since the inaugural strike in Afghanistan in 2001, the US has conducted strikes in Libya, Yemen, Pakistan, Somalia, and Iraq. By 2014, the US conducted some 450 drone strikes against terrorist targets, highlighting how heavily adopted this platform and strategy was during the War on Terror.²⁷

Drones were heavily adopted during the Obama presidential administration in his counterterrorism strategy. To compare, President Barrack Obama carried out “a total of 563 strikes, largely by drones,”

22. U.S. Government Publishing Office, “9/11 Commission Report,” 189–90.

23. U.S. Government Publishing Office, “9/11 Commission Report,” 210.

24. Fuller, “The Eagle Comes Home to Roost,” 786.

25. U.S. Government Publishing Office, “9/11 Commission Report.”

26. Michael C. Horowitz, Sarah E. Kreps, and Matthew Fuhrmann, “Separating Fact from Fiction in the Debate over Drone Proliferation,” Belfer Center, *International Security* 41, no. 2 (2016): 7. https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/files/isec_a_00257.pdf.

27. Horowitz, Kreps, and Fuhrmann, “Separating Fact from Fiction,” 7.

in Somalia, Pakistan, and Yemen, while President Bush carried out only 57.²⁸ The Obama administration was reluctant to send more American troops into the Middle East and chose to use drone strikes to fill the personnel gap.²⁹ Special operations teams, supported by drones, became a favorite under this strategy as well, due to the minimized footprint teams had in their ability to take out high valued targets.³⁰ The effectiveness of these platforms in eliminating high value targets made the armed drone synonymous with the War on Terror.

During the US' military withdrawal of Afghanistan in 2021, President Joe Biden established a new US counterterrorism policy, dubbed the "over the horizon" strategy, meant to encompass all Middle Eastern and African terrorism. This strategy relies on the increased use of drones and other platforms that do not require support infrastructure on the ground. In many ways, this is an evolution of the Obama administration's drone strategy, being able to reach our enemies while maintaining a minimal physical presence. However, the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan further removes US presence and resources from the Middle East, forcing the US to further adopt the new "over the horizon" policy. This policy was tested when a US drone neutralized al-Qaeda leader, al-Zawahiri, in Kabul in 2022.³¹ For counterterrorism, the over the horizon policy will likely remain the US strategy in the Middle East, heavily leaning on drones to accomplish this mission.

The US has implemented armed drones in its military structure and doctrine for more than 20 years and has been at war through all those years. However, all these drone operations have been in nonconventional conflicts against untraditional adversaries with limited technology and military capabilities to counter our advanced drone systems. With the release of the 2017 National Security Strategy, the US national security enterprise changed their focus from counterterrorism to

28. Jessica Purkiss and Jack Serle, "Obama's Covert Drone War in Numbers: Ten Times More Strikes than Bush," *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, January 1, 2017, <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2017-01-17/obamas-covert-drone-war-in-numbers-ten-times-more-strikes-than-bush/>.

29. Jenkins, "President Obama's Controversial Legacy."

30. Jenkins, "President Obama's Controversial Legacy."

31. Mohammad Yunus Yawar, Idrees Ali, and Jeff Mason, "U.S. Kills al Qaeda Leader Zawahiri in Kabul Drone Missile Strike," *Reuters*, August 2, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/cia-carried-out-drone-strike-afghanistan-us-officials-say-2022-08-01/>.

Great Power Competition, particularly focused on Russia and China. In the 2017 National Security Strategy, the Trump administration underlined the importance of competing with Russia and China economically and militarily.³² This focus on competition with China and Russia was also recently echoed in the Biden administration's 2022 National Security Strategy.³³ This reorientation of defense and security procedures prioritizes new military capabilities to prepare for conventional warfare with near-peer competitors and understates non-conventional capabilities, ushering in the need for new capabilities, acquisitions, equipment, and strategies for the United States military. Despite these changes, the US military will continue to need drones to fight its wars, and they are taking notes as to how drones have performed in recent conflicts.

Section II: Case Studies, Current U.S. Projects

As the United States military and its drones move on from the War on Terror to prepare for a conventional conflict with states such as Russia and China, there are some relevant examples of drone use in conventional conflicts that can enhance insight regarding implementation in modern, conventional warfare. These conflicts explore the versatility and effectiveness of drones in such conflicts and accentuate vulnerabilities of modern drones. This section will explore two relevant case studies: The first is the Nagorno–Karabakh conflict, fought between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which marked the first-time drones were used in a conventional conflict and highlighted their cost-effectiveness for smaller militaries. The second case study will be Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in which drones have been heavily utilized by both sides to great effect.

Nagorno–Karabakh: Armenia and Azerbaijan

The Nagorno–Karabakh region is a disputed territory situated between Armenia and Azerbaijan. This conflict dates back to 1988, when the Nagorno–Karabakh regional legislature resolved to break away from Azerbaijan and join neighboring Armenia. The Nagorno–Karabakh

32. White House Archives (The White House), "National Security Strategy of The United States of America, December 2017," December 2017, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

33. White House Archives (The White House), "National Security Strategy, October 2022," October 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/8-November-Combined-PDF-for-Upload.pdf>.

region has a high majority of ethnic Armenian citizens, which caused the initial breakaway legislative vote.³⁴ The conflict lasted until 1994, when “Russia brokered a ceasefire, known as the Bishkek Protocol, recognizing the Nagorno–Karabakh region as autonomous, but primarily under Armenian influence.”³⁵ The conflict was reignited shortly in 2016, most notably from September 27 to November 10, 2020, during the “Second Nagorno–Karabakh War,” when Azerbaijan retook control of much of the Nagorno–Karabakh region from Armenian control. Azerbaijan was able to gain this victory due to a superior military strategy which relied on airpower and the use of armed drones to destroy the primarily land-based Armenian military.³⁶

Before the conflict in 2020, both Armenia and Azerbaijan undertook large military modernization projects. While both nations purchased military drones, Azerbaijan invested more heavily in these systems than Armenia did.³⁷ As a result of Armenia’s reliance on Russia for arms sales, they adopted the traditional Soviet military doctrine of relying heavily on ground-attack vehicles.³⁸ Armenia had a special deal that allowed it to purchase Russian weapons at lower, Russian-funded prices than other nations, such as Azerbaijan.³⁹ While Azerbaijan also uses Russian military equipment, they cost more for Azerbaijan to purchase, which forced Azerbaijan to look towards Turkey and Israel for more weapons acquisitions.⁴⁰ Azerbaijan also wanted to improve the

34. Council on Foreign Relations, “Nagorno–Karabakh Conflict,” Center for Preventive Action Global Conflict Tracker, January 24, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/nagorno-karabakh-conflict>.

35. Council on Foreign Relations, “Nagorno–Karabakh Conflict.”

36. Shaan Shaikh and Wes Rumbaugh, “The Air and Missile War in Nagorno–Karabakh: Lessons for the Future of Strike and Defense,” CSIS (Center for Strategic and International Studies), December 8, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/air-and-missile-war-nagorno-karabakh-lessons-future-strike-and-defense>.

37. Shaikh and Rumbaugh, “The Air and Missile War in Nagorno–Karabakh.”

38. Sinem Çelik and Hülya Kınık, “The Role of Turkish Drones in Azerbaijan’s Increasing Military Effectiveness: An Assessment of the Second Nagorno–Karabakh War,” *Insight Turkey* 23 no. 4 (December 14, 2021): 169–91. <https://www.insightturkey.com/articles/the-role-of-turkish-drones-in-azerbaijans-increasing-military-effectiveness-an-assessment-of-the-second-nagorno-karabakh-war#:~:text=The Turkish defense industry UAVs,to match in the field>.

39. Robert M. Cutler, “Russian Arms Sales to Armenia and Their Geopolitical Effects,” *Geopolitical Monitor*, September 9, 2020, <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/russian-arms-sales-to-armenia-and-their-geopolitical-effects/>.

40. Çelik and Kınık, “The Role of Turkish Drones.”

force structure of its air force and purchased Israeli and Turkish drones as a cost-effective way to strengthen their airborne military capabilities.⁴¹ Some notable Azeri acquisitions included an estimated number of five Israeli Heron and ten Hermes-450 drones, and, most importantly, the armed Turkish Bayraktar TB2.⁴²

The result of the conflict ended in an impressive victory for Azerbaijan, which retook control of most the Nagorno–Karabakh region. This decisive victory was accomplished because of Azerbaijan’s technologically superior military (with the help of Turkish military advisors) and Armenia’s failures to adapt to their enemy’s capabilities. Military strategists and analysts assess that Armenia suffered heavier losses in personnel and equipment because Armenia insisted on using outdated Soviet military doctrine.⁴³ Armenia’s ground forces moved in large, closely packed groups, which made easy targets for armed drones and artillery units being spotted by ISR drones.⁴⁴ Armenia also applied minimal camouflage to artillery positions, leaving them in the same location for extended periods of time, which also made easy targets for Azerbaijani drones.⁴⁵ A key component in Azerbaijan’s strategy was eliminating Armenia’s anti-air defense systems, allowing their armed drones to freely attack Armenia’s ground forces. Modern drones, such as the TB2, Reaper, and Predator, are slower aircraft that offer no defensive countermeasures against air defense systems. To overcome this threat, Azerbaijan strategically targeted Armenia’s anti-air defense systems by deploying Israeli ‘Harop’ loitering munitions, also referred to as “suicide drones.”⁴⁶ These airborne explosive systems fly in the air, “loitering,” until they are sent towards a target, acting as a more precise artillery alternative. These loitering munitions specifically targeted Armenia’s arsenal of Russian S300 anti-air missiles. Once air defense systems were neutralized, the TB2 was able to carry on missions more effectively against vulnerable ground targets.

41. Çelik and Kınık, “The Role of Turkish Drones.”

42. Shaikh and Rumbaugh, “The Air and Missile War in Nagorno-Karabakh.”

43. Mansur Mirovalev, “Nagorno-Karabakh: How Did Azerbaijan Triumph over Armenia?,” *Al Jazeera*, December 22, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/22/nagorno-karabakh-how-did-azerbaijan-triumph-over-armenia>.

44. Mirovalev, “Nagorno-Karabakh.”

45. Mirovalev, “Nagorno-Karabakh.”

46. Ragip Soylu, “Azerbaijan–Armenia Conflict: How Baku Destroyed Russian S-300s with Israeli Suicide Drones,” *Middle East Eye*, March 3, 2021, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/azerbaijan-armenia-russia-israel-suicide-drones-destroy>.

This conflict also highlights how drones can level the battlefield in two ways. The first is through minimizing the advantage of the high ground. Armenia held the high ground for much of the Nagorno–Karabakh conflict but was ineffective at maintaining its positioning due to precision strikes being carried out against defensive positions by Azeri drones.⁴⁷ Air power has always had the capability to mitigate the advantage of high ground in warfare, but the precision afforded by drones due to their advanced sensors and cameras, and their ability to get closer to the target has made them invaluable in breaking defensive positions.

The second way drones leveled the battlefield in the Nagorno–Karabakh conflict was by demonstrating the vulnerabilities of trench warfare.⁴⁸ Much like the dive bombers in World War II, drones are eliminating the effectiveness of trenches for protection in warfare. Again, this comes down to the precise targeting that drones deliver against targets. Military analysts state that the Armenian trenches were too wide and allowed for easy targeting,⁴⁹ but we will analyze from the war in Ukraine that modern munitions and drone systems leave many uncovered and unarmored trenches defenseless against precision strikes. These advantages provided by armed drones allowed Azerbaijan to have a strategic advantage against the Armenian military, leading to a decisive victory.

The president of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, publicly voiced the critical role that Turkish armed drones had on the outcome of the war. In an interview with European news outlet, France24, he stated: Of course, they are very modern and advanced weapons and I can tell you, only by the drones which we acquired from Turkey, we destroyed Armenian military equipment worth 1 billion dollars.”⁵⁰

While this claim is likely exaggerated, as Armenia’s defense budget for 2019 was only .65 billion dollars,⁵¹ the praise given from the Azeri government highlights the importance of drones in the Azeri military

47. Çelik and Kınık, “The Role of Turkish Drones.”

48. Çelik and Kınık, “The Role of Turkish Drones.”

49. Çelik and Kınık, “The Role of Turkish Drones.”

50. Özge Özdemir, “Is Turkey a Rising Power in the World in the Production of UAV and SIAH Production UAVs?,” *BBC News Türkçe*, October 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-54533620>.

51. Macrotrends. “Armenia Military Spending/Defense Budget 1992–2024,” <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/ARM/armenia/military-spending-defense-budget>

structure. Further proving their importance, in December of 2022, Bayrak, the Turkish company that produces the TB2 Bayraktar drones, established a production facility in Azerbaijan.⁵² This demonstrates not only Azerbaijan's loyalty to the armed drone system, but also the increased proliferation armed drones are experiencing globally, even across smaller-economy countries.

The Nagorno–Karabakh conflict also highlighted that armed drones provide a cost-effective way to defeat larger armies. This lesson rings loudly to smaller states with less powerful economies and militaries. By using a small fleet of drones, Azerbaijan was able to destroy a much larger ground army. Azeri president, Ilham Aliyev, stated on national television in October of 2020, that Armenia had lost 280 battle tanks (39 of which were captured), 74 infantry fighting vehicles (24 of which were captured), 70 Grad missile launching systems, among several other ground based military platforms.⁵³ These numbers highlight the cost effectiveness of drones as well. The TB2 drone is estimated to cost 5 million US dollars per unit.⁵⁴ While the cost of a T72 tank can vary depending on model and equipped technology, modernized T72Bs are estimated to cost 2 million US dollars each.⁵⁵ The TB2 has a payload of four laser guided munitions, meaning that if an Azeri TB2 successfully hit all four tank targets in a mission, then the TB2 would cost less than the damage caused against enemy forces per payload.

Russian–Ukrainian War: Russia and Ukraine

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has demonstrated to the world that prolonged conventional conflicts are still a reality in today's international arena. This conflict has pitted Western and Russian military technology against each other in a showdown that has seen trench warfare, guerrilla style ambushes, and, most notably, the vast implementation of

52. Timucin Turksoy, "Turkish Drone Producer Registers Subsidiary in Azerbaijan," *Caspian News*, December 28, 2022, <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/turkish-drone-producer-registers-subsidiary-in-azerbaijan-2022-12-27-0/>.

53. "President Ilham Aliyev on the Equipment of the Armenian Armed Forces Destroyed and Taken as Spoils of War," *Trend Azerbaijan*, October 20, 2020, <https://www.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/3320558.html>.

54. Aaron Stein, "The TB2: The Value of a Cheap and 'Good Enough' Drone," *Atlantic Council*, August 30, 2022, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/airpower-after-ukraine/the-tb2-the-value-of-a-cheap-and-good-enough-drone/>.

55. Robert Czulda, "Is Iran Going on an Arms Shopping Spree in Moscow?" *Atlantic Council*, November 10, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/is-iran-going-on-an-arms-shopping-spree-in-moscow/>.

drones. While both nations primarily implement ground-based military doctrine, Ukraine in particular has seen vast success in implementing armed drones, even pioneering drone strategy for a prolonged conventional conflict. The war in Ukraine has, thus far, taught us three critical lessons about drones in a conventional warfare. First, as we learned in the Nagorno–Karabakh conflict, modern drones remain vulnerable to even modest anti-air capabilities. The war in Ukraine has demonstrated that this includes fighter jets of any generation, vehicle-based surface-to air-missiles, man-portable anti-air rockets, small-arms fire, and electronic warfare. Second, Ukraine has demonstrated to the world the importance of a robust and cost-effective defense and munition production capabilities, which is critical to sustain prolonged drone warfare. Third, Ukraine has demonstrated the ability and importance of drones being implemented at the tactical level with standard infantry squadrons and platoons. While drones are seeing drastic success in the Russian–Ukrainian war, these issues provide opportunities for the US armed forces and the military industrial complex to learn from in their pursuit for more advanced and effective military drones.

On February 24, 2022, Vladimir Putin’s Russia invaded Ukraine, designating the invasion as a “special military operation.” Putin justified the invasion of Ukraine by claiming that the Russian supported separatists in the Eastern regions of Ukraine called for Russian help, and that the operation hoped to achieve the “demilitarisation and denazification of Ukraine” to liberate these separatist regions.⁵⁶ The invasion involved extensive missile strikes and a large swath of ground forces driving over the Russian and Belarusian borders.⁵⁷ Initial assessments from the Pentagon claimed that Russian forces would take Kyiv in one to four days from the start of the invasion.⁵⁸ Despite Russia’s initial

56. Andrew Osborn and Polina Nikolskaya, “Russia’s Putin Authorises ‘Special Military Operation’ against Ukraine,” *Reuters*, February 23, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-putin-authorises-military-operations-donbass-domestic-media-2022-02-24/>.

57. “Russian Forces Launch Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine,” *Al Jazeera*, February 24, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/24/putin-orders-military-operations-in-eastern-ukraine-as-un-meets#:~:text=Russia has launched an all-out invasion of Ukraine,that he had approved a special military operation.>

58. Jim Sciutto and Katie Bo Williams, “US Concerned Kyiv Could Fall to Russia within Days, Sources Familiar with Intel Say | CNN Politics,” *CNN*, February 25, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/25/politics/kyiv-russia-ukraine-us-intelligence/index.html>.

gains at the start of the invasion, Ukraine has retaken most of the land Russian forces initially took control of, with the help of Western aid and military weaponry. Even before the invasion, Ukraine had acquired and integrated armed drones (primarily from Turkey) in its military structure.⁵⁹ Throughout the war, Ukraine has continued to purchase a variety of drones to repel Russian forces. These drones range from the Turkish TB2, the American Switchblade 300, and hobbyist quadcopter drones available for purchase commercially.⁶⁰ In 2023, the Ukrainian defense minister announced that Ukraine planned to purchase another \$550 million worth of drones to add to its arsenal.⁶¹ This substantial investment highlights the important role that these systems have played in Ukraine's success and demonstrate Ukraine's commitment to their continued use.

Much like we previously discussed with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, drones remain vulnerable to anti-air systems and capabilities. Ukraine has demonstrated this weakness, claiming on March 23, 2023, it had shot down 2,108 tactical level UAVs of the Russian armed forces.⁶² While this number is difficult to prove or corroborate, it is worth noting that this would include all drones, including the smaller hobbyist drones, not just the larger drones such as the Russian Orlan-10 or the Iranian Shahed-136 loitering munition drone that had been purchased in large numbers by Russia. Ukraine's air defense systems are made up of a variety of different systems from differing nations and generations. These include surface-to-air missiles such as the Russian S300, mobile anti-air cannons such as the German Gepard, and man portable

59. Selcan Hacaoglu and Marc Champion, "Ukraine Buys More Armed Drones from Turkey than Disclosed and Angers Russia," *Bloomberg*, December 3, 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-03/ukraine-buys-more-armed-drones-from-turkey-than-disclosed-and-angers-russia>.

60. Isabelle Khurshudyan, Mary Ilyushina, and Kostiantyn Khudov, "Russia and Ukraine Are Fighting the First Full-Scale Drone War," *The Washington Post*, December 2, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/12/02/drones-russia-ukraine-air-war/>.

61. Max Hunder, "Ukraine Plans \$550 Million Drone Investment in 2023 - Defence Minister," *Reuters*, January 30, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-plans-550-million-drone-investment-2023-defence-minister-2023-01-30/>.

62. Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, "The Total Combat Losses of the Enemy from 24.02.2022 to 12.03.2023," Ukraine Defense Ministry, March 23, 2023, <https://www.mil.gov.ua/en/news/2023/03/12/the-total-combat-losses-of-the-enemy-from-24-02-2022-to-12-03-2023/>.

anti-air rockets such as the MANPADS (man-portable-air defense-system).⁶³ These various systems have been successful in destroying Russian drones and have created a formidable air-denial strategy.⁶⁴

Russia has also seen success in destroying Ukrainian drones. Russia uses many similar air-defense systems that Ukraine employs, but Russia has also notably used electronic warfare to combat Ukraine's drone arsenal.⁶⁵ Russian electronic warfare troops have primarily employed truck-based radio and communications jammers that seriously hinder the Ukrainian military's ability to gather intelligence and coordinate strikes against Russian targets.⁶⁶ Russia was so successful at this approach, according to the Royal United Services Institute in London, that "the average life-expectancy of a quadcopter remained around three flights," and "the average life-expectancy of a fixed-wing UAV was around six flights."⁶⁷ The Royal United Services Institute also assessed that Russia's electronic warfare methods, alongside traditional anti-air systems, knocked out 90% of Ukraine's drone arsenal by the summer of 2022.⁶⁸ These drastic numbers highlight not only the effectiveness of Russian electronic warfare but also the vulnerabilities that modern drones have against traditional anti-air and electronic warfare systems.

By demonstrating the immense losses that both Ukraine and Russia have suffered in their drone fleet, we can clearly see a limitation of modern drones in conventional conflict through production cost and capabilities. These drones can cost anywhere from a few thousand dollars for the hobbyist drones commonly used in Ukraine to \$5 million

63. Paul McLeary, "The Little-Known Weapon Knocking down Iranian Drones over Kyiv," *POLITICO*, January 2023, <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/01/04/weapon-iranian-drones-ukraine-00076442>.

64. Maximilian Bremer and Kelly Grieco, "Air Defense Upgrades, Not F-16s, Are a Winning Strategy for Ukraine," *Defense News*, January 25, 2023, <https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2023/01/25/air-defense-upgrades-not-f-16s-are-a-winning-strategy-for-ukraine/>.

65. David Axe, "Russia's Electronic-Warfare Troops Knocked out 90 Percent of Ukraine's Drones," *Forbes*, December 24, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2022/12/24/russia-electronic-warfare-troops-knocked-out-90-percent-of-ukraines-drones/?sh=1fab9ff7575c>.

66. Axe, "Russia's Electronic-Warfare Troops."

67. Axe, "Russia's Electronic-Warfare Troops."

68. Axe, "Russia's Electronic-Warfare Troops."

for the Turkish TB2.⁶⁹ At the rate modern drones have been destroyed in Ukraine, the current production costs and capabilities for drones is not sustainable. This mirrors a trend in other military munitions stockpiles and production capabilities. Turkish drone producer Baykar, the developer of Ukraine's flagship drone, the TB2, can supposedly make 200 TB2s every year.⁷⁰ While that is not an insignificant number, the losses being shown in Ukraine eclipse the current production capacity.

While Russia has domestic drone manufacturing capabilities, it has also looked elsewhere to supplement its limited manufacturing capabilities. Since its invasion of Ukraine, Russia has relied on Iranian drones to fulfill its demands.⁷¹ These drones include the Shahed-129, the Iranian equivalent to the TB2 or the Reaper, and the Shahed-136 loitering munitions.⁷² While Russia has not previously invested heavily into its drone production, compared to other land based systems,⁷³ it has recently prioritized drone technology and manufacturing, agreeing to develop an Iranian drone production plant inside Russia.⁷⁴ This plant is currently in the planning phase and hopes to produce 6,000 drones in the coming years.⁷⁵ This large investment highlights Russia's growing aspiration for a larger drone fleet in their military structure.

The limited production capability for armed drones forces nations to choose one of two options: (1) heavily invest in their domestic drone

69. Aaron Stein, "The TB2: The Value of a Cheap and 'Good Enough' Drone," Atlantic Council, August 31, 2022, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/airpower-after-ukraine/the-tb2-the-value-of-a-cheap-and-good-enough-drone/>.

70. Nailia Bagirova, "Exclusive: After Ukraine, 'Whole World' Is a Customer for Turkish Drone, Maker Says," *Reuters*, May 30, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/exclusive-after-ukraine-whole-world-is-customer-turkish-drone-maker-says-2022-05-30/>.

71. United States Institute of Peace, "Timeline: Iran–Russia Collaboration on Drones," *The Iran Primer*, August 10, 2023, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2023/mar/01/timeline-iran-russia-collaboration-drones>.

72. United States Institute of Peace, "Timeline: Iran–Russia."

73. Isabel Facon, "A Perspective on Russia," CNAS - Proliferated Drones, Center for New American Security, 2014, <https://drones.cnas.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/A-Perspective-on-Russia-Proliferated-Drones.pdf>.

74. Dion Nissenbaum and Warren P. Strobel, "Moscow, Tehran Advance Plans for Iranian-Designed Drone Facility in Russia," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 5, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/moscow-tehran-advance-plans-for-iranian-designed-drone-facility-in-russia-11675609087>.

75. Nissenbaum and Strobel, "Moscow, Tehran Advance Plans."

manufacturing, which requires a significant amount of time and money; or (2) diversify their drone fleet and purchase from numerous different sources from various countries. While purchasing drones from abroad in places such as Turkey is a cost-effective option, there are two issues that this presents. First is the lack of control in production, including pricing, timing, and acquisition numbers. Second is lack of parts and service expertise, especially if drones are sourced from numerous countries. For these reasons and others, countries such as Russia are moving to create a stronger domestic drone manufacturing capacity.

Ukraine has used drones to devastating effect by integrating drones at the squadron level. As previously stated, Ukraine has extensively used hobbyist drones in this war. These drones are used heavily for ISR purposes but have also been retrofitted with remote harnesses to drop explosives on Russian troops, being targeted with the help of the drone's camera.⁷⁶ Another popular use of hobbyist drones is retrofitting them with explosives and using them as makeshift suicide drones against enemy positions and vehicles. While these improvisations are a rudimentary solution for accurate artillery, it demonstrates how well Ukraine is using drones at the tactical level. Implementing these drones at the squad level allows an assault team to see enemy positions and scout for hidden enemy artillery or armor that would not be visible unless in a compromised position. These small drones also allow soldiers to see the effectiveness of artillery strikes from the protection of a trench, allowing artillery to adjust their target to ensure the protection of the soldiers maneuvering on the ground.⁷⁷ These drones have allowed artillery to be much more effective, saving the lives of numerous Ukrainian soldiers and protecting vital military equipment.

While the war in Ukraine is currently ongoing, drones have already made a vital impact. While both sides implement drones, Ukraine has arguably used drones in more diverse roles and to more devastating effect. As the war continues, both sides have made their intentions of further implementing drones clear, highlighting that both sides have

76. Nick Mordowanec, "Video Shows Ukraine Drone Drop Grenades on Unsuspecting Russians," *Newsweek*, March 7, 2023, <https://www.newsweek.com/ukraine-drones-drop-grenades-russian-soldiers-video-1786120>.

77. Dalibor Rohac, "How Misdirection, Drone Warfare and Fresh Troops Powered Ukraine to Surprise Wins," American Enterprise Institute, *New York Post*, September 12, 2022, <https://www.aei.org/op-eds/how-misdirection-drone-warfare-and-fresh-troops-powered-ukraine-to-surprise-wins/>.

seen success and are continuing to find new roles for drones in pursuit of a military victory. Some of these roles are improvised but can show the versatility that drones provide on the modern battlefield.⁷⁸ Both sides have also experienced heavy losses, achieved by cyberwarfare and conventional countermeasures. The high number of losses, coupled with the visible success of military drones demonstrate that drones play a critical role on the modern battlefield, but underline the limitations of modern drone systems. These limitations include a lack of speed, countermeasures, stealth capabilities, and vulnerabilities through cyberwarfare.

Current US Military Drone Projects

In most aspects, the United States is leading the world in drone technology. The US has decades of experience using and innovating these systems and maintains a strong domestic drone manufacturing sector. While the United States heavily employs systems such as the Reaper and Predator drones, the US continues to develop new systems that seek to bring drones into the future of warfare. This section will outline some existing projects (in order), including the RQ-170 Sentinel, the X-47B, the XQ-58, and the MQ-28. These projects are publicly known, but the exact role and technologies assigned to these systems are largely classified. This section will briefly analyze these systems and predict their likelihood of acquisition from the US armed forces.

The RQ-170 Sentinel is a tailless drone aircraft designed by Lockheed Martin and Skunk Works, taking a similar design and shape as the Northrop Grumman B-2 Spirit.⁷⁹ The aircraft was introduced in 2007 and was used in the Middle East.⁸⁰ Little is known about the role or specifications of this aircraft due to its secret and ongoing development. While never officially stated, it is widely accepted that this aircraft represents the cutting edge of American stealth drone technology.⁸¹ The Sentinel is equipped with highly sophisticated ISR sensors and

78. Rohac, "How Misdirection, Drone Warfare and Fresh Troops Powered Ukraine."

79. Airforce Technology, "RQ-170 Sentinel Unmanned Aerial Vehicle," August 25, 2020, <https://www.airforce-technology.com/projects/rq-170-sentinel/>.

80. Airforce Technology, "RQ-170 Sentinel Unmanned Aerial Vehicle."

81. David Hambling, "Clone Wars: Why Iran Will Copy Captured U.S. Global Hawk Drone," *Forbes*, July 16, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidhambling/2020/07/16/clone-wars-why-iran-will-copy-captured-us-global-hawk-drone/?sh=7c42537c7540>.

technologies that are largely classified.⁸² This aircraft has also been the source of controversy, as one was electronically commandeered and captured by Iran in 2011 when flying over Iranian airspace.⁸³ This not only highlights the sophistication of Iran's cyber capabilities but also demonstrates the vulnerabilities that even advanced modern drones face in electronic warfare.

The X-47B UCAS (unmanned combat air system) is a large, tailless, next-generation drone developed by Northrop Grumman.⁸⁴ Development of the X-47 began in 2007 and has since trailblazed the way for next-generation drones by being the first of its kind to launch and land on an aircraft carrier and the first of its kind to conduct an autonomous aerial refueling operation.⁸⁵ The X-47B was designed for the United States Navy and had several roles it was evaluated to fill. Some of the roles this aircraft was developed for includes naval ISR, aerial refueling, offensive missions against enemy naval vessels and air defenses, and even limited air-to-air combat roles.⁸⁶ Ultimately, the Navy did not select the X-47B for implementation due to its size and the variety of diverse roles that the system attempted to fill.⁸⁷ While the project was not formally adopted, it paved the way for other next-generation drones by bringing their capabilities and advancements to the forefront of defense development acquisitions.

The XQ-58A Valkyrie is a long-range combat remote aircraft made by Kratos Unmanned Aerial Systems and the Air Force Research Laboratory.⁸⁸ This drone is unique from its counterparts for a few reasons. It is relatively cheap, multirole, and it does not require a runway to be

82. Airforce Technology, "RQ-170 Sentinel Unmanned Aerial Vehicle."

83. Brad Lendon, "Iran Says It Built Copy of Captured U.S. Drone," *CNN*, May 12, 2014, <https://www.cnn.com/2014/05/12/world/meast/iran-u-s-drone-copy/index.html#:~:text=Iran on Sunday unveiled what,Iranian Tasnim News Agency reported.>

84. Northrop Grumman, "X-47B UCAS," Overview, July 21, 2021, <https://www.northropgrumman.com/what-we-do/air/x-47b-ucas/>.

85. Northrop Grumman, "X-47B UCAS."

86. Asidom, "X-47B The Deadliest Stealth Drone: The U.S. Navy's Big Mistake?" Medium, December 29, 2022, April 13, 2021, <https://medium.com/@asidom15/x-47b-the-deadliest-stealth-drone-the-us-navys-big-mistake-50be4456c832>

87. Asidom, "X-47B The Deadliest Stealth Drone."

88. Kyle Rempfer, "Air Force Offers Glimpse of New, Stealthy Combat Drone during First Flight," *Air Force Times*, March 8, 2019, <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2019/03/08/air-force-offers-glimpse-of-new-stealthy-combat-drone-during-first-flight/>.

launched.⁸⁹ It also implements stealth technologies while operating slightly below supersonic speeds, maintaining a low-profile signature.⁹⁰ The Valkyrie was developed as part of the United States Air Force Research Laboratory's Low-Cost Attritable Aircraft Technology project.⁹¹ According to Kratos Defense, an underlying goal of this project is to have acquisition costs around three million dollars, which would provide an incredible value, considering the TB2 sells for around five million.⁹² Some of the roles this aircraft is thought to perform includes air-to-ground strikes, ISR, and/or disrupt enemy air defenses, potentially through electronic means.⁹³ Another key feature of this aircraft is that it does not launch from an airfield like traditional aircraft. The Valkyrie is launched from a trailer, giving it maximum flexibility in adverse environments, and providing opportunity for naval applications.⁹⁴ The Valkyrie first completed a payload test during flight on March 26, 2021, further demonstrating this developmental aircraft's capabilities.⁹⁵ The Valkyrie brings drones to the future of warfare by implementing stealth technologies, faster engines, cheaper production costs, and an airfield-free launch, maximizing versatility and usability in a conventional conflict with a near-peer adversary.

The MQ-28 Ghost Bat is a next-generation combat drone being developed by Boeing in partnership with the Royal Australian Air Force.⁹⁶

89. Kratos Defense & Security Solutions, "Kratos Receives Low-Cost Attritable Strike Unmanned Aerial System Demonstration Contract Award," July 11, 2016, <https://ir.kratosdefense.com/news-releases/news-release-details/kratos-receives-low-cost-attributable-strike-unmanned-aerial?releaseid=978805>.

90. Kratos Defense & Security Solutions, "Tactical UAVs," 2023, <https://www.kratosdefense.com/systems-and-platforms/unmanned-systems/aerial/tactical-uavs>.

91. Kratos Defense & Security Solutions, "Tactical UAVs."

92. Kratos Defense & Security Solutions, "Kratos Low-Cost Attritable Strike Unmanned Aerial System Demonstration Contract Award," 2016, <https://ir.kratosdefense.com/news-releases/news-release-details/kratos-receives-low-cost-attributable-strike-unmanned-aerial?releaseid=978805>.

93. Rempfer, "Air Force Offers Glimpse."

94. Kratos Defense & Security Solutions, "Kratos Low-Cost Attritable."

95. Air Force Research Laboratory Public Affairs, "AFRL Successfully Completes XQ-58A Valkyrie Flight and Payload Release Test," April 5, 2021, <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/2563194/afrl-successfully-completes-xq-58a-valkyrie-flight-and-payload-release-test/>.

96. Jamie Freed, "Boeing Says MQ-28 Drone Could Be a Fit for U.S. Air Force," *Reuters*, February 27, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/boeing-says-great-news-if-mq-28-drone-can-partner-with-f-35-2023-02-28/>.

This aircraft has a similar design to conventional fighter jets and is designed to work with teams of manned fighter jets.⁹⁷ The Ghost Bat is designed to complement manned fighter jets through ISR, electronic warfare sensors, kinetic defensive countermeasures, and tactical early warning systems.⁹⁸ The MQ-28 will have a flight range of 2,000 miles,⁹⁹ which is 800 miles farther than the manned F-35C.¹⁰⁰ The Ghost Bat is also designed to be cost-effective, though no price has been officially released.¹⁰¹ While the Ghost Bat is being developed in Australia, in 2022, the US Air Force acquired a Ghost Bat for military testing.¹⁰² The Ghost Bat represents one of the newest drone projects seeking to make the drone platform more stealthy, versatile, cost-effective, and deadly in a conventional conflict.

These four systems are not the only drone projects in development, but these four systems demonstrate the evolution of the next-generation drone systems. The RQ-170 and X-47B represent the trailblazers of these systems, as they implement stealth technology, sleeker designs, strike capabilities, long range, and may work in tandem with manned systems to provide intelligence and electronic combat support. The XQ-58 and MQ-28 represent the future of drone warfare because they are designed with the purpose of competing in non-permissible, conventional-style warfare.

Section III: Strategic Recommendations, Future Implementation

*Air power is new to all our countries. It brings advantages
to some and weakens others; it calls for readjustment everywhere.*

—Charles Lindbergh

Drones are a reality of modern warfare, a reality that the United States has recognized. Despite this recognition, the capabilities provided

97. Boeing, “MQ-28,” <https://www.boeing.com/defense/MQ-28/index.page>.

98. Boeing, “MQ-28.”

99. Boeing, “MQ-28.”

100. Lockheed Martin, “Everything You Need to Know about the F-35C,” 2023, <https://www.lockheedmartin.com/f35/news-and-features/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-f-35c.html>.

101. Boeing, “MQ-28.”

102. Joseph Trevithick, “Air Force Acquires Australia’s MQ-28 Ghost Bat Drone for Testing,” *The Warzone*, October 6, 2022, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/air-force-acquires-australias-mq-28-ghost-bat-drone-for-testing>; . Freed, “Boeing Says MQ-28 Drone Could Be a Fit for U.S. Air Force.”

by modern drones are modest compared to available drone countermeasures, including electronic warfare, surface-to-air missiles, small arms, air-to-air systems, and electronic warfare. These limitations provoke the need for newer platforms that can bridge the gaps to the next generation of drone warfare. To start, this section will advocate for the adoption of an entirely new drone platform and recommend against making existing drones, such as the Reaper, legacy systems. This section will briefly analyze the requirements necessary for the next generation of drones, provided by our case studies and current projects analysis. Finally, this section will provide strategic recommendations for what roles these platforms should fill, followed by a summary of tactical level considerations.

As an initial recommendation, it would be best for the United States to adopt new, innovative, and capable drone platforms. As we explained earlier, the US military is exploring new, innovative drone systems to replace their older systems such as the Reaper and Predator. However, this does not guarantee that these new systems will be acquired, despite their expensive research and development contracts. Examples of failed acquisitions include the YF-23 fighter jet and the RAH-66 Comanche helicopter. The United States military has a tradition of adopting legacy systems such as the F-15 fighter jet or B-52 bomber and then updating the platform with new systems for decades. These platform updates can often save money and require less training than adopting new systems. However, the United States military should not turn existing systems such as the Reaper and Predator into legacy platforms. These platforms are too expensive and slow; they lack stealth and defensive capabilities. Instead, the United States should look for platforms that are both capable and versatile in a conventional conflict, a great example of a candidate for a drone legacy system is the XQ-58 or the MQ-28, as they are cheaper, faster, have longer ranges, and have modern stealth and strike capabilities. These systems would have a longer and more successful service life as a legacy system than existing platforms, especially in the theatre of a conventional conflict.

Like any military acquisition, next-generation drones will need to meet certain requirements. It is necessary that these requirements fulfill the capabilities we would need in a conventional conflict with a near-peer competitor. These capabilities should include stealth technologies. Next-generation drones need to have a small radar cross section (RCS)

to infiltrate and operate in denied areas and to work alongside stealth aircraft such as the F-35. This platform should be adaptable to a variety of roles, being capable of carrying ISR, electronic warfare technology, and strike capabilities for air-to-air, air-to-sea, and air-to-surface. Versatility in these systems will be of paramount importance to adapt to the ever-changing battlefield. The new system should also be cost-effective. Existing experimental platforms such as the XQ-58 and MQ-28 have already shown that next-generation drones can be produced at lower costs while providing impressive capabilities. Lower production costs also provide for more aircraft to be procured, allowing the military to have more of these systems in more theatres around the globe; low costs also allow these systems to be used more confidently as the potential loss is significantly less than a more expensive system.¹⁰³

Lastly, these systems should have adequate maneuverability and comparable range to manned aircraft systems. These capabilities will allow next-generation drones to out-maneuver enemy countermeasures and allow them to work more seamlessly in a tandem partnership with manned systems. Further, maneuverability will keep manned aircraft systems safer when operating in a crowded air-traffic environment. These requirements will ensure that the next-generation drone systems remain relevant and versatile in a conventional conflict with a near-peer adversary.

The United States military will need to integrate next-generation drones into our existing military structure at the strategic and tactical level. These systems will have different capabilities and missions from modern drones, so implementing these next-generation drones requires strategic planning to maximize these systems' potential in a near-peer conflict. As previously stated above, next-generation drone platforms should be able to fill a variety of roles, many of which, in respect to conventional warfare, will be experimental. Frankly, the world has never seen a modern, high-tech conventional conflict. Ukraine has shown us a glimpse of what this may look like, but much of the technology used in this conflict dates to the Cold War. Some strategies that should be considered for a high-tech conventional conflict are the aforementioned tandem role within a team of manned aircraft.¹⁰⁴ Having a stealth drone with long-range electronic sensors can help provide situational

103. Boeing, "MQ-28."

104. Boeing, "MQ-28."

awareness to the battlefield in air and naval operations. Some of these next-generation platforms have already successfully completed aerial payload releases, proving their effectiveness in carrying and deploying munitions.¹⁰⁵

- The use of offensive strike capabilities. If these drones could be fitted with fire-and-forget missile systems, they could play a significant role in kinetic targeting. With the lower cost of next-generation drones, they can be deployed with less risk than a more expensive manned jet such as an FA-18 or F-35. With advanced missile guidance systems and stealth technology, a drone can be sent to attack an enemy target from long range with a lower risk of being shot down.
- Probing enemy air defenses and positions. Due to the cheaper production costs and unmanned nature, coupled with advanced electronic sensors, these next-generation systems could be perfect for probing enemy air-defenses to provide intelligence and protect future missions.
- Advanced ISR collections and sharing. Next-generation drones will be invaluable due to their advanced stealth technologies, allowing these systems to operate more effectively in non-permissive environments where ISR is most critical in changing the tide of the conflict. Additionally, other collection systems utilizing measurements and signature intelligence sensors, implemented to next-generation drones, can detect the location of nuclear weapons, giving us a more complete picture of our adversary's capabilities.
- Provide access to drones at the tactical level. Ukraine has demonstrated how effective tactical level squadrons are when controlling or supported by drones. This can be done in two ways: first is providing instant reporting from a large-frame drone (like the XQ-58) to a member of an infantry squad to provide situational awareness and allow the squad to provide artillery coordinates. The second way is to provide each squad with a small observation drone and have a designated soldier

105. Air Force Research Laboratory Public Affairs, "AFRL Successfully Completes XQ-58A Valkyrie Flight and Payload Release Test," Air Force, April 5, 2021, <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/2563194/afrl-successfully-completes-xq-58a-valkyrie-flight-and-payload-release-test/>.

who is trained in utilizing it in missions. Roles such as radio operator, designated marksman, and grenadier already exist in infantry squads, and creating a drone operator/coordinator position would be of massive benefit to tactical level success on the battlefield. Some of these drones already exist and have been implemented for specialized missions, such as the FLIR Black Hornet, but a more widespread integration of these systems would provide great benefit to tactical level success.

The next war the US encounters will not be against the adversaries we have fought for the last 25 years. Our next adversaries will be much more technologically advanced and capable. The concept of “always fighting the last war” is a controversial one in the defense field but holds some truth in military acquisitions. Our existing drone platforms lack the capabilities and technology to remain effective against a near-peer adversary. Recent conventional conflicts employing these systems have given us a glimpse at the effectiveness and limitations these modern drones provide. Instead of relying on these systems, the United States should continue to invest in and develop new systems that can operate and excel in non-permissive battlefields contested by a high-tech adversary. These systems should be a versatile and forward-thinking platform that implements stealth technology, can conduct kinetic strikes, all while remaining cost-effective to manufacture. Developing next-generation drone systems tailored for a conventional conflict with near-peer competitors will best prepare the United States military for the battles of tomorrow and allow the United States to have a leg up against our adversaries.



India's Interest and Challenges in Afghanistan Post-Taliban 2.0 Takeover

Zabid Aria

Abstract

India's goals in Afghanistan are carefully considered in light of its national, regional, and international interests. One of the objectives India seeks from Afghanistan is combating the impact of Pakistan. In addition to countering Pakistan, India also pursues a variety of goals that go beyond being Pakistan's enemy. Considering this, the region is currently facing a number of security concerns, including drug trafficking and 'terrorism with an Islamic background' since the return of the Taliban. As a result, Afghanistan is essential for India, because any changes or continuation of instability there might have a significant impact on India's national security. The importance of Afghanistan lies in this issue. India does not want Afghanistan to become the primary threat to India's national security, as it was during the Taliban 1.0 regime. Meanwhile, the above-mentioned challenges have forced India to recognize Afghanistan as a main security challenge for its national security.

Keywords: Taliban, Islamic Radicalism, National Security, Pakistan, Terrorism

Afghanistan has played a significant role in Indian foreign policy since its independence from British rule because this landlocked country is located at the entry point of Central Asia, East Asia, and South Asia.¹ The importance of Afghanistan for India lies in economic and security aspects: economically, Afghanistan can connect India to Central Asian Republics, and from a security perspective, Afghanistan has always been crucial for India. For instance, most of the invaders who

1. Yow Peter Raiphea, "India Afghanistan Relations 2001–2011" (PhD diss., North-Eastern Hill University, 2017), 12, <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/217131>.

conquered India crossed through Afghanistan.² Even in the present scenario, the rise of Islamic Radicalism in Afghanistan poses various security challenges to India's National Security. This challenge can turn Afghanistan into safe havens for anti-India Islamist groups such as Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT).

As a result, in the present scenario, India has emerged as one of the regional powers pursuing greater interests in a stable and developing Afghanistan. Therefore, since its independence from the British in 1947, India has strived to increase its influence in Afghanistan, but the steady relations between both countries improved significantly with the fall of the Taliban 1.0 dictatorship in 2001 and the establishment of a democratic administration through the support of the United Nations (UN) and particularly the US (2001–2021).³ There were various factors that contributed to the strengthening of India and Afghanistan's relationship during this specific period. But the main factor for both countries was the Pakistan factor and terrorism.

India's goals in Afghanistan are carefully considered in light of its national, regional, and international interests. One of the objectives India seeks from Afghanistan is combating the impact of Pakistan because Pakistan seeks to turn Afghanistan into a safe haven for Kashmiri militants and other terrorist groups interested in fighting in Kashmir. Therefore, India wants to counter any Pakistan influence in Afghanistan. In addition to countering Pakistan devastating policy, India also pursues a variety of goals that go beyond countering Pakistan's, like accessing to the natural resources of Central Asia and projecting its power as a regional player. Considering this, the region currently faces a number of security concerns, including drug trafficking and 'terrorism with an Islamic background'. As a result, Afghanistan is essential for India, because any changes or continuation of instability there might have a significant impact on India's national security. The importance of Afghanistan lies in this issue: India does not want Afghanistan to become the biggest threat to Indian National Security, as it was during the Taliban 1.0 regime from 1996 to 2001. This period of Taliban rule was marked by violation of human rights, restriction on media and suppression of independent voices. Meanwhile, the above-mentioned

2. Raiphea, "India Afghanistan Relations," 3.

3. Javaid Umbreen and Rameesha Javaid, "India Influence in Afghanistan and Its Implications for Pakistan," *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 53, no. 1 (June 2016), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/j.ctt1q6105>.

challenges have forged India to recognize Afghanistan as a main challenge for its national security. Committed to this objective, the paper aims to shed light on India's interests and challenges in Afghanistan post-Taliban 2.0 takeover. The analysis will address the challenges and its repercussion on India's strategy in the region.

1. India's Interest in Afghanistan

Indeed, India's objectives in Afghanistan are multifaceted and driven by a mix of domestic, regional, and global interests. One of the primary concerns for India is Pakistan's "strategic depth" policy in Afghanistan, which India views as a security threat due to the potential for destabilizing the region and supporting anti-Indian elements.⁴ In addition to countering Pakistan's influence and addressing security concerns, India aims to strengthen its position in the region by seeking access to the energy-rich Central Asian Region (CAR). Afghanistan's strategic location provides India with potential trade and economic opportunities, as well as a gateway to connect with Central Asian markets and resources. Furthermore, India's engagement in Afghanistan aligns with its broader foreign policy objectives of expanding its power status, enhancing regional cooperation, and projecting its influence in the international arena. By assisting Afghanistan in its reconstruction and development efforts, India aims to position itself as a responsible global player and a reliable partner for regional stability. Overall, India's approach towards Afghanistan is carefully calculated to achieve multiple objectives, ranging from addressing security concerns and counter-terroring terrorism to pursuing economic opportunities and increasing its regional and global influence.

1.1 Countering Pakistan

In Afghanistan, India and Pakistan are locked in a zero-sum game, where any steps for establishing close relations with Afghanistan taken by either country is considered a security threat by the other.⁵ Similarly, India saw Pakistan's dominance over Afghanistan as a threat to its security. Hence, India wishes to limit Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan to

4. Shanthie D'Souza, "India, Afghanistan, and the 'End Game,'" ISAS Working Paper No. 124, (2011): 8, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2150711>.

5. Marium Kamal, "Indian Strategic Influence in Afghanistan: Realist Ends through Social Means," *A Research Journal of South Asian Studies* 34, no. 2 (July–December 2019): 465, <http://journals.pu.edu.pk/journals/index.php/IJSAS/article/viewFile/3274/1401>.

protect its security and economic interests. By limiting Pakistan's influence, India aims to achieve two goals: first, to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for terrorist groups under the control of Pakistan's Intelligence Service, Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI); and second, to gain access to Central Asian countries.⁶ As a result, it has become crucial for India to prohibit Pakistan from establishing a strong foothold in Afghanistan.

For reaching this goal over the last two decades (2001-2021), India has invested heavily in various sectors in Afghanistan to counter Pakistan's tenacious efforts to establish a client state there.⁷ However, the overthrow of the former Afghanistan government and the reemergence of the Taliban undermined India's containment strategy. Pakistan, on the other hand, saw India-Afghanistan relations as a threat to its national security because both countries (India-Afghanistan) are lying on two sides of Pakistan's border. Thus, Pakistan believes that a pro-Islamabad government in Kabul will keep Pakistan from being trapped between two adversaries: India in the east and an "irredentist" Afghanistan with a claim to the Durand Line in the west.⁸ Pakistan also saw a friendly government in Afghanistan as a means to balance India's dominance in South Asia. So, to counter Pakistan's policy, India's presence in Afghanistan is strategically important, as it not only assists India in monitoring its neighbor but also influences activities within Pakistan.⁹ Due to these reasons and its vital interests, India wishes to maintain relationships with the Taliban, albeit with a limited presence.

Therefore, after Afghanistan's government fell at the hands of the Taliban 2.0, India has sent some of its low-level diplomats to Kabul to

6. Fauzia Ghani, "India-Afghanistan Knot in South Asia: Implications for Pakistan 2000-2014," *Journal of Indian Studies* 3, no. 2 (July-December 2017): 193, <https://tehqeeqat.org/downloadpdf/2245>.

7. C. Christine Fair, "Securing Indian Interests in Afghanistan Beyond 2014," *National Bureau of Asian Research* 17, (January 2014): 28, <https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2014.0016>.

8. Naseema Akhter and Arif Hussain Malik, "India's Involvement in Afghanistan: An Analytical Perspective of Current Interests and Future Prospects," *International Journal of Political Science and Development* 4, no. 8 (December 2016): 289, <https://doi.org/10.14662/IJPSD2016.050>.

9. Shasanka Sekhar Pati, "Indo-US Cooperation in Afghanistan: Moving Towards Convergence," *Indian Journal of Society and Politics* 5, no. 1 (2018): 67, [https://www.ijsp.in/admin/mvc/upload/50114 Indo-US Cooperation in Afghanistan Moving Towards.pdf](https://www.ijsp.in/admin/mvc/upload/50114%20Indo-US%20Cooperation%20in%20Afghanistan%20Moving%20Towards.pdf).

resume their activities in the future. The term 'Taliban 2.0' used by some experts and analysts in the wake of their return, referred them as the group's evolved tactics, strategies and possibly change their approach to governance compared to their previous rule.

1.2 Prevent Anti-India Terrorism

The Taliban, Haqqani Network, al-Qaeda in the Subcontinent (AQIS), Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), and other Pakistan-backed extremist groups pose security threats to India. The majority of these terrorist organizations are based in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province and in the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Furthermore, most of these groups operating in Afghanistan and Indian-administered Kashmir are guided and supported by Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) and military establishment. By backing these groups, Pakistan's military aims to create a vulnerable and subservient state in Afghanistan in order to establish strategic depth against India.¹⁰ Similarly, India's primary goal in Afghanistan is to keep Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for Pakistan-sponsored terrorist groups that launch attacks against India or its interests in Afghanistan.¹¹ Despite these policies, the ISI has sponsored multiple terrorist groups to carry out terrorist attacks against India or India's interests elsewhere. The 2002 attack on the Indian Parliament and the Mumbai attacks on Taj hotel in 2008 are two examples of terrorist infiltration within India. Similarly, ISI-backed groups targeted the Indian Embassy in Kabul as well as Indian consulates in the Jalalabad and Balkh provinces of Afghanistan. The likelihood of similar attacks occurring again is very high. Terrorists will carry out attacks against India or India's interests in Afghanistan at any time if they see an opportunity. For instance, Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) changed its magazine name from *Nawa-e-Afghan Jihad (Voice of Afghan Jihad)* to *Nawa-e-Ghazwa Hind (Voice of the Great Indian Battle)* and published an article congratulating the Taliban victory, indicating that the future focus of AQIS will be on India and Kashmir.¹² Additionally, in October

10. Kirit K. Nair, *India's Role in Afghanistan Post 2014: Strategy, Policy, and Implementation* (New Delhi: Knowledge World, 2015), 21.

11. Larry Hanauer and Peter Chalk, *India's and Pakistan's Strategies in Afghanistan: Implications for the United States and the Region* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2012), 39.

12. bdul Basit, "The US-Taliban Deal and Expected US Exit from Afghani-

2021, al-Qaeda released two video clips through their telegram accounts, calling for conflict in India, especially in Kashmir. The videos highlighted that the safe haven provided to the group leadership in Afghanistan gives confidence to the group to focus on India.¹³ The announcement increased India's concern because there is a possibility that thousands of LeT and JeM members who have affiliations with al-Qaeda and fought alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan might flow back to Kashmir, thereby intensifying the security situation.

1.3 Engagement with The Taliban

When the Taliban took over Kabul in 1996, India closed its embassy and refused to recognize the Taliban regime due to anti-India sentiment. India, on the other hand, maintained ties with the United National Front (UNF) or Northern Alliance the only anti-Taliban armed group during 1996 to 2001. During this period, India provided medical, financial, and military assistance to the front.¹⁴ Following al-Qaeda's attacks on two American power icons, the World Trade Center Building, and the Pentagon, the U.S provided assistance to the UNF in its efforts to overthrow the Taliban regime. Following the fall of the Taliban 1.0, India maintained cordial relations with Afghanistan, believing that a friendly and stable government in Afghanistan was in India's best interests, because a secure Afghanistan will reduce India's security concerns. India desired to ensure that Afghanistan never fall back into the hands of the Taliban and never again turn to anti-Indian interests.¹⁵ However, the Taliban's return in mid-August 2021 is seen as a setback to India's policy. But this time, India wishes to make contact with the Taliban to safeguard its interests in Afghanistan. Therefore, some months after the takeover of Kabul by the Taliban, India sent its senior

stan," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 12, no. 4 (June 2020): 11, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26918076>.

13. Mohammed Sinan Siyech, "The Return of the Taliban: 'Foreign Fighters' and Other Threats to India's Security," *Observer Research Foundation*, no. 515 (January 2022): 6, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-return-of-the-taliban-foreign-fighters-and-other-threats-to-india-s-security>.

14. Avinash Paliwal, "Afghanistan's India-Pakistan Dilemma: Advocacy Coalitions in Weak States," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 29, no. 2 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2015.1058617>.

15. Peerzada Tufail Ahmad, "India's Soft Power and Pakistan's Hard Power Policy in Afghanistan," *Research Review International Journal of Multidisciplinary* 4, no. 5 (May 2019): 1521, https://www.academia.edu/39684718/India_s_Soft_Power_and_Pakistan_s_Hard_Power_Policy_in_Afghanistan.

diplomat to engage with the authorities and discuss New Delhi's interests in Afghanistan.¹⁶ Since then, India has sent technical personnel to reopen its embassy in Kabul. But the initiation of a full-fledged relationship between India and the Taliban remains uncertain due to India's concerns about the situation in Afghanistan and the Taliban's ties with anti-India terrorist groups based in the country.

1.4 Power Project

The importance of commerce and trade in Indian foreign policy has grown in response to India's growth and integration into the global economy. A context emerged where Indian policymakers recognized India's global influence and its role in shaping the world.¹⁷ To put it another way, India's involvement in Afghanistan is an attempt to carve out a larger role for itself as a regional dominant power in line with its military and economic profile. Through this policy, India seeks to establish itself as a credible regional power capable of maintaining peace and stability on its borders. India's involvement in Afghanistan as the largest regional donor is based on its policy of viewing itself as a significant economic power capable of assisting needy states in its neighborhood.¹⁸ India is not only involved in the region through economic diplomacy, it is also involved militarily. Since the 1950s, India has participated in United Nations Peacekeeping Missions.¹⁹ In addition, India has sent navy ships to the Somali coast to participate in anti-piracy operations. Furthermore, it has increased military cooperation within the South and Central Asian regions. In Central Asia, India established a military air base in Tajikistan, from which the UNF received assistance from 1996 to 2021 and trained Kyrgyz troops for a peacekeeping mission.²⁰ India has also provided training to former Afghanistan Defense personnel at the Indian Military Academy.

16. Kallol Bhattacharjee, "India Sends Diplomats to Kabul for Talks with the Taliban," *The Hindu*, June 2, 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-sends-diplomats-to-kabul-for-talks-with-the-taliban/article65486694.ece>.

17. Tawseef Ahmad Khan, "Objectives of Indian Engagement in Afghanistan," *International Journal of Research in Social Studies* 8, no.1 (January 2018): 762, https://ijmra.us/project doc/2018/IJRSS_January2018/IJMRA-13194.pdf.

18. Harsh V. Pant, "India's Changing Afghanistan Policy: Regional and Global Implications," Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College (December 2012): 6, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11447>.

19. Hanauer and Chalk, *India's and Pakistan's Strategies*, 13.

20. Hanauer and Chalk, *India's and Pakistan's Strategies*, 13.

Considering the following activities, India's goal is to achieve regional dominance through military and economic cooperation. In summary, Afghanistan is a test for India's ability to project power, therefore, India must return to Afghanistan to pursue its objectives. According to Harsh V. Pant "India's ability to deal with instability in its own backyard will ultimately determine its rise as a global power of major import".²¹

1.5 Access to Central Asian Region (CAR)

Afghanistan is seen as a link to the energy-rich Central Asian region, where India is eager to expand its influence. But even so, India lacks direct access to the region and thus cannot penetrate. India is thus dependent on Afghanistan as it serves as the only gateway to the region, enabling India to increase its influence and improve trade relations with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan (K2T2U1).²² India has one of the fastest-growing economies and industrial development, both of which necessitate the discovery of new energy resources. As a result, India sees Afghanistan as a bridge to establishing direct contact with CARs and securing its future energy needs. Energy security is not the only factor motivating India's desire for access to the region. To broadly evaluate India's foreign policy in the context of its regional ambitions, India wishes to compete with other powers such as the United States, Russia, and China, which have already established their influence in the region, and compete for greater influence over the region. For example, India's long-term regional policy is the construction of the Chahbahar seaport in Iran. India pursues two goals by investing in this port. First, to bypass Pakistan and reduce Afghanistan's reliance on the Karachi port in Pakistan. Second, to transport goods from India to Afghanistan and from Afghanistan to the Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan K2T2U1 countries.²³ Hereafter, Iran and Afghanistan are vital corridors through which India can project power and influence throughout Central Asia and beyond.²⁴ By putting this port into operation, India will be able to maintain trade relations with Central Asia via both water and land routes.

21. Pant, "India's Changing Afghanistan Policy."

22. Akhter and Malik, "India's Involvement in Afghanistan," 289.

23. Sonam Singh, "Indian Quest for Strategic Access in Afghanistan and Its Implications for Pakistan, *International Research Journal of Management Science and Technology* 9, no. 3 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.32804/IRJMST>.

24. Fair, "Securing Indian Interests," 28.

2. Challenges For India's Afghanistan Policy

2.1 Growing Nexus Between Terrorist Organizations

Afghanistan has long been regarded as a breeding ground for Islamist militant groups such as Taliban, Haqqani Network, al-Qaeda, the Islamic State of Khorasan, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Ansarullah of Tajikistan, the East Turkistan Islamic Movement, and others. Most of the Islamic militants who have terrorized India since the 1990s, including Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT), Harakat-ul-Mujahiddin (HuM), and the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), have received their training in Afghanistan.²⁵ The mentioned terrorist organizations have varying degrees of affiliation with the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and other regional terrorist organizations.²⁶ These groups have launched a number of attacks against India and Indian diplomatic missions in Afghanistan, including an attack on the Indian embassy in Kabul, Mumbai attack 2008, Uri and Pulwama attack in Jammu and Kashmir which resulted to the death of 40 Indian soldiers.

So, India's objective is to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a hub for terrorist organizations intending a terrorist attack on India or its diplomatic missions in Afghanistan or elsewhere.²⁷ The concerning issue is that since 2001, the link between these militants has grown stronger than ever before in history. The majority of Pakistan-based terrorist groups that operated against India in Kashmir are now allied with international terrorist networks, raising the threat level. Furthermore, anti-India militants receive training, weapons, financial assistance, and shelter from other terror organizations. Moreover, based on reports, since the return of the Taliban in August 2021, approximately 30 militants of foreign nationalities have been discovered in Kashmir.²⁸ In addition to foreign fighters' infiltration in Jammu & Kashmir, the Kashmir police had also discovered caches of American M4, M16, and

25. Fair, "Securing Indian Interests," 27.

26. Fair, "Securing Indian Interests," 28.

27. Shakoor Ahmad Dar, Sadhana Pandey, and Rouf Ahmad Bhat, "Capacity Building Initiatives by India in Afghanistan: A Developmental Strategy," *2nd International Conference on Recent Developments in Science, Engineering, Management, and Humanities* (January 2019): 164, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336846310_Capacity_Building_Initiatives_by_India_in_Afghanistan_A_Developmental_Strategy.

28. Siyech, "The Return of the Taliban," 10.

other US-made arms and ammunition in the Kashmir valley that ultimately fell into the hands of the Taliban and their allies in Afghanistan after the U.S forces withdrawal.²⁹ Similarly, a video released by a group named the People's Anti-Fascist Front (PAFF), had shown that its members were equipped with M249 automatic rifle, 509 tactical guns, M1911 pistols and M4 carbine rifle. It seems the leftover ammunitions have been sold openly by the Taliban and terrorist organizations are procuring these weapons and smuggling them into the Kashmir valley.³⁰ In a recent incident, the Indian army in Poonch district, Kashmir arrested an Afghan national who is a member of the Al-Badr military unit.³¹ Al-Badr is a Haqqani military unit. The name is derived from Badruddin Haqqani, the third son of Jalaluddin Haqqani founder of Haqqani Network, who was killed in an American drone strike ten years ago in North Waziristan.³² As a result, India is deeply concerned about the growing link between militants and insurgency in Kashmir.

2.2 State Sponsored Terrorism Against India in Abroad

Pakistan is one of the most active states in South Asia in terms of terrorism sponsorship. Security experts believe that Pakistan is involved in terrorist financing. They have believed Pakistan had been 'flirting' with these Jihadists for decades, even using them as a tool of state policy.³³ Furthermore, the Pakistan government has been accused of assisting terrorist groups such as Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), and Harakt-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) in launching a series of attacks in India

29. Junaid Kathju, "US Arms Left in Afghanistan Are Turning Up in a Different Conflict," *NBC News*, January 30, 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/us-weapons-afghanistan-taliban-kashmir-rcna67134>.

30. Idrees Lone, "US Army Weapon Left in Afghanistan Makes Its Way to Kashmir; Terror Group Releases Video," *WION*, January 20, 2022, <https://www.wionews.com/india-news/us-army-weapon-left-in-afghanistan-makes-its-way-to-kashmir-terror-group-releases-video-446245>.

31. Press Trust of India, "Afghan National Linked to 'Al-Badr' Booked Under Stringent Law in J&K," *India Today*, August 10, 2023, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/jammu-and-kashmir-police-books-afghan-man-under-uapa-2419179-2023-08-10>.

32. Wajid Rouhani, "A Member of the Haqqani Network's Special Unit Was Arrested in the Kashmir Region of India," *Independent Persian*, August 10, 2023, <https://www.independentpersian.com/node/349846>.

33. Paulo Casaca and Siegfried O. Wolf, "Pakistan and State-Sponsored Terrorism in South Asia," in *Terrorism Revisited: Islamism, Political Violence, and State-Sponsorship* (Springer International Publishing, 2017).

that started in Kashmir and gradually spread to other Indian states.³⁴ India has always blamed Pakistan's Intelligence Agency (ISI) for all terrorist attacks in India, including the Kashmir insurgency, the attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001, the Mumbai train bombing in July 2006, the 2006 Varanasi bombing, the August 2007 Hyderabad bombing, and the 26/11 Mumbai attack.³⁵ Even Pakistan's elites endorsed these claims, for example, "former President Zardari publicly admitting that the country deliberately created and nurtured terrorist groups such as LeT and JeM as a policy to achieve short-term tactical objectives".³⁶ Despite having the support of the Pakistani government, these terrorist organizations worked with Pakistani Islamist parties such as Jamiat-e-Islami Pakistan, Jamat-ulma-Islam (JuI), and many others to radicalize them further. These Islamic parties have a radical interpretation of Islam. These ideological Jihadists pose a danger not only to India but have also imported their radical ideology into Pakistan, leading to increased Islamist-related suicide and insurgent activities, which have been inflicting tremendous panic in the Pakistani establishment military ranks.³⁷

Likewise, since the Taliban took over Kabul, Indian security concerns have grown more than ever because Afghanistan was used as a training ground for Pakistan-backed militants fighting in Indian-administered Kashmir during the first Taliban rule (1996–2001).³⁸ Since then, India has been concerned that Pakistan may use Afghanistan as a base for militant groups to launch an attack on it. Even Indian policymakers see no changes in Pakistan's Kashmir policy. The top Pakistani military leader and retired generals maintained that India should not be allowed to rest until they agree to accept a solution to the Kashmir dispute "as demanded by them."³⁹ So, to prevent any anti-India activity, India wants

34. Pradeep Kumar, "Pakistan Sponsored Terrorism: Security Threat to India," *International Research Journal of Management Science & Technology* 9, no. 3 (2018): 213, <http://doi.org/10.32804/IRJMST>.

35. Kumar, "Pakistan Sponsored Terrorism," 212.

36. Casaca and Wolf, "Pakistan and State-Sponsored Terrorism in South Asia."

37. Daniel Byman and Sarah E. Kreps, "Agents of Destruction? Applying Principal-Agent Analysis to State-Sponsored Terrorism," *International Studies Perspectives* 11, no. 1 (February 2010): 9, <https://academic.oup.com/isp/article/11/1/1/1785085>.

38. Zachary Constantino, "The India–Pakistan Rivalry in Afghanistan," United States Institute of Peace, January 29, 2020, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/01/india-pakistan-rivalry-afghanistan>.

39. Kumar, "Pakistan Sponsored Terrorism," 213.

diplomatic and physical presence in Afghanistan to scrutinize the situation closely and to prevent the use of Afghanistan soil by Pakistan against India.

2.3 Drug Trafficking

Another source of concern for India's security is drug trafficking in Afghanistan, which has a direct impact on the country's national security. Afghanistan has become a hotspot for drugs, particularly poppy, as a result of continuous war and a lack of political setup and enforcement of law and order.⁴⁰ According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Afghanistan is the main source of methamphetamine, crystal or meth production.⁴¹ Poppy cultivation and illegal poppy trade are the main sources of income for terrorist groups, who use it to buy weapons. Another source of concern is the spread of opium production throughout the region, so India's policy in Afghanistan includes countering drug trafficking and narco-terrorism. Drugs are smuggled into India via its border with Pakistan. Between 1996 and 1997, the amount of drug trafficking from Afghanistan to India was 64% opium poppy, but by 2002, it had dropped to 5%.⁴² The reasons for the decrease in drug trafficking were measures implemented such as border vigilance, fencing, and electrification along the border. Furthermore, India had taken additional measures such as training of Afghanistan anti-narcotic department and providing of some surveillance instruments for the custom department to combat the drug smuggling.⁴³ Since the Taliban's return, drug trafficking from Afghanistan to India has increased once more, posing a significant security challenge for the country.⁴⁴

40. Ghani, "India-Afghanistan Knot in South Asia," 196.

41. "Afghan Opium Poppy Cultivation Plunges By 95 Percent Under Taliban: UN," *Aljazeera*, November 5, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/5/afghan-opium-poppy-cultivation-plunges-by-95-percent-under-taliban-un>.

42. Ghani, "India-Afghanistan Knot in South Asia," 196.

43. Umbreen Javaid and Tehmina Aslam, "Growing Geo-Economic and Geo-Strategic Interests of India in Afghanistan: Implications for Pakistan," *Journal of Political Studies* 23, no. 2 (2016): 671, http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/pols/pdf-files/Tehmina - 20_v23_2_16.pdf.

44. Rupert Stone, "India Faces Double Drugs Threat from Afghanistan, Myanmar," *Nikkei Asia*, January 4, 2022, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Afghanistan-turmoil/India-faces-double-drugs-threat-from-Afghanistan-Myanmar>.

2.3 Lack of Direct Transit to Afghanistan and Obstacles via Iran

One of the major barriers between India and Afghanistan is the lack of direct land and sea connections.⁴⁵ The shortest land route between these two countries is through Pakistan, but Pakistan has consistently refused to allow India to use its territory to reach Afghanistan and Central Asia. To overcome this challenge, India built a 218-kilometer-long road connecting the Afghanistan highway to the Iranian border, as well as heavily invested in Chahbahar port and developed rail and road links to the Afghanistan border in order to easily reach Afghanistan.⁴⁶ However, the main impediment to using this port is US sanctions against Iran, which limit India's ability to increase its investment and fully utilize this project. Furthermore, the U.S is not pleased with India's engagement with Iran. The schism between Iran and the United States has placed India in a delicate situation. It is extremely challenging for India to maintain a balance between its engagement with Iran and its relationship with the United States.

Conclusion

No doubt India and Afghanistan established close and cordial relations over the last two decades (2001–2021). Their relationship was highly developed in different aspects such as economic, political and security. Both countries signed various agreements like Strategic Partnership agreement in 2011 aimed to strengthen their ties. This change was a unique opportunity for both countries to enhance level of their engagement post-Taliban expel in 2001. During this time India highly engaged politically in Afghanistan and took part in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Apart from its reconstruction engagements India also trained erstwhile Afghanistan Security Forces, police personals and provided military equipment to the previous Afghan National Army (ANA). All these initiatives were taken by India to counter Pakistan spoiler role in the region as well as to demonstrate its power in the re-

45. Rajeev Agarwal, "Afghanistan Post-2014: Can India Emerge as a Key 'Security Collaborator'?", *Asian Strategic Review* (2015): 94, https://idsa.in/system/files/book/book_ASR2015.pdf.

46. Aishwarya Paliwal, "Afghanistan Crisis: Indian Trade Worth \$1.5 Billion Stops Abruptly as Afghans Stare at Bleak Future," *India Today*, August 24, 2021, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/afghanistan-crisis-indian-bilateral-trade-stops-abruptly-afghans-bleak-future-1844493-2021-08-24>; Agarwal, "Afghanistan Post-2014," 94.

gion. India view Afghanistan as a place where it can project its power to the world by playing a significant role.

However, since the return of the Taliban these policies have been experiencing set back and India has lost its position in Afghanistan. Besides losing its position in Afghanistan, India has also faced with various challenges which required a comprehensive policy to counter it. However, India has taken some steps, such as training Taliban diplomats, participating in regional conferences, unofficially surrounding of Afghanistan Embassy in New Delhi to pro-Taliban diplomats, and appointing a chargé d'affaires in Afghanistan under the Taliban to restore its previous status. In addition to these measures, New Delhi is closely monitoring the relations between the Taliban and Pakistan, particularly regarding Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) activities in Afghanistan. Since the Taliban's return, the TTP has increased its anti-Pakistan activities from Afghanistan soil, causing dissatisfaction in Islamabad. Pakistan had expected the Taliban to assist in countering the TTP challenge; however, contrary to expectations, the Taliban's return has led to a deterioration of the security situation in Pakistan. New Delhi believes that as tensions between the Taliban and Pakistan increase, more space will be created for India in Afghanistan.

Despite all these measures, the divergence between India and the Taliban is very wide. India is a democratic and secular country, whereas the Taliban are religious fundamentalist groups with links to regional and international terrorist organizations, including anti-India extremist groups who believe in global Jihad and the establishment of an Islamic State based on Sharia law. Moreover, these groups also advocate for the continuation of Jihad in Kashmir under India's administration until the liberation of Kashmir from India. Considering these issues, it is not an easy task for India to establish its leverage in Afghanistan under the Taliban. Therefore, India has a long way ahead in Afghanistan to restore its previous status under the Taliban.