

UTAH VALLEY UNIVERSITY
CENTER FOR NATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES

THE UVU SECURITY REVIEW

VOLUME X - ISSUE I

Spring 2025



UVU Security Review

The UVU Security Review is Utah's first student-edited academic journal focused on national security issues. The Review is published twice annually—in April and December—and it is supported by the Center for National Security Studies (CNSS) at Utah Valley University (UVU). The Review publishes timely, insightful articles on critical national security matters, including topics relating to foreign affairs, intelligence, homeland security, terrorism, and national defense. The Review accepts articles from UVU students, alumni, faculty, staff, and administration. Submissions should be sent to the Review Editor-in-Chief at CNSSJournal@uvu.edu.

The Center for National Security Studies

The CNSS at UVU was established in January 2016. The Center is the first of its kind in the State of Utah. The CNSS is a nonpartisan academic institution for the instruction, analysis, and discussion of issues related to the field of US national security. The mission of the CNSS is twofold: to promote an interdisciplinary academic environment on campus that critically examines both the theoretical and practical aspects of national security policy and practice; and to assist students in preparing for public and private sector national security careers through acquisition of subject matter expertise, analytical skills, and practical experience. The CNSS aims to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities needed to succeed in the growing national security sector.

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UVU Security Review

Volume X Issue I
Spring 2025

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A Note From the Editor-in-Chief

Dear Readers,

It is with excitement that I present to you the Spring 2025 Edition of the UVU Security Review. As Editor-in-Chief, I have had the privilege of working with our contributors, editors, and faculty. Each individual who has contributed to this edition of the UVU Security Review has volunteered precious time and effort.

To the authors, I extend my gratitude and admiration for the hard work and insight you share with us through your submissions. Thank you for taking the time to research, study, and reflect on the national security topic of your choice. I hope that this experience has been enriching for you as a professional, and I hope our readers benefit from your insights.

Thank you, Emma Fullerton, Hope Fager, and Drew Bushell for your work this semester to ensure the submissions were appropriately type-set, edited, and published according to the applicable academic standards. I would like to thank each of the editors who also contributed to this process to ensure that the journal was published in a timely and professional manner. Thank you, Dr. Roberto Flores, for your mentorship and guidance this semester.

Finally, I would like to thank you, the reader, for your interest in the UVU Security Review. We live in an ever-changing world, and it is more important than ever before to have a society that is educated on the national security issues of the day. After all, it is up to us to overcome today's challenges. As President Reagan once said, "freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same."

May we understand and appreciate the cost of the freedoms we enjoy, and may we do our part to secure such freedoms for the generations to come. I hope this edition of the UVU Security Review challenges you to think about today's national security issues. I appreciate you taking the time to read this publication. On

behalf of the entire UVU Security Review staff, thank you.

With gratitude,
Henry Wolthuis
Editor-in-Chief

Long-Term Security Implications of the U.S. Withdrawal from Afghanistan *Lacie Jacobson*

The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 marked more than the conclusion of America's longest war; it represented a pivotal geopolitical transformation that fundamentally reshaped regional power dynamics, fueled terrorist organizations, and left a lasting mark on global perceptions of U.S. reliability. In response to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the U.S. initiated "Operation Enduring Freedom," beginning the "war on terror." The primary objectives of this comprehensive military campaign were to find and prosecute the terrorists responsible for the 9/11 attacks, eradicate al-Qaeda, root out any other terrorist organizations that sought to harm the U.S., and remove the Taliban regime that provided support networks and safe havens for terrorists.¹

U.S. and allied forces initially invaded Afghanistan in 2001, overthrowing the Taliban regime within weeks, and began nation-building efforts to help establish a new Afghan government, which would take place over the following two decades. Unfortunately, the U.S. shifted its focus to the Iraq War between 2003 and 2009, which allowed the Taliban to regroup and launch an insurgency. Recognizing the quickly deteriorating security landscape in Afghanistan, President Obama authorized a troop surge² in 2009

1 Amanda Onion, Missy Sullivan, Matt Mullen, and Christian Zapata. "U.S.-Led Attack on Afghanistan Begins | October 7, 2001." History.com. <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/u-s-led-attack-on-afghanistan-begins>.

2 President Barack Obama "The Way Forward in Afghanistan." The White House. December 1, 2009. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/issues/defense/afghanistan>.

to counter the insurrection. This order dramatically increased U.S. military presence in Afghanistan by 100,000 personnel.³ The elimination of al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden by U.S. Navy SEALs in 2011 was a strategic victory, but challenges in Afghanistan remained as it had not resolved the fundamental issues that undermined stability in Afghanistan.

Persistent regional instability and the lack of support at home eventually compelled the Trump Administration to sign the 2020 Doha Agreement,⁴ which established a definitive timeline for a complete withdrawal of U.S. troops by May 1, 2021. This agreement was dependent upon specific assurances that the Taliban would denounce al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations and refrain from attacking U.S. troops or launching high-profile attacks. However, the Taliban violated the core provisions of the agreement, demonstrating a disregard for the negotiated terms, and escalated violence against U.S. and Afghan military forces.

After President Biden was elected, he subsequently honored the withdrawal agreement but extended the departure timeline to September 11,⁵ before eventually accelerating the withdrawal to August 31. The international community was surprised by how quickly the Taliban's strategic offensive insurgency forces began taking provincial territories. On August 15, Taliban forces captured

3 Associated Press and Reuters. "The US War in Afghanistan Is Over. This Is How It Began and What It Left Behind." ABC News., July 6, 2021. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-07-07/afghanistan-war-troop-withdrawal-us-nato-taliban/100272542>.

4 U.S. Department of State. Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Which Is Not Recognized by the United States as a State and Is Known as the Taliban, and the United States of America. March 10, 2020. www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Agreement-For-Bringing-Peace-to-Afghanistan-02.29.20.pdf

5 Terri Cronk. "Biden Announces Full U.S. Troop Withdrawal from Afghanistan by Sept. 11." U.S. Department of Defense., April 14, 2021. <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/article/2573268/biden-announces-full-us-troop-withdrawal-from-afghanistan-by-sept-11>.

Kabul with minimal military resistance, as the Afghan National Army dissolved, with many soldiers abandoning their posts or collectively surrendering.⁶ This rapid collapse enabled Taliban forces to seize substantial U.S.-provided military equipment, which significantly altered the power dynamics in Afghanistan, forcing Afghan President Ashraf Ghani into exile in the United Arab Emirates.

The evacuation at Hamid Karzai International Airport became a distinct symbol of the withdrawal's complexity. More than 123,000 individuals,⁷ including government employees, military personnel, and Afghan nationals seeking refuge, were evacuated under increasingly dangerous conditions. The operation's tragic conclusion came on August 26, when a self-proclaimed Islamic State in Khorasan (ISIS-K) suicide bomber killed 180 people, including 13 U.S. service members, marking the final U.S. casualties of America's longest war.

While the Biden Administration fulfilled a long-standing commitment to evacuate U.S. troops, the chaotic nature of the withdrawal irreparably compromised decades of strategic investment and progress. The abrupt departure created a power vacuum that enabled the Taliban to swiftly re-establish control, emboldened terrorist networks, including ISIS-K and al-Qaeda, and presented long-term security challenges for the U.S. and its allies and other powers in the region. By systematically examining the withdrawal's immediate aftermath, terrorist group resurgences, regional power shifts, and the resulting U.S. credibility crisis, this research will provide a comprehensive analysis of the long-term security implications that will reshape U.S. foreign policy and military engagement strategies for years to come.

6 Reuters. "Taliban Enter Afghan Capital as US Diplomats Evacuate by Chopper." Reuters., August 15, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-troops-arrive-afghan-capital-assist-evacuations-2021-08-14>.

7 The Washington Post. "Military Carries out Strike in Kabul as Slain Service Members Are Returned to U.S." The Washington Post., August 29, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/08/29/afghanistan-kabul-taliban-live-updates>.

Immediate Aftermath: Governance, Economic, and Social Implications

The Taliban's return to power precipitated severe changes to Afghanistan's political landscape, dismantling the Islamic Republic and reinstating the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. This regime's re-establishment mirrors the Taliban's previous authoritarian rule during the late 1990s, characterized by a central government enforcing strict interpretations of Islamic law. This repressive government lacks international legitimacy, existing in a state of diplomatic isolation that undermines its institutional credibility and global engagement.⁸ This institutional transformation extends beyond political restructuring, additionally altering Afghanistan's security and governance infrastructure.

The Taliban's governance structure centers around the leadership council, Rahbari Shura, with Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada holding ultimate authority.⁹ The government's makeup raises deep security concerns, as it incorporates multiple designated terrorists and former Guantanamo detainees,¹⁰ including Sirajuddin Haqqani, a U.S.-designated terrorist with documented connections to al-Qaeda, who now serves as acting interior minister. This leadership arrangement represents more than a political transition; it signifies a strategic reconstruction that

8 Rahimi, Haroun, and Mahir Hazim. "International Law and the Taliban's Legal Status: Emerging Recognition Criteria?" *Washington International Law Journal*, 2023. <https://digitalcommons.law.uw.edu/cgi/view-content.cgi?article=1917&context=wilj>.

9 Maizland, Lindsay. "How the Taliban Has Changed Afghanistan, a Year after Taking Power." PBS, August 30, 2022. <https://www.pbs.org/news-hour/world/how-the-taliban-has-changed-afghanistan-a-year-after-taking-power>.

10 Joscelyn, Thomas, and Bill Roggio. "Taliban's Government Includes Designated Terrorists, Ex-Guantanamo Detainees." *FDD's Long War Journal*, September 22, 2021. <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2021/09/talibans-government-includes-designated-terrorists-ex-guantanamo-detainees.php>.

incorporates known terrorist elements directly into Afghanistan's governmental structure. The reorganization of leadership directly impacted Afghanistan's economic sustainability, exposing the fragility of its financial systems.

Before the Taliban's return to power, Afghanistan's economy was in a state of critical dependency, with international aid financing approximately 75% of public expenditures.¹¹ The abrupt cessation of international support in August 2021 triggered an unprecedented economic collapse. The suspension of \$2 billion from the Afghanistan Reconstructive Trust Fund,¹² combined with comprehensive international sanctions and the freezing of \$9 billion in national assets,¹³ caused a catastrophic 30% decrease in Afghanistan's GDP.¹⁴ Afghanistan's banking system has become completely incapacitated, exposing the fragility of the country's economic foundations. The most extreme consequences of the economic collapse went beyond fiscal metrics, triggering a humanitarian crisis of record scale.

The humanitarian consequences of this economic collapse have been devastating. Human Rights Watch has characterized the post-withdrawal period as a "deepening and increasingly deadly humanitarian crisis,"¹⁵ with the United Nations reporting that over 95% of Afghan households now face acute food insecurity and spiking malnutrition rates.¹⁶ Skyrocketing unemployment rates,

11 Human Rights Watch. "Afghanistan: Economic Roots of the Humanitarian Crisis." March 2, 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/01/afghanistan-economic-roots-humanitarian-crisis>.

12 World Bank. "The Afghanistan Reconstructive Trust Fund." <https://www.wb-artf.org/who-we-are/about-us>.

13 Human Rights Watch. "Afghanistan: Economic Roots of the Humanitarian Crisis."

14 Byrd, William. "One Year Later, Taliban Unable to Reverse Afghanistan's Economic Decline." United States Institute of Peace, August 11, 2022, [URL no longer available].

15 Human Rights Watch. "Afghanistan: Economic Roots of the Humanitarian Crisis."

16 Human Rights Watch. "Afghanistan: Economic Roots of the Hu-

devaluation of the currency, and dramatically inflated food prices have pushed millions of Afghans to the edge of survival, resulting in mass displacement of the population.¹⁷ This humanitarian emergency extends beyond Afghanistan's borders, increasing major refugee pressures in neighboring countries and potentially destabilizing regional geopolitical dynamics. As economic pressures escalated, the Taliban's oppressive governance further worsened the population's systemic vulnerabilities, particularly targeting women's fundamental rights.

The Taliban's governance has led to a steadily deteriorating human rights situation, with women and girls bearing the most severe consequences. Extensive restrictions have effectively eliminated women's fundamental freedoms, including education, mobility, and professional opportunities. Women are now prohibited from receiving secondary and higher education, forbidden to travel without wearing full hijabs with face coverings and a male chaperone, and categorically excluded from public sector, government, and most NGO positions. Women peacefully protesting these oppressive policies have been met with state violence, including arbitrary detentions, excessive force, and documented instances of torture.¹⁸

Re-Emergence of Terrorist Groups

The withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan created a power vacuum exploited by terrorist groups, such as ISIS-K and al-Qaeda. Afghanistan has become a failing state where the Taliban struggles to maintain law and order beyond urban cities, creating ideal conditions for terrorist organizations to rebuild and grow. As a security expert notes, "the combination of a weak

manitarian Crisis."

17 United States Institute of Peace. "One Year Later, Taliban Unable to Reverse Afghanistan's Economic Decline."

18 Human Rights Watch. "World Report 2024: Rights Trends in Afghanistan." July 9, 2024. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/afghanistan-0>.

state and a collapsing economy gives terrorist groups relative freedom within which to operate and provides a pool of potential recruits.”¹⁹ Benefitting from this changing landscape, al-Qaeda has reestablished itself, using Afghanistan as a safe haven to reconstruct its operational infrastructure. Similarly, ISIS-K has capitalized on the instability, doubling its ranks to around 4,000 fighters by recruiting from former Afghan military personnel and other militant networks.²⁰

The Taliban’s response to the terrorist threat is characterized by a combination of denial and defiance. While refusing assistance from the U.S. to fight ISIS-K, the Taliban argues they are completely capable of managing the violent extremist group on their own. Zabihullah Mujahid, a chief spokesperson for the Taliban, also insists that groups like ISIS-K pose no significant threat,²¹ a stance driven by the desire to assert political legitimacy. This overly confident posture is undermined by a series of devastating terrorist attacks that ISIS-K continues to conduct. In addition to the tragic bombing at Kabul Airport during the U.S. military withdrawal, ISIS-K has orchestrated other high-profile attacks including a suicide bombing at the Russian embassy in Kabul, killing six people including embassy staff and Afghan civilians,²² and cross-border attacks in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Iran. The Iranian attack, which claimed the lives of about one hundred individuals, is described as

19 Jones, Seth G. “Countering a Resurgent Terrorist Threat in Afghanistan.” Council on Foreign Relations, April 2022. <https://www.cfr.org/report/countering-resurgent-terrorist-threat-afghanistan>.

20 Jones, Seth G. “Countering a Resurgent Terrorist Threat in Afghanistan.”

21 CBS News. “The Taliban Insists ISIS-K Is No Threat. Bloodshed on Afghan Soil Tells a Different Story.” October 23, 2021. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/afghanistan-news-war-taliban-isis-k-threat-attacks-kabul/>.

22 Al Jazeera. “Two Russian Embassy Staff among Six Killed in Kabul Suicide Blast.” September 5, 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/5/suicide-bomb-blast-near-russian-embassy-in-kabul-afghan-police>.

the “[deadliest] terrorist attack that Iran has experienced since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.”²³

Confronted with the Taliban’s perceived ineffectiveness in successfully addressing the terrorist threat, the U.S. has pursued over-the-horizon drone operations,²⁴ targeting leaders of these terrorist organizations. In a notable success, the U.S. launched a drone strike in 2022 on a safe house in Kabul, eliminating al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.²⁵ Similar operations have neutralized several high-profile ISIS-K leaders but, unfortunately, not all have been successful.²⁶ These unwanted interventions have been met with opposition from the Taliban, who view such actions as a violation of Afghanistan’s sovereignty, international law, and the Doha Agreement.²⁷

While these drone operations have proven effective in eliminating high-value targets, they have considerable operational limitations. The absence of troops on the ground creates intelligence gaps and increases the risk of noncombatant casualties.²⁸ Without immediate and contextual human intelligence

23 Skorka, Melissa. “The Real Lessons of Countering ISIS in the Middle East: How America Can Shore Up Its Approach to Intelligence and Deconfliction to Defeat ISIS-K in Afghanistan and Pakistan.” Hoover Institution, May 13, 2024. <https://www.hoover.org/research/real-lessons-countering-isis-middle-east-how-america-can-shore-itsapproach-intelligence>.

24 The White House. “Remarks by President Biden on the End of the War in Afghanistan.” August 31, 2021, [URL no longer available].

25 Miller, Aaron David. “What the Al-Qaeda Drone Strike Reveals About U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan.” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 2, 2022, [URL no longer available].

26 Miller, Aaron David. “What the Al-Qaeda Drone Strike Reveals About U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan.”

27 Al Jazeera. “Taliban: ‘Consequences’ If US Drones Enter Afghan Airspace.” September 29, 2021. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/29/taliban-consequences-if-us-continues-to-fly-drones-in-airspace>.

28 Hennigan, W. J. “‘A Tragic Mistake’: Botched Drone Strike in Afghanistan Raises Concerns Over Biden’s Counterterrorism Strategy.” Time, September 18, 2021. <https://time.com/6099377/afghanistan-drone-strike->

from personnel on-site, these remote operations struggle to adapt to evolving dynamic situations. The lack of on-the-ground verification increases the risk of unnecessary collateral damage and civilian casualties, as demonstrated by the botched drone strike in August 2021. In response to the Kabul Airport bombing, the U.S. intended to target ISIS-K members but tragically caused the deaths of ten Afghan civilians, including seven children,²⁹ which clearly illustrates these challenges.

Regional Power Shifts and the Geopolitical Fallout

Since 2012, China has steadily increased its economic and political interest in Afghanistan, with additional momentum following the withdrawal of U.S. forces in 2021. This involvement is primarily driven by the Belt Road Initiative (BRI), aiming to enhance global trade routes and infrastructure by “creating a vast network of railways, energy pipelines, highways, and streamlined border crossings,”³⁰ connecting regions west and south of China. Afghanistan’s strategic location in South Asia, bridging Central Asia and the Middle East, makes it an important link in China’s expansive geopolitical design.

By strategically positioning itself as Afghanistan’s primary foreign investor, China is not solely pursuing economic returns but also establishing a foothold in a historically unstable region, focusing on infrastructure projects, mining, and the energy sector. In 2023, China signed a 25-year multimillion-dollar contract with Afghanistan, promising \$150 million in the first year and an additional \$540 million over the next three years;³¹ this is the first

counterterrorism/.

29 Hennigan, W. J. “‘A Tragic Mistake’: Botched Drone Strike in Afghanistan Raises Concerns Over Biden’s Counterterrorism Strategy.”

30 McBride, James, Noah Berman, and Andrew Chatzky. “China’s Massive Belt and Road Initiative.” Council on Foreign Relations, February 2, 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>.

31 D’Souza, Shanthie Mariet. “China’s Belt and Road Initiative and the

significant investment since the Taliban's return to power. China has also maintained diplomatic relations with the Taliban, emphasizing regional stability and security, and has engaged in trilateral dialogues with Afghanistan and Pakistan to promote connectivity and economic cooperation benefiting the entire region.³²

The rapid expansion of China's influence in South Asia, particularly in Afghanistan, challenges U.S. strategic interests in the region. While both nations share a desire to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a breeding ground for terrorists who threaten their own security, their approaches differ significantly. The U.S. remains cautious of China's growing economic and diplomatic leverage, which could potentially reshape regional power dynamics and economic dependencies, challenging America's long-standing strategic positioning in the area.³³

The withdrawal of U.S. troops has caused neighboring countries to reevaluate their relationships with the new Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Despite historical differences and ongoing disputes, Iran has adopted a practical diplomatic strategy, seeking to normalize relations with the Taliban. This approach is guided by a calculated assessment of regional stability, addressing immediate security issues, like the ISIS-K threat, managing the border and refugee crisis, and keeping key trade relations.³⁴

Pakistan's relationship with the Taliban has become increasingly complex and filled with tension. Historically, a longstanding supporter of the Taliban, Pakistan finds itself attempting to navigate a more challenging diplomatic landscape

Taliban's Economic Dreams." *The Diplomat*, October 19, 2023, [URL no longer available].

32 Liaqat, Saher, and Abu Hurairah Abbasi. "Afghanistan in China's Grand Strategy." *The Diplomat*, August 4, 2023. <https://thediplomat.com/2023/08/afghanistan-in-chinas-grand-strategy/>.

33 United States Institute of Peace. "China's Influence on Conflict Dynamics in South Asia." December 16, 2020, [URL no longer available].

34 London, Douglas, Syed Mohammad Ali, and Ahmad Sayer Daudzai. "Iran-Taliban Ties: Pragmatism over Ideology." Middle East Institute, September 18, 2024, [URL no longer available].

successfully. The Taliban seeks to assert its independence, rejecting the idea of being a Pakistani proxy, ruining Pakistan's hopes to leverage this relationship and influence Afghan politics to further its strategic interests.³⁵ This has led to public disagreements, criticisms, deadly border clashes along the Durand Line,³⁶ and mutual accusations. The Taliban has criticized Pakistan for allowing the U.S. to utilize its airspace to conduct drone attacks on targets in Afghanistan, while Pakistan has accused the Taliban of harboring terrorists, like Masood Azhar, head of the Jaish-e-Mohammad³⁷ extremist group. This tension is an example of the fragile nature of regional alliances, despite commonalities and incentives for cooperation, emphasizing the possibility of further violence and instability if diplomatic channels are not carefully managed.³⁸

The geopolitical shifts have had major humanitarian consequences, specifically for involuntarily displaced Afghans seeking refuge in nearby countries. Neighboring countries have responded to this mass influx of migrants by securitizing their borders, increasing troop presence, and constructing physical barriers to prevent illegal migration.³⁹ This approach has made the refugee movement exponentially more dangerous, forcing individuals to rely on expensive and risky smuggling routes, where

35 Siddique, Abubakar. "Tensions Increase Between Pakistan, Afghan Taliban Despite Historical Ties." RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, September 30, 2022. <https://www.rferl.org/a/tensions-pakistan-afghan-taliban-despite-historical-ties/32059510.html>.

36 The disputed border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

37 "Jaish-e-Mohammad (JEM)." National Counterterrorism Center, https://www.dni.gov/nctc/terrorist_groups/jem.html.

38 Siddique, Abubakar. "Tensions Increase Between Pakistan, Afghan Taliban Despite Historical Ties."

39 Abdullah Mohammadi, Hanh Nguyen, and Jennifer Vallentine, "The Impact of the Afghanistan Crisis on Migration: Increasingly Securitized Borders Will Only Make Migration Riskier and More Dangerous," Mixed Migration Centre, January 17, 2023, <https://mixedmigration.org/the-impact-of-the-afghanistan-crisis-on-migration/>.

they are subject to violence, robbery, and detention.⁴⁰ These border issues not only impact individual migrants simply trying to survive but also risk creating additional tensions between Afghanistan and its neighbors, fueling future instability and humanitarian challenges.

U.S. Credibility Crisis and Global Strategic Implications

The chaotic withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan significantly damaged U.S. credibility among NATO allies and global partners. The abrupt collapse of the Afghan government, accompanied by the resulting humanitarian crisis, exposed critical failures in U.S. military planning and diplomatic leadership. NATO allies were particularly alarmed by the apparent lack of strategic foresight and collaborative planning, with key European nations, such as Germany, the U.K., and France, expressing deep concern about the operational and moral implications of the withdrawal.

European leaders were straightforward in their criticisms. Norbert Röttgen, then-chairman of the German parliament's foreign relations committee, expressed strong disapproval and described the withdrawal as a "serious and far-reaching miscalculation" that inflicted "fundamental damage to the political and moral credibility of the West."⁴¹ British officials echoed similar sentiments, with Tom Tugendhat, then-chair of the U.K. parliament's foreign affairs committee, describing it as "the biggest foreign policy disaster since Suez"⁴² and calling for a reassessment of how the U.K. manages its international alliances. French President Emmanuel Macron took advantage of the opportunity to advance his long-standing vision of European strategic autonomy, arguing that the withdrawal emphasized the need for the European Union to develop military, economic, and technological interdependence from an

40 Mohammadi, Nguyen, and Vallentine, "Impact of the Afghanistan Crisis on Migration".

41 Matthew Karnitschnig, "Disbelief and Betrayal: Europe Reacts to Biden's Afghanistan 'Miscalculation,'" POLITICO, August 17, 2021. <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-reacts-bidens-afghanistan-withdrawal/>.

42 Karnitschnig, "Disbelief and Betrayal."

undependable and increasingly unpredictable U.S.⁴³

The perceived display of U.S. vulnerability emboldened rival powers, like Russia and China, to pursue more aggressive international strategies. While the connection remains speculative, General Mark Milley, then-chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, admitted that although Vladimir Putin probably had his sights set on Ukraine long before the war in Afghanistan ended, the disastrous results of the withdrawal could have influenced Russia's decision to invade Ukraine in 2022.⁴⁴ The withdrawal potentially showed a weakness in U.S. resolve and NATO unity, creating an opening that Russia calculated would minimize the likelihood of a combined international response.

China has weaponized the messy Afghanistan withdrawal narrative, to place additional pressure on Taiwan and undermine its confidence in U.S. support.⁴⁵ The Global Times, a state-affiliated Chinese newspaper, highlighted the withdrawal as evidence of U.S. unreliability, implying that the U.S. would respond similarly and abandon Taiwan.⁴⁶ This narrative emphasized a historical pattern of U.S. abandonment, referencing previous withdrawals from South Vietnam in 1975 and Syria in 2019. The editorial explicitly argued

43 Tom Wheeldon, "Proposals for an EU Army Re-Emerge after Afghan Pullout – but Many Remain 'Hard to Convince,'" France 24, September 2, 2021. <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20210902-proposals-for-an-eu-army-re-emerge-after-afghan-pullout-%E2%80%93-but-many-remain-hard-to-convince>.

44 Jerry Dunleavy, "Milley Concedes Afghanistan Withdrawal May Have Influenced Putin's Ukraine Move," Washington Examiner, April 9, 2022. <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/2880165/milley-concedes-afghanistan-withdrawal-may-have-influenced-putins-ukraine-move/>.

45 Oriana Skylar Mastro, "What the U.S. Withdrawal from Afghanistan Means for Taiwan," Stanford University, September 13, 2021. <https://fsi.stanford.edu/news/what-us-withdrawal-afghanistan-means-taiwan>.

46 Global Times, "Afghan Abandonment a Lesson for Taiwan's DPP," Global Times, August 16, 2021. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202108/1231636.shtml>.

that “abandoning allies to protect U.S. interests is an inherent flaw that has been deeply rooted in [American foreign policy] since the founding of the country.”⁴⁷ By framing the Afghanistan withdrawal as a part of a broader pattern of strategic retreat, China aims to undermine Taiwan’s confidence in potential U.S. security guarantees.

Lessons Learned for Future U.S. Engagements

The U.S. experience in Afghanistan can provide helpful insights into the challenges and pitfalls of nation-building efforts and international military interventions and offer valuable lessons for future engagements. Key challenges include misunderstanding of local dynamics, ineffective governance, and reliance on unsustainable military solutions. These lessons highlight a need for a shift toward multilateral approaches that also include diplomacy and development. Adjustments in U.S. foreign policy now emphasize strategic restraint, integrated strategies, and stronger alliances. Measures such as improved intelligence, capacity building, and flexible operations aim to prevent similar issues in the future.

Challenges of Nation-Building

Nation-building in Afghanistan proved to be far more complex and challenging than the U.S. originally anticipated. Analyzing the events following the withdrawal suggests that the U.S. underestimated and misunderstood the cultural, political, and social dynamics of the country, leading to ineffective governance structures, a lack of perceived legitimacy among local Afghans, and an unopposed Taliban resurgence. Success in nation-building requires a deeper understanding of local contexts and the meaningful involvement of local communities in the governance process.⁴⁸ U.S. reliance on military solutions without incorporating

47 Global Times, “Afghan Abandonment a Lesson.”

48 Seth G. Jones, “Improving U.S. Counterinsurgency Operations:

political and developmental reforms further weakened stability; victories against the Taliban insurgencies were only temporary and could not be sustained long-term without the existence of a strong, capable, and legitimate Afghan government. Future efforts must integrate these elements to create sustainable systems of governance and development.

Counterinsurgency and Local Engagement

Continued success in counterinsurgency efforts depends on winning the support of the local populations. In Afghanistan, the U.S. imposed top-down solutions without adequately engaging with the local communities, which undermined the legitimacy and effectiveness of its efforts. A more inclusive approach, empowering locals, including them in critical decisions, and fostering ownership of the governance processes, is key to lasting peace.

Strategic Coordination and Policy Consistency

The absence of a coherent and consistent strategy, along with poor coordination among international and local actors hindered the overall mission. The frequent policy changes and inconsistent leadership from the U.S. further complicated efforts. A more unified and well-coordinated approach is key for the success of such complex operations, ensuring all stakeholders are aligned with common goals.

Implications for U.S. Foreign Policy

The events following the withdrawal from Afghanistan have prompted a reassessment of U.S. foreign policy to support an increasing consensus to be more cautious and selective in future military interventions.⁴⁹ Policymakers have adopted a

Lessons Learned from Afghanistan,” RAND Corporation, May 31, 2008. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9357.html.

49 U.S. Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations. Afghanistan 2001 to

more restrained approach, focusing on core national interests and avoiding overextension.⁵⁰ This shift reflects a commitment to measured and calculated interventions that align with strategic priorities. Integrated strategies that combine military, diplomatic, and developmental tools are gaining traction as they better address the multifaceted nature of conflicts and promote long-term stability. Another priority has been to strengthen alliances and partnerships, particularly with NATO and regional actors, improving collective security and burden-sharing.⁵¹

Preventing Future Challenges

In response to the lessons learned from Afghanistan, the U.S. has adopted new strategies to address similar challenges in the future and foster stability in fragile states. One significant shift is the implementation of an over-the-horizon counterterrorism approach, relying on advanced technologies, such as drones, to monitor and neutralize terrorist threats without requiring physical troop presence on the ground.⁵² This approach minimizes risks to U.S. personnel while remaining vigilant against emerging threats.

Economic and humanitarian aid remains a priority in U.S. efforts to stabilize Afghanistan and other regional nations. Investing in essential services, infrastructure, and developmental projects, the U.S. aims to reduce vulnerabilities that can foster extremism and contribute to instability. The implementation of the Global Fragility Act has been central to the U.S. commitment to

2021: U.S. Policies Lessons Learned. 117th Cong., 1st sess., November 17, 2021. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2022.

50 Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. What We Need to Learn: Lessons from Twenty Years of Afghanistan Reconstruction. August 2021. <https://www.sigar.mil/interactive-reports/what-we-need-to-learn/index.html> [URL no longer available].

51 Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, What We Need to Learn.

52 Biden, “Remarks on the End of the War in Afghanistan.”

conflict prevention and sustainable development.⁵³ This legislation promotes a whole-of-government approach to address instability by focusing on governance reform, economic development, and community resilience in fragile states.

In the October 2022 National Security Strategy, the Biden Administration outlined intentions to improve diplomatic efforts by increasing cooperation and support to trusted partners and international organizations to develop coordinated strategies to tackle Afghanistan's challenges, including terrorism. Specifically, the U.S. plans to shift strategies from a "U.S.-led, partner-enabled" to one that is "partner-led, U.S.-enabled."⁵⁴ These partnerships are vital for promoting stability and guaranteeing a more collaborative, multilateral approach to address these complex security and humanitarian issues.

Conclusion

The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan marks a turning point in modern international relations, exposing the complexities of military interventions and global security strategies. This chaotic departure did more than simply remove American troops, it reshaped regional power dynamics by creating a vacuum that only empowered the Taliban and terrorist organizations. Not only did the withdrawal undermine years of strategic investment, but also significantly damaged U.S. credibility on the world stage.

Afghanistan became a powerful symbol of the difficulties that come with nation-building and counterinsurgency. The withdrawal highlighted the limitations of military-centered strategies and the consequences of neglecting local political, cultural, and social

53 U.S. Department of State. Prologue to the United States Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability. 2022. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CSO-2022-SPCPSprologue-EN-2022-03-30-FINAL508.pdf>.

54 White House. National Security Strategy. 2022. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>.

dynamics. While prolonged military presence had extensive human and financial costs, the abrupt exit demonstrated the potential dangers of hasty and poorly planned disengagements.

Moving forward, the U.S. must navigate an increasingly multipolar global landscape by adopting more nuanced strategies that balance diplomacy, economic development, and selective military actions. The increasing influence of rival powers, like China, calls attention to the need for collaborative and multilateral approaches to address security challenges. The lessons from Afghanistan call for strengthened partnerships, investment in local capacity building, and flexible counterterrorism measures. By implementing these elements, the U.S. can adapt to evolving threats and maintain its role as a responsible and dependable global leader.

Navigating the Urban Battlefield

Zach McEwan

Introduction

Clausewitz said, “war is not merely a political act but a real political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, a carrying out of the same by other means,” constantly evolving as nations vie for resources, power, and ideological dominance.¹ Every shift in warfare seeks to create advantages for one side while imposing disadvantages for the other. Gaining a competitive edge—whether through superior tactics, training, or technology—saves lives and is the ultimate goal, especially as adversaries adapt to counter each new advantage.

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has remained the dominant global military power, shaping the modern battlefield in ways that have inadvertently driven conflict further into urban environments. One pivotal moment that David Kilcullen frequently references in *The Dragons and the Snakes: How the Rest Learned to Fight the West* is the 1991 Gulf War’s “Highway of Death,” where U.S. forces demonstrated overwhelming conventional power by annihilating a retreating Iraqi column in open terrain. He claims this display reinforced to America’s adversaries that direct conventional engagements against U.S. forces in open spaces would likely result in decisive defeat. As Kilcullen’s title suggests, modern enemies have learned and adapted by shifting their strategies to counter Western conventional military dominance. He claims that among these adaptations are

1 Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. J.J. Graham (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1943), 280.

decentralizing command structures, blending into dense urban populations, and using civilians as shields—tactics that minimize America’s technological superiority while raising humanitarian concerns.²

Urban environments—defined as cities for the purposes of this paper—pose immense challenges for U.S. conventional forces because the terrain favors defenders. Dr. Jacob Stoil describes a city as “a World War I battlefield, where the complex defensive lines, the complex terrain extends three to five miles in depth.”³ This characterization evokes an image of civilian populated battle spaces akin to three-dimensional trench warfare, with verticality adding yet another layer of complexity. Fighting in cities often limits mobility, disrupts intelligence gathering, and forces commanders to make difficult decisions regarding collateral damage.⁴ The battles of Fallujah and Mogadishu exemplify the immense cost and danger of urban warfare—Fallujah required prolonged, high-intensity operations to dislodge entrenched adversaries, while Mogadishu demonstrated how tactical failures can quickly escalate into catastrophe.^{5,6} These conditions increasingly constrain the effectiveness of U.S. warfighters and demand new solutions to prepare for future operations.

As urban combat becomes an unavoidable reality of modern

2 David Kilcullen, *The Dragons and the Snakes: How the Rest Learned to Fight the West* Narrated by Simon Vance. Penguin Audio.

3 John Spencer, “Militaries’ Approaches to Cities,” Urban Warfare Project, West Point Press, October 2024, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/59nmyehWeGd9TRALowYRab?si=b9df0cbaa09c4e1b>.

4 Kilcullen, *Dragons and the Snakes*.

5 John Spencer and Jayson Geroux, “Urban Warfare Case Study #6: First Battle of Fallujah,” Modern War Institute at West Point, October 28, 2022, <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/urban-warfare-case-study-6-first-battle-of-fallujah/>.

6 John Spencer, Jayson Geroux, and Liam Collins “Urban Case Study #9: The Battle of Mogadishu,” Modern War Institute at West Point, October 31, 2024, <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/urban-case-study-9-the-battle-of-mogadishu/>.

warfare, the U.S. military must adapt to overcome these challenges. This requires maintaining the relevance and dissemination of the strategic and tactical options available to commanders and Soldiers, enhancing and prioritizing urban combat training, and leveraging emerging technologies to mitigate disadvantages and regain operational superiority. Addressing these factors will ensure that American forces remain effective in future conflicts, even within the unforgiving complexities of the urban battlefield.

The Urban Megatrend

Before exploring solutions, it is essential to understand the relevance of the issue and why urban environments demand examination. As of 2023, 57% of the global population lived in urban areas, with North America being the most urbanized at 83% and Africa the least at 45%.^{7,8} The United Nations projects that by 2050, this figure will rise to 68%, with Africa and Asia urbanizing the fastest.⁹ This rapid growth will strain resources and governance as cities expand, particularly in developing nations where infrastructure struggles to keep pace.

Due to this megatrend, conflicts will inevitably be drawn into these environments, altering the nature of warfare.¹⁰ Physicians and researchers Frederick M. Burkle and Ronak B. Patel further highlight that rapid urbanization often leads to unsafe

7 World Bank, Urban Population (% of Total Population), accessed February 12, 2025, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS?end=2023&start=1960&view=chart&year=1967>.

8 Statista. Degree of Urbanization (Percentage of Urban Population in Total Population) by Continent in 2023. Accessed February 12, 2025. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/270860/urbanization-by-continent/>.

9 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 2018 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects. May 16, 2018. Accessed February 12, 2025. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html>.

10 Kilcullen, David. *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

conditions, stating, “many fast-growing cities create conditions of significant disparities in standards of living, which set up a natural environment for conflict over resources.”¹¹ Without proper urban planning, governments may struggle to meet these growing demands, fostering instability and, in some cases, necessitating military intervention for humanitarian or political means as in the UN peacekeeping mission in Somalia that led to the Battle of Mogadishu. The prolonged battle for Aleppo during the Syrian Civil War is another example of this, where rapid urbanization, weak governance, and external interventions contributed to large-scale destruction and humanitarian crises.¹² Given that most of the global population will reside in cities, future conflicts are almost certain to be fought in urban environments.

The Connectivity Megatrend

Another significant megatrend is the rise of global connectivity. The widespread adoption of smartphones and social media is a relatively recent development, yet its impact on modern warfare is profound. Facebook launched in 2004, Google released Google Maps in 2005, and Apple introduced the iPhone in 2007. According to the World Bank, global internet usage has surged from 14% in 2004 to 67% today.¹³

These technologies allow civilians and combatants alike to document destruction in real time, shaping public perception

11 R.B. Patel and F.M. Burkle, “Rapid Urbanization and the Growing Threat of Violence and Conflict: A 21st Century Crisis,” *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine* 27, no. 2 (April 2012): 194–97, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049023X12000568>.

12 Fadil Bandarin, “Cultural Heritage in the Context of Mass Atrocities,” in *Cultural Heritage in the Context of Mass Atrocities*, ed. Nathaniel L. D. Hentoff and James A. A. Reeve (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2020), <https://www.getty.edu/publications/cultural-heritage-mass-atrocities/part-2/10-bandarin/>.

13 World Bank, *Internet Users (% of Population)*, accessed February 12, 2025, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS>.

of conflicts. While this transparency holds Western powers accountable to their citizens, it also provides adversaries with opportunities to manipulate narratives, potentially undermining public support for military operations. As Kilcullen notes, “adversaries are using cyber to achieve lethal effects.”¹⁴ By leveraging digital technology, adversaries further decentralize their leadership, run propaganda campaigns, and coordinate efforts to recruit, disrupt, and deceive.

This technological shift is also narrowing the gap between non-state actors and conventional military forces. As Kilcullen explains, “The fire-control system that enables [high] precision sits on a cellphone—a far lighter, cheaper, more discreet, and less bulky platform than used by conventional forces.”¹⁵ The accessibility of these tools is significantly leveling the urban battlefield, giving irregular forces capabilities that were once exclusive to state militaries.

Combined effects on the Urban Battlefield

As urbanization and global connectivity continue to rise, managing civilian considerations will be one of the greatest challenges facing the U.S. military. According to the American Red Cross, “Civilians in areas of armed conflict and occupied territories are protected by the 159 articles of the Fourth Geneva Convention.”¹⁶ These protections limit military actions, restricting

14 David Kilcullen, “298: The Convergence of Hybrid Threats and Liminal Warfare with Dr. David Kilcullen,” MASC Blog, December 10, 2020, <https://madscriblog.tradoc.army.mil/298-the-convergence-hybrid-threats-and-liminal-warfare-with-dr-david-kilcullen/#:~:text=Blending%20cyber%20kinetic%20operations.&text=Adversaries%20are%20using%20cyber%20to,%2C%20data%2C%20and%20communications%20infrastructures.>

15 David E. Sanger, “The End of High-Tech War,” MIT Technology Review, March 11, 2020, <https://www.technologyreview.com/2020/03/11/905388/the-end-of-high-tech-war/>.

16 American Red Cross, Summary of the Geneva Conventions of 1949

attacks on civilians and essential infrastructure such as hospitals and religious sites. Furthermore, international humanitarian law (IHL) deems the use of civilians as human shields—whether passively by moving military objectives near civilians or actively by bringing civilians to military objectives—a war crime. However, Médecins San Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) says in their practical guide to humanitarian law that “even if the use of human shields by a party to the conflict is a clear violation of IHL, military commanders remain bound to obey IHL rules protecting civilians if they still decide to proceed with the attack.”¹⁷ This means that if an army decides to attack, they are still responsible for civilian casualties, providing adversaries with an opportunity to exploit public perception.

Because Western nations played a key role in establishing these rules, their military operations are constrained by these political and humanitarian considerations that their adversaries often ignore or exploit. Commanders must work with legal counsel to weigh difficult decisions by asking difficult questions: Will destroying key infrastructure violate humanitarian law? Can civilians be evacuated, and if so, will they still have access to essential rights? If they refuse to leave, is it ethical to continue military operations knowing civilian casualties are inevitable? The influence of civilian considerations on military strategy is evident in both past and ongoing conflicts. In Fallujah (2004), U.S. forces were pressured to halt operations due to humanitarian concerns, while in the Israel-Hamas War, international scrutiny and political pressures continue to shape military decision-making.¹⁸

and Their Additional Protocols: International Humanitarian Law, April 2011, https://www.redcross.org/content/dam/redcross/atg/PDF_s/International_Services/International_Humanitarian_Law/IHL_SummaryGeneva-Conv.pdf.

17 Guide to Humanitarian Law, “Human Shields,” accessed February 13, 2025, <https://guide-humanitarian-law.org/content/article/3/human-shields/#:~:text=The%20prohibition%20of%20human%20shield,also%20considered%20a%20war%20crime>

18 Modern War Institute, “First Battle of Fallujah.”

After Hamas's deadly October 7, 2023, attack on Israel, killing about 1,200 people and resulted in 251 hostages being taken, Israel imposed severe restrictions on Gaza's infrastructure.¹⁹ On October 12, 2023, The Guardian reported, "No power, water, or fuel to Gaza until hostages freed, says Israeli minister."²⁰ Nearly a year later, Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor labeled the ongoing blockade "a tool of genocide."²¹ Global criticism of Israel escalated despite its efforts to allow humanitarian aid into Gaza. Tensions peaked on April 1, 2024, when an Israeli airstrike killed seven international aid workers from the World Central Kitchen.²² Widely reported by international media, the incident further damaged Israel's global standing and complicated its military operations against Hamas. In response to mounting concerns, former U.S. President Joe Biden later warned Israel "not to send troops into Rafah without a credible plan to protect civilians," fearing mass civilian casualties due to Hamas's presence in the overpopulated city.²³ As a result, the important military objective became

19 Yaroslav Trofimov, "Hamas Holds 250 Hostages in Gaza," Wall Street Journal, November 2, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/hamas-hostages-israel-gaza-41432124>.

20 Martin Chulov and Stephanie Kirchgaessner, "No Power, Water or Fuel to Gaza Until Hostages Freed, Says Israeli Minister," The Guardian, October 12, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/12/no-power-water-or-fuel-to-gaza-until-hostages-freed-says-israeli-minister>.

21 Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, "Israel's Deliberate Blackout of the Gaza Strip for Nearly a Year Is a Tool of Genocide," Euro-Med Monitor, October 16, 2023, <https://euromedmonitor.org/en/article/6474/Israel%E2%80%99s-deliberate-blackout-of-the-Gaza-Strip-for-nearly-a-year-is-a-tool-of-genocide>.

22 Leila Fadel, "World Central Kitchen Workers Die in Gaza as Humanitarian Efforts Struggle to Reach People," NPR, April 1, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2024/04/01/1242177519/world-central-kitchen-workers-deaths-gaza>.

23 Najib Jobain, "Biden Tells Israel Not to Send Troops into Rafah Without 'Credible' Plan to Protect Civilians," PBS NewsHour, October 12, 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/biden-tells-israel-not-to-send>.

increasingly difficult to attack without severe ramifications.²⁴

These pressures from allies and adversaries in the region appear to have delayed Israel's entry into Rafah. Although Israel announced its intentions to enter Rafah on February 9th, the full ground invasion did not begin until May 6th. During this time, shipments of bombs from the U.S. were halted, even as Israel attempted to maintain pressure on the city through airstrikes. More U.S. threats to cut off Israeli military support followed, demonstrating the cost of attacking the city despite its military importance.²⁵ Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claimed that civilian casualties were minimized due to extensive efforts to move civilians out of the city, though media outlets have disputed this assertion.²⁶

Hamis is aware of how these political pressures limit Israel's warfighting and have therefore chosen to embed itself within civilian infrastructure, such as mosques and hospitals—protected spaces under international law.^{27,28} The clearest example is Al-

troops-into-rafah-without-credible-plan-to-protect-civilians.

24 Associated Press, "Israel's Offensive in Rafah Faces Pushback Amid Growing Concerns for Civilians," AP News, October 12, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/rafah-offensive-israel-netanyahu-hamas-palestinians-014b2d850bbe28897b624bc5e5378320>.

25 National Public Radio (NPR), "A Timeline of the Battle for Rafah in the Israel-Hamas War," NPR, May 8, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2024/05/08/1249657561/rafah-timeline-gaza-israel-hamas-war>.

26 NPR, "Fact-Checking Netanyahu's Claim That Rafah Civilian Casualties Are 'Practically None,'" NPR, July 25, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2024/07/25/nx-s1-5051749/fact-checking-netanyahus-claim-that-rafah-civilian-casualties-are-practically-none>.

27 Israeli Defense Forces, "Hamis Uses Mosques for Terrorism," YouTube Shorts, published February 13, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/HABqZ7B77e0>.

28 UN Watch, "Claim 46: Israel Targets Hospitals in Violation of International Law in Its Post-October 7th War," UN Watch, accessed February 12, 2025, <https://unwatch.org/item-7/claim/claim-46-israel-targets-hospitals-in-violation-of-international-law-in-its-post-october-7th-war/>.

Shifa Hospital believed to have been used as a command HQ where hostages were kept.²⁹ When Israel assaulted this location, it brought international scrutiny with critics saying, “the military operation effectively cut off and shut down a crucial part of Gaza’s medical network with little evidence that Hamas was using the hospital as a command post.”³⁰ While Israeli and U.S. intelligence agencies remain firm that Hamas turned the hospital into a military target, Hamas’s deception leaves confusion for the public. This creates a strategic dilemma: while Israel may possess intelligence pinpointing Hamas operatives, striking these locations carries significant political and humanitarian risks as shown in backlash to Israel’s attack on Rafah and Al Shifa hospital.

This conflict underscores the challenges of urban warfare beyond the terrain itself, where combatants blend into civilian populations, limiting the effectiveness of conventional military strategies. In these environments, superior firepower and advanced technology can become liabilities rather than advantages.

Staying Up to Date on Doctrine

Addressing the challenges of urban warfare requires continuous learning, research, and guidance to ensure that lessons from the past are not lost to future warfighters. Over the 21st century, the U.S. military has engaged in numerous urban battles and refined its approach based on those experiences. In September 2024, the U.S. military updated its doctrine—its guiding principles for warfare—to include an Urban Warfare guide. This critical update provides commanders at both the strategic and tactical levels with tools to better understand their operational

29 Jake Tapper, “U.S. Intelligence Assessment Links Hamas to Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza,” CNN, January 3, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/01/03/politics/us-al-shifa-intelligence-assessment/index.html>.

30 Ben Hubbard, “Al-Shifa Hospital: The Heart of Gaza’s Health System Under Siege,” The New York Times, November 13, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/13/world/middleeast/gaza-al-shifa-hospital-world-health-organization.html>.

environment and improve their chances of success.

One key feature of the updated doctrine is the classification of different types of urban operations. These include surgical operations, such as the response to Hurricane Katrina, a natural disaster with minimal risk of violence; precision operations, as seen in Sadr City, where cement walls were built to isolate a violent district in Baghdad; and high-intensity operations, exemplified by the Battle of Aachen in World War II, a hard-fought urban battle in which German soldiers were ordered to fight to the last man.³¹ This framework enables the military to tailor its response proportionally, fostering civilian confidence and ensuring a measured approach to urban conflict.

The guide serves as a valuable training resource, establishing a standardized foundation for Soldiers. Among its seven chapters, it includes a detailed analysis of the urban environment, considering economic, social, and informational factors. It also provides sections on offensive and defensive operations, offering guidance on transitioning between the two to effectively clear an urban environment, as well as on stabilizing operations and reestablishing peace. Particularly noteworthy is the section on civilian population control, which emphasizes that “the local population can become a threat” given the stresses war brings.³²

While the doctrine addresses many of the challenges the U.S. military faces—including the influence of consolidated media presence in urban areas—it falls short in providing specific strategies to counter these threats effectively and decisively. The responsibility of interpreting and implementing these principles will ultimately rest on commanders and their Soldiers, who must assess the operational environment and make informed decisions based on the doctrine. This underscores a crucial takeaway: Soldiers must train rigorously in these principles and be prepared for any situation.

31 U.S. Department of the Army, Urban Operations (ATP 3-06.11), Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2024, 9.

32 U.S. Army, Urban Operations, 19.

Improving and Prioritizing Training

With the updated doctrine for urban environments, it's crucial to develop training that helps the U.S. military achieve its strategic objectives in urban warfare. This training must focus on both individual soldiers and units.

To address the complexities of urban operations, creating a specialized school to train soldiers as subject matter experts in urban environments would be beneficial. Infantry officer Michael G. Anderson suggests that, just as there are specialized schools for small-unit tactics, sniper skills, and digital battlefield management, there should be a similar school for urban warfare.³³ This would provide soldiers with a formal certification, similar to the badges or tabs earned from other specialized schools. Graduates could return to their units as experts, enhancing their unit's urban operational capabilities.

In addition to individual training, units must also train together in urban environments. A dedicated urban training center, scaled appropriately for larger units, would help implement the principles of the Urban Warfare Guide. The Israeli Defense Force's Urban Warfare Training Center (UWTC), which includes over 600 structures and realistic urban features, serves as a model.³⁴ A similar U.S. facility exists in Indiana with 300 brick-and-mortar structures with roughly 1.5 million square feet under roof and 1.8 miles of subterranean tunnels.³⁵ This training center is a great start

33 Michael G. Anderson, "Fight for the City: Creating the School of Urban Warfare," Modern War Institute, August 30, 2022, <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/fight-for-the-city-creating-the-school-of-urban-warfare/>.

34 Israel Defense Forces, "Urban Warfare Training Center – Simulating the Modern Battle-Field," Israel Defense Forces, October 26, 2011, <https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/training-and-preparation/urban-warfare-training-center-simulating-the-modern-battle-field/>.

35 Indiana National Guard, "Muscatatuck Training Center," Indiana National Guard, accessed [date], <https://www.in.gov/indiana-national-guard/muscatatuck-training-center/#:~:text=Muscatatuck%20>

but could be broadened to match or exceed the Israeli's UWTC. Various sizes of urban terrain could provide unique challenges.

While the time spent on urban training could reduce focus on other areas, the increasing necessity of urban warfare, demonstrated by past engagements, justifies prioritizing it. As units and individuals gain expertise, the integration of technology could further enhance operational effectiveness.

Incorporating Technology

One of the most impactful advancements in modern warfare is drones on the battlefield. Drones have already proven effective in the Ukraine-Russia war, where they immobilized tanks, conducted precision strikes, and enhanced intelligence gathering. Utah-based Live View Technologies (LVT) has developed low-power, edge-based AI computer vision capable of detecting humans, vehicles, animals, and behaviors with greater speed and accuracy than human operators monitoring video streams.³⁶ In urban environments, drones with this technology could provide real-time surveillance ahead of soldiers, reducing risks to personnel. This could help distinguish combatants from non-combatants, assist in room-clearing operations, and gather critical local intelligence in dense urban areas. The Black Hornet 4 provides a template design for this level of covert reconnaissance ability that could be enhanced by AI. Some U.S. Infantry units are already beginning training with this equipment to quickly locate enemies and to provide better visuals ahead of urban operations.³⁷ Ukraine is

Training%20Center%20(MuTC)%20offers, homeland%20and%20win%20the%20peace.

36 LiveView Technologies, "LVT In Action—Deter Intruders with Automated Responses," LiveView Technologies, accessed February 13, 2025, <https://www.lvt.com/resources/automated-deterrence-providing-proactive-security>.

37 Teledyne FLIR, "Black Hornet 4," Teledyne FLIR, accessed February 14, 2025, <https://www.flir.com/products/black-hornet-4/?vertical=uas&segment=uis>.

using drones with costs ranging from a few hundred to \$200,000 for long-range models.³⁸ Drones are becoming a cost-effective tool to reshape urban warfare in favor of the U.S. military.

This example highlights the potential of artificial intelligence (AI). While LVT's cameras use low-powered AI, companies like NVIDIA are advancing AI by accelerating data processing to drive innovation across sectors.³⁹ This high-speed AI will be essential in overcoming a few problems in the urban environment. The first is information overload caused by the connectivity megatrend. There are so many people using technology that it becomes difficult to separate out important information, such as communication from a decentralized leader, from the noise of everyone else. It takes time to sift through this information. AI can help speed up the process, finding important information quicker, leading to actions that can disrupt enemy networks.

Another challenge AI can address is open-source intelligence gathering. With vast amounts of freely accessible information on the internet, AI can efficiently sift through data, identifying relevant insights and guiding intelligence analysts toward critical information. This increased efficiency enhances situational awareness, making it easier to understand and navigate complex urban environments. By rapidly processing and analyzing data, AI makes it more difficult for enemies to hide within civilian populations and more dangerous for them to exploit connectivity for strategic advantage. It disrupts enemy command structures and hinders adversaries' ability to operate effectively in cities. By leveraging AI, the U.S. military could maintain a critical information advantage on a global scale, improving decision-making, target identification, and battlefield coordination in urban warfare.

38 Eric Reguly, "How Cheap Drones Are Transforming Ukraine's War Against Russia," *The Globe and Mail*, February 9, 2024, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-ukrainian-drones-weapons-russia-war/>.

39 Ben Oliveri, "Why Accelerated Data Processing Is Crucial for AI Innovation in Every Industry," *NVIDIA Blog*, June 7, 2024, <https://blogs.nvidia.com/blog/accelerated-data-processing-ai-industry-innovation/>.

Continuing the Conversation

Ultimately, warfare has undergone a profound transformation since the end of the Cold War, with urbanization and connectivity emerging as a defining trend that presents national security threats and military challenges. This shift demands a comprehensive understanding of urban terrain, civilian considerations, and political complexities, all of which shape the urban battlefield in ways traditional military strategies have not fully addressed. To maintain its position as the world's leading military power, the U.S. must remain proactive in creating and disseminating urban related doctrine, create an urban master school and improve urban training centers, and integrate cutting-edge technology into its operations. These actions will help prepare the U.S. military for fights that are increasingly urban and continue innovation in the space so that humanitarian and military goals can be reached simultaneously.

As the U.S. military prepares for future conflicts, peacetime is the opportunity to experiment, refine strategies, and learn from global conflicts. Observing ongoing urban battles worldwide provides invaluable insights that can inform doctrine, training, and technological innovation. When urban conflicts inevitably arise, the military must ensure it is not just reacting but leading the way in modern, adaptive, and effective urban warfare. Ignoring these challenges risks ceding the battlefield to our adversaries, a mistake we cannot afford to make.

The Ethical Dilemmas in the Recruitment and Handling of Espionage Agents

Aaron Bret Allred

Espionage operates in a world of shadows, where secrets are currency and deception is the norm. It remains one of the key instruments to the realm in national security. It offers states unmatched insight into the intentions, capabilities, and vulnerabilities of potential adversaries. However, the process behind recruiting and managing of espionage agents raises complex ethical dilemmas that challenge the very principles of justice, dignity, and basic human rights. Intelligence agencies that operate in an environment defined by secrecy and high stakes decision-making are often confronted with situations where moral lines are blurred, and the welfare of the individuals involved can often be jeopardized. Espionage agents, typically selected from vulnerable or compromised positions, are tasked with performing operations that offer personal risks, including potential betrayal, physical harm, and psychological trauma. The questions that arise surrounding the ethics of these agents, regarding their treatment, their actual understanding of the risk that they face, and the methods used in their recruitment, are central to the integrity of intelligence operations. Diving deeper into ethical philosophies puts into perspective the study of historical context in which espionage has been carried out. The ethical theories that have and can be used to inform decision-making and the policies that need to be instituted for the well-being of agents.

Historical Background

In the 21st century, espionage has evolved significantly in

ways such as: advances in technology, global interconnectedness, and growing complexities of international relations. The recruiting of espionage agents in today's world presents many ethical challenges, shaped by the digital age and shifting of geopolitical dynamics. Intelligence agencies like the CIA now must operate in environments where recruitment is done through virtual means, and personal vulnerabilities are then exploited in subtle ways. Traditional methods of recruitment based on ideological alliances or personal desperation have adapted to a world where cyber capabilities social media and the new global flow of information create new ethical risks.

Case Studies

A prominent example of espionage recruitment in the modern world is the case of Reality Winner (R.Winner). R.Winner was a former NSA contractor who had leaked classified documents to media outlets in 2017. R. Winner's decision was not simply driven by coercion but was done by a moral disagreement with the U.S. government's policies on foreign interference in elections. This situation shows how the vulnerabilities of individuals who work within intelligence agencies can be manipulated. Though, not necessarily through foreign direct recruitment, but done so through personal ethical crises that led to whistleblowing. Assistant Attorney General, John C. Demers stated, "The defendant schemed to take and disclose information she had sworn to protect- and then did so almost as soon as she had the chance."¹

Another example is the recruitment of Edward Snowden, who revealed surveillance programs that were conducted by the NSA in 2013, which raised ethical questions regarding the duty of care that intelligence agencies are required to give their operatives.

1 Office of Public Affairs (OPA). "Federal Government Contractor Sentenced for Removing and Transmitting Classified Materials to a News Outlet." United States Department of Justice, August 23, 2018. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/federal-government-contractor-sentenced-removing-and-transmitting-classified-materials-news>.

Snowden's actions posterized as whistleblowing, his recruitment and his access to sensitive information were made possible by the own internal practices and oversight of the NSA. The decision made by Snowden came from his belief that the agency's actions were illegal, and it exposed modern espionage recruitment complexities. "Snowden's case reveals not only the vulnerabilities in the NSA's recruitment and retention practices but also the ethical quandaries faced by intelligence agencies as they balance operational secrecy with the rights of individuals."²

With the digital age in which we are living, it has introduced new dimensions of the recruitment of espionage agents, particularly from cyber espionage. Foreign agencies have now started to target individuals through social media and digital communication tools which they used to exploit personal information in relationships that end up turning individuals into assets. We saw this approach exemplified in 2016 with Russian interference in the U.S. presidential election where hackers who had ties to the Russian government infiltrated organizations like the Democratic National Committee.³ Cyber espionage in the world today involves the use of tools to help identify targets, manipulate personal data, and recruit individuals who are often not fully aware of the consequences.

Ethical Philosophies and Frameworks

Along with the modern history of espionage recruitment, philosophical ethics impact the frameworks in which intelligence agencies can in a morally responsible manner handle and recruit agents. These include virtue ethics, ethics of care, golden and platinum rules, and Kantian ethics.

2 Bamford, James. "James Bamford on NSA Spying and Edward Snowden." C-SPAN, February 3, 2014. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?317237-1%2Fjames-bamford-nsa-spying-edward-snowden>.

3 Naylor, Brian, and Scott Detrow. "Russian Hackers Penetrate Democratic National Committee, Steal Trump Research." NPR, June 14, 2016. <https://www.npr.org/2016/06/14/482029912/russian-hackers-penetrate-democratic-national-committee-steal-trump-research>.

Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics, which is rooted in the teachings of Aristotle, emphasizes the development of moral character. In espionage, virtue ethics implies that both intelligence officers and recruited agents should act in accordance with a foundation of moral excellence. This philosophy suggests that officers should never resort to using exploitation recruitment or pressure agents into participating in espionage. Through virtue ethics, agencies have an consequential ethical responsibility to adhere to an environment that encourages providing agents with the necessary resources and psychological support that is needed for them to maintain their moral compass during their work.⁴

Ethics of Care

The ethics of care, by Carol Gilligan, is an alternative to traditional rule-based ethical systems focusing on relationships, empathy, and moral responsibility that is associated with caring for others.⁵ Intelligence agencies have a responsibility to care for the agents they recruit rather than just tools of national security, they are individuals with personal lives, struggles, and moral concerns. In the recruiting of these agents, it must not exploit these vulnerabilities but instead allow for the agents to make an informed autonomous decision with their involvement. A level of transparency is needed to include an honest discussion of the risks and emotional toll of espionage. This gives the agents a chance to weight their personal ethical considerations and decide whether to proceed. The agencies responsibility for the individual should

4 Rueter, Scott. "Virtue Ethics: What It Is and How It Works." Philosophos.org, May 3, 2023. <https://www.philosophos.org/ethics-virtue-ethics>.

5 Fang, Kevin, and Priya Shah. "A Right to Spy? The Legality and Morality of Espionage." Just Security, November 14, 2024. <https://www.justsecurity.org/85486/a-right-to-spy-the-legality-and-morality-of-espionage/>.

not end after the recruitment phase but should extend throughout the agent's involvement. The lack of care and attention to the well-being of the agents can lead to disastrous consequences. This philosophy suggests that having a more supportive and empathetic environment could have prevented situations like R. Winner's, where agents feel that are forced to take drastic and morally driven actions.

Golden and Platinum Rules

Treat others as you would like to be treated, or in other words - The Golden Rule, has been a moral principle for centuries. This ethical command asks for fairness and respect, implying that individuals, and intelligence agents, should never be manipulated or deceived in any way that undermines their dignity. Intelligence officers when adhering to this rule would approach recruitment with transparency and respect, ensuring that the potential recruit fully understands the risk and implications of their involvement. The Platinum Rule extends the idea of the Golden Rule by suggesting that we should focus on treating others as they are wanting to be treated. This emphasizes the need of intelligence officers to recognize the unique perspectives, values, and personal experiences of each individual recruit.⁶ These rules focus on encouraging intelligence agencies to treat agents as moral equals, giving fairness, transparency, and have respect for their autonomy. Recruited agents should be empowered to make their own decisions that align with their personal values and beliefs.

Kantian Ethics

Kantian ethics, based on the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, it showcases the importance of duty, respect for individuals, and an idea known as "categorical imperative" which suggests that one

6 Shatz, Itamar. Effectiviology. 2024. <https://effectiviology.com/platinum-rule/>.

should only act according to universal laws and rules.⁷ This means that intelligence agencies have the duty to treat agents not simply as tools but that they should be used for operational success and deserve respect, dignity, and be considered morally and humanely. Looking from a Kantian perspective, the recruitment practices that involve manipulation, deceit, and coercion, violate the autonomy of agents and are ethically indefensible. Aligning with Kant's categorical imperative, agents should be given the freedom to make autonomous decisions that align with their moral autonomy and should be respected throughout the process.

Ethical Challenges

With the recruitment and handling of espionage agents, there are inherently ethical challenges that arise stemming from the nature of intelligence work itself. The covert and high-stakes environment that these agencies operate in typically demand action that tests moral boundaries, create dilemmas, and raise concerns about the ethical treatment of agents. Addressing these issues requires not only acknowledgment of their prevalence but also the understanding of their implications for both operational integrity and individuals involved.

Manipulation and Deception in Recruitment

The act of manipulation undermines the moral autonomy of recruits by coercing them to make decisions they might not make unless pressured into. This treatment of individuals makes them tools rather than moral beings able to make their own decisions. Deception aids in this issue by withholding critical information or posterizing the risks and rewards in misleading ways. While secrecy is needed in intelligence work, deliberately misleading

7 Johnson, Robert, and Adam Cureton. "Kant's Moral Philosophy." Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, January 21, 2022. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kant-moral/#:~:text=The%20most%20basic%20aim%20of%20moral%20philosophy.>

individuals about the possible dangers they might face breaches their ability to informed decisions.

Duty to Agent's Well-Being

Once an agent is recruited, they face extreme physical, emotional, and psychological pressures. Included in these challenges is the threat of exposure, isolation from support systems, and the possibility of the moral burden of betraying personal or professional loyalties.⁸ Despite recruits having to go through these challenges, intelligence agencies often provide vary limited long-term support for these agents, focusing instead on the immediate benefit to the agency based off their operation.

Transparency and Informed Consent

Another ethical challenge that arises in espionage is the lack of transparency gifted to agents, specifically regarding of risks and potential consequences of their actions. Agents may not fully understand the implications of their actions including the risk of exposure, imprisonment, or retaliation against their families.⁹ The lack of transparency provided to individuals brings about the question whether the individual's consent to participate in espionage acts is genuine. During these operations, while it may not be possible to disclose every detail about the operation, agencies must work to provide their recruits with a concise and clear understanding of the risks and ethical dilemmas that they may encounter.

Policy Recommendations

8 Ursula, Wilder, "Inside the Mind of the Spy: Agents Struggle in the Shadows." Brookings, July 5, 2012. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/inside-the-mind-of-the-spy-agents-struggle-in-the-shadows/>.

9 Ursula, Wilder, "Inside the Mind of the Spy: Agents Struggle in the Shadows." Brookings, July 5, 2012. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/inside-the-mind-of-the-spy-agents-struggle-in-the-shadows/>.

In addressing the ethical challenges that arise in the recruitment and handling of espionage agents, intelligence agencies must adopt policy frameworks that are designed to uphold moral standards without compromising national security objectives. The foundation of an effort to improve on the ethical standards of espionage, we need to establish clear and enforceable guidelines for recruiting and handling agents.

Establishing Ethical Guidelines

Guidelines must respect and reflect universal principles, individual autonomy, and transparency while also addressing the unique demands of intelligence work. Currently the United States uses The CIA's Directorate of Operations Guidelines, which emphasize professionalism and the ethical treatment of human sources which has set a benchmark for operational conduct.¹⁰ While this guideline has been instrumental in the shaping of ethical recruitment and management practices, the growing landscape of the world and espionage demands requires updates to address contemporary challenges. These include modern threats, technological advancements, and shifting societal values. The CIA needs refining these guidelines to ensure that they remain relevant, robust, and ethically grounded.

Improved Oversight and Accountability

Oversight and accountability are crucial in ethical intelligence operations. In the United States, we have mechanisms such as congressional intelligence committees and review boards to help ensure that activities going on in the intelligence world align with national security goals, legal standards, and ethical considerations.

10 Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). "Take a Peek Inside CIA's Directorate of Operations." Central Intelligence Agency, July 10, 2024. <https://www.cia.gov/stories/story/take-a-peek-inside-cias-directorate-of-operations/>.

However, these systems have flaws, gaps in transparency, and inconsistencies on accountability. These committees rely heavily on the executive branch for disclosures which tend to lead to incomplete or biased reporting. The strengthening on congressional oversight requires a streamline reporting mechanism that ensures that intelligence agencies are providing concise actual updates that facilitate efficient scrutiny. There also needs to be an expansion on the technical expertise of staff committee in areas such as cyber security and artificial intelligence. This would allow for the committee to better assess the complexities of modern intelligence activities.

Mental Health and Support Services

The mental health and the well-being of recruits are essential to the effectiveness and operations in national security. Espionage agents and their handlers frequently operate in high pressure environments that demand absolute secrecy, emotional resilience, and sustained focus. Despite mental health being central to operational success, intelligence agencies have fallen short on prioritizing the psychological traumas that come with espionage. Being able to address this requires policies and procedures that prioritize the mental wellbeing of individuals throughout their careers. At the conclusion of an assignment, this does not mark the end of mental health challenges that recruits face. Having post-operational support is essential for allowing agents to reintegrate into routine life and address any lasting psychological impacts. Agents should be given access to long-term therapy and counseling services that are critical for addressing chronic stress and post-traumatic stress disorder. Agents should also be offered placement into the CIA's employee assistance program even after their operation has concluded.¹¹ Promoting the importance of psychological wellbeing, behaviors that model a healthy mindset

11 Wilder, U. M., Dr. "The Psychology of Espionage." Central Intelligence Agency, June 2017. <https://www.cia.gov/resources/csi/static/psychology-of-espionage.pdf>.

and challenge the stigma that surround mental health should come from leadership within the intelligence community.

Whistleblowers Protections

An essential component in the maintaining of accountability and ethical standards within the intelligence community is the protection of whistleblowers. By protecting individuals who report misconduct or ethical violations, it upholds the integrity of intelligence operations and fosters a culture of transparency and trust. While the United States has the Intelligence Community Whistleblower Protection Act (ICWPA), it is very vague in the definition of what it deems as retaliation. The law protects against things such as firing or demotion but does not address things like isolation and marginalization against the whistleblower. As well the ICWPA should be updated to include contractors that work within the intelligence community.¹² While this act serves as critical framework for safeguarding whistleblowers, its overall effectiveness can be updated and enhanced to foster a more secure and ethical environment. Which would ensure that whistleblowers are not only protected but also empowered to uphold the values and the integrity in intelligence operations.

Conclusion

The ethical dilemmas in the recruitment and handling of espionage agents often presents significant challenges to intelligence agencies with their pursuit of national security objectives. As operations in the intelligence world evolve and become increasingly complex, the policies that guide these practices must adapt to ensure that they align with modern ethical standards, the rights of agents, and the broader national security priorities. The historical context as well as case studies have shown

12 DeVine, Michael E. "Intelligence Community Whistleblower Protections: In Brief." Congressional Research Service, October 18, 2018. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45345/1>.

that while espionage is rooted in secrecy and necessity, it has often operated in morally ambiguous territory. Ethical philosophies whether grounded in virtue ethics, the ethics of care, golden and platinum rules, or Kantian ethics, are crucial in shaping the policies that govern espionage. Despite current policies existing, the intelligence community continuously faces challenges when it comes to ensuring the safety and the ethical treatments of its agents and whistleblowers. The path forward is by reexamining the ethical frameworks of espionage practices and the policies that enforce them. It is up to the intelligence community to refine its practices and policies, ensuring that national security goals are achieved without the compromising of ethical treatment of its agents or the integrity of the agencies themselves. Through the consistent enforcement of these ethical principles and through policy reforms can intelligence agencies maintain the trust of both their personnel and the United States' citizens, establishing that their operations remain morally justifiable, humane, and effective.

Advanced Technology Threats to the Nuclear Triad

Emmy Stens

One of the most critical frameworks for U.S. national security is the nuclear triad, which consists of land based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and strategic bombers. The triad ensures a credible deterrent from adversaries in providing multiple delivery platforms against aggression and threats of attacks. ICBMs offer rapid response capabilities within 4.5 seconds , SLBMs provide stealth deployment underwater and strategic bombers allow recallable and retargetable options in the air. Altogether, these deployments create a second-strike capability making it almost impossible for adversaries to fight all nuclear assets in a first strike. The nuclear triad supports crisis stability by discouraging escalation, it assures allies under the US nuclear umbrella and helps to prevent nuclear amplification. Its ongoing modernization allows the adaptation to emerging threats, including advancements in missile defense and cyber warfare. The nuclear triad continues to be a cornerstone of US deterrence while maintaining global stability and protecting national interests. As global threats evolve, the effectiveness of the U.S. nuclear triad faces challenges from advancements in missile defense, cyber warfare, and emerging nuclear capabilities of adversaries . Ensuring the triad remains a credible deterrent requires continuous modernization and strategic adaptation to maintain national security and global stability.

With adversaries investing in advanced nuclear technologies, the modernization of the nuclear triad faces pressing challenges, as outlined in recent reports by the Arms Control Association.¹

1 Klare, M. (2023). An Arms Control Association Report Assessing

Much of the U.S. nuclear triad relies on technology from the Cold War era. For example, the Air Force's current ICBM fleet is set to be replaced by the new ground-based strategic deterrent (GBSD), known as the Sentinel program, to meet evolving threats. According to Klare² adversaries like China and Russia are integrating artificial intelligence and hypersonic missiles, which challenges the U.S.'s second-strike capabilities and destabilize traditional deterrence strategies.

The modernization of the U.S. nuclear triad is important in the ability to counter the growing capabilities of strategic competitors. Investing in programs, like the Sentinel for ICBMs, upgraded SLBM systems, and advanced bomber technology is necessary to reinforce the triad's role as a credible deterrent. Without adequate modernization, the U.S. risks losing its deterrence advantage, increasing vulnerability to nuclear escalation or coercion by adversaries. Addressing these modernization needs will secure the triad's efficacy as a central pillar of national and global security well into the future.

Advancing technology is transforming each of the legs of the nuclear triad, enhancing their capabilities while introducing new complexities for deterrence. Land-based ICBMs are improving with new guidance systems and hardened infrastructures which increase precision and survivability. SLBMs are being developed with quieter propulsion and better payload designs, ensuring stealth and resilience of their capabilities. Strategic bombers, such as the B2 Spirit and the newly revealed B-21 Raider, incorporate advanced stealth features and systems for real-time targeting and coordination. Emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and hypersonic weapons will complicate the dynamics within our deterrence detection. AI will improve early warning and detection systems but at what cost to our response

the Dangers: Emerging Military Technologies and Nuclear (In)Stability.
https://www.armscontrol.org/sites/default/files/files/Reports/ACA_Report_EmergingTech_digital.pdf

2 Klare, An Arms Control Association Report Assessing the Dangers: Emerging Military Technologies and Nuclear (In)Stability.

times ? Hypersonic weapons, meanwhile, can evade traditional defenses which challenge existing strategies. These advancements place a greater demand to deterrence frameworks with potential vulnerabilities and to maintain stability in the fast changing and growing technological change.³

Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles in Ground Based Deterrent Systems

Intercontinental ballistic missiles are a critical part of the U.S. nuclear deterrent strategy. The Sentinel program, formerly GBSD, is being developed by Northrop Grumman Corporation and its associates to improve the Minuteman III system. Sentinel addresses the obsolete components and increased maintenance challenges, both within the asset itself and the launch facilities, by advanced technology within the guidance, propulsion and targeting systems. Integrating the advanced cybersecurity measures to counter evolving threats will enhance accuracy, range, and survivability. While the Sentinel program is one of the largest in the Department of Defense's history, it is riddled with budgetary concerns, having had a Nunn-McCurdy breach investigation in 2023 looking into the challenges of escalating costs of modernization and alignment of broader defense priorities. While ICBMs ensure a rapid response to threats, fixed silo locations make them vulnerable to targeting, with potential incentivized preemptive strikes during crises.

The importance of modernizing the ICBMs with Sentinel is created in maintaining a credible and survivable nuclear deterrent able to withstand a potential first strike and deliver a response when necessary. They are a vital component of the nuclear triad, and this modernization ensures that the US can meet its national security objectives within this program. All costs associated with upgrading and replacing the Minuteman III by developing Sentinel are valid

3 Klotz, F. G., & Evans, A. T. (2022, January 3). Modernizing the U.S. Nuclear Triad: The Rationale for a New Intercontinental Ballistic Missile. [Www.rand.org. https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA1434-1.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA1434-1.html)

and substantial, based on the allocation of resources.⁴ Additionally, challenges including integration, testing and deployment pose risks to the timeline and success.⁵ These must be managed carefully and ensure that the modernization of the technology does not compromise U.S. strategic stability. These assets have been in 24/7 alert mode since the 1970s. The past fifty plus years have shown that our technology, against the capabilities of our adversaries, needs to move at a faster pace than we have allowed it . There are approximately four hundred missiles in launch facilities (LF) that are getting the upgrade to the Sentinel ICBM. Boosters and guidance systems are aging out and creating safety concerns among the current programs. The LFs are also aging in their ability to withstand the changes that the Sentinel upgrades will bring. Fiber networks and better structural concrete reinforcement will enable these facilities to extend their life well into the Sentinel's future.

Ballistic Missile Submarines and Sea-Launched Cruise Missile – Nuclear

Ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) are the backbone of the sea-based leg of the nuclear triad and are also essential in second-strike capabilities for the United States. Stealth underwater makes them the most survivable component of the triad, able to patrol vast oceanic areas undetected and launch sea-launched cruise missiles, nuclear (SLCM-N) from almost every location. The aging Ohio-class SSBNs are approaching the end of their service lives to give way to the Columbia-class SSBNs, which are enhanced with improved capabilities. The Columbia-class subs are

4 Klotz, F. G., & Evans, A. T. (2022, January 3). Modernizing the U.S. Nuclear Triad: The Rationale for a New Intercontinental Ballistic Missile. [Www.rand.org](https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA1434-1.html). <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA1434-1.html>

5 United States Air Force. (2024, August 16). Sentinel: The history of the DAF modernizing the backbone of America's national security. Air Force. <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/3876098/sentinel-the-history-of-the-daf-modernizing-the-backbone-of-americas-national-s/>

equipped with quieter technologies improving stealth movements, increased missile payload which allows them to stay out longer and produce a bigger fight, and operational lifespans that extend past the current Ohio-class fleet. All these advancements ensure the continued viability undersea well into the 21st century,⁶ but not without their own threats.

The strategic importances of these SSBNs is in their ability to be a reliable and resilient deterrent against aggression from our adversaries. Consistent and constant at-sea presence deters potential strikes by guaranteeing a retaliatory response, even in the event of a successful first strike on other components within the triad.⁷ Even with these great capabilities, the SSBNs still have their own challenges including high costs and technical demands in order to maintain uninterrupted strategic use during the transition from Ohio-class to Columbia-class.⁸

Sea-Launched Cruise Missiles with nuclear capability (SLCM-N) are a versatile and flexible addition to the US nuclear weaponry. Unlike SSBNs, SLCM-Ns provide tactical and regional deterrence by offering precision-strike nuclear options within the sea-based leg. They can be launched from either ships or submarines which allows them to get closer to conflict zones to address regional threats. Their ability to operate covertly and strike

6 United States Air Force. (2024, August 16). Sentinel: The history of the DAF modernizing the backbone of America's national security. Air Force. <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/3876098/sentinel-the-history-of-the-daf-modernizing-the-backbone-of-americas-national-s/>

7 U.S. Department of Defense. (n.d.). America's Nuclear Triad. U.S. Department of Defense. <https://www.defense.gov/Multimedia/Experience/Americas-Nuclear-Triad/>

8 Lopez, C. T. (2024, May 23). U.S. Needs Sea-Based Nuclear Capability to Ensure Second-Strike Capability. U.S. Department of Defense; DoD News. <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3786326/us-needs-sea-based-nuclear-capability-to-ensure-second-strike-capability/>. Article describing the need to seamlessly replace the Ohio-class SSBN with the Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine.

with such precision shows improves the ability to deter adversaries and reassure allies. Modernization and improvement of the current missiles, Trident II D5LE, is facing challenges as the industrial base has atrophied and supply chain issues are rising. This advancement is the biggest challenge on the U.S. Navy in order to maintain its leg of the triad⁹ in the next generation of the fight for national security.

Anti-submarine warfare (ASW) technology poses significant threats to the effectiveness of these SLBMs and their stealth capabilities. Autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs) with sonar and AI algorithms enabling persistent tracking of the SSBNs which can compromise the stealth capabilities . Satellites and underwater drones with advanced sensors, are challenging the survivability of these weapons. These advancements are a potential issue in undermining the advantage of SLBMs which necessitate continuous innovation in order to maintain credible deterrence.

Air-Based Strategic Bombers

Air-based strategic bombers' modernization is centered on the next generation of stealth bombers: The B-21 Raider is developed with advanced stealth technology which allows it to penetrate contested airspace undetected and an architecture that will assist in integrating future upgrades. This is the sixth generation of the stealth bombers for the United States. The B-21's adaptability ensures that it remains technologically relevant against evolving threats. It is also optimized for nuclear and conventional missions which enhance their versatility across multiple ranges of scenarios. Northrop Grumman has reduced its maintenance requirements and extended operational range as its emphasis to lower lifecycle costs and improve mission readiness compared to older bombers such

9 U.S. Department of Defense. (2024, May 23). U.S. Needs Sea-Based Nuclear Capability to Ensure Second-Strike Capability. U.S. Department of Defense. <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3786326/us-needs-sea-based-nuclear-capability-to-ensure-second-strike-capability/>

as the B-2.¹⁰

Other advanced technologies, particularly in targeting and artificial intelligence (AI), are assisting in the modernization of bomber operations. Integration of AI-driven systems within the bombers, like the B-21, will enhance mission efficiency and decision-making. Advanced targeting systems benefit from AI by analyzing gross amounts of datasets in real-time, optimizing strike paths and mitigating threats in a quicker time in order to complete mission success. AI enabled drones are being adapted to these bombers which can improve their autonomous flight capabilities and could provide greater operational precision.¹¹ AI also strengthens response time to be more effective to dynamic threats in contested airspace. This trend is creating a broader alignment in defense where AI is leveraged to improve command and control systems and integration of unmanned aerial vehicles.¹²

The bombers provide amazing flexibility within the nuclear triad by offering visible deterrence, rapid global reach, and their uniqueness to be recalled after deployment due to their manned driving force. This allows the US to respond to a wide range of threats from nuclear engagements to conventional conflicts.¹³

10 Denton, C. (2024, June 18). What You Need to Know About Northrop Grumman's B-21 Raider. Northrop Grumman Newsroom. https://news.northropgrumman.com/news/features/what-you-need-to-know-about-northrop-grummans-b-21-raider?_gl=1

11 Wolfe, F. (2019, December). Artificial Intelligence Efforts for Military Drones. Interactive.aviationtoday.com. <http://interactive.aviationtoday.com/avionicsmagazine/december-2019-january-2020/artificial-intelligence-efforts-for-military-drones/>

12 National Security Agency/Central Security Service. (2024). Artificial Intelligence Security Center | National Security Agency. Nsa.gov. <http://www.nsa.gov/AISC/>

13 Terry, Lt. Col. N. B., & Cone, P. P. (2020). Hypersonic Technology: An Evolution in Nuclear Weapons? In Air University (AU) (pp. 74–99). STRATEGIC STUDIES QUARTERLY - PERSPECTIVE. https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/SSQ/documents/Volume-14_Issue-2/Terry.pdf

Operational challenges aside, the integration of hypersonic technologies and AI systems require significant investment, rigorous testing, and training to maintain reliability. Adversaries are advancing their air defense systems which is making our advancements just as necessary in continual improvements to the bombers stealth and countermeasure technologies. Despite these challenges, air-based bombers modernization protocols are necessary to ensure they remain critical in the deterrence strategy. Growing with new developments and challenges is what will continue to make the US nuclear triad the strongest force in the world.

Emerging Technologies in the Nuclear Triad

Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping military drone usage and their operations by providing increased autonomy in decision making and enhanced situational awareness for both the ground troops and other military support. They are quickly becoming an essential tool for modern and future warfare. The integration of AI in drones' augments both operational efficiency and reduces human interaction in complex missions which could prove costly. The National Security Agency, the U.S. Government Accountability Office, and Avionics International have all written about the usage and benefits of this emerging technology.

AI technology is transforming strategy in the nuclear environment by adding to situational awareness, in early warning systems and in the decision-making processes of unmanned vehicles. They can process and analyze large amounts of data in real time which assists in identifying emerging threats and provides insight to the decision makers. The increasing reliance on AI and its capabilities presents risks such as over relying on automated systems which can lead to unintended consequences. The Arms Control Association has warned that AI decision making processes can cause mistrust between nuclear armed states which can

increase the likelihood of miscalculation of actions.¹⁴

Hypersonic Weapons

Hypersonic weapons development emphasizes a significant shift in nuclear deterrence strategies. They are able to travel at speeds exceeding Mach 5 which challenges current missile defense frameworks. The speed and agility of these weapons reduce response time for adversaries which complicates interception efforts.¹⁵ This also raises concerns about misinterpretation during a crisis and an established lack of arms control agreements about hypersonic technology, it can pose a challenge to global safety.

Cybersecurity Advances

Advanced technology integration within nuclear systems requires protection within the infrastructure and nuclear systems from cyber threats. Attacks on command-and-control systems can disrupt everyday operations or lead to larger catastrophic events. According to the research,¹⁶ the integration of cybersecurity measures against increasing threats will ensure protection from targeting nuclear assets. Addressing the opportunities and risks associated with technological advancements, strategists and the national security community can strengthen the efforts of deterrence while maintaining threats to strategic stability.

14 Klare, M. (2023). An Arms Control Association Report Assessing the Dangers: Emerging Military Technologies and Nuclear (In)Stability. https://www.armscontrol.org/sites/default/files/files/Reports/ACA_Report_EmergingTech_digital.pdf

15 Klare, M. (2023). An Arms Control Association Report Assessing the Dangers: Emerging Military Technologies and Nuclear (In)Stability. https://www.armscontrol.org/sites/default/files/files/Reports/ACA_Report_EmergingTech_digital.pdf

16 National Security Agency/Central Security Service. (2024). Artificial Intelligence Security Center | National Security Agency. Nsa.gov. <http://www.nsa.gov/AISC/>

Conclusion

Advanced technology plays a critical role in modernizing the nuclear triad, ensuring that its land-, sea-, and air-based components remain effective in addressing 21st-century security challenges. Innovations in guidance systems, propulsion, stealth technology, and cybersecurity are not only extending the operational life of platforms like ICBMs, SSBNs, and strategic bombers but also enhance their precision, survivability, and resilience. Emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and hypersonic systems, further augment the triad's capabilities while introducing new considerations for strategic deterrence and operational readiness.

These advancements carry significant strategic implications. They strengthen the United States' ability to deter adversaries, reassure allies, and maintain global stability. However, they also present challenges, including rising costs, technical hurdles, and the risk of destabilizing arms races. As the nuclear triad evolves, it is essential to address these challenges responsibly, ensuring that modernization efforts are aligned with broader goals of stability and international security.

To achieve this balance, leadership must emphasize arms control and diplomatic engagement alongside technological innovation. Strengthening global frameworks for arms control and fostering international dialogue on emerging technologies can mitigate risks while supporting the triad's modernization. Combining robust modernization and thoughtful strategic planning, the US can uphold its commitment to deterrence, security, and peace in an increasingly complex global landscape.

Cybersecurity and the Evolving Threat Landscape in National Security

Noah Lindorf

The digital age has transformed national security, introducing both unprecedented opportunities and significant vulnerabilities. Cybersecurity now stands at the forefront of national defense, as cyberattacks from state and non-state actors threaten critical infrastructure, private industries, and democratic institutions. This paper examines the evolving cyber threat landscape, the role of government agencies in defending against these threats, and the policy challenges associated with maintaining cybersecurity in a rapidly changing technological environment. The discussion will also highlight the importance of international cooperation and emerging technologies in addressing these growing challenges.

“Cyberattacks have the power to bring our daily lives to a screeching halt. Nearly everything we use to work, play, and live relies on computer systems that are vulnerable to attacks. For example, an attack on an electrical grid could leave millions without power during hot summer months. An attack on transportation systems could bring traffic to a standstill”.¹ The interconnectedness of modern infrastructure has amplified the risks of cyberattacks. Power grids, water systems, healthcare facilities, and financial institutions are increasingly reliant on digital systems, making them prime targets for adversaries. Notable examples include the 2021 Colonial Pipeline ransomware attack, which disrupted fuel supply across the eastern United States, and the 2015 cyberattack on

1 U.S. Government Accountability Office. “What Are the Biggest Challenges to Federal Cybersecurity? (High Risk Update).” U.S. GAO, June 13, 2024. <https://www.gao.gov/blog/what-are-biggest-challenges-federal-cybersecurity-high-risk-update>.

Ukraine's power grid. These incidents underscore the fragility of systems that millions rely on daily. A successful cyberattack on a critical node of infrastructure could cascade into widespread chaos, highlighting the importance of robust cybersecurity measures. Moreover, as the world becomes more digitized, the attack surface for adversaries expands exponentially, complicating defensive strategies.

The integration of smart technologies into everyday systems introduces new vulnerabilities. Smart grids, autonomous vehicles, and IoT devices offer efficiency and convenience but also create potential entry points for attackers. Ensuring the security of these technologies requires a proactive approach, including rigorous testing and constant monitoring to detect and address vulnerabilities before they can be exploited.

Nation-states such as Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea have employed cyberattacks to achieve geopolitical objectives. These attacks often aim to steal intellectual property, conduct espionage, or undermine public trust. "APT (advanced persistent threat) actors are well-resourced and engage in sophisticated malicious cyber activity that is targeted and aimed at prolonged network/system intrusion. APT objectives could include espionage, data theft, and network/system disruption or destruction".² Operations like Russia's interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election and China's extensive intellectual property theft highlight the strategic importance of cyberspace in modern conflicts. These operations are often conducted in the grey zone, an area below the threshold of traditional warfare, to avoid direct military retaliation while achieving strategic objectives. "The cyber threat is simultaneously a national & homeland security threat and a counterintelligence problem. State and non-state actors use digital technologies to achieve economic and military advantage, foment instability, increase control over content in cyberspace and achieve other strategic goals — often faster than our ability to understand

2 Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency. "Cyber Threats and Advisories." Accessed April 13, 2025. <https://www.cisa.gov/topics/cyber-threats-and-advisories>.

the security implications and neutralize the threat”.³ The evolving nature of cyber conflicts necessitates a reevaluation of national security strategies to include robust countermeasures against such covert threats.

State-sponsored actors are also increasingly collaborating with private entities or criminal organizations to obscure their involvement. This complicates attribution and response, as distinguishing between government-directed operations and independent cybercriminal activities becomes more challenging. Addressing these hybrid threats requires a multifaceted approach, combining intelligence-sharing, diplomatic pressure, and, when necessary, offensive cyber capabilities.

The DHS, through its Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), plays a pivotal role in protecting critical infrastructure. CISA collaborates with private sector partners to identify vulnerabilities, share threat intelligence, and implement defensive measures. This collaboration is critical as much of the nation’s infrastructure, including energy grids and financial networks, is privately owned. CISA also conducts tabletop exercises to simulate cyberattack scenarios, enhancing preparedness across sectors. The agency’s proactive approach to identifying potential vulnerabilities and implementing preventive measures is essential in mitigating the risks of large-scale cyber incidents.

CISA’s efforts also extend to raising public awareness about cyber hygiene. Initiatives like the “Stop.Think.Connect.” campaign aim to educate individuals and businesses on basic cybersecurity practices, emphasizing the shared responsibility of protecting digital spaces. By fostering a culture of awareness and preparedness, CISA helps build a more resilient cyber ecosystem.

The NSA, along with U.S. Cyber Command, conducts offensive and defensive cyber operations. While the NSA focuses on intelligence gathering, Cyber Command is tasked with disrupting adversarial cyber activities and defending military networks. These

3 Office of the Director of National Intelligence. “Cyber Security.” Accessed April 13, 2025. <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/ncsc-what-we-do/ncsc-cyber-security>.

agencies operate together to protect national interests, using advanced technologies and a vast array of intelligence sources to stay ahead of potential threats. Offensive cyber operations by Cyber Command can serve as a deterrent by demonstrating the U.S.'s capability to retaliate effectively against cyber adversaries.

The NSA also plays a crucial role in securing classified information and preventing insider threats. Programs like the Information Assurance Directorate (IAD) ensure that sensitive communications remain protected against adversarial attempts to intercept or exploit them. This dual focus on offense and defense underscores the NSA's central role in national cybersecurity.

The FBI addresses cybercrime and cyberterrorism, investigating incidents ranging from ransomware attacks to the activities of hacktivist groups. Its role as the primary law enforcement agency ensures coordination between federal and state governments. The FBI's cyber division works closely with international partners to trace the origins of cyberattacks and apprehend perpetrators, showcasing the importance of global collaboration in addressing cyber threats. The FBI's partnerships with private sector entities also play a significant role in mitigating threats. By facilitating information sharing through programs like the InfraGard initiative, the bureau enhances the ability of businesses to detect and respond to cyber incidents effectively. These collaborations highlight the interconnected nature of modern cybersecurity efforts.

Identifying the perpetrators of cyberattacks is often challenging due to the anonymity of cyberspace. This ambiguity complicates deterrence, as responses must balance demonstrating strength with avoiding escalation. The 2014 Sony Pictures hack, attributed to North Korea, illustrates the difficulties in holding actors accountable. Attribution requires advanced forensic techniques and international cooperation, as attackers often route operations through multiple countries to obscure their origins. Developing a framework for rapid and accurate attribution is critical for effective deterrence, as it allows governments to respond decisively to cyber threats. In addition to attribution, creating credible deterrence

mechanisms requires a clear articulation of consequences for cyber aggression. This might include economic sanctions, diplomatic measures, or targeted cyber counterattacks. However, striking the right balance between deterrence and escalation remains a persistent policy challenge.

Efforts to enhance cybersecurity often raise concerns about privacy and civil liberties. Legislation like the USA PATRIOT Act has sparked debates over government surveillance, while tech companies face pressure to provide law enforcement with access to encrypted communications. Striking a balance between security and individual rights is a complex challenge, as excessive surveillance can erode public trust while insufficient measures leave systems vulnerable to attack. Policymakers must navigate these tensions carefully to maintain public confidence while ensuring robust cybersecurity protections.

Privacy concerns also extend to the collection and storage of personal data by private companies. High-profile data breaches, such as the 2017 Equifax incident, have highlighted the risks of inadequate security practices. Establishing clear regulations and accountability measures for data protection is essential to safeguarding privacy in the digital age.

Cybersecurity requires global collaboration, as cyber threats transcend national borders. Initiatives like the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime aim to foster international cooperation, but differing legal frameworks and political interests hinder comprehensive agreements. Establishing clear norms for state behavior in cyberspace and promoting information-sharing between nations are crucial for addressing the global nature of cyber threats. The development of multilateral agreements that outline acceptable conduct in cyberspace could help reduce the frequency and severity of cyber conflicts.

International cooperation can also enhance collective defensive capabilities. Joint cybersecurity exercises, intelligence-sharing agreements, and capacity-building initiatives in developing nations strengthen the global response to cyber threats, demonstrating the importance of unity in addressing these

challenges.

While AI enhances defensive capabilities, it also enables sophisticated cyberattacks. Adversaries can use AI to automate phishing campaigns, bypass security protocols, or conduct disinformation campaigns with greater efficiency. AI-driven attacks can adapt to countermeasures in real-time, making them particularly challenging to defend against. On the defensive side, AI is being leveraged to analyze vast quantities of data for anomalies, helping detect potential threats before they materialize. However, the dual-use nature of AI underscores the importance of ethical considerations in its development and deployment.

The commodification of ransomware has lowered the barrier to entry for cybercriminals. RaaS platforms provide tools and infrastructure for launching attacks, enabling less-skilled actors to target vulnerable organizations. This trend has led to an increase in the frequency and sophistication of ransomware attacks, with victims ranging from small businesses to large corporations and municipal governments. The financial and reputational damage caused by ransomware attacks highlights the need for robust defensive measures and public awareness campaigns to mitigate their impact.

Compromising third-party vendors offers attackers indirect access to high-value targets. The 2020 SolarWinds breach, which affected multiple government agencies, underscored the risks inherent in global supply chains. Such attacks exploit the interconnected nature of modern supply chains, where a single compromised component can have far-reaching consequences. Strengthening supply chain security requires close collaboration between government and industry, as well as rigorous auditing and monitoring of third-party vendors. Emerging solutions to supply chain vulnerabilities include blockchain technology and zero-trust

The growing demand for cybersecurity experts has outpaced the available workforce, creating a significant skills gap. According to recent studies, the global cybersecurity workforce shortage exceeds millions of unfilled positions. This deficit hampers the

ability of organizations to implement robust defenses against sophisticated threats. Training and certification programs, such as those offered by the SANS Institute and CompTIA, play a crucial role in bridging this gap. However, addressing the skills shortage requires systemic changes, including integrating cybersecurity education into K-12 curricula and expanding university-level programs.

The public and private sectors must also invest in retraining programs to transition professionals from adjacent fields into cybersecurity roles. Initiatives like the U.S. Department of Labor's apprenticeship programs have shown promise, but scaling these efforts is essential to meet the demand. Furthermore, increasing diversity in the cybersecurity workforce can bring fresh perspectives to problem-solving, enhancing the sector's overall resilience.

Cybersecurity professionals face high levels of stress due to the relentless nature of cyber threats and the criticality of their responsibilities. Constant vigilance, long hours, and the pressure of responding to incidents can lead to burnout, impacting job satisfaction and retention. Organizations must prioritize mental health resources and create supportive work environments to address this issue.

Providing opportunities for career growth and professional development can also improve retention. Encouraging certifications, offering competitive compensation, and recognizing contributions can foster loyalty and reduce turnover rates. These measures are vital to maintaining a motivated and capable workforce.

Zero Trust represents a paradigm shift in cybersecurity, moving away from the traditional "trust but verify" model to "never trust, always verify." This approach assumes that threats could originate from within or outside the network and enforces strict access controls at every level. By continuously validating users and devices, Zero Trust minimizes the risk of unauthorized access, even if an attacker breaches the perimeter.

"Sophisticated cyber actors and nation-states exploit vulnerabilities to steal information and money and are developing capabilities to disrupt, destroy, or

threaten the delivery of essential services. Defending against these attacks is essential to maintaining the nation's security. Protecting cyber space is the responsibility of individuals, families, small and large businesses, SLTT and federal governments. By preventing attacks or mitigating the spread of an attack as quickly as possible, cyber threat actors lose their power. Any cyber-attack, no matter how small, is a threat to our national security and must be identified, managed, and shut down".⁴

Implementing Zero Trust requires a comprehensive understanding of an organization's network and assets. Steps include segmenting networks, deploying multi-factor authentication, and utilizing behavior analytics to detect anomalies. Although challenging to implement, the long-term benefits of Zero Trust far outweigh the initial investment, especially in today's increasingly complex threat landscape.

Decentralized models, such as blockchain technology, offer promising advancements in cybersecurity. Blockchain's distributed ledger system enhances data integrity by making it virtually tamper-proof. Applications include securing supply chains, protecting sensitive records, and improving identity management systems. However, the scalability and energy consumption of blockchain-based systems remain challenges to widespread adoption. Ongoing research aims to address these issues, paving the way for practical and efficient decentralized cybersecurity solutions.

The advent of quantum computing poses a potential threat to current encryption standards, as quantum computers could break widely used cryptographic algorithms. To counter this, researchers are developing quantum-resistant cryptographic methods. These algorithms aim to secure communications against both classical and quantum attacks, ensuring long-term data protection. Governments and private organizations are investing in post-

4 Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency. "Cyber Threats and Advisories." Accessed April 13, 2025. <https://www.cisa.gov/topics/cyber-threats-and-advisories>.

quantum cryptography research to stay ahead of this emerging threat. The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) is leading efforts to standardize quantum-resistant algorithms, underscoring the importance of proactive measures in safeguarding the future of cybersecurity.

Collaboration between government agencies and private companies is essential to address the dynamic nature of cyber threats. Information-sharing initiatives, such as the Cybersecurity Information Sharing Act (CISA), facilitate real-time communication about vulnerabilities and attack patterns. However, concerns about data privacy and liability often hinder full cooperation. Establishing clear guidelines and legal protections can encourage greater participation and trust between stakeholders.

Joint cybersecurity exercises can further enhance readiness by simulating real-world scenarios and identifying areas for improvement. Programs like the National Cybersecurity Preparedness Consortium (NCPC) provide valuable training resources to enhance cross-sector collaboration.

Investing in research and development (R&D) is critical to staying ahead of adversaries. Governments should allocate more funding to emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and quantum computing, to enhance both defensive and offensive capabilities. Public grants and incentives can also encourage innovation within the private sector, fostering a competitive and forward-thinking cybersecurity landscape.

Because of the transnational nature of cyber threats, the international community must work together to establish a cohesive cybersecurity framework. This could include agreements on norms of behavior, joint response protocols, and mechanisms for conflict resolution in cyberspace. Expanding existing frameworks, such as the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime, to include more nations can strengthen global efforts.

Establishing a dedicated cybersecurity agency under the United Nations could facilitate coordination and oversight, ensuring a unified response to global cyber challenges. While achieving consensus among nations is complex, the benefits of a

collaborative approach far outweigh the risks of fragmented efforts.

The evolving cyber threat landscape demands a proactive and multifaceted approach to national security. As adversaries leverage advanced technologies to exploit vulnerabilities, governments, private sectors, and international bodies must collaborate to build a resilient cybersecurity ecosystem. Addressing workforce challenges, adopting emerging solutions, and fostering innovation are critical to defending against current and future threats. By prioritizing cybersecurity, nations can safeguard their critical infrastructure, economic stability, and democratic values in an increasingly interconnected world.

The United States Must Remain the World's Policeman *David Evans*

The United States is currently experiencing a highly polarized atmosphere, with sharply differing views on its global role, particularly as the world's policeman, or the leading global power. This discussion is of utmost importance, given the unmatched military power of the U.S. and its long-standing commitment to promoting peace in various regions. Central to this debate is whether such a role is seen as a form of colonialism or as a positive influence for good, particularly in defending human rights. In his article, "Army of Peace Johnson claims that the U.S. aimed to establish a global police force through the UN, and explains that after the war, many American leaders had worries and were greatly concerned about the potential Soviet expansion and wanted the U.N. to be a countermeasure.¹ As the decades have gone by, the rest of the world has not sufficiently measured up to counter the current global superpowers such as Russia and China, and this has created a numerous amount of issues. From whispers of genocide, to the threat of nuclear war, to invasions, it is crucial that the rest of the world is capable of defending itself or being defended from current and potential threats. The United States of America possesses currently one of if not the strongest economies in the world, and to back it up it also has the world's strongest military. As a result of this, the United States has a moral obligation to maintain human rights across the globe.

The U.S. has historically established itself as the global

1 Johnson, I. O. Army of Peace: American Military Ambitions for the United Nations and the Origins of the Cold War. Adams Center, 2022, [URL no longer available].

leader in peacekeeping and international security, especially since the end of World War II. This role has included military interventions, occupations, diplomatic efforts, and the formation of alliances to foster stability in areas prone to conflict. The United States has reach and influence across the world, on many different spectrums such as humanitarian aid, widespread international alliances and relations, and a powerful and ready global military presence. The 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) affirms that the United States will work to strengthen fragile states “where state weakness or failure would magnify threats to the American homeland” and “empower reform-minded governments, people, and civil society” in these places.² For better or worse, as we have actively done so, we have become increasingly crucial to the survival of many of these States, and our missions, goals, and operations in these various places have helped them maintain their freedoms.

Abandoning our operations abroad can have incredibly disastrous outcomes. The recent withdrawal from Afghanistan highlights the dangers of abandoning our operations abroad. The Taliban’s resurgence has led to numerous human rights violations, leading to a much lower and dangerous quality of life for the people in Afghanistan. Women and girls have had their education suspended and their schools closed, they have been forced out of many of their employments and had their opportunities and rights stripped from them. Not only that, but many are now subject to Punishments for “Moral Offenses”, and can face punishment for perceived violations of the Taliban’s interpretation of Islamic law, which can include flogging, stoning, and even death. These punishments can be handed down for offenses such as adultery, running away from home, or working without a male guardian. Shortly after the Taliban’s takeover, a powerful earthquake struck Paktika province in southeastern Afghanistan. This earthquake had

2 White House. “National Security Strategy of the United States of America.” Washington, DC: The White House, December 2017. <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

a magnitude of 5.9 and caused widespread devastation, killed over a thousand people, and displaced and injured thousands more. Because of the Taliban's strict control and the complex political circumstances it has presented, humanitarian aid was restricted, slow, and not nearly as sufficient as it could have been. As Asst. Prof. Austin Wright explains, "The U.S. departure created a vacuum that was filled by the Taliban, whose return has already triggered an increase in violence and the erosion of human rights".³ The chaotic withdrawal has shown that abandoning active operations and leaving regions vulnerable can result in disaster.

In contrast, when the U.S. commits to completing its mission, the outcomes can be largely positive. These missions can drive stability, strengthen alliances, and advance national interests. In the Balkans during the 1990s, ethnic cleansing was carried out by various factions across the region, notably by Serb forces against Croats and Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), as well as Kosovo Albanians. One of the most infamous events of these conflicts, occurred during the Bosnian War was the Srebrenica massacre, in which Serb forces killed more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys. It is widely considered the worst act of genocide in Europe since World War II. Not only were horrific violations of human rights committed, but the region lost many beloved cultural sites. Serbian forces also destroyed many of these sites, including Kosovo's Islamic mosques and Orthodox Christian churches. The U.S. intervention in Kosovo during the 1990s serves as a key example of the positive effects of American involvement. The U.S. eventually authorized NATO airstrikes against Bosnian Serb forces in 1995, and the Dayton Peace Accords ultimately ended the conflict. By stopping the ethnic cleansing taking place this intervention showcased the benefits of U.S. intervention working alongside neighboring countries to maintain regional peace. As Senator Roth emphasized, the Kosovo intervention proved that

3 Wright, A. "What Went Wrong in Afghanistan? Policy Expert Examines U.S. Missteps." University of Chicago News, August 30, 2021. <https://news.uchicago.edu/story/what-went-wrong-afghanistan-policy-expert-examines-us-missteps>.

U.S. military action, in cooperation with international partners, was essential in stopping the widespread violence and ensuring that peace and human rights were restored to a region on the brink of total collapse.⁴

Furthermore, U.S. military presence in various regions serves to protect American interests and deter authoritarian regimes. The Gulf War is a prime example, where US intervention liberated Kuwait from an Iraqi occupation. The United Nations (UN) condemned the invasion, and economic sanctions were imposed on Iraq. In August 1990, Iraq, under the leadership of the infamous Saddam Hussein, invaded Kuwait. The United States and its allies intervened, which culminated in the U.S. leading a massive air campaign followed by a ground assault that expelled Iraqi forces from Kuwait in just 100 hours of combat. The coalition forces, which included countries like the UK, France, and Saudi Arabia, quickly overwhelmed the Iraqi military. This intervention underscored the importance of dealing with threats to international order, which ultimately benefits both America's interests and international security. As Bret Stephens points out, America might be "the mightiest country in the history of the planet" due to its extensive nuclear arsenal and global economic reach.⁵ However, this power has serious limits. The withdrawal from Afghanistan serves as a reality check of the very real challenges that come from attempting to create lasting peace, echoing past conflicts like Vietnam where military intervention did not lead to the desired outcomes.⁶

Opponents of U.S. intervention often argue that such actions can be seen as colonial and invasive, resulting in cultural disruption and resentment among the local populations. The Iraq

4 Roth, S. "Roth Floor Statement on Lessons Learned in Kosovo Conflict." U.S. Senate Committee on Finance, April 27, 2000. <https://www.finance.senate.gov/chairmans-news/roth-floor-statement-on-lessons-learned-in-kosovo-conflict>.

5 Stephens, B. "Yes, America Should Be the World's Policeman." *The Wall Street Journal*, November 14, 2014. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/yes-america-should-be-the-worlds-policeman-1415984889>.

6 Stephens, "Yes, America Should Be the World's Policeman."

War is frequently cited as a prime example of a policy that led to such disaffection and resentment. According to Sanam Vakil, deputy director of the Middle East North Africa programme at Chatham House, the decision to invade Iraq was a “huge violation of international law” and that the real objective of the Bush administration was a broader transformational effect in the region”.⁷ It is no doubt that the United States does not have an unblemished history when it comes to our involvement in conflict.

While these criticisms raise important and valid concerns, they also overlook the serious dangers of “minding our business.” For instance, the emergence of extremist groups like ISIS have resulted in drastic cultural destruction on their own part. The World lost numerous historical sites and knowledge as a result of the violence they caused. The group famously destroyed the ancient Buddhist statues of Bamiyan in Afghanistan, a loss that erased centuries of history and cultural heritage.⁸ By working with local leaders, the U.S. can help to stabilize regions and counter the influence of such groups, ultimately preserving cultural heritage and promoting peace on a global scale, and attempting to heal the wounds of such devastating conflicts and destruction, whether they are the results of colonialism or not.

Another argument against the U.S. acting as the world's policeman is that it diverts resources and attention away from urgent domestic issues such as our nationwide drug addiction, healthcare, the housing crisis, and homelessness, especially amongst our veterans. These hit especially close to home, as these are the problems Americans face day in and day out. These problems are what they are reminded of in their own families, their friendships, in their work and personal lives, and are serious issues that need addressing. In his article, “U.S. Steps Back; Reduced Role as World Policeman Comes Amid Declining Appetite for

7 Vakil, S. “Examining the Justifications for the U.S. Invasion of Iraq”, [URL no longer available].

8 NBC News. “ISIS Destroys Ancient Artifacts in Iraq, Syria, and Beyond.” March 25, 2015. <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/isis-n315451>.

Entanglement Abroad,” J.D. Tuccille, a journalist and editor known for his work that often emphasizes libertarian views, shows us how the United States is no longer tightly holding onto its traditional role as the world’s policeman. He highlights how the U.S. is moving away from its traditional position as a dominant global police force toward a more isolationist approach.⁹ This change is largely driven by American citizens getting tired of the repeated wars and money we are funneling out of our country into others, while our circumstances seem to be getting worse for many Americans.

However, the issue is not nearly as simple as taking care of domestic problems versus the problems abroad. By promoting global peace and security, the U.S. can prevent conflicts that may spill over and affect our domestic interests. It is important to remember that what happens internationally drastically affects what happens here domestically. A key example that many Americans can famously remember is how the war in Ukraine drove up gas prices and drastically affected the energy industry. The reality is that global conflicts do affect us even if the average American cannot see it in their day to day life, influencing everything from supply chain to national security. When the U.S. engages in military interventions or diplomatic efforts abroad, it is not always just about the morality of promoting peace in distant lands; it is also serving the perceived best interests for its own citizens. For instance, U.S. involvement in conflicts like the Kosovo and the Gulf War, was not about the issues in those regions alone, but about securing the stability of international oil markets of which Kuwait is a major contributor of, or keeping NATO alliances that are crucial for global security. In addition, extremist groups such as ISIS or the Taliban give many examples of how unchecked threats abroad can lead to refugee crises, and regional destabilization that will affect us greatly.

In closing, the debate over the United States’ role as the

9 Tuccille, J. D. “U.S. Withdraws as Global Policeman, Leaving Others to Pick Up Slack.” National Post, October 21, 2023. <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/j-d-tuccille-u-s-withdraws-as-global-policeman-leaving-others-to-pick-up-slack>.

world's policeman extends beyond our own interests, it is about how the U.S. must remain committed to its role, at least for now when there is no other option. The reality is that no other country or organization currently possesses the same level of militaristic capability, economic influence, and diplomatic influence as the United States, especially as it is backed by NATO. It has the power, it has the influence, and if not the United States, then who? The simple truth is that if the United States does not step up to lead in times of international crisis, no other nation is positioned to take on this responsibility with the morality this world needs. In the Constitution of which the United States was founded on, we find the words "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness".¹⁰ If the United States desires these for itself, it must desire them for all men. The United States has a moral obligation to maintain human rights across the globe.

10 Continental Congress. United States Constitution (1787).

Modern Counter Terrorism, Israelis Pager Attack on Hezbollah *Samuel Gale*

On September 17, 2024, thousands of communication devices, pagers, and radios simultaneously exploded across Lebanon and Syria. The United Nations, in a press release, said the attacks killed at least 32 people and injured another 3250.¹ According to NPR, “Among the dead are a boy and a girl, as well as medical personnel.”² Hundreds of those injured were in critical condition. The next day, on September 18th, 2024, another wave of devices, including walkie-talkies, exploded like the pagers. According to Lebanese officials, 14 people were killed, and 450 people were injured. The attack targeted Hezbollah operatives and was conducted by Israel’s intelligence group Mossad and the Israeli defense force. According to NPR, Israel’s defense minister Yoave Gallant said this following the attacks. “Excellent achievements together with the shin bet, together with Mossad.”³ He does not explicitly mention the communication devices that exploded, but the international community viewed his comments as accepting responsibility for the attacks.

The attack had been in its works for months. According to

1 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), “Exploding Pagers and Radios: A Terrifying Violation of International Law, Say UN Experts,” press release, September 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/09/exploding-pagers-and-radios-terrifying-violation-international-law-say-un>.

2 NPR, “Israel-Hezbollah Timeline: 12 Days That Transformed a Bloody Conflict,” September 29, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2024/09/29/g-s1-25348/israel-hezbollah-lebanon-hassan-nasrallah-timeline>.

3 NPR, “Israel-Hezbollah Timeline.”

Reuters, Earlier in the year, on February 13th, 2024, the general of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, gave a speech warning his followers that their “phones are more dangerous than Israeli spies.”,⁴ instructing them to break, bury, or lock them in an iron box. The Hezbollah leaders feared their follower’s phones were at risk of giving information and location data. The Hezbollah organization ordered thousands of pagers from a Taiwanese company, Gold Apollo, and a Japanese company, ICOM, who were the manufacturers of the devices. The devices used in the attack were the “Gold Apollo rugged paper AR-924 and ICOM IC-v82.”⁵ The Israeli intelligence group Mossad was able to plant explosives in these devices in the manufacturing process so that they would be armed before they arrived. When Israeli intelligence was ready to strike, all they had to do was send out an activation signal. When the signal was received, the explosives detonated.

In this paper, I will look at Mossad’s attack on Hezbollah through the lens of international humanitarian law to decide if their actions were legal or not. Did they have proper authority to conduct an attack? Was there a necessity for the attack? I will look at potential violations in targeting principles, such as distinction, proportionality, and necessity within targeting. And I will analyze the use of indiscriminate weapons, booby traps, and humanity. This research will show that Israel violated the law of war and that there is a need for accountability.

1. Proper Authority Under International Law

Understanding whether Israel had proper authority is essential when determining whether it violated the laws. The United Nations Charter prohibits using force and outlines only acceptable times. Article 2(4) says, “All members shall refrain in

4 Laila Bassam and Maya Gebeily, “Israel Planted Explosives in Hezbollah’s Taiwan-Made Pagers, Say Sources,” Reuters, September 18, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-planted-explosives-hezbollahs-taiwan-made-pagers-say-sources-2024-09-18/>.

5 Bassam and Gebeily, “Israel Planted Explosives.”

their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.”⁶ This is the foundation for prohibiting force outside the United Nations. Within the parameters of the United Nations’ use of force, there are three legal paths to the use of force. These include a United Nations resolution, self-defense, and host nation consent.

Articles 39, 41, and 42 of the United Nations Charter outline the path to a United Nations resolution. (39) “The Security Council shall determine the existence of any threat to peace, breach of peace, or act of aggression and shall make recommendations or decide what measure should be taken by articles 41 and 42 to maintain or restore international peace and security.”⁷ Article 41 speaks about solutions that do not use military force, so in this case, it is not essential because military action was taken. Article 42 says, “Should the Security Council consider that measure provided for in article 41 would be inadequate or have proved inadequate, it may take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security. Such action may include demonstrations, blockades, and other operations by air, sea, or land.”⁸ Did Israel have authority from the United Nations? The United Nations press release says, “UN human rights experts today condemned the malicious manipulation of thousands of electronic pagers and radios to explode simultaneously across Lebanon and Syria as terrifying violations of international law.”⁹ To further that point, a United Nations official, Rosemary DiCarlo, commented in a news article from Al Jazeera. “We risk seeing a conflagration that could dwarf even the devastation and suffering witnessed so far.”¹⁰ He made

6 United Nations, Charter of the United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>.

7 United Nations, Charter of the United Nations.

8 United Nations, Charter of the United Nations.

9 OHCHR, “Exploding Pagers and Radios.”

10 Al Jazeera, “UN Warns Escalating Israel-Hezbollah Violence Risks Devastating Conflict,” September 20, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/>

this comment warning that further violence between Israel and Iran-backed groups like Hezbollah risked starting a more significant conflict. This statement clarified that the United Nations did not support their actions in the region.

Did Lebanon permit Israel to conduct its operation in its territories? The law on host nation consent is implied in documents such as the U.N. Charter and other documents like the Geneva Conventions. It is also mentioned in the DOD Law Of War Manual. Section 3.5 says, “military operations conducted in the territory of another state require either the consent of that state or a justification under international law, such as self-defense.”¹¹ Section 4.3.3 says, “Operations in another state territory should be conducted with the consent of the host nation, or under conditions where such consent is not required due to legal justifications, such as the unwillingness of the state to address the threat.”¹² According to the DOD law of war manual you must have the consent of the host nation except for a few conditions. Those being self-defense or the host nation is unable or unwilling to address the threat. The unwilling or unable doctrine is found in section 4.3.3.2: “In the absence of host nation consent, states may conduct operations if the territorial state is unwilling or unable to effectively address the threat.”¹³ Was Lebanon willing or able to take care of the groups operating out of its borders? I don’t believe we have enough weather information on whether they were choosing to allow the group to operate within its borders. One thing to consider in this case is found in a news article by the Associated Press. It says, “Lebanon filed a complaint against Israel at the U.N Labor Organization over the string of deadly attacks involving AP exploding pagers saying workers were among those killed

news/2024/9/20/un-warns-escalating-israel-hezbollah-violence-risks-devastating-conflict.

11 U.S. Department of Defense, Law of War Manual, updated July 2023, <https://media.defense.gov/2023/Jul/31/2003271432/-1/-1/0/DOD-LAW-OF-WAR-MANUAL-JUNE-2015-UPDATED-JULY%202023.PDF>.

12 U.S. Department of Defense, Law of War Manual.

13 U.S. Department of Defense, Law of War Manual.

and injured.”¹⁴ Lebanese leaders are not happy with the attacks that killed and injured its citizens. It’s clear that Israel did not have permission to operate from the host nation and could not use this consent as a justification to conduct operations in a sovereign nation.

The only other legal use of force is self-defense. Because they conducted an offensive attack self, defense is hard to claim. According to a Reuters article, “Israel media reported that Netanyahu claimed responsibility for the attack during a cabinet meeting, telling the minister that senior defense officials and political figures were opposed to the detonation of the pagers but that he went ahead with the operations.”¹⁵ The prime minister was determined to conduct this attack even though officials did not agree to move forward with it. That paints the picture that it was not self-defense and that he wanted to perform an offensive strike.

Necessity

When looking at the law and the actions of Israel, Israel’s attack on Hezbollah fighters was strategically planned. But what was their military objective? The goal was to remove the organization’s communications networks. To justify military necessity, one must determine whether communication was a concrete military function for Hezbollah. Article 52(2) of additional protocol 1 says,

Attacks shall be limited strictly to military objectives. In so far as objects are concerned, military objectives are limited to those objects which, by their nature, location, purpose,

14 Jamey Keaten, “Lebanon Files Complaint Against Israel at UN Labor Body over Deadly Pager Explosions,” Associated Press, November 6, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/lebanon-pagers-explosion-israel-mousta-fa-bayram-un-bcafb4419834d9d4f83aab3ffd82b1e3>.

15 “Netanyahu Approved Pager Attacks Against Hezbollah, Spokesman Says,” Reuters, November 11, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/netanyahu-approved-pager-attacks-against-hezbollah-spokesman-says-2024-11-11/>.

or use, make an effective contribution to military action and whose total or partial destruction capture or neutralization, in the circumstances ruling at the time, offers a definite military advantage.¹⁶

According to this definition of military objectives, targeting pagers would be allowed under military necessity. Destroying communication networks effectively contributes to military action, so it is a legal target for the operation.

II. Violations of Targeting Principles

Necessity (Within Targeting)

Another part of the necessity principle relates to targeting. The question is, did the aggressor take precautions to minimize civilian harm? The law applicable is found in Article 57 of AP1. “(1) in the conduct of military operations, constant care shall be taken to spare the civilian population, civilians, and civilian objects. (2) With respect to attacks, the following precaution shall be taken:

- (a) Those who plan or decide upon an attack shall:
 - i. Do everything feasible to verify that the objectives to be attacked are neither civilians nor civilian objects and are not subject to special protection but are military objectives within the meaning of paragraph 2 of article 52, and it is not prohibited by the prohibitions of this protocol to attack them;
 - ii. Take all feasible precautions in the choice of means and methods of attack with a view to avoiding and, in any event minimizing incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, and damage to civilian objects.

16 International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/api-1977>.

iii. Refrain from deciding to launch any attack which may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated.

B. An attack shall be canceled or suspended if it becomes apparent that the objective is not a military one or is subject to special protection or that the attack may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated.

C. Effective advance warning shall be given of attacks which may affect civilian population, unless circumstances do not permit.¹⁷

In the context of the pager attacks, Israel did not follow any of the precautions laid out here. Section (2)(a)(i) says to do everything to verify the objects of said attack are not civilian. That can be achieved when aiming a firearm, conducting a drone strike, and many other forms of modern combat. But in this case, there is no way to verify that the pagers that contained explosives, delivered months ago, are in the hands of the intended target. There is far too much separation and no way to verify that they haven't been sold to a civilian, held by a child, or sent to the wrong place entirely. Sections (2)(a)(i) and (ii) say to take all precautions in the choice of weapons to protect civilians and not launch an attack that is excessive in relation to the objective. The option to send out thousands of handheld explosives to detonate all at one time should be expected to cause civilian harm and excessive damage related to the military advantage. Finally, sections (b) and (c) say that an attack must be suspended if injury or loss of life is excessive concerning the military advantage and that the civilians must be

17 ICRC, Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions (Protocol I).

warned. Israel had months to warn civilians and cancel or suspend their attack but, in the end, did neither. Was each specific targeting decision necessary to achieve a legitimate military aim? And did Israel take all feasible precautions to minimize harm to civilians and civilian objects? The choice to strike the communication systems of the Hezbollah group is considered a legitimate military objective, but they did not take the precautions under Article 57 of Additional Protocol 1 to minimize harm.

Distinction

Distinction is essential when conducting military operations because it protects the people not involved in the hostilities from falling victim to where they live. The foundation of the distinction principle starts at the planning stage before weapons are chosen and used. This is what the law says Article 48 of Additional Protocol 1 says:

“In order to ensure respect for and protection of the civilian population and civilian objects, the parties to the conflict shall at all times be distinguished between the civilian population and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives and accordingly shall direct their operations only against military objectives.”¹⁸

Article 51(1)(2) of Additional Protocol 1 says this:

I. “The civilian population and individual civilians shall enjoy general protection against dangers arising from military operations.”

II. “The civilian population as such, as well as individuals’ civilians, shall not be the object of attack. Acts or threats of violence, the primary purpose of which is to spread terror among the civilian populations, are prohibited.”¹⁹

There are questions to be asked here. How did Israel distinguish between combatants and civilians in planning and

18 ICRC, Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions (Protocol I).

19 ICRC, Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions (Protocol I).

executing the attack? Article 48 said, “shall at all times be distinguished between the civilian population and combatants.” There is a clear violation of Article 48 because Israel chose a method that did not allow them to be distinguished at all times in the attack. There was no reasonable expectation that they would be able to distinguish whether the pager that exploded was being held by or was near civilians or civilian property. Another critical question is, were the individuals targeted genuinely affiliated with Hezbollah? In this situation, there was no way to determine who the pagers were given to. Were they given to Hezbollah members who were only involved in the hostilities? Were they given to those not directly involved but helping the cause? Or were some given to their family members or sold elsewhere and are now in the hands of an innocent civilian? The UN press release said, “To the extent that international humanitarian law applies, at the time of the attacks, there was no way of knowing who possessed each device and who was nearby.”²⁰ They go on to say, “Simultaneous attacks by thousands of devices would inevitably violate humanitarian law by failing to verify each target and distinguish between protected civilians and those who could potentially be attacked for taking direct part in hostilities.”²¹ Israel violated these laws by not planning an attack that they could distinguish between civilians and combatants at the time of the attack. Because of that, civilian lives were lost.

Humanity

The principles of humanity set in International Humanitarian Law are foundational norms that ensure human dignity is respected even during an armed conflict. They are there to limit suffering and maintain some level of humanity. Such prohibitions are unnecessary suffering with respect to targeting and, necessity, protections of individuals not taking place in hostilities. Civilian detainees and medical personnel must be treated with respect and

20 OHCHR, “Exploding Pagers and Radios.”

21 OHCHR, “Exploding Pagers and Radios.”

protected from torture and inhumane treatment. Humanity must be balanced between military necessity that allows actions that achieve the objective. That being said, the use of force cannot violate humanitarian protection, and principles of proportionality must be followed.

Much of the humanity principles are embedded all over International Humanitarian Law and are applicable to every aspect. Prohibition against targeting and terrorizing civilians can be found in Additional Protocol I, Additional Protocol II, Common Article 3 of the Geneva Convention, the Fourth Geneva Convention, Marten's Clause, and Rules 2 and 6 of Customary International Humanitarian Law. What I want to focus on here is Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Article 33(2) of Convention IV

"No protected person may be punished for an offense he or she has not personally committed. Collective penalties and likewise all measure of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited."²²

Rules 2 and 6 of customary IHL²³ go into detail on the scope and examples of prohibition of violence to physical or mental well-being, but for this essay, article 33 of Convention IV is enough. To put it simply, acts of terror are prohibited, and the population cannot be punished for crimes committed by people in their cities. The facts of this case are that thousands of civilians were injured in an attack that spread chaos. The U.N. commissioner for human rights, Volker Turk, said this. "This has unleashed widespread fear, panic, and horror among the people in Lebanon, already suffering in an

22 International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention), 12 August 1949, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gciv-1949>.

23 International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Customary International Humanitarian Law Database, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl>.

increasingly volatile situation since October 2023 and crumbling under a severe and long-standing economic crisis; this cannot be the new normal.”²⁴ Another vital quote came directly from the U.N., a UN press release on the attack said, “It is also a war crime to commit violence intended to spread terror among civilians, including to intimidate or deter them from supporting an adversary. A climate of fear now pervades everyday life in Lebanon.”²⁵ When comparing the facts of the case and the law, it can be argued that this attack spread terror among civilians in greater proportion to the military objective of the attack. The United Nations also made it clear that they believe that this attack violated the principles of humanity.

III. Legality of Weapons and Booby Traps

To determine whether the pagers violate weapon laws, such as indiscriminate weapons and booby-trap prohibitions, it is essential to understand how the pagers were used and the technology employed to conduct the attack. On Oct 15, 2024, a Reuters article was published explaining the technology and how it worked.²⁶ The explosives were a thin square sheet that contained six grams of an explosive called white pentaerythritol tetranitrate (PETN). The explosive was put in between two battery cells, and the rest of the space between the cells had a flammable strip used as a detonator. All of this was placed in a battery cover to be hidden if a pager was opened. The article says, “From the outside, the pagers’s power source looked like a standard lithium-ion battery pack used in thousands of consumer electronic goods.”²⁷ The explosives were plastic, which made them invisible to X-ray

24 Al Jazeera, “UN Warns Escalating Israel-Hezbollah Violence.”

25 OHCHR, “Exploding Pagers and Radios.”

26 Maya Gebeily, James Pearson, and David Gauthier-Villars, “How Israel’s Bulky Pager Fooled Hezbollah,” Reuters, October 16, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/graphics/ISRAEL-PALESTINIANS/HEZBOLLAH-PAGERS/mopawkkwjpa/>.

27 Gebeily, Pearson, and Gauthier-Villars, “How Israel’s Bulky Pager Fooled Hezbollah.”

detection. Because the explosive took up about one-third of the battery's volume, it had significantly less electrical power. The article says, "A battery with a similar mass of 35G would have an expected energy capacity of around 8.75(Watt hours), not 2.22."²⁸ Because of this, Hezbollah noticed the battery drained much faster than expected but did not believe it to be a security concern and continued to hand them out.

There was a major issue with the pagers and batteries used: pager model AR-942 and batteries labeled LI-BT783. Neither of them existed on the market. To overcome this, a fake news article was written and posted online, giving a fake backstory of the product. A former Israel intelligence officer not involved with the attack made this statement: "You want to make sure that if they look, they find something... not finding anything is not good."²⁹ This was done to curb any suspicion from Hezbollah. The way they were able to make their product look real was to sell their model AR-924 through an existing brand, Gold Apollo. The chairman of Gold Apollo told reporters that he was approached three years ago by a former employee named Teresa Wu to discuss licensing. Wu was granted the right to design and market their products under the Gold Apollo brand. The article says, "The chairman said he was not impressed by the AR-924 when he saw it but still added photos and a description of the product to his company's website, helping give it visibility and credibility. There was no way to directly buy the AR-924 from his website."³⁰ When asked, the chairman said he did not know the explosive nature of the product.

In September of 2023, images and descriptions of the AR-924 and its battery showed up on apollossystemshk.com, a website that claimed to have a license to sell Gold Apollos products. The website was addressed to Hong Kong by a company called Apollo

28 Gebeily, Pearson, and Gauthier-Villars, "How Israel's Bulky Pager Fooled Hezbollah."

29 Gebeily, Pearson, and Gauthier-Villars, "How Israel's Bulky Pager Fooled Hezbollah."

30 Gebeily, Pearson, and Gauthier-Villars, "How Israel's Bulky Pager Fooled Hezbollah."

Systems HK. When investigated, it was found that no company of that name exists in Hong Kong corporate records. The Reuters article says, “A section of the apollossystemshk.com site devoted to the LI-BT783 puts emphasis on the battery’s outstanding performance. Unlike the disposable batteries that powered the older generation pagers, it boasted 85 days of autonomy and could be recharged via USB cable, according to the website and a 90-second promotional video on YouTube.”³¹ Another critical event happened in late 2023 when two different battery stores came online with the LI-BT783 listen in their catalogs, and in an online forum, a user stated, “I know this product... It’s got a great data sheet and great performance.”³² Israeli intelligence went to profound measures to make these products seem legit to Hezbollah and the average consumer.

IV Indiscriminate Weapons

In the principle of distinction, the individual makes the choice between a combatant and a civilian when targeting. The basis of indiscriminate attacks is weapons systems are used that cannot discriminate a combatant from a civilian. An important question to ask is whether the explosives implanted in the devices could accurately distinguish between military and civilian targets. This is how the law prohibits and defines indiscriminate attacks. Additional protocol 1 article 51(4)(a)(b)(c) (5)(a)(b):

(4) Indiscriminate attacks are prohibited.

Indiscriminate attacks are.”

a) Those which are not directed at a specific military objective

b) Those which employ a method or means of combat which cannot be directed at a specific military

31 Gebeily, Pearson, and Gauthier-Villars, “How Israel’s Bulky Pager Fooled Hezbollah.”

32 Gebeily, Pearson, and Gauthier-Villars, “How Israel’s Bulky Pager Fooled Hezbollah.”

objective

c) Those which employ a method or means of combat the effects of which cannot be limited as requirement by this protocol and consequently, in each such case, are of a nature to strike military objects and civilians or civilian objects without distinction.³³

(5) Among others, the following types of attacks are to be considered indiscriminate

a) An attack by bombardment by any methods or means which treats as a single military objective a number of clearly separated and distinct military objectives located in a city, town, village, or other area containing a similar concentration of civilians or civilian objects

b) An attack which may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated.³⁴

The law is clear: attacks must be directed at a specific military objective.

The pagers violate this law in a few ways. First (4)(b) says an attack is indiscriminate when it cannot be directed at a specific military objective. Unlike many weapon systems with targeting technology, a pager with an explosive inside has no ability to direct itself toward the objective. (4)(c) states that the weapons need to have limiting abilities. The pagers cannot limit themselves to only go off when in the hands of a combatant. These two make the pagers unlawful to use. Another violation of law is that the pager attack could be considered a bombardment of a city, and last, it would be expected that the attack would cause excessive damage to the advantage anticipated. The nature of the pagers used as

33 ICRC, Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions (Protocol I).

34 ICRC, Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions (Protocol I).

weapons is a clear violation of Article 51 of AP1 and should not have been used to facilitate their military objective.

Booby-traps

In 1980, the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons was adopted, with the purpose of restricting and prohibiting weapons that cause excessive suffering or are indiscriminate in nature, particularly on civilians. Articles II and III are the most relevant to this case because they cover mines, boobytraps, and similar devices. Article II defines a boobytrap and other devices.

(4) "booby-trap" means any device or material which is designed, constructed or adapted to kill or injure, and which functions unexpectedly when a person disturbs or approaches an apparently harmless object or performs an apparently safe act.

(5) "Other devices" mean manually emplaced munitions and devices including improvised explosive device designed to kill, injure or damage and which are activated manually, by remote control or automatically after a lapse of time.³⁵

The pagers used in the attacks fall under both definitions. They are harmless devices adapted to kill and injure when remotely activated. Article III of the CCW explicitly prohibits these devices.

(1) "This article applies to (a) Mines, (b) booby-traps, (c) other devices

(3) It is prohibited in all circumstances to use any mine, booby-trap, or other devices which is

35 International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Protocol on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby-Traps and Other Devices as Amended on 3 May 1996 (Amended Protocol II), Article 3, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/ccw-amended-protocol-ii-1996/article-3?activeTab=>.

designed or of a nature to cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering.”³⁶

Israel created and employed devices to harm or kill when detonated, going through extreme measures to make the devices as unassuming as possible. The result of their plan took the lives of civilians and injured thousands in excessive ways—many losing eyes, limbs, and digits. There was no reasonable expectation that the pagers were unsafe to handle and were a textbook booby-trap. The choice to use the pagers was another violation of international law.

Conclusion

When analyzing the attacks of September 2024 in Lebanon, there are many things to consider when determining if it was lawful. In this paper, I focused on many fundamental principles of planning an attack, such as authority, necessity, targeting, and weapons principles. Like in many historical events, some laws were followed while others were ignored. Once one law is violated, the entire operation is no longer a legal attack. After an in-depth analysis of the law and the facts of the case, it is clear that some aspects of international humanitarian laws were violated. Thus making the attack unlawful. Israel had questionable authority to conduct its attack. They did not have a U.N. resolution to use force, and they did not have consent from the host nation to perform operations. They could try to make the case of self-defense or under the unwilling or unable doctrine. Still, there is not enough information to determine with assurity whether they did or did not have proper authority. The military objective of disabling the communication networks is a legal option to target because communication is a military function. While the overall objective was legal, the attack was against necessity in targeting. The law says that all precautions must be taken to avoid a civilian loss of life and property and to call off or suspend the attack if all precautions are not taken.

36 ICRC, Amended Protocol II to the CCW, Article 3.

Many problems arose when choosing the means and methods to carry out the military objective. The attack violated distinction laws because after the pagers were sent out, Israel could not distinguish between civilians and combatants. The responsibility remains with Israel to ensure that only military objectives were met, but that was not the case. The primary and most obvious violation of law was the indiscriminate weapons that were booby-traps in nature. The exploded pagers fall under the definition of booby traps, which are all prohibited. The pagers also did not have the technology to distinguish between combatant and civilian, and because of that, innocent people were killed. Because of the violations, the attack was unlawful and should have been stopped or altered before it was carried out.

It may be argued that although Israel violated some aspects of the law, they followed others and conducted an attack on a deserving terrorist organization, citing that some experts say that this was the greatest counter-terror operation in modern history. While that may be the case, an attack becomes illegal when any one aspect of the law is broken, and, in this case, many laws were broken.

After conducting the research, it's clear that the pager attack in September 2024 violated aspects of international humanitarian law. Because Israel is an ally of the United States, they have an obligation to abide by the rules and to ensure the protection of life. The best way to fix this is for Israel to self-correct and hold itself accountable for the lives lost due to the poor planning and execution of their military objective. This can be done using the judicial system they already have in place. The United States needs to voice its disapproval of the attacks to let the international community know that we do not condone the way the attack was carried out. This research is necessary because these laws are put in place to protect innocent human lives, and when they are deliberately ignored, there are dire consequences. Nations live in fear, and innocent men, women, and children die. Freedoms are taken, and if unchecked, there becomes a culture of lawlessness that bad actors see and follow.

Republic of China Paper *Camden Mead*

Introduction

The self-governing island of Taiwan lives in a difficult geopolitical state where it bears all the responsibilities of a state without receiving any of the benefits. The island is required to host a military, develop international trade agreements, and manage its currency, which is reminiscent of a fully functioning, independent nation-state. Taiwan has been prevented from reaching statehood due to the intense diplomatic initiatives of the People's Republic of China (PRC). China views Taiwan as a breakaway region of its nation and has long sought to reunify the island with mainland China. This has been one of the fundamental promises laid out by the current leader of China Xi Jinping and has resulted in the PRC engaging in intense diplomatic posturing to isolate the self-governing island of Taiwan.

Though lackluster international engagement with the island has been one of the most complex issues plaguing the island in recent years, Taiwan once had a multitude of international partners that recognized its autonomy, as demonstrated in its role as the most powerful organization in the world—The UN Security Council.

This paper will explore the establishment of the current government ruling the island of Taiwan and its breakaway from mainland China. It will also explore how this breakaway initially saw a significant amount of international recognition to the government of Taiwan, and how the occupation of the UN Security Council seat shifted the dynamics of the Cold War. It will then explore the fall of international recognition of the island and how the People's

Republic of China leveraged a multitude of international partners to remove Taiwan from the UN. It will then explore how the United States and its partners should counter China's diplomatic presence on this issue. I will finally explore the legal and strategic possibilities in providing Taiwan with limited access to the United Nations, and why it presents a critical strategic opportunity to the supporters of Taiwan.

Warlord Era and the Chinese Civil War

The modern Chinese state as we recognize it dates to the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, which was the last effective dynasty in Chinese history.¹ Immediately following the successful coup, the government reorganized itself as the Republic of China under the rule of revolutionary hero Sun Yat-sen.² At this time, Sun would go on to form the Kuomintang (KMT) Party, which he would lead until he died in 1925. The Republic was infamously weak and fractured immediately upon its inception, resulting in Sun abdicating his presidential authority to Yuan Shikai—the popular military leader and previous official in the Zing Dynasty.³ Yuan would later attempt to reorganize the government and reestablish the monarchy system in 1915 but would fail one year later in 1916.⁴ Yuan would die only three months later, resulting in a power vacuum in the country. This led to a fractured period in the country known as the “Warlord Era.”⁵ This era in Chinese history saw large swaths of the country being controlled by regional warlords in direct opposition to the

1 Chicago Public Library, “Timeline of China’s Modern History,” Chipublib.org, 2012, <https://www.chipublib.org/timeline-of-chinas-modern-history/>.

2 Chicago Public Library, “Timeline of China’s Modern History.”

3 Chicago Public Library, “Timeline of China’s Modern History.”

4 New World Encyclopedia contributors, “Yuan Shikai,” New World Encyclopedia, https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Yuan_Shikai&oldid=1113923

5 Hsi-Hseng Chi and Wd Hf~aty, “THE CHINESE WARLORD SYSTEM: 1916 to 1928,” 1969, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD0683470.pdf>.

centralized Republic.⁶ His-Hseng Chi describes the dynamic of these warlords in his report on the Warlord Era by stating:

“Many of them were merely armed bands, held together by able leaders and dependent on plunder for their living. These warlords took orders from nobody since the military hierarchy had already broken down. They were virtually sovereign units.”⁷

These sovereign warlords numbered about 2,000 during the length of the era and seriously jeopardized the central government’s control over the nation.⁸ The era would officially end when the KMT party centralized authority in 1928 under the leadership of KMT leader Chiang Kai-shek.⁹

Upon his ascension to power, Kai-Shek began to fear the rapidly growing political fore of the Chinese Communist Party, under the leadership of Chen Duxiu.¹⁰ Though the party had formed in 1921, the Chinese Communist Party had found its footing during the warlord era, as it allowed the party to strike multiple agreements with the weak central government in 1924 to counter the growing strength of the warlords in the northern parts of the country.¹¹

These agreements would be known as the First United

6 His-Hseng Chi “THE CHINESE WARLORD SYSTEM: 1916 TO 1928” 1969.

7 His-Hseng Chi “THE CHINESE WARLORD SYSTEM: 1916 TO 1928” 1969.

8 His-Hseng Chi “THE CHINESE WARLORD SYSTEM: 1916 TO 1928” 1969.

9 Chicago Public Library, “Timeline of China’s Modern History,” Chipublib.org, 2012.

10 Richard McGregor, “The Chinese Communist Party: 100 Years That Shook the World,” the Guardian, June 27, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/27/the-chinese-communist-party-100-years-that-shook-the-world>.

11 The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “United Front | Chinese History [1937-1945],” in Encyclopædia Britannica, September 18, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/United-Front-Chinese-history-1937-1945>.

Front and saw the Communist Party grow exponentially in prestige until the alliance collapsed in 1927 following Kai-Shek's expulsion of Communists from its leadership. This expulsion is widely considered to be the beginning of the first phase of the Chinese Civil War and resulted in violent clashes between the KMT and the Communists.

The first phase of the war saw the KMT experience a multitude of battlefield successes which drove the Communist Party out of the major urban centers by 1934 leading to a mass migration of communist party members, also known as the "Great March".¹² The Great March was devastating for the party, with some projections placing the death toll upwards of 90,000 people.¹³ Following the march, the party would establish its base of operation in the northern province of Shaanxi.¹⁴ During this time, Mao Zedong was centralizing his power in the party and was appointed to the role of Chairman in 1935.¹⁵

The KMT would continue to launch attacks against the CCP until 1936 when a group of the KMT's military leadership kidnapped Kai-Shek and demanded that he prioritize defending the Chinese state from the Japanese.¹⁶ This event would be known as the Xi'an incident, and it would result in the Kai-Shek verbally committing to an alliance with the communist party known as the Second United Front on December 25th, 1936.¹⁷ This alliance is widely seen as the end of the first phase of civil war.¹⁸

12 Richard McGregor, "The Chinese Communist Party: 100 Years That Shook the World,"

13 Kathryn Kolata and Dmitry Shlapentokh, "The Long March," 1999.

14 Kathryn Kolata and Dmitry Shlapentokh, "The Long March," 1999

15 Kathryn Kolata and Dmitry Shlapentokh, "The Long March," 1999

16 Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Xi'an Incident." Encyclopedia Britannica, December 5, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Xian-Incident>.

17 Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Xi'an Incident." Encyclopedia Britannica, December 5, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Xian-Incident>.

18 Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Xi'an Incident."

Second Sino-Japanese War and the Second United Front

While the internal conflict between the Chinese state and the Communist Party was happening, tensions between Imperial Japan and the Republic of China had been on the rise throughout the 1930s. This tension resulted in multiple small clashes between the two powers during the decade, the first of these events was the “Mukden Incident” of 1931.

The incident was sparked when a section of a Japanese railway in the city of Mukden was destroyed using explosives.¹⁹ The Japanese blamed Chinese nationalists for the attack and invaded the resource-rich region of Manchuria, setting up the puppet state of Manchukuo.²⁰ Historians will later theorize that the explosion was a false flag operation orchestrated by the Japanese military to justify an invasion of Manchuria, though this evidence is mostly circumstantial.

The two countries would continue to engage in minor skirmishes throughout the next six years until the full-scale breakout of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. This was triggered by another ambiguous situation just a couple of miles outside of modern-day Beijing at the Marco Polo Bridge on July 7th, 1937.²¹

The incident was triggered by the disappearance of a Japanese soldier from his post. The Japanese unit stationed at the bridge demanded access to the Chinese village of Wanping on the other side of the bridge to search for him. When the Chinese refused, arguing broke out between the two sides until a shot was

19 Office of the Historian, “Milestones: 1921–1936 - Office of the Historian,” State.gov, 2019, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/mukden-incident>.

20 Office of the Historian, “Milestones: 1921–1936 - Office of the Historian,” State.gov, 2019, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/mukden-incident>.

21 Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. “Marco Polo Bridge Incident.” Encyclopedia Britannica, June 30, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Marco-Polo-Bridge-Incident>.

fired. This resulted in a full-scale battle erupting between the two sides.²² Though the belligerents would sign a cease-fire on the next day, Japanese forces—tired of attacks by Chinese paramilitary groups happening in Manchukuo, launched a full-scale invasion of China later that week.

The beginning of the conflict was marked by decisive Japanese victories, with the Japanese quickly seizing Shanghai, Nanjing, and Southern Shanxi before the end of 1937.²³ The Chinese military—though numerically superior, was poorly equipped, trained, and coordinated which led to a string of military defeats throughout the first three years of the conflict.

Though the KMT and the CCP found themselves fighting side-by-side throughout the war, the Second United Front members were distrustful and uncoordinated.²⁴ The KMT was primarily concerned with urban defense, whereas the CCP utilized the guerrilla tactics developed by Mao Zedong to harass Japanese forces in the rural countryside. This fundamental lack of coordination and different approaches in military strategy resulted in a disproportionate amount of nationalist combat casualties compared to their communists.²⁵ This trend would weaken the KMT while allowing the CCP to strengthen their control over the Chinese countryside, which would later play a critical role in centralizing CCP authority following the end of the Japanese war.²⁶ By 1940, the conflict was relatively frozen, with the KMT holding the Japanese

22 Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. “Marco Polo Bridge Incident.” Encyclopedia Britannica, June 30, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Marco-Polo-Bridge-Incident>.

23 New World Encyclopedia, “Second Sino-Japanese War - New World Encyclopedia,” Newworldencyclopedia.org, 2019, https://www.new-worldencyclopedia.org/entry/Second_Sino-Japanese_War.

24 Sophia Maroulis, “The Second United Front: A KMT and CCP Alliance in Name, but Not in Practice,” Pacific Atrocities Education, August 8, 2022, <https://www.pacificatrocities.org/blog/the-second-united-front-a-kmt-and-ccp-alliance-in-name-but-not-in-practice>.

25 Sophia Maroulis, “The Second United Front” 2022

26 Sophia Maroulis, “The Second United Front” 2022

forces to the eastern coast of the country. The communist party hotly contested most of the rural areas occupied by the Japanese military.²⁷ This allowed the communists to cement their control in these areas, while also taking minimal casualties.

Second Part of the Civil War

As it slowly became clear in early 1945 that the Japanese could not continue the conflict, the CCP and KMT began to ramp up preparations for another internal conflict. Following the Japanese surrender in August of 1945, fighting began between the two sides in the newly liberated Manchuria.²⁸ The fight initially saw many nationalist victories from 1945-1946, securing most urban areas and infrastructure. This victory was short-lived, however, as the communist party would utilize its vast amount of guerrilla experience to wear down the central government's military capacity.

The Sino-Japanese War helped the CCP create a military doctrine centered around controlling rural areas and using them as a springboard for long and effective sieges against the KMT.²⁹ This strategy proved to be effective against the worn-out nationalist army and would go on to completely kick the nationalists out of Manchuria by 1948.³⁰ Though the communists were outnumbered by the nationalists by almost five to one (~5.5 million KMT, 1.1 million CCP) only around half of the KMT forces were considered combat-ready, and many of the nationalists' forces were inexperienced in combat and were largely unmotivated.³¹ The general populace of the Republic of China was also unsatisfied

27 New World Encyclopedia, "Second Sino-Japanese War - New World Encyclopedia," Newworldencyclopedia.org, 2019, https://www.new-worldencyclopedia.org/entry/Second_Sino-Japanese_War.

28 Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Chinese Civil War." Encyclopedia Britannica, October 9, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Chinese-Civil-War>.

29 Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Chinese Civil War.

30 Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Chinese Civil War.

31 Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Chinese Civil War.

with the nationalist's failure to curb corruption, implement land reform, and counter hyperinflation throughout the country.³² These concerns were also being addressed by the communist party who implemented popular land reform in their area of control by seizing property owned by wealthy landowners, increasing their popularity throughout the country.³³

The ideologically driven CCP had superior strategy, motivation, and an increasing amount of foreign equipment supplied by the Soviet Union.³⁴ By January 1949, the CCP controlled all of China north of the Yangtze River and was prepared to launch a full-scale invasion of the south. Though the nationalists attempted to produce a peace treaty with the CCP in early 1949, the deal was rejected, and the full-scale invasion of the south began on April 19th, 1949.³⁵ Mao Zedong declared the establishment of the People's Republic of China on October 1st, 1949 after driving the nationalists to a few strongholds on the southern coast of the country. Major KMT strongholds fell in rapid succession resulting in the Republic of China officially relocating to Taiwan on December 5th securing the communist victory.³⁶

International Recognition for China and The Security Council Seat

As World War II began to end, the world's major powers soon began to form an international organization in the hope of creating a peaceful postwar era. Delegates from over fifty nations gathered in San Francisco in April of 1945 to discuss the creation

32 Jay Habegger, "Origins of the Chinese Hyperinflation | Jay Habegger," Fee.org (Foundation for Economic Education, September 1988), <https://fee.org/articles/origins-of-the-chinese-hyperinflation/>.

33 John Wong, "Chinese Land Reform in Retrospect," 1974, https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNAAA611.pdf.

34 Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Chinese Civil War."

35 Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Chinese Civil War."

36 Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Chinese Civil War."

of the United Nations and drafted the UN Charter.³⁷ As part of the charter, the members created the security council consisting of the five allies during World War II, including the United States, the United Kingdom, France, The Soviet Union, and The Republic of China.³⁸ The charter identifies its foundational philosophy by stating in the 5th chapter article 24:

to ensure prompt and effective action by the United Nations, its members confer on the Security Council's primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and agree that in carrying out its duties under this responsibility the Security Council acts on their behalf.³⁹

The Security Council was intentionally created with a significant amount of administrative and functional power, as the five permanent members were widely considered to be the strongest and most reliable powers following World War II. The most powerful ability granted to these permanent members is the ability to veto any resolution before the council. Though the Communist Party had completely conquered China by late 1949, the nationalists, continued to vote on 78 Security Council resolutions during and following the Chinese Civil War.⁴⁰

Though recognition of the Republic of China in the UN ended in 1971, recognition of the ROC was in doubt much earlier.

37 National World War II Museum, "The 1945 San Francisco Conference and the Creation of the United Nations," The National WWII Museum | New Orleans, May 10, 2022, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/1945-san-francisco-conference-and-creation-united-nations>.

38 United Nations, "Chapter v: the Security Council (Articles 23-32)," United Nations, 1945, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-5>.

39 United Nations, "Chapter v: the Security Council (Articles 23-32)," United Nations, 1945, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-5>.

40 United Nations Security Council, "Resolutions | United Nations Security Council," Un.org, 2015, <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/resolutions-0>.

Immediately following Mao Zedong's announcement of the establishment of the People's Republic of China, multiple nations officially recognized the government including the Soviet Union, North Korea, and Israel. Despite lacking logistical or political support of the Chinese public, the ROC continued to assert its sovereignty over Mainland China and argued it was a government within exile. This policy would result in both the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China holding competing claims over China for decades.

The first major challenge to the recognition of the Chinese government came in 1961 when Albania introduced a motion to the General Assembly requesting that the recognition of China in the United Nations be reconsidered. Though the text of the resolution changed significantly from the original, the General Assembly passed resolution 1688 officially stating the recognition of China was in flux, and that the UN should treat the question as an "important question".⁴¹ This crack in support for the Republic of China came after an intense diplomatic effort from the People's Republic of China, specifically in Africa and the Middle East.⁴² China's ability to court these two regions was symbolic of the Global South's distrust of Western powers, and China's desire to end their diplomatic isolation. During the height of the decolonization period from 1950-1960, China frequently engaged with local revolutionary movements across the continent and provided economic, military, and political assistance to these emerging states.⁴³ The initial goal

41 Dag Hammarskjöld Library, "Research Guides: UN General Assembly Resolutions Tables: 16th Session (1961-1962)," [research.un.org](https://research.un.org/en/docs/ga/quick/regular/16), accessed November 18, 2023, <https://research.un.org/en/docs/ga/quick/regular/16>.

42 Alex Vines and Jon Wallace, "China-Africa Relations," Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank, January 18, 2023, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/01/china-africa-relations>.

43 David H. Shinn and Joshua Eisenman, "China and Africa a Century of Engagement," Google Books, 2024, https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=hu7n1YNNrqcC&oi=fnd&pg=PP2&dq=chinese+diplomatic+history+in+africa&ots=sOPeBU_5b2&sig=1thehT-

of Chinese engagement in Africa was to support the spread of Maoism throughout the continent, whose anti-imperial and pre-industrial focus resonated with a population ravaged by decades of brutal colonialism. Though the CCP was limited in its support of these states due to its poor economic situation following nearly twenty years of internal and external conflict, China's diplomatic presence was frequently felt in revolutionary circles throughout the continent.

China's African policy would continue to grow as new countries continued to form and geopolitical pressure forced it to compete in the international arena. In 1960, tension between China and the Soviet Union began to mount over its bilateral relationship and leadership of the global communist movement. Though multiple attempts were made to revitalize the alliance during 1961 and early 1962, the alliance soon collapsed following the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Mao Zedong publicly criticized the Soviet Union's handling of the conflict and claimed that "capitulating" to the United States had weakened the global communist movement.⁴⁴ This soon left the Soviet Union and China at odds over foreign policy, specifically in the global south. As the two communist states began to compete for diplomatic weight in Africa, China dedicated various resources to the continent, with senior CCP members visiting the continent multiple times between 1960-1965.⁴⁵

During this period, China developed its "Eight Principles of Economic and Technological Aid" which determined how China would politically engage with its allies—particularly those in Africa. The policy dictated that China would never coerce the recipients of foreign aid into endorsing policy objectives advantageous to

wt_n_NSKnomazuf62X7_s#v=onpage&q=chinese%20diplomatic%20history%20in%20africa&f=false.

44 Li, Mingjiang. 2010. "Ideological Dilemma: Mao's China and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1962–63." *Cold War History* 11 (3): 387–419. doi:10.1080/14682745.2010.498822.

45 Yu, George T. "China's Role in Africa." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 432 (1977): 96–109. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1042892>.

the state.⁴⁶ This was an attractive offer to many African states who viewed the aid provided by Western Powers as coercive in nature rather than the mutually beneficial alternative presented by the Chinese.⁴⁷ This African strategy was largely successful and resulted in eighteen nations switching their recognition from the Republic of China to the People's Republic of China by 1965.⁴⁸ Though this recognition would fluctuate due to instability within many of China's partners in Africa, this level of diplomatic leverage soon discouraged many European powers from opposing Chinese recognition due to its influence in international geopolitics. This somewhat isolated the Americans in their opposition to the PRC and made the shift in recognition inevitable.⁴⁹

The United States was able to prevent Chinese recognition from shifting to the PRC until 1971 by building a large coalition of states ideologically opposed to communism in their sphere of influence. This mostly consisted of countries from Latin and South America, The Caribbean, and microstates in Oceania.⁵⁰ Thirteen states still officially recognize the ROC as the official government in China within this coalition, most of which continue to rely on the political support of the American government. However, this

46 David H. Shinn and Joshua Eisenman, "China and Africa a Century of Engagement," Google Books, 2024, https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=hu7n1YNNrqcC&oi=fnd&pg=PP2&dq=chinese+diplomatic+history+in+africa&ots=sOPeBU_5b2&sig=1theHT-wt_n_NSKnomazuf62X7_s#v=onepage&q=chinese%20diplomatic%20history%20in%20africa&f=false.

47 Alex Vines and Jon Wallace, "China-Africa Relations," Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank, January 18, 2023, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/01/china-africa-relations>.

48 Yu, George T. "China's Role in Africa."

49 Dag Hammarskjöld Library, "Research Guides: UN General Assembly Resolutions Tables: 16th Session (1961-1962),"

50 Bala Chambers, "Latin America Increasingly Turning to China at Taiwan's Expense," www.trtworld.com, 2023, <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/latin-america-increasingly-turning-to-china-at-taiwans-expense-12799837>.

support is gradually fading, as demonstrated by Honduras officially switching its recognition in March of 2023.⁵¹

The United Nations formally switched recognition from the ROC to the PRC in 1971 when the United Nations held an official vote expelling Kai-Shek's representatives from the organization. This vote is known as Resolution 2758 and was introduced by fifteen former recipients of Chinese aid, thirteen of whom were Middle Eastern and African countries.⁵²

One-China Policy

Though the PRC was active in dedicating a substantial number of diplomatic resources to developing substantive relationships with developing states in the Middle East and Africa, China also sought to shift its relationship with the United States following the PRC's assentation inside of the UN.

The United States would continue to support Taiwan's claim on mainland China rather than identifying it as an independent country to preserve its spot on the UN Security Council, and to diplomatically isolate the CCP. This plan would dictate American foreign policy for years until the United States formally recognized the CCP in 1979 following years of secret negotiations with the Party.⁵³ These negotiations culminated in the United States creating the "One-China Policy" with the CCP, which formally acknowledged China's authority over mainland China and rejected the ROC's

51 Associated Press, "Honduras Establishes Ties with China after Ending Recognition of Taiwan," PBS NewsHour, March 26, 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/honduras-establishes-ties-with-china-after-ending-recognition-of-taiwan>.

52 Dag Hammarskjöld Library, "Research Guides: UN General Assembly Resolutions Tables: 26th Session (1971-1972)," [research.un.org](https://research.un.org/en/docs/ga/quick/regular/26), accessed November 18, 2023, <https://research.un.org/en/docs/ga/quick/regular/26>.

53 Congressional Research Service, "Taiwan: The Origins of the U.S. One-China Policy," <https://crsreports.congress.gov/Product/Pdf/IF/IF12503/1> (US Congress, September 27, 2023), [Congress.gov](https://crsreports.congress.gov/Product/Pdf/IF/IF12503/1).

claim over China.⁵⁴ Though this policy formally ended American support for the ROC's claim on China, it did not formally resolve the question of political autonomy over Taiwan. Instead of formally declaring its support for Taiwanese independence or Chinese authority over the island, it ambiguously acknowledged the Chinese position without offering one of its own.⁵⁵

This policy was followed by the adoption of the Taiwanese Relation Act in early 1979 which established an official platform for non-official relations with Taiwan. Critically, the law mandated that the United States would "Make available to Taiwan such defense articles and defense services in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability." And to "maintain the capacity of the United States to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people in Taiwan."⁵⁶ The adoption of the One-China Policy and the later adoption of the Taiwanese Relations Act was largely seen as a compromise between the two superpowers necessary to normalize relations and push the question of Taiwanese independence to a later date. Though the One-China Policy was strategically necessary at the time, the failure to reinterpret the question of Taiwanese autonomy by the US government has continually thwarted attempts to discuss Taiwan's autonomy on the international stage. The strategic implications of this failure continue to grow as Chinese policy towards Taiwan becomes more aggressive.

Taiwanese International Engagement

54 Congressional Research Service, "Taiwan: The Origins of the U.S. One-China Policy,"

55 Congressional Research Service, "Taiwan: The Origins of the U.S. One-China Policy,"

56 United States. Congress. Conference Committees. 1979. Taiwan Relations Act: Conference Report to Accompany H.R. 2479. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Taiwan has attempted to counter its diplomatic isolation by joining international organizations to engage with foreign powers in an unofficial capacity. In 2009, Taiwan joined the World Health Organization's governing body, the World Health Assembly (WHA), with formal permission from the People's Republic of China as an unofficial observer. Taiwan, under the name of Chinese Taipei, was able to participate in the Assembly from 2009-2016, which allowed the island to interact with other nations in an official capacity. This set the precedence that Taiwan's engagement in international organizations does not necessarily demonstrate its autonomy from mainland China and could be used to further expand Taiwan's engagement with the international community.

Taiwan's participation in the WHA ended in 2017 following the Taiwanese Presidential election in which Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) presidential candidate Tsai Ing-wen came to power. The DPP has long advocated for the end of the "One-China Principle" and refused to participate in the organization within a Chinese Delegation. This resulted in China subsequently blocking Taiwan's efforts to participate in the organization, a policy which they continue today.⁵⁷

Though Taiwan is no longer participating in the WHA, this case set a precedent demonstrating that the island can be involved in international organizations without violating or attempting to reinterpret the One China Policy. The United States has utilized this precedence to continue to support Taiwan's involvement in the WHA, however, these efforts have continually been blocked by the PRC.

The United States should utilize this case study to assist with Taiwan's engagement in the United Nations, specifically as an unofficial observer. Like the World Health Organization, the United Nations permits organizations to engage in its General Assembly as non-voting observers. There are currently two non-

57 Ben Blanchard, "Taiwan Says May Be Hard to Attend WHO Assembly, Blinken Offers Support," Reuters, May 2, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/taiwan-says-may-be-hard-attend-who-assembly-blinken-offers-support-2024-05-02/>.

member observers in the United Nations, the State of Palestine, and the Holy See. In addition to the observer distinction, the United Nations provides other labels to further identify the geopolitical status of the observers within the UN, also granting the observer status to organizations that do not meet the definition of a state. These groups are commonly governing bodies that have significant political power in their respective regions including the European Union, the Organization of American States, and the African Union.

The United States should utilize these existing structures to provide Taiwan with the opportunity to engage with international states in an official capacity. This policy would help end Taiwan's diplomatic isolation and allow the state to collaborate with nations from around the world, thus providing it with an increased sense of legitimacy on the international stage.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the geopolitical status of Taiwan is a deeply complicated issue that is rooted in decades of historical conflicts and diplomatic engagement. The rise of the PRC has isolated Taiwan on the global stage and has prevented it from regaining a sense of international legitimacy lost following the Chinese Civil War. The United States and its allies have traditionally played a major role in securing Taiwanese engagement in organizations such as the World Health Assembly, which provides an ideal framework to continue to developing Taiwan's capacity to engage with international organizations. By fostering an international community that supports Taiwan's legitimacy on the international stage, we can help deter a conflict and significantly contribute to international peace and security.
