Online Appendix: What Explains Counterterrorism Effectiveness? Evidence from the U.S. Drone War in Pakistan

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Fieldwork and Interviews

This project relies on extensive interviews conducted through fieldwork. I used a non-probability sampling approach to conduct the interviews, which I detail below. Given my focus on process tracing the trajectories of the targeted groups and the role of the US counterterrorism campaign in altering the trajectories, a non-probability sampling approach geared towards key elites was suitable. Tansey notes the advantage of a non-probability sampling approach for process tracing: "…the goal of process tracing is to obtain information about well-defined and specific events and processes, and the most appropriate sampling procedures are thus those that identify the key political actors those who have had the most involvement with the processes of interest."[1] Below I detail the sample of the most relevant political actor essential for tracing the processes of interest related to the US counterterrorism campaign.

In conduct and reporting of interview data, I took cues from best practices in Bleich and Pekkanen (2013). In line with their suggestions, I report sample selection procedure and the final frame, response rate and type, format/length, and compensation strategies.

I acknowledge that safety concerns and logistical hardships constrained my access and coverage of interviewees. Even then, the sixty-six respondents, combined with field documents and secondary sourced accounts, provide rich and detailed data to shed light on specific events and processes of theoretical interest.

Sample Selection

I located my interview respondents in two steps. First, I cultivated relationships of trust and confidence with retired counterterrorism officials in the U.S. and Pakistan, as well as informed journalists to establish better knowledge of the key actors. I spent time trying to identify the names and positions of counterterrorism operators with critical appointments and members of the armed groups for the relevant period. Second, I made requests by email, phone, in-person meetings, and through referrals of network of acquaintances (made during initial field visits in 2015 and 2016) to those identified in the purposive sampling process to participate in the study. On the side of the armed groups, my interviews with members of armed groups were facilitated by a number of local fixers, with whom I built relationships during initial field visits. Combined, I conducted the interviews in multiple trips to Pakistan and various locations in the U.S. between March 2016 to August 2017.

IRB and Interview Details

I withhold the transcripts of these interviews, and the identity of respondents as agreed under the IRB protocol for the project. I also withhold the questionnaires to the respondents as they included specific details on the role and positions of the respondents, which can plausibly reveal their identity.

I am fluent in Urdu. Majority of the interviews in Pakistan were conducted in Urdu. Because of language limitations combined with safety concerns of the respondents, seven interviews were

[1] Tansey 2007, 768

conducted by an IRB approved enumerator, four of which were in Pashto. I conducted the other fifty-nine interviews in English, Urdu, or with the aid of a Pashto-speaking enumerator translating for interviewees (N~16).

The interviewees were predominantly male (N=65); there was one female interviewee. Among the members of armed groups, the ages ranged from 30 to 50. Among security elites, the youngest official was around 40 years old.

The interviews were documented either in audio recordings or in written notes, depending on the preference of the respondent. Four of seven enumerator interviews were returned with audio recordings. To ensure security of the data, data from both mediums were transferred to cloud-based storage and the contents of the interview from the device/notebook used to record the interview were removed and/or destroyed. The typical interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes, though some were longer.

Summary of Interviews

Respondent Category	Interviews	Location of Interview
Al-Qaeda	5	Karachi
Pakistan Taliban	7	DI Khan, Bannu, Bajaur, Islamabad
ISI	7	Islamabad, Karachi, Rawalpindi, Peshawar
Pakistani Military	6	Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Peshawar, DI Khan
CIA/US Government Officials	6	Various locations in the US
Karachi Police	2	Karachi
Kidnapped by TTP/Al-Qaeda Civilians	3	Peshawar, Islamabad
Civilians from towns/villages of drone strikes	22	Bannu, DI Khan, Karachi, Miramsha and Mir Ali in North Waziristan Agency
Journalists in contact with TTP/Al-Qaeda	8	Bannu, DI Khan, Karachi, Peshawar, Islamabad
Total	66	

Caveats on Interview Data

First, the data is on an extremely sensitive topic and the interviews were conducted during a tapering but active conflict period. The safety of the respondents was and remains a very real concern for me. In addition, I faced some of the same challenges to personal and research team's

safety that ethnographers undertaking “extreme fieldwork” face. Respondent information, in line with the IRB protocol, as well as names of the research facilitators have been anonymized.

Second, I was declined interviews both in the U.S. and in Pakistan. This was a major point of concern for me, raising the specter of bias. To ensure that non-participation was not associated with some particular viewpoint, I located respondents from the same category and of a similar type to those who declined and remained successful. Certainly, all respondents in elite interviewing are not of equal value; some elites know more than others. Thus, while my efforts to create a sample with representation mitigated omission of any obvious perspective, it still leaves the possibility that I might have missed critical details on key processes. To alleviate major omissions, I have tried to triangulate information extensively from available primary and secondary source materials.

Third, a key challenge for some respondents was of situating timelines given the study’s broad temporal scope. To minimize omissions, I structured my interview questions with major events from the study period -- major decapitations, violent attacks in mainland Pakistan and beyond, and statements given out by officials/armed group leaders.

Fourth, the accuracy of the claims of senior U.S. and Pakistani intelligence officials was a major concern. Security elites can have motives to spin and/or deflect. Thus, I have treated the data they provide with caution. I made extensive efforts to cross-check details from multiple sources. Given the secrecy surrounding the campaign, I was not able to get all the details confirmed from multiple sources. To mitigate against omissions and bias, I provide quotes from an array of respondents. Nevertheless, limits remain.

Fifth, I remained aware of the possibility that the respondents might try to respond in interviews with what they thought I wanted to hear. I structured the questions to minimize any overt positionality. I worked to appear humble, and through my survey of the secondary literature and field interactions, relied on words and terms likely to be familiar to the respondent category. I made my questions informative, while striving to be detached and objective. I strove to keep the atmosphere pleasant and comfortable while maintaining focus. To the extent I failed to minimize my own positions in interviews with armed groups and/or security/intelligence elites, it is not obvious how those positions might bias the responses in any one direction. Security elites and members of armed groups had more power and agency over me in the interviews. They had no obvious reason to conform to my views.

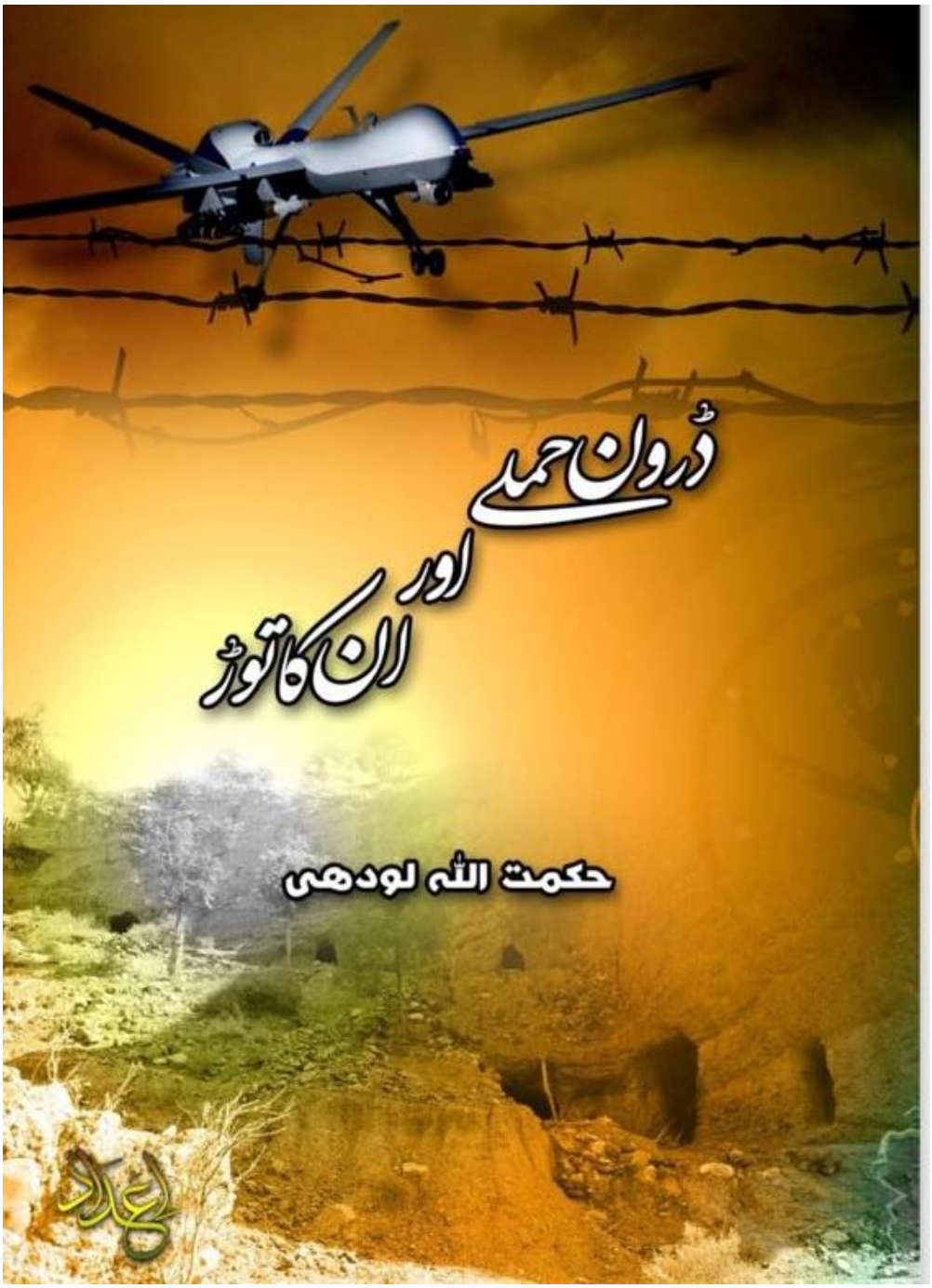
Sixth, I was concerned that the seven out of the sixty-six interviews conducted by the enumerator might bias the reported data. I took two steps to improve the quality of responses. First, I worked to make the enumerator questionnaires detailed, with concrete details on memorable events during the study. Given that four interviews were returned with a recording, I was able to check the responses in the recordings, which suggested high quality of engagement by the enumerator. Second, I cross-referenced responses that the enumerator obtained with those that I obtained of overlapping questions for the same category of respondents. There was no obvious deviation in those responses across the seven respondents.

Safety Concerns

Some readers might be interested in more details on how I engaged and identified local fixers, who arranged interviews with members of the armed groups. Given the context, however, any more specificity on local fixers can potentially reveal the identity of those who facilitated me in the field and expose them to danger by the armed groups, Pakistani government, and/or the U.S. government. In withholding this information, I take cue from Driscoll and Schuster 2017, who argue that it is important to have "…situational awareness in research design"; this "is crucial to supporting the kind of research [which is] empirically grounded, sensitive to community-based concerns, built out of local idioms, theoretically rigorous – while also grappling with the non-zero probability that affiliation with the ethnographer could expose the local research team to charges of espionage."

Some readers may question why I do not number the interview respondents in the footnotes in main body of the text. I do not do so because identification numbers of respondents can allow specific datapoints to be strung together, which can plausibly point towards specific individuals, and endanger their safety. This is a remote possibility. However, given the secrecy surrounding the information relayed to me, the small number of officials/personnel who were knowledgeable on relevant issues during the period, and the concerns voiced by respondents themselves, I tread on the side of caution.

Sample Images of Documents/Materials Obtained Through Fieldwork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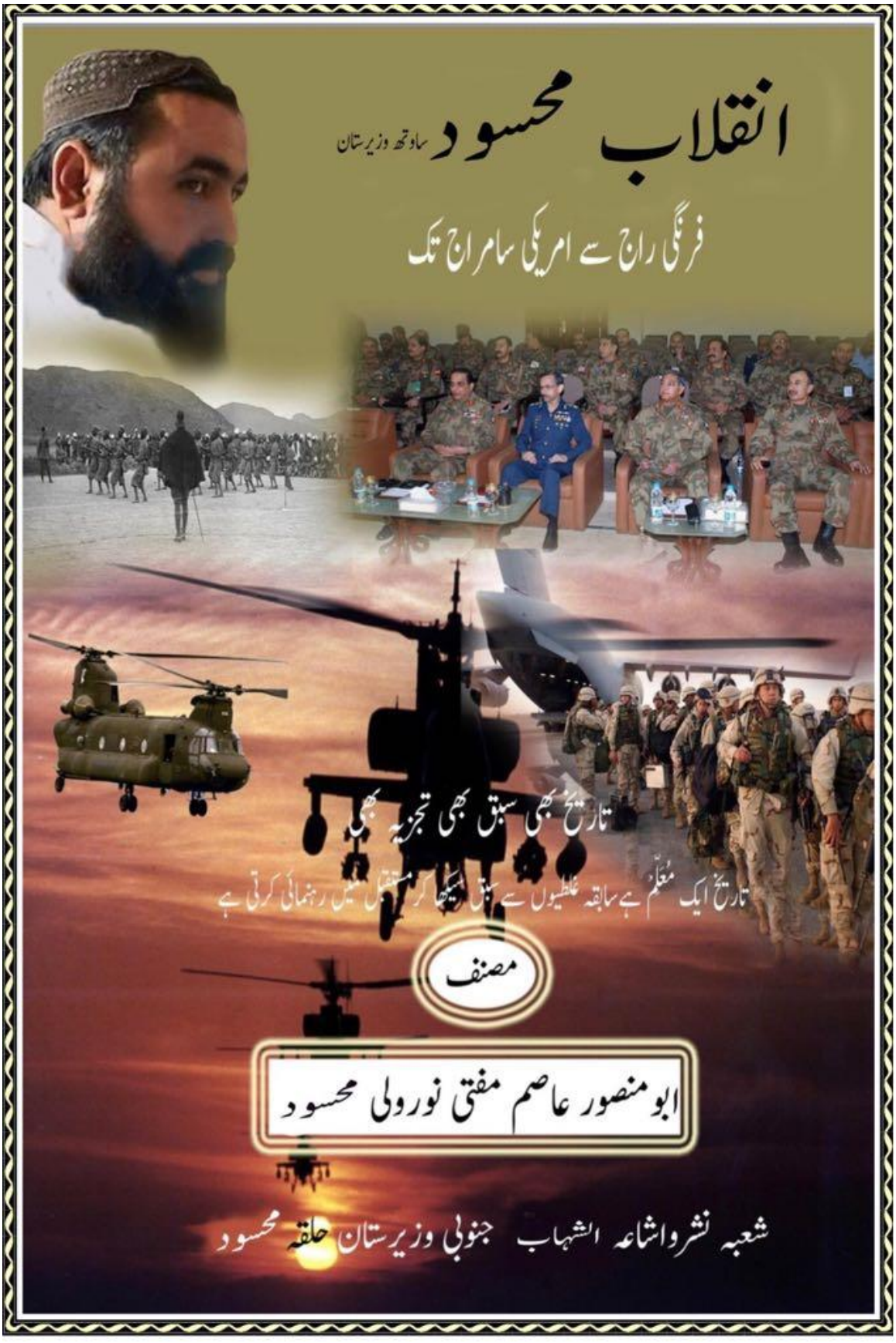
انقلاب محسود
ساوتھ وزیرستان
فرنگی راج سے امریکی سامراج تک
تاریخ بھی سبق بھی تجزیہ بھی
تاریخ ایک معلّم ہے سابقہ غلطیوں سے سبق سیکھا کر مستقبل میں رہنمائی کرتی ہے
مصنف
ابو منصور عاصم مفتی نورولی محسود
شعبہ نشرواشاعہ الشہاب جنوبی وزیرستان حلقہ محسود

Field work Access to the North Waziristan Agency

As of 2017, the North Waziristan Agency was heavily militarized, where movement of all civilians through major entry and exits was regulated. I was able to access the region through a *rahdari*, the local term for guarantee/safe passage, secured by a tribal leader from the political administration's office.

My Claims on Civilian Casualties

My fieldwork suggested two reasons why civilian deaths may not lead to a surge in recruitment. First, the notion that harming civilians causes counter-mobilization locally seems to be overstated for areas targeted by U.S. drone strikes. I did not find evidence of families and communities of victims turning to the armed groups either to avenge or to seek security from drones. Some were traumatized and felt anger; however, even that subset of respondents did not report that they wanted to join the insurgency. It is highly plausible that these respondents concealed their preferences before me, so I am cautious in drawing any kind of inferences from this data.

Second, to the extent civilians from beyond Waziristan sought to join al-Qaida or the Pakistan Taliban in response to drone strikes (as has been suggested in light of the testimony of Faisal Shahzad, who sought to bomb Times Square, New York), the challenge of spies faced by both groups prevented sustained recruitment. Some interviewees noted that groups feared that new recruits might be spies. As one respondent noted: "The new ones…were always doubted."[2]

To be clear, my limited claims on civilian casualties in drone strikes are not based on assessments provided by Pakistani or U.S. security officials. I also could not collect systematic data on the extent of civilian victimization as gaining unsupervised access to a representative sample of the civilians of the North Waziristan Agency remains very challenging. Any survey, including a sensitive survey, would pose serious risks -- in many ways insurmountable -- to the lives of both the respondents and the enumerators, which will be in violation of the ethical guidelines central to any IRB protocol. The dilemmas outlined by Driscoll and Schuster 2017 -- especially around the concern of local security services seeing the researcher and the research team as "spies" – are extraordinarily intense, which warranted caution.

It is worth noting, however, that multiple Pakistani officials – especially those with access to the CIA's forward bases and knowledge of the U.S. targeting process – portrayed the drone program as a highly precise form of violence, insisting that the U.S. government went to great lengths to and was successful at avoiding collateral damage.

The following quote captures the general sentiment in the subset of Pakistani officials involved with the campaign on civilian victimization: "It was a very good program, this drone one, and it greatly minimized collateral damage. They [the Americans] used to develop targets with great care, and I say this because I saw the process up close for over two years. It was like watching a TV. On it we could tell who is a man, woman, or child. If they were trying to watch a room in a house, and they didn't know who was inside, they could use some kind of thermal sensing to assess the gender and age of those inside. Using this technique, they could also tell us that in a house of four rooms, there is a woman and a child in the first room, there are, say, 8 people all of whom are male in the second room and so on."

Research Design

Details on the US-Pakistan Counterterrorism Pact

[2] Interview Taliban Operative, 2017

A key component of the empirical strategy are the details on the US-Pakistan counterterrorism pact. While some of the details are discussed in the main body of the paper, here I lay out more details which couldn't be accommodated due to reasons of space.

In 2004, the U.S. government launched a counterterrorism program with the consent of the Pakistani government in the Waziristan regions of Pakistan.[3] The campaign was governed by a pact agreed upon between the CIA and ISI. The pact involved demarcation of "flight boxes" over the Waziristan region for the flight of drones, establishment of CIA's forward bases inside and near the tribal areas, and an understanding on the quantum of drone flights and timing of strikes. In 2008, the U.S. government reconfigured the counterterrorism campaign.[4] A former Pakistani intelligence official from the Counterterrorism Wing of the ISI[5] who coordinated the drone program with the U.S. government stated that in the first week of January 2008, Michael Hayden, Director CIA, and Michael McConnell, Director National Intelligence, met the President of Pakistan General Pervez Musharraf and brokered a wide-reaching intelligence sharing and targeting arrangement with looser rules of engagement.[6]

Three points on the negotiation process are relevant. First, the Pakistani President General Pervez Musharraf gave a political nod for an expanded counterterror campaign in the tribal areas during a meeting with U.S. intelligence chiefs in early January 2008. General Musharraf's agreement was motivated by the desire to retain U.S. support in the face of calls for his resignation by a variety of domestic political actors.

Second, in line with General Musharraf's nod to the U.S. intelligence chiefs, Pakistani military negotiators in the period, led by General Ashfaq Kayani and including representatives of Pakistan's nuclear bureaucracy, the Strategic Plans Division, finalized the parameters of the a) beefed up intelligence sharing b) continuous reconnaissance and kinetic targeting for areas over Waziristan regions, which were part of one of two "flight boxes" first negotiated in 2004 for selective air strikes.[7] As in 2004, the Pakistani negotiators were concerned that the U.S. intelligence might use a carte blanche of surveillance over FATA to spy on proximate sites of Pakistan's nuclear program, offices of ISI detachments suspected to be aiding the Haqqani Network, and "other facilities" -- most likely camps of militants backed by Pakistani intelligence.[8] Despite U.S. insistence for a larger flight box, the Pakistani military negotiators did not agree to extension of the box over Waziristan. Significantly, the negotiators revoked the second box over the Bajaur Agency on the pretext of minimizing the U.S. footprint in Pakistan for concerns of public backlash.

Third, the U.S. government respected the limits of the flight box for undertaking sustained overhead surveillance. U.S. and Pakistani officials from the period noted that barring occasional transgressions and isolated drone strikes based on human intelligence, drone surveillance was limited to regions of the flight box. The sanctity and importance of the box to the U.S.

[3] Interview former Pakistani official, 2016
[4] Interview former Pakistani official, 2016
[5] ISI's Counterterrorism wing is one of many departments in the organization. One respondent noted that it was raised post 9/11 to work with the U.S. government.
[6] Interview former Pakistani official, 2016
[7] The existence of flight boxes has been discussed by Mazzetti 2013, 108
[8] This concern of Pakistani negotiators confirmed by a U.S. government official from the period.

government is made plausible by evidence on the negotiations that took place between the Pakistan and U.S. governments throughout 2008 for its expansion. U.S. officials sought the expansion of the flight box over Waziristan, as early as February 2008 and later in 2010.[9] They also sought addition of a third box in areas of the Baluchistan province. Respondents from the U.S. government and Pakistani intelligence noted that Pakistan committed to the extension in exchange for real time video feed of drone operations over FATA. The U.S. government agreed to provide it under a program called "CETRIX" to be installed at Pakistan Army's headquarters, called GHQ, but a dip in diplomatic relations led to its shelving. "CETRIX" was mentioned by officials of both governments.[10]

Were the negotiations influenced by or a response to the spike in violence in the North Waziristan Agency in the second half of 2007? Pakistani officials from the period explicitly denied this. A Pakistani official coordinating the counterterrorism campaign with the U.S. government noted: "If you recall, we were in deep national crisis at that time. Benazir Bhutto was killed on the 27th [of December, 2007]. Elections were due soon. North Waziristan was far from a priority for either General Musharraf or [Chief of Army Staff] General Kayani."[11] A senior military officer involved in military operations from the period denied the program launch was linked to the surge in violence, adding that he protested drone use in his area of operations.[12]

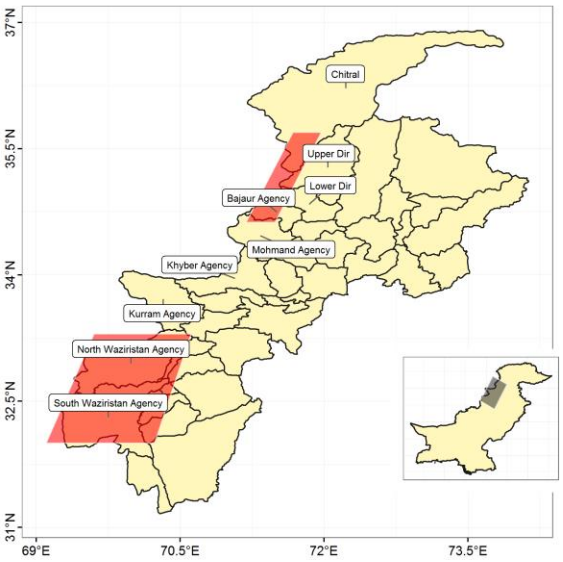

Figure 1. Insert shows map of Pakistan. Shaded areas were demarcated as flight boxes in 2004. From 2008, the lower shaded area remained as the only flight box. The shading has been approximated from a hand-marked map obtained from a Pakistani intelligence official privy to the demarcation.

[9] Interview former U.S. Government Official, 2016
[10] Interview former U.S. Government Official, 2016; Interview former Pakistani Official, 2016.
[11] Interview former Pakistani Official, 2016
[12] Interview former Pakistani Official, 2016

Coding of L&S

I operationalize this framework for the U.S. campaign in Pakistan by outlining a transparent coding scheme, shown in the table below, and narrative description capturing the changes in indicators. The coding is based on semi-structured interviews with Pakistani and U.S. intelligence officials.

For legibility, the coding scheme focuses on indicators which plausibly proxy for various facets implied in its definitions. These include forward bases involving Pakistani local intelligence agents, sharing of logs of civilian populations like population records, sustained aerial surveillance involving U.S. government's aerial precision geolocation and full-motion video technologies, USG access to telephone exchanges in Pakistan, and network discovery processes like intensive human-intel networks. In one column of the table, I note how each indicator proxies for legibility. For each year, if 3 or more criteria are met, I code them as high.

For speed, the coding scheme focuses on indicators which plausibly proxy for the pace at which U.S. government pursued legibility leads or more information or strikes against targets. These include four different facets of the United State Government process: U.S. government's domestic political, legal, and diplomatic process for targeting, U.S. government's deference to Pakistan for seeking permission, size of analytical capability, and availability of strike and surveillance platforms proximate to areas of operations like drones. In one column of the table, I note how each indicator proxies for speed. For each year, it is high if 1 or more criteria are met in the Pakistan process and 3 or more are satisfied in the U.S. process.

This coding allows me to make clear predictions about the effectiveness of the campaign under the varied levels of L&S. It also allows future researchers to theoretically and empirically build on and challenge these indicators by collecting more fine-grained quantitative data.

Table

Operationalization	What does indicator reveal?	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Source	Note
Indicators of Legibility														

Forward bases in tribal areas with Pakistani intel personnel	Maps of social, economic, political terrain		1	1	1	1	1	1					Pak intel officials/ US Official	
Population records shared	Maps of social, economic, political terrain; logs of civilian identities					1	1	1					Pak intel officials	
Daily (majority of the time) aerial surveillance drawing on aerial precision geolocation, full-motion video	logs of civilian identities and behavior, network connections in the population					1	1	1	1	1	1	1	Pak military officials of NWA and U.S. Officials	
USG access to telephone exchanges/sharing of call records/recording/sharing of phone calls	logs of civilian behavior, network connections in the population					1	1	1		1	1	1	Pak intel officials	
Intensive human-intel (Dedicated counterterrorism detachments/budget/ manpower increases for drone strikes)	Maps of social, economic, political terrain, network connections in the population					1	1	1		1	1	1	Pak intel officials	
If 3 or more including daily aerial surveillance, code as high		Low	Low	Low	Low	High	High	High	Low	High	High	High		
Indicators of speed of exploitation														
		2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014		

Strike platform availability															
High (1)						1	1	1	1	1	1	1	US officials	
USG Process															
Sustained targeting permitted (political, legal, diplomatic process)	Permissiveness of strikes					1	1	1	1	1	1	1	US officials	
USG policy of seeking permission from DG ISI/Pakistani political principals (0 if yes, 1 if no)	Permissiveness of strikes					1	1	1	1	1	1	1	US officials	
High analytical capability (analysts processing incoming leads)	Conversion pace of available lead into more information and/or pace of mobilization for strike on a raw lead containing actionable intelligence					1	1	1	1	1	1	1	US officials	One U.S. official notes analytical capability for Pakistan campaign was orders of magnitude higher than for Yemen, Somalia
Availability of strike platforms proximate with rapid turnaround, proximate to AOR	Conversion pace of available lead into more information and/or pace of mobilization for strike on a raw lead containing actionable intelligence					1	1	1	1	1	1	1	US officials	
Pakistan process															
Consent for continuous surveillance	Permissiveness of strikes					1	1	1		Missing	1	1	Pak military officials	
Assurance to keep flight box de-conflicted	Permissiveness of strikes					1	1	1		Missing	1	1	Pak military officials	
High if at least 1 in Pakistan process and 3 or more in U.S. process		Low	Low	Low	Low	High	High	High	Low	NA	High	High		

Additional Narrative Details

Pakistani military/intelligence allowed the U.S. government to surveil the region within the flight box and also assured them on keeping the flight boxes de-conflicted.[13] One former officer of the Pakistani military's Military Operations (MO) directorate, who was involved with the complex negotiations surrounding the use of drones in early 2008, explained "de-conflicting" as Pakistan's assurance of not interfering in the airspace of U.S. drone flights engaged in overhead surveillance, adding that the "[Pakistani military's] Air Defense Command had a procedure to monitor [drone activity] and report violations of the limits of the boxes."[14] One senior U.S. official from the period noted that the campaign starting 2008 maintained sustained daily aerial surveillance, communication interception with help of Pakistani intelligence, and an abundance of full-motion video, communication interception sensors and a sizable bureaucracy of analysts to exploit and analyze leads. The official added that similar capabilities were not realized in Yemen, at least until 2014.

Between February 2011 and until mid-2012, Pakistani military on multiple occasions refused the assurance on de-conflicting of air space and asked the CIA to cut back on surveillance of the region. After a U.S. military raid on a Pakistani check post along the Afghan-Pakistan border led to a breakdown of relations between the two countries, Pakistan even communicated threats of shooting down drones through the back channel, which the U.S. government took seriously leading to a temporary hiatus in surveillance and drone strikes for a few months. The cooperation reverted to "normalcy" by the second quarter of the 2012 on "rules of engagement which were similar to before" and remained so until the start of the territory clearance operation in 2014, called Zarb-e-Azb, according to one Pakistani official knowledgeable on the issue.[15]

Figures

[13] Interview former Pakistani Official, 2016
[14] Interview former Pakistani Official, 2016
[15] Interview former Pakistani Official, 2016

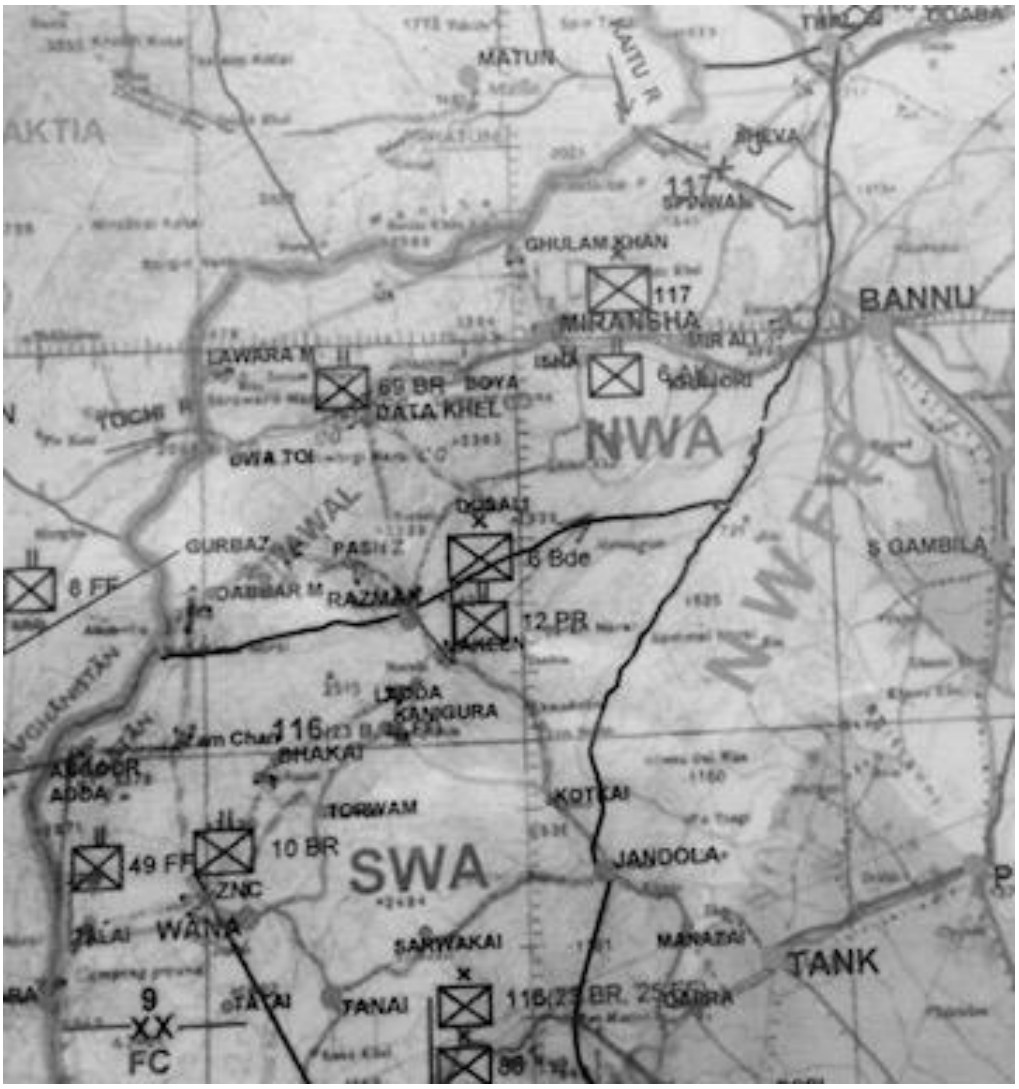

Figure 1. Operational map used by Pakistani security officials in late 2007/early 2008. NWA is shorthand for North Waziristan Agency. SWA is shorthand for South Waziristan Agency. Main locations to note in this map include Mir Ali, Miransha [also spelled Miramshah, as I do in this paper], Bannu [outside of North Wazirstan Agency], Data Khel, and Razmak. Other notation on this map includes Pakistani military deployments.

Figure 2. This chart shows the frequency of drone strikes recorded by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism. Interview respondents suggested that these strikes substantially undercount strikes especially for years 2005 to 2008.

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