

Turning to Constructivism and Psychology: The Need for Innovative Responses to Extremism

Jennifer Tuttle

Carnegie Mellon University

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Institute for Politics and Strategy

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Chapter 1: Introduction: A Need for Innovative Policies

The Threat of Modern Extremism

The current international political system places a heavy focus on one of the most pressing issues of the current era: extremism in the form of terrorism and insurgencies. Extremism is a word that can be applied to a vast variety of actors and strategies, defined by Manus Midlarsky as “the will to power by a social movement in the service of a political program typically at variance with that supported by existing state authorities, and for which individual liberties are to be curtailed in the name of collective goals, including the mass murder of those who would actually or potentially disagree with that program.”¹ Terrorist organizations and insurgencies are two physical manifestations of extremism that allow the concept to take control of a region, often resulting in widespread violence. While the concept of extremism is by no means new, its ability to cause widespread destruction through insurgencies and terrorist organizations using modern technology and strategies certainly is, leading extremism to be a large source of concern even in countries that are thousands of miles from any armed extremist conflicts. Policy has failed in the past to provide a solution with the potential to calm these fears, and in the case of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, seems to only strengthen the flame of extremism.

Background: The Failures of the War on Terror

Starting in the 1980s, unrest in the Middle East led to the rise of an extremist Muslim jihad movement, with incidents of terrorism rising in the Middle East and in

¹ Manus Midlarsky, “Theory and Empirics,” in *Origins of Political Extremism: Mass Violence in the Twentieth Century and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Europe. It was not until September 11, 2001, however, that radical jihadist terrorism came to the frontlines of the United States.

The “Global War on Terror” that President George Bush announced just days after the 9/11 attack was the beginning of a dangerous descent into ineffective military campaigns in the Middle East. In his Address to the Nation on September 20, 2001, President Bush stated that “our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated”.² While terrorism is a concept that in the current state of affairs is attached to very specific groups and attacks, the true definition of “international terrorism” is quite broad. According to the U.S. Code, international terrorism is an activity or group of activities that: “involve violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that violate federal or state law; appear to be intended to (i) intimidate or coerce a civilian population, (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion, or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government; and occur primarily outside the territorial jurisdiction of the U.S., or transcend national boundaries in terms of the means by which the are accomplished, the persons they appear intended to intimidate or coerce, or the local communities in which their perpetrators operate or seek asylum.”⁴ By declaring a kinetic war against such a strategy President Bush made a victory in the Middle East impossible.⁵

² George Bush, “Address to the Nation,” Address, Washington, DC, September 20, 2001.

⁴ Terrorism: Definitions, U.S. Code 18 (1988), § 2331.

⁵ George Bush, “Address to the Nation,” Address, Washington, DC, September 20, 2001.

If one thing is clear in the current fight against terrorism worldwide, it is that an innovative response is necessary, with a focus on tactics that do not involve an indiscriminately violent, destructive military response. With terrorist organizations and ideologies gaining momentum both in the Middle East and in the Western world, how can human psychology and international political theory combine to provide a socially conscious, human-focused method to combat the extremist ideologies that lead to the rise of terrorism and insurgencies? Is it a more effective long-term counterterrorism and counterinsurgency strategy to use socially focused policies that encourage nation building in the Middle East and Muslim community building in the Western world that focuses on individuals and their own personal goals? In this thesis I claim that while traditional realist theory in International Relations places a focus on power dynamics, the religious, individual, and group psychological nuances underlying terrorist activity indicate that a more refined focus on the sociological and psychological variables emphasized by constructivism and political/social psychology, most notably identity formation, may provide policymakers with a more appropriate set of tools for countering insurgencies and terrorism.

The Realist Response

Most of the policy discussions surrounding the Global War on Terror claimed that a military response was necessary. Paul Bremer argued that terrorism can only be destroyed militarily, and the National Military Strategic Plan for the War on

Terrorism reiterated that the United States response would be militarily focused.⁹ However, after the military campaigns began, it became clear that a military response was ill-equipped to handle this unique threat.

In his book *Good Taliban*, Jack Fairweather presents a different opinion. In 2001 the CIA was very close to reaching a diplomatic agreement with the Taliban, but they instead chose to invade, resulting in a devastating failure that reinforced support for terrorist organizations in the Middle East.¹⁰ Olivier Roy claims that the United States government dismissed all possible tactics that did not involve a military invasion when they could have opted for constructivist and non-violent responses.¹¹ Even after the official end of the Global War on Terror, the concept that terrorism cannot be defeated militarily, as ideologies can survive, remains difficult for the United States government to comprehend.

Argument and Research Methodology

The rest of this paper will proceed by presenting constructivist theory and psychology's application to international politics and group dynamics. I will present arguments in favor of a turn to constructivism, as well as arguments that constructivism produces non-traditional policies that garner better responses. I will focus on the constructivist concepts of cultural context and the formation and utilization of identity. The next chapter will bring forward modern psychology

⁹ Paul Bremer, "A New Strategy for the New Face of Terrorism," *The National Interest*, November 1, 2001. ; Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism," Washington, DC, 2006.

¹⁰ Jack Fairweather, "Good Taliban," in *The Good War: Why We Couldn't Win the War or the Peace in Afghanistan* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

¹¹ Olivier Roy, "Who Is the Enemy? Where Is the Enemy?" in *The Politics of Chaos in the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 11-13, 52-64.

theories on extremists and extremist recruitment, and then link them to the international relations in general, as these are two fields that greatly strengthen each other when joined. The psychological facets of individuals and groups of individuals that are recognized and incorporated into constructivism will be discussed, showing that constructivism and psychology work well together, offering better insight into how political actors behave.

Case Study Method

I will test my hypothesis by presenting two sides within one case study: Operation Enduring Freedom. The first side will focus on the realist, traditional methods used by the United States military in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. The second will focus on the counterinsurgency methods used in Operation Enduring Freedom that attempted to incorporate the lessons of constructivism and psychology to create a sociological-based counterinsurgency response. I will analyze the methods and processes of each of these approaches in relation to constructivism and psychology, once again focusing on the concepts of social context and identity. I selected both aspects of to this case study for variation on the independent variable. In this case, the independent variable is the kind of policies that were enacted, and more specifically, which theory these policies were based on. The dependent variable is the success or failure of these policies in countering terrorism. Selecting cases on the independent variable allows for the avoidance of a selection bias, and also allows for variation without assuming the outcome of the dependent variable. In this case study, as the dependent variable

was success/failure, it was vital that the cases be selected on the independent variable.¹³

¹³ Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, "Determining What to Observe," in *Designing Social Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 135-49.

Chapter 2: Constructivist Theory, Psychology, and the Theoretical Argument of the Thesis

Constructivism

In the realm of international relations and political theory, one of the most important first steps to identifying and examining a situation or policy is selecting the correct theory. While policymakers create many counterterrorism and counterinsurgency policies in accordance with the theories of realism and liberal institutionalism, in many cases they choose these theories because of a failure to identify the most effective level of analysis.¹⁴ In the case of extremism, a cultural and social micro-level of analysis is the best option. Terrorist organizations and insurgencies are closely related to the populations from whence they come, as well as the populations they attempt to control or target. Therefore, when analyzing these organizations, it is vital that these populations be examined as well, and incorporated into the analysis. The ideologies of terrorist organizations and insurgencies do not appear without a root cause, and cultural and social-based levels of analysis account for this root cause. Constructivism provides an opportunity to examine terrorism at this level of analysis, as it allows policymakers and political strategists to identify the root of the groups' actions and issues through its focus on the smallest level: the individual members.

Constructivism is the claim that international politics are defined and determined by social and historical context and developments. Political actors are

¹⁴ J. David Singer, "The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations," *World Politics* vol. 14 (April 1960), 77-92. ; Waltz, Kenneth N. Man, "The State, and War; a Theoretical Analysis," (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

dependent upon their identities, which are created from their cultural norms and traditions.¹⁵ These identities are what drive states to take actions, and what explain these actions. Actors take specific actions in relation to other states based on their understanding and interpretation of the others' identity, and therefore modify their relationship based upon the norms of that state.

A Constructivist Interpretation of Realist Assumptions

Due to its focus on social and cultural contexts, constructivism inherently opposes realism, which argues that international political happenings are all based on four assumptions: states are the central actors; international politics are anarchic with no central authority; all actors are rational and act on self-interest; and all actors seek to maximize their power.¹⁶ Constructivism rejects these assumptions as too broadly defined and argues that because states act within their own social systems, each state determines the meaning of these concepts for itself.¹⁷

Constructivism also allows for non-traditional actors such as insurgents take a larger role, as its stress is not on states, but rather on actors and how they interact with other actors. What is viewed as a rational action varies differently across the world, a concept that is especially apparent amongst terrorist organizations and insurgencies, and while there is no *de facto* leader in the world many nations act in accordance with their neighbors and allies, falling into a socially constructed

¹⁵ Jeffrey T. Chekel, "The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory," *World Politics* 50 (2): 324-48.

¹⁶ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

¹⁷ Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory," *International Security* 23 (1998): 177.

pattern.¹⁸ Suicide bombings, for example, become more understandable under constructivism as a “tragic tradeoff”, or an action where two sacred values are weighed against each other, in this case the desire to commit jihad versus the sacredness of life, focusing on the question of morality.¹⁹ Fixed assumptions of rationality and anarchy across identities and states can have no meaning when the norms these assumptions are based upon are not fixed.²⁰ Constructivism is a movement away from the materialistic, power-driven focus of realism and toward a focus on social context as the defining variable of international relations.

Constructivism does not ignore the implications of power, however. It simply gives it a different definition. Constructivism defines power as a collection of tools, including not only weapons and physical capabilities, but also “knowledge, ideas, culture, ideology, and language”.²¹ These “discursive” powers influence the social practices that inform the actions and thus the identity of groups and states, therefore creating the reality that individual states function in as political actors. This power is what determines interactions between states, with one actor serving as the dominant power and the other as the lesser, creating a system of hierarchy within the international political system.²² These unconventional powers are often what insurgencies and terrorist organizations depend upon in their operations.

¹⁸ David Desler, “What’s At Stake in the Agent-Structure Debate?” *International Organization* 43 (1989): 460.

¹⁹ J.M. Goldgeier, & P.E. Tetlock, “Psychology and International Relations Theory,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 4 (2001): 67-92.

²⁰ Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Theory* (1995): 129-177.

²¹ Ted Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory,” *International Security* 23 (1998): 177.

²² Ted Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory,” *International Security* 23 (1998): 185.

Identity

A central concept in constructivism is that a state's identity is constantly being questioned and assessed by both its enemies and its allies, as this is the only method of predicting how a state will act and respond to the actions of others. This identity is made up of a series of preferences and interests that are based on the cultural and social background of the actor. This is true of not only traditional state actors, but also actors that are attempting to gain legitimacy and act as states, such as insurgencies. Constructivism highlights "interests" as the independent variable that determines a state's identity, theorizing that interests define needs and desires, and therefore offers a prediction as to how a state will act in a specific situation. This, is not analogous to the neo-realist idea of an identity constructed from a singular definition of self-interest, but rather assumes that the identity will be unique and based upon a series of variables that define its interests.²³ In constructivism, identities are not limited; therefore a state can possess several coinciding identities that inform their actions in coordination with each other.²⁴ The social identity of each state influences how they both act and react, and therefore how they play out their own interests in the international political system.²⁵

A state's own identity is not the only major social force at play under constructivism. The state's interpretation of other states' identities is also a driving factor that determines both how the state will act and react in relation to others. Indeed, constructivism argues that any identity is not fully formed until it is given an

²³ Robert Keohane, "International Institutions: Two Approaches." *International Studies Quarterly* 32 (1988): 390-391.

²⁴ Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory," *International Security* 23 (1998): 175-177.

²⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72 (1993): 22-49.

antagonist, or an “other”, that stands in contrast. Without a sense of alienation or contrast, identities fail to be adequately developed and/or specific. Throughout history, identities have been understood as existing in relation to other identities. The result is that the “other” is deemed as superior, equal, or inferior, and thus the relationship between the two identities is born out of conflict or the absence of it. As mentioned previously, these comparisons and contrasts lead to a hierarchical system, where one actor is able to exert power over another.²⁶

Interactions with the “other” inherently require that a state not only recognize their own identity, but also interpret the other’s identity correctly and create predictions as to how the other will act. States with shared identities, such as states that are allies or have shared interests, will be at peace with each other. When identities are difficult to understand they are also difficult to predict create uncertainty. This requires other states to operate under the assumption that said state could take a variety of actions, and therefore they must be prepared for each possibility.²⁷ Constructivism attempts to identify the background of an actor and thus their identity, therefore making uncertainty a variable as opposed to a constant. This allows a state to determine definitively whether an opposing state poses a security threat or not, thus ridding the state of a security dilemma and allowing the state to take informed actions in relation to the threat’s identity.²⁸

²⁶ Ted Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory,” *International Security* 23 (1998): 184-186.

²⁷ Robert Jervis, “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics* 30 (1978): 167-170.

²⁸ Ted Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory,” *International Security* 23 (1998): 188.

As Richard Ashley argues, foreign policy practices are built upon “precedents and shared symbolic materials” which define a state and its identities, as well as its interests.²⁹ These practices, through collaboration in order to create an identity, are what informs the actions that states take and therefore how they act in the international political system. Democracies generally do not come into conflict with each other because they recognize each other and harvest a mutual understanding of the other’s identity.³⁰ Times of peace between nations that are not democracies can be interpreted as an understanding between states that adopt a similarly constructed identity.³¹ The lack of understanding can also explain times and areas of conflict.³² States have multiple identities that take superiority over each other based on the situation.³³ Identities are not to be assumed, but rather are constantly being created and reproduced based on the historical context of the actor or area. Constructivism presents the rise of extremist organizations and their conflicts with states and other organizations as conflicts of societal and cultural norms, breaking down into primarily ideological conflicts that are compounded by a failure to recognize identities.

Ultimately, constructivism argues that the international political system is determined by actions made by unique actors. These actors make decisions based

²⁹ Richard K. Ashley. 1988. “Foreign Policy as Political Performance,” *International Studies Notes*: 52-54.

³⁰ Michael W. Doyle, “Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 12 (1983): 205–35.

³¹ Ted Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory,” *International Security* 23 (1998): 192.

³² Michael Barnett, “Institutions, Roles, and Disorder: The Case of the Arab States System,” *International Studies Quarterly* 37 (1993): 271-280.

³³ Ted Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory,” *International Security* 23 (1998): 192-195.

on their identity, which is constructed out of interests built upon cultural, sociological, and historical contexts. Counterinsurgency policies that attempted to insert the United States as a power figure over the people in the Middle East were based on ignorance of this concept, ignoring the society in which they were acting.³⁴ The people turned to power structures that are aligned with their historical context, creating power vacuum and a cycle of instability that extremist organizations are able to exploit time and time again. No counterinsurgency policy can work in the long-term without acknowledging the mistakes of the past and the lessons that can be garnered from them.

The Importance of Linking Psychology and International Relations Theories

Psychology is generally treated as a very different realm than that of international political theory. However, when using a theory such as Constructivism, which depends deeply on a sociologically constructed analysis, it is necessary to delve into a more focused level of analysis, highlighting the importance of communities and group-based political dynamics. It is then foolish to ignore the implication that psychology can have on the real-life application and implementation of policies that are generated from this socially constructed theory.

It is not a surprise that psychology is usually seen as having limited value when it comes to international policy towards extremism, as it seems to be too broad to be useful. Many falsehoods are circulated when it comes to the mentality of terrorists and extremists, including that they are paranoid or narcissistic. The

³⁴ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism, Washington, DC, 2006.

problem is that this description is applicable to a large percentage of the population, including a vast majority who will never participate in any manner of extremism or political violence. In the United States alone more approximately one in five adults experience a mental illness in any given year, with 4.2% of adults citing a serious impact on their ability to carry out normal life activities because of mental illness. More than 2% of adults suffer from a dissociative disorder, but in the United States more than half of all adults experience a de-personalization or de-realization episode consistent with a dissociative disorder at least once in their lifetime.³⁵ Globally, depression is the most common mental illness, with more than 350 million people suffering from it, followed by Bipolar Affective Disorder and Schizophrenia, which count 60 million and 21 million global sufferers, respectively.³⁶ While it is popular to make broad claims that the psychology of terrorist can be narrowed down to a specific profile, this is simply not true. In reality research has as of yet found no single psychological profile that can separate those who turn to terrorism from those who do not. Silke states, "most serious researchers in the field at least nominally agree with the position that terrorists are essentially normal individuals".³⁷

While psychology cannot as of yet offer a psychological profile for terrorists, psychological principles can offer insight into why individuals turn to extremism. Therefore, it is foolish of international political theory to ignore them, or else

³⁵ National Alliance on Mental Illness, *Mental Health by the Numbers*, 2015.

³⁶ "Mental Disorders," World Health Organization, October 2015.
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs396/en/>.

³⁷ J.M. Goldgeier, & P.E. Tetlock, "Psychology and International Relations Theory," *Annual Review of Political Science* 4 (2001): 23-25.

constructivism would turn into an identity-based theory that ignores the principles of humanity. Goldgeier and Tetlock argue that a micro-level of analysis is the basis of most international political theories, and that these theories, including constructivism, ignore the implications that human nature and psychological factors can have on international politics, while ironically relying more on psychological assumptions than they realize. In their words, “when we shift attention to each tradition’s explanatory shortcomings, we believe these can be at least partly corrected by incorporating other psychological assumptions into the conceptual frameworks”. Goldgeier and Tetlock dismiss reductionist theories, such as realism, as focusing too much on second-level and third-level analysis, instead arguing for political theories and policies that are rooted in contextualization, such as constructivism. They argue that such theories allow for psychology to be truly understood, as well as used, in a way that maximizes its explanatory power in relation to international political actions.³⁸

The Psychology of Extremism

Psychology is indeed necessary to understand the actions that any man or woman takes, let alone actions taken by individuals who have the ability and desire to cause rampant violence, death, and destruction. This desire does not emerge out of nothing, and therefore if there is any effective theory to be made in order to stop this, it must acknowledge the importance of psychology. Identity is one of the largest aspects of modern psychology, beginning with the research of Freud and

³⁸ J.M. Goldgeier, & P.E. Tetlock, “Psychology and International Relations Theory,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 4 (2001): 67-92.

James. Both scholars theorized that an individual's sense of personal identity is made up of both internal forces, such as one's personality and basic character, and external forces that they encountered in their environment within society, such as their family background, ethnicity, and relationships. Erik Erikson would go on to call this the "ego identity", or "the answer to the age-old question, "Who am I?"".³⁹

Erikson argues that each individual has two different possible outcomes in the development of their identity. One is a "positive identity" while the other is a "negative identity". The negative is born out of opportunities and identities that are presented to individuals at vital stages of their development conversely as the most unwanted yet also the most realistic. A positive identity is born out the opposite of this experience, where the most socially minded identity is both presented and chosen at vital stages in development and thus a health individual is brought into society. The most important stage for the birth of these identities is between the age of twelve and nineteen years. This is also the prime target age for recruitment into terrorist organizations.

In a study of extremist organizations in West Germany conducted by Lorenz Böllinger, it was found that the research subjects "failed to successfully incorporate trust, autonomy, and initiative into their personalities".⁴⁰ Crenshaw speculated that these individuals were brought up in volatile households with feelings of helplessness, guilt, suspiciousness, and shame. Böllinger's theory was that these individuals had joined extremist organization in order to find positive identities by

³⁹ J. Horgan, "The Search for the Terrorist Personality," in *Terrorists, Victims, and Society: Psychological perspectives on terrorism and its consequences*, (West Sussex, UK: 2003), 3-27.

⁴⁰ Michael P. Arena and Bruce A. Arrigo, "The Psychology of Terrorism," in *The Terrorist Identity: Explaining the Terrorist Threat* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 17-19.

joining a collective identity, where they would be able to surmise a higher calling and a sense of stability and structure.

Knutson furthered this argument and expanded upon Erikson's theory of identity by arguing that adolescents on the verge of adopting a negative identity, due to isolation, discrimination, or a host of other rejections, will take this negative identity to the highest degree by joining extremist groups, thus harming society but finding a sense of purpose. She also hypothesized that a "terrorist identity" is determined by three factors. The first is the environment the individual is raised in, and the opinions and values they are exposed to. The second is the desire to find an identity that is not traditional or personal, for instance a group identity or a terrorist identity. The third is a personal crisis or catalytic experience that drives the individual to believe that the extremist identity is their only possible option.⁴¹

The desire for an identity is the most applicable aspect of psychology in explaining why individuals are driven to join terrorists and insurgencies. This need, created by a variety of the factors discussed in the prior paragraphs, drives individuals to adopt a group or collective identity as their own personal identity. The structure and hierarchy of insurgencies and terrorist organizations allow them to finally feel a sense of order and guidance in their life, as well as providing a feeling of purpose, as if through the group they are working for a greater good.⁴² For these individuals, who have been isolated and rejected throughout their lives, this collective identity serves to finally experience an identity. In his memoir *American*

⁴¹ R. L. Akers & A. L. Silverman, "Toward a Social Learning Model of Violence and Terrorism," in *Violence: From Theory to Research*, (Cincinnati, OH: Lexis-Nexis-Anderson Publishing, 2004), 19-35.

⁴² Michael P. Arena and Bruce A. Arrigo, "The Psychology of Terrorism," in *The Terrorist Identity: Explaining the Terrorist Threat* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 17-19.

Soldier Tommy Frank asserted that in his experience with insurgents in the Middle East, the members of the groups seemed to have stronger connections and allegiances to the group itself and the other members as opposed to a specific ideology.⁴³ As psychologists argue, joining a collective identity is the solution to the psychological concept of “splitting,” where “the need to have a stable identity, to resolve a split and be at one with oneself and with society . . . is an important bridging concept which helps to explain the similarity in behavior of terrorist in groups of widely different espoused motivations and composition.”⁴⁴ Essentially, a group appears to the isolated individual and offers a path to a new life and a true feeling of belonging, where all of their needs will be fulfilled, and many individuals choose to follow this path.

Abraham Maslow theorized that human beings have a hierarchy of needs that must be fulfilled step-by-step before they can achieve self-actualization, which is considered the desired state of being for most people. These steps are: (1) Physiological needs; (2) Safety needs; (3) Social and belongingness needs; (4) Esteem needs; and (5) Self-actualization. Each prior need must be fulfilled before the higher level needs can be achieved, and the first four are considered the “deficiency needs”, or the needs that must be met for an individual to begin to feel complete and relaxed. Without the achievement of these basic needs, they will not be able to live a normal life. As each subsequent need is fulfilled, however, the individual feels a motivation to move on to fulfilling the next need, until the reach

⁴³ Tommy Franks, *American Soldier*, (New York: Regan Books, 2004).

⁴⁴ Michael P. Arena and Bruce A. Arrigo, "The Psychology of Terrorism," in *The Terrorist Identity: Explaining the Terrorist Threat* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 15-22.

the final step of self-actualization.⁴⁵ For individuals struggling to achieve even the most basic level on this hierarchy of needs, terrorist and extremist organizations offer the chance to move forward and achieve these needs, most pointedly in the third and fourth steps, where mental needs related to the social and personal realms are met, but also the most basic need for food, water, shelter, and physical protection. If outside nations hope to assist the population in resisting insurgencies and terrorist organizations, they must ensure that these needs can be readily fulfilled through other means or allegiances.

The Psychology of Public Support for Terrorist Organizations and Insurgencies

While not every individual in a region controlled by an insurgency or terrorism organization will be a member of its system, many serve as a support base for the organization, offering it local legitimacy and power. These individuals support these organizations because of a belief that the organization is making a positive impact. Many such individuals feel compelled to support insurgencies due to a sense of duty or an implied connection, whether it be personal, tribal, religious, ethnic, or a combination of these factors. In many cases a negative motivation also exists to drive individuals to support an insurgency, such as the risk of death, imprisonment, or harsh conditions, or the assumption that there is no alternative organization to support.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ A. H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," in *Classics in the History of Psychology*, (Web: 1997).

⁴⁶ Paul K. Davis and Angela O'Mahoney, "Specifying the Model," in *A Computational Model of Public Support for Insurgency and Terrorism: A Prototype for More-general Social-science Modeling*, (RAND Corporation, 2013), 7.

An insurgency must also be effective at achieving its goals in order to gain public support. The inability to deliver on promises and prove the existence of power and capabilities weakens the credibility and thus the legitimacy of an insurgency. If the public perceives the insurgency as being illegitimate in its claims on a region or state it becomes almost impossible for the insurgency to gain significant and adequate public support. It is usually difficult to instill violent tactics as legitimate, especially when that violence is manifested in the form of terrorism. War is one matter, but attacks on civilians and civil institutions are a different matter entirely. Insurgencies must ensure that their violence is seen as either an inherent facet of the culture of the public, as is sometimes the case in Islamic terrorism, or as a necessary evil that is able to deliver results.⁴⁷ In Afghanistan, the public was often divided on their opinion of terrorism, with some individuals regarding it as a breach of Islamic law and teachings while others saw it as an essential and legitimate part of Islam. It is also a common occurrence that individuals will condone the use of terrorism when it is used against those who are identified as “others,” or inherently different from themselves.⁴⁸

The final factor in determining if the public will support an insurgency is the outcome of the public’s cost-benefit analysis. If the costs and risks associated with supporting an insurgency are not determined to be worth the potential benefit, individuals will not be willing to offer their support. This, however, is how an

⁴⁷ Paul Davis, Eric Larson, et al. 2012. “Public Support for the Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan,” in *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency and Terrorism*. (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2012).

⁴⁸ Paul K. Davis and Angela O’Mahoney, “Specifying the Model,” in *A Computational Model of Public Support for Insurgency and Terrorism: A Prototype for More-general Social-science Modeling*, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2013): 9.

economist or political scientist would approach this factor. In reality, the public does not have the ability to carry out a rational cost-benefit analysis, and is instead influenced by the immediate actions around them, therefore they are forced to make a decision in the heat of the moment, so to speak. Especially in the case of young people, perceptions of risks are often diminished and incorrectly calculated, and therefore emotions are the primary factor in the calculation. Intimidation can also skew the perception of risk, as can the assumption of an outcome. Cultural contexts also present individuals with different personal risks, forcing them to choose a side in conflicts based on the allegiance of their family, tribe, or community.⁴⁹

These factors, which determine whether a public will support and give legitimacy to an insurgency, are dependent upon a variety of psychological, sociological, and cultural contexts. Public support is not something that should be taken lightly or ignored, especially in the case of regional insurgencies, and therefore it is vital to understand its roots in order to change or transition it away from the insurgency and onto a different political option.

Conclusion

Constructivist Theory allows for the integration of psychological and sociological contexts and perspectives into the international political system. By focusing on the concepts of identities, the “Other”, and the historical background of a political actor, constructivism paints a more complete picture in international

⁴⁹ Paul K. Davis and Angela O’Mahoney, “Specifying the Model,” in *A Computational Model of Public Support for Insurgency and Terrorism: A Prototype for More-general Social-science Modeling*, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2013): 9-10.

relations and conflicts, and thus allows for more apprehensive policies to be created and enacted properly.

Constructivist Theory is vital to comprehending why extremist organizations take the actions they do, as well as how these groups were able to gain power. Extremism is often prominent in regions that suffer from a vacuum of power, and therefore allow a group with extreme ideas to take power as long as they are able to offer a solution better than the depression and anarchy of the status quo. In the Middle East and Africa, where proxy wars have been fought by the United States, Russia, and a host of other western nations, regions are often left in horrific conditions with little to no governmental organization or public services. This exact historical context allowed extremist organizations to rise up and take the region captive as the de facto government, therefore this context must be considered when developing policies to loosen the hold these organizations are able to keep. The unique identities of extremist organizations also add more complexity and depth to foreign policies, and offer explanations as to why certain policies are ineffective at reaching peace, or at least the absence of conflict.

Chapter 3: Case Study on Realist Policies in Afghanistan

Introduction

Following the September 11, 2001 terror attack on the United States and the subsequent discovery of Osama bin Laden's involvement, President George W. Bush gave the Taliban an ultimatum: either deliver Osama bin Laden to United States military custody and exile al-Qaeda, or face military intervention.⁵⁰ After the Taliban's refusal of such demands or negotiations, an invasion of Afghanistan under the name Operation Enduring Freedom was launched by the United States in conjuncture with the United Kingdom.

Operation Enduring Freedom

Just fifteen days after the September 11 attacks President Bush, General Tommy Franks, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld authorized a team of the Special Activities Division of the CIA to infiltrate Afghanistan. Several days later Air Force combat controllers and teams from the 5th Special Forces Group were airlifted into Afghanistan, where they joined with the Special Activities Division and the Northern Alliance. After a few short weeks this group had overtaken several cities in the region that had previously been controlled by the Taliban.⁵¹

The official start of Operation Enduring Freedom was on October 7, 2001, when the United States and the United Kingdom announced that they would begin a formal military campaign to invade Afghanistan and destroy the Taliban. Due to early warnings and their inherent ability to move quickly and without detection, many members of al-Qaeda and the Taliban, in particular top commanders and

⁵⁰ George Bush, "Address to the Nation," Address, Washington, DC, September 20, 2001

⁵¹ John Gresham, "The Campaign Plan - Special Operations Forces and Operation Enduring Freedom," Defense Media Network, September 12, 2011.

leaders, fled their city strongholds for the Pashtun region of Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁵² By December the United States military had established itself in the region, and on December 20 the United Nations mandated the International Security Assistance Force to ensure that Afghani forces were able to maintain their control over Kabul and over key regions.⁵³

In 2002, however, the exiled Taliban began their plans on an insurgency in the region that would take back the control it had lost. Extensive recruitment began in the area, with villages in Afghanistan and Pakistan, especially in Pashtun regions, being the focus. Makeshift training camps began to crop up along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, where recruiter fighters were trained in guerilla warfare and terrorist tactics. The Taliban was able to pull many of these fighters from the tribes in the region. Omar established himself as the leader of the group, followed by a council that oversaw all the Taliban's actions. The insurgency began with relatively small attacks, focused on mostly abandoned outposts where a group of 50 fighters would overtake the base and then disperse into smaller grounds, launching guerilla attacks with improvised explosive devices on any U.S. or Alliance forces that they encountered. The Taliban increased the number of attacks and the significance of their targets overtime, building up to larger, more important cities.⁵⁴

In 2003 NATO entered the conflict, taking control of the United Nations International Security Assistance Force.⁵⁵ The coalition grew to include forces and support from forty-two nations, and attempted to establish control throughout the

⁵² David Shukman, "The Taliban Are Forced out of Afghanistan," *BBC History*.

⁵³ "ISAF- Chronology," *NATO*. <http://www.nato.int/isaf/topics/chronology/index.html>.

⁵⁴ John Ware, "The Taliban Resurgence in Afghanistan," *BBC History*.

⁵⁵ "ISAF- Chronology," *NATO*.

region.⁵⁶ In 2004 a popular election was held in Afghanistan, now renamed the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, with Hamid Karzai, who had been selected at the Bonn Conference as the head of the Afghan Interim Administration, as the elected president.⁵⁷ While NATO gained significant ground in their operations, the Taliban's tactics and style of organization allowed it to be incredibly evasive. Several extensive campaigns such as Operation Volcano, Operation Achilles, and Operation Mountain Fury were launched in an attempt to find and defeat the remaining Taliban.⁵⁸

The achievements of these military campaigns were dampened by the number of civilian casualties resulting from military actions. On March 4, 2007 United States Marines killed sixteen civilians and left thirty-three injured after a bomb ambush.⁵⁹ The unit was ordered out of Afghanistan in order to appease local authorities and the general Afghani population. Several other incidents of civilian fatalities led to problems with the population.⁶⁰ United States military casualties also rose, with 899 deaths in 2007, marking it as the deadliest year for U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan.⁶¹

In 2008 the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan rose to 26,607 in January to 48,250 in June, indicating that the situation in Afghanistan was much more dire than

⁵⁶ "International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)," *Institute for the Study of War*.

⁵⁷ Carlotta Gall, "Election of Karzai Is Declared Official," *New York Times*, November 4, 2004.

⁵⁸ Fisnik Abrashi, "U.S., Afghan Troops Launch Offensive," *Washington Post*, September 16, 2006.

⁵⁹ Carlotta Gall, "16 Civilians Die as U.S. Troops Open Fire in Afghanistan," *The New York Times*, March 4, 2007.

⁶⁰ Ann Tyson, "Marine Unit Is Told To Leave Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, March 24, 2007.

⁶¹ "2007 Was Deadliest Year for U.S. Troops in Iraq," *NBC News*, December 31, 2007.

initially thought.⁶² An operation that was once intended to be carried out by special services had grown into a full-fledged invasion and war. At the same time, despite gains by the coalition, the Taliban continued to gain scattered victories, including the overthrowing of Kandahar prison, where 1200 prisoners were freed including 400 Taliban members. The Taliban also carried out numerous coordinated attacks on private and NATO supply trucks, demanding that the drivers hand over money as well as their cargo and then setting fire to the vehicles.⁶³ At the same time several military actions caused an even larger rift between the United States and Pakistan, leading the later to declare that supply routes would be closed off and that the Pakistani military would use deadly force on any U.S. military personnel who entered the nation. The United States continued to carry out raids and operations within Pakistan, sometimes with confirmed or alleged civilian casualties, creating further tension and public out-cry that only increased as drone use was expanded.⁶⁴

In 2009 the number of U.S. troops stationed in Afghanistan continued to rise, with over 17,000 being added to the operation.⁶⁵ President Karzai asked the United States to agree to negotiation discussions with the Taliban, as he believed the situation was worsening, but the United States refused to respond to either the Taliban or Karzai's request.⁶⁶ Within the United States, public support of the war began to fall, in particular because of the ever-increasing number of troops

⁶² Congressional Research Service, "U.S. Forces in Afghanistan," The Library of Congress (2008).

⁶³ "Taliban Jail Raid Frees Hundreds," *BBC News*, June 14, 2008.

⁶⁴ "Pakistan: GIs on Cross-border Raids Will Be Shot," *NBC News*, September 16, 2008. ; "Pakistan Fires on NATO Aircraft," *BBC News*, September 25, 2008.

⁶⁵ Susan Page, "Obama's War: Deploying 17,000 Raises Stakes in Afghanistan," *USA Today*, February 17, 2009.

⁶⁶ Ahmed Rashid, "How Obama Lost Karzai," *Foreign Policy*, February 21, 2011.

deployed.⁶⁷ Despite all of this, the Taliban continued to regain control in the region, with Major General Michael T. Flynn reporting that the Taliban was able to “sustain support, fuel legitimacy, and bolster capacity” and that conflicts would continue to increase in 2010.⁶⁸ The Taliban at this time is believed to have been almost at the level it had been before the September 11 attacks, with estimates reaching 25,000 fighters.⁶⁹

On May 2, 2011 a team of U.S. Navy Seals stormed a compound in Pakistan where they discovered and killed Osama bin Laden.⁷⁰ Despite this monumental and symbolic victory against al-Qaeda and the Taliban, the United States and the coalition continued to lose ground in their military endeavors. The Battle of Kandahar in just days after marked another victory for the Taliban. During this battle the Taliban attacked several different government buildings throughout the city of Kandahar with the objective being to drive out the Afghan government and take control of the city. The battle lasted two days and although it was a victory for the coalition forces the city experienced a large amount of damage.⁷¹

A month later President Obama announced a plan for the gradual removal of ground troops from the region, declaring that 10,000 troops would return throughout 2011, followed by 23,000 others by the summer of 2012. The rest of

⁶⁷ Frank Newport, "More Americans Now View Afghanistan War as a Mistake," *Gallup*, February 19, 2014.

⁶⁸ Peter Bergen, "U.S. Intelligence Briefing: Taliban Increasingly Effective," *Foreign Policy*, January 26, 2010.

⁶⁹ Michael O'Hanlon, "Staying Power: The U.S. Mission in Afghanistan Beyond 2011," *The Brookings Institution*, September 2010.

⁷⁰ Peter Baker, Helene Cooper, and Mark Mazzetti, "Bin Laden Is Dead, Obama Says," *The New York Times*, May 01, 2011.

⁷¹ "Afghanistan: Kandahar Taliban Attackers 'defeated'," *BBC News*, May 8, 2011.

NATO elected to follow the United States, with the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Norway, and Spain all planning gradual returns with a complete withdrawal as their ultimate goal.⁷² Despite these withdrawals, Taliban attacks continued at a steady rate.

When WikiLeaks released classified U.S. military documents in 2010, some of which referred to the covering-up of civilian casualties and certain military endeavors, the United States military faced significant criticism from the global community.⁷³ In January 2012 it came to light that there had been several incidents in which United States military service members had committed crimes or acts that were considered to be immoral and damaging to the image of Operation Enduring Freedom and the United States military. This included evidence of troops posing with or defiling the bodies of dead insurgents and civilians, videos of troops killing Afghans while laughing or signing, burning Qurans, and most notable the Panjwai massacre, where a U.S. Army Staff Sergeant killed sixteen civilians and wounded six others, with most of the victims being children and members of the same family.⁷⁴

President Karzai declared that the Panjwai incident indicated that the United States military should leave the region and allow the Afghan security forces to take control, as too many civilians had been killed under U.S. command. He also declared that the United States and NATO repeatedly refused to cooperate in investigations into civilian fatalities and therefore the only solution was a removal of the troops.

Across Afghanistan there were protests that took the form of the general decrying of

⁷² "ISAF- Chronology," *NATO*.

⁷³ John Bingham, "Wikileaks Afghanistan: Suggestions US Tried to Cover up Civilian Casualties," *The Telegraph*, July 27, 2010.

⁷⁴ "How It Happened: Massacre in Kandahar," *BBC News*, March 17, 2012.

Americans and American influence in the Middle East.⁷⁵ The Taliban made a public statement that the United States military would continue to commit such crimes, and that the Taliban would deliver revenge onto the Americans in the name of the victims. Two days later, after refusing to continue cooperating in peace talks with the Afghani government, the Taliban attacked an Afghan government envoy at the site of the attack, killing one and injuring three.⁷⁶

The Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement between the United States and Afghanistan was signed on May 2, 2012. This agreement planned for a withdrawal of U.S. troops while also maintaining a pathway of support between the two nations.⁷⁷ This was followed by a NATO summit weeks later in Chicago which outlined how NATO forces would withdraw from the region while offering support to Afghan security forces.⁷⁸ In summer of 2013 security had officially been transferred to the control of Afghan forces, with the number of Afghan troops and police reaching 350,000. Despite continued bombings and attacks by the Taliban, the withdrawal continued into 2014.⁷⁹ On October 26, 2014 the United States gave control of Camp Leatherneck to Afghan forces, marking the official end of United

⁷⁵ Emma Graham-Harrison, "President Karzai Casts Doubts on US Version of Afghan Village Massacre," *The Guardian*, March 16, 2012.

⁷⁶ Tom Peter, "Afghanistan Shooting: Protests Are Peaceful, but Era of Cooperation Closing," *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 13, 2012.

⁷⁷ The United States of American and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement Between the United States of American and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," May 2, 2012.

⁷⁸ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Chicago Summit Declaration on Afghanistan," News Release, May 21, 2012.

⁷⁹ Nathan Hodge, "Blast Mars Day of Security Handover in Kabul," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 18, 2013.

States combat operations in Afghanistan.⁸⁰ On December 28, 2014 NATO likewise ended their official combat operation, although the United States and NATO would each continue to give military support to the Afghan forces under Operation Freedom's Sentinel and Operation Resolute Support. American and NATO forces continue to maintain a presence in Afghanistan, albeit a much smaller one that is remnant of the original Special Forces team that Rumsfeld and Bush had in mind in 2001.⁸¹ The Taliban is still classified as a threat in the region, with significant victories in certain regions.⁸²

Lessons From this Operation

While Operation Enduring Freedom is still a continuing operation, between its creation in 2001 and its decline in 2014, it failed to achieve its primary goals and objectives. While at first it was successful at driving the Taliban out of the region and establishing dominance over the area, this power was not maintained. The Taliban was able to return to several of its previously held outposts and gained supporters and fighters that led it to be comparable in size to the Taliban at the time of September 11, 2001.⁸³ A primary problem that the United States government and military faced in Afghanistan was that conventional techniques of warfare were not adaptable to fighting an insurgency. These realist-based militaristic procedures are suitable in situations where the enemy is a traditional, known threat that will

⁸⁰ Dan Lamothe, "Why the End of Camp Leatherneck in Afghanistan Matters," *Washington Post*, October 27, 2014.

⁸¹ Department of Defense, "Statement by Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel on Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Freedom's Sentinel," News Release, December 28, 2014.

⁸² Edwin Mora, "Taliban Controls One-Third of Afghanistan Border Province," *Breitbart News*, March 16, 2016.

⁸³ Peter Bergen, "U.S. Intelligence Briefing: Taliban Increasingly Effective," *Foreign Policy*, January 26, 2010.

proceed in a predictable manner. In the case of an insurgency that is scattered throughout difficult and rough terrain and disbursed and camouflaged amongst civilians it falls dangerously short.

The “Power” Problem

One issue is that “power” is inappropriately defined in this case. The United States defined power materialistically. The United States military is the largest in the world as well as the most heavily funded, with weapons and capabilities that far outnumber anything the Taliban or al-Qaeda had under their control. To the United States there was no question of whether or not it could supply sufficient power to dominate the insurgencies, and therefore the operation seemed as if it would have a predictable outcome of victory. This power calculation was simply incorrect.

Constructivism teaches that power is as much a social issue as it is a materialistic one. Not only can power come in many hypothetical forms, it can also be re-defined based on the sociological and historical contexts of the actor involved.⁸⁴ To the Taliban power was defined not as pure military force, but rather as a collection of materialistic and hypothetical factors. These included: knowledge of the terrain and geography of the region; public support and assistance; and specialized training in guerilla tactics.

The Taliban was comprised of fighters from cities, villages, and tribes throughout Afghanistan. They had experience not only with the layout of the region but also the layout of geographical features that could prove especially treacherous

⁸⁴ Ted Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory,” *International Security* 23 (1998): 171-200.

to those without knowledge of them.⁸⁵ Amongst civilians, the Taliban was also able to garner public support, and therefore was able to blend in easily and quickly by masquerading as harmless civilians. This support network also provided the Taliban with intelligence on the location and capabilities of United States and coalition troops, whether from actual civilians or from operatives who were able to avoid detection.⁸⁶

Specialized training and guerilla tactics are perhaps the most important forms of power that the Taliban used. By both breaking off into smaller groups and using the previously mentioned terrain to their advantage, the Taliban was able to move throughout the region quickly without calling attention to themselves. This mobility was something that the United States did not handle very well. The traditional invasion tactics that the U.S. military used were ill equipped to respond to this type of evasion, and coupled with improvised explosive devices and guerilla attacks, conventional warfare power was simply not the correct factor in the conflict.⁸⁷ The strategic nature of the Taliban also allowed it to quickly retreat, as it did following the initial invasion, and wait for a more optimal time to retake power. The Taliban was able to regroup in Pakistan while gaining new recruits and training its fighters, and eventually became a viable opponent once more. If the United States had used a constructivist framing of power, it would have been able to recognize

⁸⁵ Sinno, Abdulkader, "The Rise of the Taliban, 1994–2001," in *Organizations at War in Afghanistan and Beyond*, (Cornell University Press, 2008), 222-253.

⁸⁶ Paul Davis, Eric Larson, et al. 2012. "Public Support for the Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan," in *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency and Terrorism*. (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2012), 71-89.

⁸⁷ Peter Bergen, "U.S. Intelligence Briefing: Taliban Increasingly Effective," *Foreign Policy*, January 26, 2010.

that a large military force compared to a small one does not automatically ensure a victory, and therefore military power should not be so heavily relied upon when fighting an insurgency. While this facet was considered within Operation Enduring Freedom, as evident based on the analysis conducted in the next chapter, it was not used to the capacity that it should have been. Power is relative to the identities of the states involved in the conflict, and must be calculated with these identities in mind.

Cultural Contexts

Another problem with the realist approach within the military campaigns in Afghanistan is it reduced the cultural contexts of the region to a secondary concern. Constructivism tells us that political actions in the international system are based on the social and cultural contexts of the region. In Afghanistan, perhaps the most important factor in the cultural realm is religion. Afghanistan is an Islamic nation, with 99.8 percent of the population identifying as either Sunni or Shia.⁸⁸ Insurgencies that claim to represent the faith of Islam while preaching extremism are able to gain support quickly. As mentioned before, public support of terrorist organizations and insurgencies can grow if the public believes that the organization is working to protect the interests of the religion. At the same time, Afghanistan is a nation and a region that has experienced countless invasions from outside forces. Great Britain first attempted to colonize the Afghan region in the nineteenth century, leading to a series of wars that lasted into the twentieth century.⁸⁹ The Soviet occupation of the nation during the Cold War only served to harden the

⁸⁸ "Afghanistan Demographics Profile 2014," Index Mundi, 2014.

⁸⁹ Robert Mackey, "Pakistan's British-Drawn Borders." *The New York Times*, May 5, 2009.

Afghan people to the idea that outside nations will attempt to invade them and use them for their own benefit.⁹⁰ This idea bleeds into several other concepts that will be discussed later. When the United States launched their military operation, despite attempting to be seen as bringing stability and democracy to the region, they were seen as the newest version of these outsider invaders. By failing to realize this essential identity that the Afghan people would assign to them, the United States only bolstered the propaganda that the Taliban and al-Qaeda sought to spread, therefore adding more fervor and passion to the fight against them.

Identity

Identity is another constructivist factor that the United States ignored when launching the kinetic military operations within Operation Enduring Freedom. As mentioned in the section on cultural contexts, Afghanistan is a nation with a very old and very deep cultural, social, and religious identity. Realism and realist-based policies such as those used in Operation Enduring Freedom ignore the role that identity plays in determining how two actors will relate to one another. The United States misjudged the identity that Afghanistan would act on, as well as the identity of the Taliban.

The Taliban's own self-defined identity as the defender of Islamic interests inherently made it a near impossible enemy to destroy.⁹¹ By constructing its identity out of religious beliefs that allow for violence and reward martyrdom the Taliban

⁹⁰ Paul Davis, Eric Larson, et al. 2012. "Public Support for the Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan," in *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency and Terrorism*. (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2012), 71-89.

⁹¹ "The Taliban," *The Council on Foreign Relations*. 2015.

became an actor that would stop at nothing to achieve its goals, even if that meant extinction. This identity informed its actions when committing the September 11 terrorist attacks as well as when responding to the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. This identity is also what accounted for the amounts of public support and recruited fighters that the Taliban experienced during the early years of Operation Enduring Freedom. Constructing an identity on religious contexts turned supporting the Taliban, or at least not opposing it, into a question of loyalty to the Muslim faith. While many Muslims reject the extremist doctrine of the Taliban and other terrorist organizations, this identity not only gave the Taliban credibility but also made them an attractive candidate for support in a volatile time.⁹² In believing that a decisive military campaign would be sufficient in destroying the Taliban's power in the region, the United States incorrectly believed that the Taliban would accept defeat once they lost their foothold in the nation. Instead, using this religious identity, the exiled members of the Taliban remained true to their cause and began using their identity to rebuild their forces.⁹³ If the United States had been using a constructivist viewpoint that took into consideration the Taliban's unique identity as an extremist religious organization, they might have been able to predict that only complete obliteration would end the Taliban's control.

The United States also failed to correctly identify Afghanistan or the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, as it would later become, as a sovereign nation with its own

⁹² Paul K. Davis and Angela O'Mahoney, "Specifying the Model," in *A Computational Model of Public Support for Insurgency and Terrorism: A Prototype for More-general Social-science Modeling*, (RAND Corporation, 2013), 9-10.

⁹³ Peter Bergen, "U.S. Intelligence Briefing: Taliban Increasingly Effective," *Foreign Policy*, January 26, 2010.

interests and context. The United States, NATO, and Afghan security forces conducted military operations in coordination with each other. This cooperation and mutual dependence allowed for a positive relationship to be built, in particular between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. However when the civilian fatalities and breaches of this trust on behalf of the United States began to be exposed, this relationship quickly became more complicated.⁹⁴ The United States had originally hoped to enter Afghanistan, expel the Taliban, and establish a democracy. The identity of this established democracy that would emerge clearly was not the identity that the United States wished it to have. Under President Karzai the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan became a nation with its own control over the region and established legitimacy, and therefore it constructed an identity of a sovereign nation with its own interests that were separate from those of the United States.

President Karzai's declaration that NATO troops had to leave the region for the protection of the Afghan people clearly shows that this identity was taking hold, and that the United States had not accounted for it.⁹⁵ The military had been conducting air strikes and targeting civilian areas suspected of harboring terrorists with the opinion that this was simply another tactic to achieve the shared objective of ridding Afghanistan of the Taliban. Events such as the bombing of a wedding in Kandahar that killed thirty civilians, with none of them holding any known

⁹⁴ Emma Graham-Harrison, "President Karzai Casts Doubts on US Version of Afghan Village Massacre," *The Guardian*, March 16, 2012.

⁹⁵ Emma Graham-Harrison, "President Karzai Casts Doubts on US Version of Afghan Village Massacre," *The Guardian*, March 16, 2012. ; Carlotta Gall, "16 Civilians Die as U.S. Troops Open Fire in Afghanistan," *The New York Times*, March 04, 2007.

affiliation with the Taliban or al-Qaeda, drove the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to take actions that reflected its identity.⁹⁶ Under constructivism, such a response would have been predictable, as attacks on civilians and civilian fatalities directly conflict with the identity of a sovereign nation attempting to gain the support of its public. Under realism however, the United States assumed that they held the power, and that the Republic would continue to believe that United States control was in their best interest.

The Other

Constructivism tells us that part of identity formation is the presence and recognition of an “other”, or an identity that is in opposition.⁹⁷ For the Taliban, the United States had constructed the perfect “other” identity for them to act on. The Western world is representative of nearly everything that extremist Islam condemns. The Taliban was able to use this identity as a contrast to the identity they were attempting to construct, explaining not only why the September 11, 2001 attacks were carried out, but also why the Taliban was so willing to face destruction in a war against the United States. The Taliban could not fully realize their identity without the oppositional force of the United States, and therefore a fight against the United States’ identity became a vital part to the very existence of the Taliban’s identity.

If the United States could have recognized this fact it would have been possible for them to take advantage of it, however their realist approach made such

⁹⁶ Luke Harding, and Matthew Engel, "US Bomb Blunder Kills 30 at Afghan Wedding," *The Guardian*, July 1, 2002.

⁹⁷ Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory," *International Security* 23 (1998): 184-186.

a strategy impossible. It was not simply the Taliban that had identified the United States as the “other”, but also the Afghan people. As mentioned before, the value of public support should not be minimized, especially when running or fighting an insurgency.⁹⁸ By realizing that the Afghan people assigned them an identity as the “other”, the United States could have attempted to use the lessons of constructivist theory to change their perceived identity to one of similarities instead of differences. By continuing on with a identity perceived to be based on invasions and occasional hostile acts towards civilians the United States continued to be the enemy that must be beaten back, no matter the cost. When the unfortunate atrocities sometimes committed by United States military personnel began to come to light this identity was only further cemented.

Conclusion

Operation Enduring Freedom is an example of the conventional, realism-based policies on which the United States relies so heavily when conducting foreign policy missions. It is also an example of what happens when realism falls short. If the United States hopes to develop better policies when it comes to combatting insurgencies and terrorist organizations, it must develop policies that take into account the historical, sociological, and psychological factors of the regions and the organizations it wishes to reach.

Chapter 4: Case Study on Constructivist and Psychological-Based Policies in Afghanistan

Winning the War of Hearts and Minds

In 2009 the United States sent a surge of troops to Afghanistan with a different doctrine in focus: that of counterinsurgency. Counterinsurgency became a larger target of focus within U.S. military doctrine in 2006, when Field Manual 3-24 was published outlining what exactly counterinsurgency was and how it would be used by the U.S. military, as well as stressing that force should take on a secondary role in favor of more intellectually-based approaches.⁹⁹ In 2009 the U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide officially defined counterinsurgency as “comprehensive civilian and military efforts taken to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes”. Counterinsurgency tactics recognize that insurgency conflicts are inherently political and social, and therefore require different approaches than conventional warfare to truly be ended.¹⁰⁰ By adopting more of the lessons of constructivism as opposed to a strictly realist approach, many practices used by the United States in Afghanistan that followed the “hearts and minds” approach to counterinsurgency are a step in the right direction towards a more holistic approach to combatting terrorism.

It should be noted that counterterrorism theory and counterinsurgency theory are two different concepts. While both attempt to slow and eventually end the power of extremism, they each face a different type of extremism and thus must respond differently. Counterterrorism is inherently difficult to define, as terrorism

⁹⁹ United States Army, *Counterinsurgency Field Manual: 3-24*, 2007.

¹⁰⁰ United States Government, *Counterinsurgency Guide*, 2009

can have a variety of forms and thus require a variety of responses.¹⁰¹ A general definition is “operations that include the offensive measures taken to prevent, deter, preempt, and respond to terrorism.”¹⁰² Counterinsurgency, on the other hand, is defined as “those military, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat an insurgency.”¹⁰³ Counterinsurgency policy inherently adopts a holistic approach to “combat” while counterterrorism operates under the assumption that strategies must be as “bloodless, risk-free, and precise as possible.”¹⁰⁴ While both counterterrorism and counterinsurgency doctrine share similarities and are closely related, their strategies are not interchangeable and should not be treated as such.

Within counterinsurgency doctrine there are two separate bodies of thought. The first is the “winning the war of hearts and minds” approach, which attempts to win over the population affected by an insurgency by using emotional, mental, and intellectual appeals to them. By offering not only security and necessities for survival, but also ambitious development projects, this strategy attempts to gain not only legitimacy, but also support from a targeted population. The opposite body within counterinsurgency is the “draining the sea” approach, which follows the same policies that kinetic military operations rely on. This line of thought argues that killing targeted civilian populations ensures that insurgencies no longer have

¹⁰¹ Paul Wilkinson, *Terrorism Versus Democracy: The Liberal State Response*, (New York: Routledge, 2006) 203.

¹⁰² US Army Field Manual 4, 2006.

¹⁰³ Michael Boyle, “Terrorism and Insurgency,” in *Contemporary Security and Strategy*, (Palgrave Macmillan: 2008) 186.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Ignatieff, *Virtual War*, (London: Vintage Random House, 2001) 164.

supporters who can offer them assistance, either in passive or active forms. Such tactics are most successful when a population is small, easily contained, and unable to give active support to the insurgency, no matter how willing they are.¹⁰⁵ While both of these strategies are included in the broader counterinsurgency doctrine, only the “winning the war of hearts and minds” approach accounts for the lessons of constructivism. This strategy was also the counterinsurgency approach that was adopted by the United States during Operation Enduring Freedom.

Human Terrain Teams

By 2006 it was obvious that the United States military was not winning the war in Afghanistan through kinetic military operations alone. It was also obvious that the United States did not have sufficient intelligence on the cultural and social context of the population, with Major General Robert Scales declaring that the U.S. military did not have sufficient cultural awareness to carry out successful warfare in the region.¹⁰⁶ In 2006 the Human Terrain System (HTS) was created within the United States Army, with the objective of gaining the cultural knowledge necessary for carrying out missions in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Human Terrain System is made up of a series of Human Terrain Teams (HTTs), made up of social scientists, researchers, anthropologists, and soldiers who work together to interact with locals and gain socio-cultural intelligence for the use of military personnel.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Alexander B. Downes, "Draining the Sea by Filling the Graves: Investigating the Effectiveness of Indiscriminate Violence as a Counterinsurgency Strategy," *Civil Wars: The Origins and Effectiveness of Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Strategies* 9, issue 4 (2007): 420-444.

¹⁰⁶ Karl Eikenberry, "The Limits of Counterinsurgency Doctrine in Afghanistan," *Foreign Affairs*, September 2013.

¹⁰⁷ *Human Terrain System*, Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin, 2011.

Paktia Province

In 2007 coalition and Afghan security forces were deployed to the Paktia Province in eastern Afghanistan because of an unusually high number of suicide bombings, suspected insurgents, and attacks on both coalition and Afghan officials.¹⁰⁸ A Human Terrain Team traveled with the forces into the region, where they determined that poverty was rampant in the area along with a high concentration of widowed women. In the social context of a patriarchal society of Afghanistan, this forced young men to seek out work in order to support their families. Most often, they turned to the Taliban for employment, acting as paid insurgents. Based on these findings, the United States began a program in the Paktia Province that sought to give women job training.

The same team also analyzed an incident in which the Taliban, in what was originally assessed to be an act of intimidation, beheaded a tribal elder. In contrast to this original assessment, the Human Terrain Team determined that the beheading was an attempt to further the divide between members of the Zadran tribe.¹⁰⁹ One of the oldest and most powerful tribes in the southeastern region, inter-tribal conflict would have allowed the Taliban to take control of the area and the people. Colonel Martin Schweitzer stated that combat operation conducted by his unit, the 82nd Airborne Division, in the Paktia Province decreased by sixty percent after the arrival of Human Terrain Teams. According to him, the focus shifted away from fighting the Taliban towards aiding the Afghan population through a “human

¹⁰⁸ *Human Terrain System*, Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin, 2011.

¹⁰⁹ David Rohde, "Army Enlists Anthropology in War Zones," *The New York Times*, October 05, 2007.

perspective...focused on bringing governance down to the people".¹¹⁰ The Human Terrain Team in the Paktia province also established a free medical clinic, acted as mediators for inter- and intra-tribal conflicts, and assisted with the establishment of a school.

Anthropology

One of the most promising features of the Human Terrain System was that it attempted to use the field of anthropology to fully understand the cultural and sociological contexts of Afghanistan and the Afghan people.¹¹¹ By recognizing that cultural knowledge is essential in developing effective counterinsurgency policies, the HTS accounted for the main tenet of constructivism: that all political action is based upon the cultural and historical contexts of the actors.¹¹²

Montgomery McFate, an anthropologist with the United States Navy and the creator of the Human Terrain System, argues that when the United States began to encounter non-conventional enemies in the second half of the twentieth century, such as insurgencies, the doctrine of conventional warfare became less attractive and less effective. Because insurgencies are based in the cultural and social context of the regions they are rooted in, it is vital that military personnel understand these origins as well as how they motivate the actors. HTTs attempted to not just focus on the realist aspects of the conflict, but rather to reach the roots of where the conflict had come from, how it had evolved, and where it had the potential to go. HTPs also

¹¹⁰ David Rohde, "Army Enlists Anthropology in War Zones," *The New York Times*, October 05, 2007.

¹¹¹ Noah Shachtman, "Army Social Scientists Calm Afghanistan, Make Enemies at Home," *WIRED*, November 29, 2007.

¹¹² Within the anthropological community questions were raised concerning the morality of anthropologists collecting information and data for military use. These concerns are outside the scope of this thesis, and will not be discussed.

attempted to understand the Afghan people by studying them anthropologically.¹¹³ By doing so, HTPs placed value on the historical and cultural background of the individuals that made up the political actors involved in the conflict.

As the United States began to withdraw from Afghanistan it was decided that Human Terrain Teams would be taken out of the region as well. The Pentagon largely shifted its focus from cultural and social intelligence in the region in favor of digital intelligence collection from outside the region. U.S. Representative Duncan Hunter launched a campaign against the program in early 2014, claiming that it was expensive and ineffective, compounding the general United States position that irregular warfare should not be focused upon.¹¹⁴ In 2014 the Human Terrain System was officially defunded.

Provincial Reconstruction Teams

When International Security Assistance Forces were authorized by NATO to deploy in Afghanistan in December 2001 plans were made for Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) to be sent as well. These teams, like Human Terrain Teams, are made up of a collection of civilians and soldiers. PRTs from the United States are made up of soldiers, civilian advisors, and civilian members of foreign affairs agencies such as the Department of State, USAID, or the Department of

¹¹³ *Human Terrain System*, Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin, 2011.

¹¹⁴ Christopher Lamb et al., "The Way Ahead for Human Terrain Teams," *Joint Forces Quarterly* 70(2013): 21-29. ; Tom Vandenbrook, "Military Social Sciences Tab up to \$726M since '07," *USA Today*, January 02, 2014.

Justice, usually totaling sixty to one hundred people per team.¹¹⁵ Each team develops its own strategy, with the focus in Afghanistan in 2003 through 2012 being on establishing a strong governing alternative to the Taliban and al-Qaeda while maintaining short-term control.¹¹⁶

The overall goal of PRTs is to provide the Afghan people with humanitarian aid and assistance in regions experiencing conflict and insecurity. Provincial Reconstruction Teams first operated in Afghanistan in the beginning of 2003. They were spread throughout the region and inserted into various cities and areas in an attempt to respond to the needs and concerns of that specific community. In regions of relative peace, PRTs are able to focus on development projects, whereas in regions of more intense and dangerous conflict, PRTs have to also focus on their own security. Because individual NATO member nations create and deploy PRTs, each team is unique in how it responds to and interacts with the community. While some nations take a more military-focused approach in their administration, many others focus on negotiation, mediation, and community building.¹¹⁷ PRT development projects ranged from the distribution of supplies and humanitarian aid, the building of schools, and conducting public diplomacy in the region. Outreach is conducted to determine the needs of the particular community as well as to gain the trust of the people and assure them that the PRTs are stationed for their benefit. By engaging with the leadership of tribes and regions, PRTs are able to commit to

¹¹⁵ Peter Viggo Jakobsen, "PRTs in Afghanistan: Successful but not Sufficient," *Danish Institute for International Studies*, 2005.

¹¹⁶ NATO Review, "NATO Review: Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan".

¹¹⁷ NATO Review, "NATO Review: Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan".

community engagement and harvest trust between the local population and the PRTs, as well as the NATO forces they represent.¹¹⁸

In April 2008 there were twenty-five PRTs operating in Afghanistan, but by 2013 only one PRT was still deployed, as many of them had been returned during the NATO withdrawal from the region.

The Definition of Power as Assumed by the HTS and PRTs

Both the Human Terrain System and Provincial Reconstruction Teams, perhaps unconsciously, did not place a focus on the realist conceptualization of power dynamics, zero-sum games, and systemic-level analysis. As opposed to the kinetic military operations that were run by the United States and NATO, HTTs and PRTs are proof that factors beyond physical strength and weapons capabilities determine the power within international relations. The United States' efforts to recognize and analyze cultural and social knowledge as sources of power within military combat operations had been almost non-existent before the implementation of these programs.¹²² With these programs, the United States was beginning to recognize that societal intelligence and cultural knowledge convey are factors in power as well, and that this type of power can help to determine the victor in a conflict.

¹¹⁸ Robert M. Perito, "The U.S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan-Lessons Identified," *United States Institute of Peace Special Reports* 152 (2005).

¹²² Karl Eikenberry, "The Limits of Counterinsurgency Doctrine in Afghanistan," *Foreign Affairs*, September 2013.

In particular, each of these programs made an effort to recognize the power of public support. One of the most important parts of any counterinsurgency policy is the ability to triumph over insurgencies in the fight for control of the population.¹²³ The military operations that the United States and NATO had been conducting showed a lack of interest in this vital power factor, leading to tension between the troops and the Afghan people as well as between the United States and the Afghan government they had worked to put into power. The Human Terrain System made a valiant effort to not only identify this power, but to work to improve it by improving the relationships between the coalition troops and the Afghan populace. By mapping out social norms, cultural influences, and the sociological constructs of the region and the individual communities, HTTs were able to grasp this power and give the United States the potential to use it. Provincial Reconstruction Teams conducted a similarly social-power-based program. By acting as a *de facto* public relations team for their nations and NATO, PRTs worked to win over the allegiance of the Afghan people.¹²⁴

By creating social welfare programs, providing the Afghan people with supplies and resources, establishing medical care centers, and working to solve rifts between tribes or tribal factions, both types of team were unconsciously deciding to put constructivism and sociology to work in the warzone of Afghanistan.

¹²³ Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clarke, Beth Grill, and Molly Dunigan, *Paths to Victory: Detailed Insurgency Case Studies* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2013).

¹²⁴ Robert Bebbler, "The Role of Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Counterinsurgency Operations: Khost Province, Afghanistan," *Small Wars Journal* (2008): 1-18.

Looking Through the Lens of Constructivism

HTS, PRTs, and Identity

Perhaps the best constructivist concept that these two programs sought to utilize was the idea that each actor in a political system makes actions based on its identity. The main goal of these programs was to discover and analyze the correct identities of the parties involved. Although these teams did not work directly with the Taliban, they researched how the Taliban had maintained its power in the region, in particular how it had maneuvered the social and cultural terrain of the region. As General David Petraeus described it, in the fight against the Taliban “the Afghan people are the decisive ‘terrain,’” and these programs sought to understand this terrain as best they could.¹²⁵

Where combat operations and policies had failed to understand that the identity of the Afghan people had to be understood in order to achieve victory, HTTs worked to understand how this identity was constructed, how it informed the actions of the Afghan people, and how it could be used to appeal to and negotiate with the leadership and other actors in the region. Their successes at integrating into communities and evaluating the true sources of problems are testament to their ability to correctly interpret both the cultural and sociological contexts of Afghanistan and the identities that they created.¹²⁶ The PRTs’ shift toward acting as a confidant and negotiator for tribal leadership shows a similar ability to

¹²⁵ D.H. Petraeus, “The Future of the Alliance and the Mission in Afghanistan,” 45th Munich Security Conference, February 8, 2009.

¹²⁶ *Human Terrain System*, Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin, 2011.

understand the reality of the cultural situation in Afghanistan and develop strategies based on their obtained knowledge.¹²⁷

The Other

The Human Terrain Teams and Provincial Reconstruction Teams also attempted to change the identities of coalition forces as they were perceived by the Afghan people, to limited success. These programs were attempting to change public opinion of the NATO and United States forces in the region by strengthening ties and creating a mutual understanding with the Afghan people. Constructivism and psychology would define this as an actor attempting to lessen their role as the oppositional “other” in the eyes of the counter-actor.¹²⁹ Part of the reason coalition forces had difficulty in the region is that they were not accepted by the population. As mentioned before, the military side of the conflict enforced the idea that the Western world was invading, and that they were not acting in the best interests of the Afghan people. HTTs and PRTs attempted to change this view.

A problem within the PRTs was that they were intended to be a collection of civilians and military personnel working collaboratively to reach out to the population. In reality, a large majority of the members of the sixty to one hundred people teams were military personnel.¹³⁰ This reinforced the idea that these teams were simply another division of the combat mission, and therefore that civilians could not trust them. As evidenced by President Karzai’s declaration that the PRTs

¹²⁷ NATO Review, “NATO Review: Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan”.

¹²⁹ Ted Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory,” *International Security* 23 (1998): 171-200.

¹³⁰ Robert Bebbler, “The Role of Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Counterinsurgency Operations: Khost Province, Afghanistan,” *Small Wars Journal* (2008): 1-18.

were harming the establishment of a stable government, as opposed to helping it, the Afghan people and government identified the PRTs as a risk to their sovereignty.

PRTs faced a host of problems, mainly based in security. The goal of PRTs was rooted in the United States military, and thus made the teams an attractive target to insurgents in the region, perhaps unsurprisingly. Some teams, such as those in the Kandahar region, experienced significant casualties.¹³¹ With the Taliban interpreting the PRTs as another military operation, the Afghan population followed suit.

The Psychology of HTTs and PRTs

As psychology tells us, individuals are motivated by their needs. Base needs, such as food, shelter, and safety, must be met before social, self-esteem, and self-actualization can be achieved.¹³² HTTs and PRTs attempted to usurp the Taliban from its potential role as the source of need fulfillment for the Afghan people. By offering people humanitarian aid, medical treatment, and training programs, HTTs attempted to first ensure that the Afghan people's basic needs were being met. They also hoped to establish procedures through which the population's needs would be met by organizations other than the Taliban. In the instance of the Paktia province, where young men were turning to the Taliban to earn a wage and support their families, the HTT worked to ensure that women could take over the role as the breadwinner, and therefore prevent young people from turning to the Taliban for the fulfillment of their needs. PRTs also recognized this concept, as they worked to

¹³¹ NATO Review, "NATO Review: Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan".

¹³² A. H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," in *Classics in the History of Psychology*, (Web, 1997).

ensure that the needs of the region they were stationed in were met by means other than insurgency. Where militaristic, combat-focused polices had ignored the psychology of the people they were interacting with, these sociological policies recognized its importance.

Criticism

Despite the many successes of these programs, and the significance of their integration into the more kinetic military approach, both of these programs faced considerable criticism. Lack of public support and trust in the region led to major setbacks, especially with the PRTs. A disconnect between these programs and the Afghan government, as well as non-governmental organizations operating in the region, led to confusion and anger which in turn led to stunted growth and success. HTTs received considerable criticism from the anthropological community, which declared that anthropology should not be used as military intelligence to assist in the occupation of a nation.¹³³ This led to a discrediting of many of the social scientists involved in the program, as well as difficulties in recruiting talent to join the teams. Overall both of these programs were too heavily connected to their respective combat objectives to succeed. While they attempted to use the sociological and psychological concepts on which constructivism is based, they were not able to fully realize this theory. While these programs were working models of the highly applicable lessons of constructivism and psychology as pertaining to counterinsurgency, their goals were overshadowed by a failed kinetic military

¹³³ Roberto J. Gonzalez, "Phoenix Reborn?: The Rise of the Human Terrain System," *Anthropology Today* 23 (6) (2007):21-22.

campaign. The true potential and implementation of these ideas and policies could not be achieved while the programs were subservient to military operations, as they acted as secondary-support systems to the kinetic activities. Had the programs been allowed to thrive and act as independent endeavors, their potential for success would have been much greater.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The dual threats of terrorism and insurgency are some of the most pressing issues of the modern world. With the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, perhaps there has never been a moment in international relations when new and innovative counterterrorism and counterinsurgency policies were so desperately needed. While it is foolish to think that terrorism and insurgency – based on ideologies and tactics that have existed since the beginning of warfare - will ever be eradicated, it is possible to stem their power and prevent them from wreaking havoc within the international political system. The endless flow of military campaigns in the Middle East have only served to further the ideology of Islamic extremism, not weaken it as intended. Kinetic, conventional military operations based on the fundamental zero-sum calculus of power politics espoused by realist thinkers have failed to adequately respond to the need for new tactics, but constructivism and psychologically based concepts of human social behavior offer explanations and predictions where realism falls short. By opening policy aims to the implications of regional social contexts, historical backgrounds, and the true situation in which people make decisions, constructivism and psychology allow policymakers to truly understand the people and organizations with whom they are working. Psychology helps to complete this theory by explaining the mentality of the people making up these organizations, the reasoning behind their choices, and how it may be possible to persuade them to abandon these choices. While these theories are far from perfect, and cannot hope to explain every action within the international political system, they help fill in cracks where other theories fail.

Hopefully, with a turn to innovative responses, international violent extremism can be limited and discouraged. The United States and the Western world clearly understand the need for new policies, as evidenced by the sociological-based programs that were attempted in Afghanistan; however, it is a need to which the United States government has not fully committed as of yet. While the theory of constructivism is far from perfect, and cannot hope to explain every action within the international political system, it helps fill in cracks where other theories fail. This thesis aims to demonstrate that with a turn to innovative responses, international violent extremism can be limited and discouraged.

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