SHIFTING STRATEGIES AND TACTICS OF THE US/NATO FORCES AND THE TALIBAN IN THE PRESENT AFGHAN WAR

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It has been a decade since the United States invaded Afghanistan and toppled the Taliban regime in response to the September 2001 terrorist attacks by the Al Qaeda against targets in America. The initial ground assault by the Northern Alliance and US Special Forces, backed by an air campaign, led to the quick collapse of the Taliban. But a decade on, a ferocious insurgency is being waged by the Taliban and their supporters as the US plans to withdraw most of its forces from Afghanistan by 2014, which will surely be followed, or even preceded, by its North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) allies, without America being able to stabilise the country or achieve all of its political objectives. This paper will try to understand the changes that have occurred in the strategies and tactics of both sides during the course of the war. The nature of the Taliban insurgency will be looked at and the attempt will be made to understand if the insurgency is purely a guerrilla war or something else. The present war would be briefly compared with the Afghan War of the 1980s and also the Taliban's military campaigns till 2001. Before going into these

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details, it is important to look at the kind of warfare that was adopted by both sides.

LINEAR AND NON-LINEAR WARFARE

While the most commonly used classification of warfare is attrition warfare and manoeuvre warfare, what is increasingly being preferred is the classification of warfare as linear and non-linear as it explains the full range of options available to fighting forces all over the world. While linear refers to a line or lines, then linearity in the context of warfare can be regarded as tactics that use linear tactical formations such as lines. Linear formations especially became common after the introduction of gunpowder.[1] At the same time, linearity is not just about the shape of formations and armies. It is more about the number of directions that fighting occurs in. An army uses linear tactics if it normally trains to conduct offensive operations on a single continuous front at the tactical-operational level.[2] Most modern-day armies are mostly trained to fight in the linear manner. On the other hand, non-linear warfare consists of operations in which units move and fight in multiple directions, are widely separated and are capable of supporting each other by concentrating mass or fires.[3] While linear warfare is more static, methodical, attrition-based and siege-like, non-linear operations are fragmented, dynamic and manoeuvre-based. Armies or units that use linear tactics generally are better protected (heavier), less mobile, possess greater close combat power, and rely on thicker and more stable lines of supply than armies that normally use non-linear tactics. In non-linear warfare, there is no line of adjacent friendly units stretching left and right, no stable front, flanks, and rear.

There are three kinds of non-linear warfare. They are (a) manoeuvre; (b) guerrilla and other special operations; and, finally (c) swarming. As opposed to the attrition/manoeuvre classification, manoeuvre warfare here is just one of three different non-linear war-fighting methods. Manoeuvre

1. Sean J. A. Edwards, *Swarming and the Future of Warfare*, PhD. Thesis (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2005), p. 29.
2. Ibid, p. 31.
3. Ibid, p. xviii

warfare has been mostly used by certain nation-state armies during the 20th century, resulting in highly successful military campaigns. Typically, armies using manoeuvre tactics did not advance as a line against the opposing linear front.[4] Rapid advances were made by mobile troops bypassing enemy centres of strength. The focus was on combined arms, developed battlefield command, mobility and the avoidance of static warfare.[5] Examples of the use of manoeuvre warfare include by the Germans during the two World Wars, including the *blitzkrieg*, the Deep Operation Theory of the Soviet Red Army which was developed during the 1920s and 1930s but could not be implemented during the early stages of World War II due to Stalin's purges, the Operational Manoeuvre Groups (OMGs) of the Soviets during the 1980s and, finally, the Air-Land Battle Concept of the United States during the 1980s and the 1990s. These concepts are relevant in the Afghan context to the strategies and tactics adopted by the US and NATO forces.

In guerrilla warfare, the emphasis is on movement and evasion over direct and sustained confrontation. Guerrillas rely on stealth to conduct surprise raids and ambushes and then quickly withdraw because they do not have heavy weapons or armour. Guerrillas do not maintain a linear front nor do they rely on major lines of communication. They fight a war without fronts. Guerrilla fighters need bases and sanctuaries for units to recover from battles, reorganise and rest. It is these areas that need access to a steady flow of supplies, not the mobile units in the field.[6] The presence of safe and secure bases in Pakistani territory had allowed the Afghan Mujahideen to fight the Soviets during the 1980s and currently enables the Afghan Taliban to fight US/NATO forces. The final type of non-linear warfare is swarming. Swarming has been studied in detail by John Arquilla, David Ronfeldt and Sean J. Edwards of the RAND Corporation. According to Edwards, "Swarming occurs when several units conduct a convergent attack on a target from multiple axes."[7]

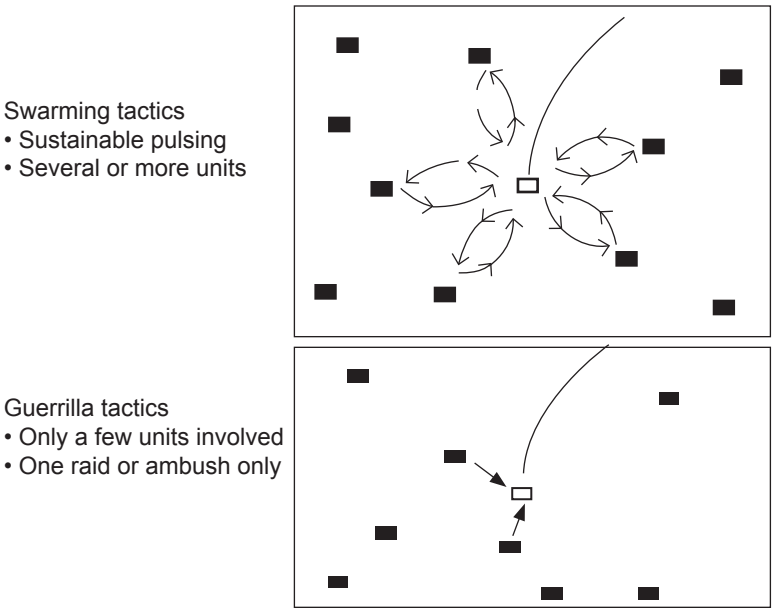
4. Ibid, pp. 49-50.
5. John Buckley, "Land Warfare: Attrition and Maneuver", in George Kassimeris & John Buckley, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Modern Warfare* (Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2010), pp. 96-97.
6. Edwards, n. 1, pp. 62-63.
7. Ibid., p. xvii.

Swarming involves the convergent actions of several units that continue to attack by dispersing, manoeuvring, and reinitiating combat (pulsing).

Swarming refers to a convergent attack by many units as the primary manoeuvre from the start of the battle or campaign not the convergent attacks that result as a matter of course when some unit becomes isolated and encircled because of some other manoeuvre like linear warfare. Swarming involves running battles of encirclement, in other words, a moving battle where the surrounded force can continue to move as a whole. Swarming units do not attempt to maintain a static perimeter around a defender, they tend to give ground when counter-attacked and maintain a looser flexible encirclement. Swarming involves the convergent actions of several units that continue to attack by dispersing, manoeuvring, and reinitiating combat (pulsing). In other words, swarming usually involves sustained pulsing rather than sustained close combat. Pulsing is what distinguishes swarming from guerrilla ambushes. Guerrilla attacks usually involve only one or two units that conduct a raid or ambush and then disperse to end the battle.[8] According to John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, "Examples of swarming can be found throughout history, but it is only now able to emerge as a doctrine in its own right. That is largely because swarming depends on devolution of power to small units and a capacity to interconnect those units that has only recently become feasible, due to the information revolution."[9]

8. Ibid., pp. 66-68.
9. John Arquilla & David Ronfeldt, *Swarming & the Future of Conflict* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2000), p. vii.

Fig 1: Differences Between Swarming Tactics and Guerrilla Tactics



Source: Sean J. A. Edwards, *Swarming and the Future of Warfare*, PhD. Thesis (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2005), p. 69.

Swarming, according to Arquilla and Ronfeldt, involves "sustainable pulsing" of either force or fires. The introduction of precision-guided munitions does not mean that swarming will be done merely by fires.[10] This is most evident by the wars and conflicts that have taken place after the Gulf War of 1990-91. Swarming has been used by insurgent groups and militias against more powerful conventional armies with more firepower during the 1990s and the 2000s.

US AND NATO MILITARY STRATEGY AND TACTICS

The Bush Administration

When the US decided to attack the Taliban regime in 2001 for its sheltering of Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda, the Afghan entity was very different from what it is today. The Taliban were conventional actors with tanks

10. Ibid., pp. 21-22.

and artillery that occupied traditional fighting positions. Linear warfare capitalising on superior firepower was used against an enemy that presented a lucrative array of targets.[11] Special Forces directed precision fires against Taliban positions and assistance was provided to the Northern Alliance which was conducting the ground campaign. But once the Taliban collapsed, they ceased to become a conventional enemy. As the war became unconventional, the US response became more conventional. There was a need to shift from linear to non-linear warfare. The military theoretician, Edward Luttwak, has noted that all armed forces combine elements of linear warfare and non-linear warfare. The closer a military is to linear warfare, the more inward is the focus. Internal administration and operations receive the most attention, and the organisation is much less responsive to the external environment comprising the enemy, the terrain and the specific phenomenon of any particular conflict. On the other hand, non-linear warfare is more externally focussed. Studying the enemy, identifying his weaknesses, and configuring one's own capabilities to exploit those weaknesses achieves victory.[12]

The linear style warfare of the US, which includes heavy aerial bombardment, has been criticised as it has resulted in civilian casualties which, in turn, has antagonised the population and contributed to swelling the ranks of the insurgents. While the US chain of command was advantageous for unconventional warfare before the collapse of the Taliban, it became more conventional when the need was exactly the opposite. The ever increasing size of the military command and control system in Afghanistan created delays in getting permission for Special Forces operations. In this manner, the initiative is lost to the insurgents. The conventionalisation of the US campaign in Afghanistan was the result of the creation of Combined Joint Task Force 180 under the command of a regular army General, a development which marginalised the Special Operations Forces.[13] The focus on linearity has resulted in less attention on providing

11. Hy. S. Rothstein, *Afghanistan and the Troubled Future of Unconventional Warfare* (New Delhi: Manas Pulications, 2006), p. 12.
12. Ibid., pp. xiv-2.
13. Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnokov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (New York: Columbia Univesity Press, 2008), p. 189.

security to the local population. Intelligence is the principal source of information on insurgents. But the lack of safety and assurance about the fact that the insurgents are losing has prevented the population from providing intelligence. The lack of unity of effort among the government agencies has further increased the problem. Wave after wave of coalition forces from different units and organisations invaded the villages and towns of Afghans in pursuit of the same objectives, earning the displeasure of the population.

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There are also differences in the approach of the US Army units and the Special Forces. While both forces were involved in Operation Mountain Sweep in August 2002, the US Army's lack of awareness about the local culture resulted in the loss of whatever the Special Forces had achieved in the previous six months in terms of counter-insurgency and intelligence operations.[14] The US strategy during the early years of the war in Afghanistan under the Bush Administration was based on a 'Light Footprint Strategy' which focussed on putting a smaller number of troops on the ground in Afghanistan to attain objectives. This was on the basis of the need to avoid the experience of the Soviet Union. But it resulted in lack of adequate numbers of troops to stabilise Afghanistan. The war in Iraq diverted attention away from Afghanistan which allowed the Taliban insurgency to gain strength. The Bush Administration had no political strategy for Afghanistan because of its preoccupation with Iraq. Rather than an increase in the Special Forces component, most of the Special Forces soldiers were soon pulled out of Afghanistan to serve in Iraq. There has also been a downsizing in vital air assets like helicopters. US troops in the southern parts of Afghanistan were forced to respond to minor Taliban attacks in Humvees. With an average overland speed of 5-10 miles an hour over rocky terrain, Taliban insurgents are long gone before the US forces arrive.[15]

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which is a multinational coalition, was in the first four years of the war, mainly based in Kabul and had

14. Rothstein, n. 11, p. 140.
15. Kathy Ganon, *I is for Infidel: From Holy War to Holy Terror: 18 Years Inside Afghanistan* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), p. 16.

While NATO assumed command of the ISAF, the nature of deployment of troops by individual NATO member nations reflected differences in the way they looked at their mission in Afghanistan.

little or no presence in the provinces. Only in 2006 did the ISAF contingents begin to be deployed in the south under the NATO command. With the increasing role of the ISAF, there were two separate commands operating in Afghanistan: the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the main aim of which was to fight the Taliban and Al Qaeda and the ISAF Command, tasked with Afghan reconstruction. US Special Forces were placed under Operation Enduring Freedom.[16] The operation of two separate commands created complications in the counter-insurgency effort in Afghanistan. US forces under OEF conducted operations in ISAF territory without informing NATO commanders.[17] The US handing over the security of the southern provinces to NATO increased doubts about America's commitment to Afghanistan as NATO was not trained in counter-insurgency operations.[18] While NATO assumed command of the ISAF, the nature of deployment of troops by individual NATO member nations reflected differences in the way they looked at their mission in Afghanistan. Deployments came along with what is termed as 'national caveats' whereby each NATO member decided on the number of troops to be stationed, the area in which they were to be deployed, and the nature of their duties. The United States, Britain and Canada are the main countries involved in counter-insurgency operations against the Taliban in the south and east of Afghanistan. Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Greece are deployed in the more stable areas and are not involved in combating the insurgency.[19]

In the case of Afghanistan, the United States and NATO have committed the least number of troops for any peace-keeping mission since World War II.

16. Antonio Giustozzi in Caroline Holmquist-Jonsäter and Christopher Coker, eds., *Novelty is in the Eye of the Beholder: Understanding the Taliban in Afghanistan* (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), p. 60.
17. Ibid., p. 60.
18. Seth G. Jones, "Averting Failure in Afghanistan", *Survival*, vol. 48, no. 1, Spring 2006, p. 111.
19. Caroline Wyatt and Rob Watson, "Nato at Pains to Dismiss Afghan Tensions", *BBC*, accessed from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7233971.stm on 10-1-2011.

The ratios of peace-keepers to citizens in the missions in Bosnia and Kosovo were better than in Afghanistan. There were differences in the approach of NATO member nations in their counter-insurgency activities in Afghanistan. The Canadians pursued war-fighting methods as they believe that there should be security before development. They send convoys to the farthest regions to assert their presence On the other hand, the Dutch strategy in the province of Uruzgan focussed on supporting the local government. They exercised caution and set up far away from the villages. They negotiated with the elders as well as the Taliban. The Dutch acted as honest brokers for villagers whose relatives had been captured by the coalition forces.[20] But doubts have been raised about the viability of the Dutch approach. They mainly remained confined in the region of Tarin Kwot, sheltered from some of the Taliban's largest concentration of forces by a mix of US and Australian troops. The Dutch were also reported to be not doing very well in terms of delivering reconstruction to Uruzgan, even compared to the US.[21] Because of domestic politics, the Dutch withdrew all their troops from Afghanistan in 2010.

Obama's Surge and Covert War in Pakistan

By the time Barack Obama became the US President in the beginning of 2009, there was a full-blown insurgency in Afghanistan mainly concentrated in the south and southeast of the country and was termed as the "Taliban Resurgence". Regular terrorist attacks were also conducted against the Afghan government and coalition troops in cities like Kabul and Kandahar. Recognising the drawbacks of the previous Bush Administration's "Light Footprint" strategy which led to the strengthening of the insurgency, Obama called for a surge in the number of US troops in Afghanistan. In December 2009, Obama announced that an additional 30,000 troops would be sent to Afghanistan and there would be a shift from the earlier emphasis on counter-terrorism to a counter-insurgency strategy. They were to be mainly deployed in the south and southeast of Afghanistan, including the provinces of Helmand,

20. Patricia Hartnagel in "Canada's Role in Afghanistan: Submissions to the Manley Panel, Compiled by Richard McCutcheon and John Derksenp, *Peace Research: The Canadian Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies*, vol. 39, no. 1-2, 2007, p. 108.
21. Guistozzi, n. 13, pp. 199-200.

Kandahar, Paktia, Paktika and Khost. It also called for the rapid expansion and development of the Afghan security forces. The strategy developed in 2009 divided the main insurgency affected areas into two. The first area is the south, including Helmand and Kandahar provinces, the stronghold of the Quetta Shura Taliban. The second area is the east which contains Khost, Paktia and Paktika provinces and is the stronghold of the Haqqani network.

The implementation of the counter-insurgency strategy in both areas simultaneously would have required 40,000 troops in addition to the 70,000 US troops already deployed in Afghanistan. As only 30,000 troops were going to be deployed, the 2009 plan was to be implemented in a two-phase manner. In the first phase lasting from 2010 to 2011, most of the 30,000 troops were to be sent to the south where a counter-insurgency strategy would be implemented. The coalition forces would clear the Taliban from key population areas. The Afghan national security forces would hold the cleared areas. A smaller number of troops would be sent to the east where a counter-terrorism strategy was to be adopted rather than a counter-insurgency one because of the smaller number of troops. Coalition troops would not clear population centres. Rather, the momentum of the Haqqani network here would be halted and prevented from spreading into the adjacent provinces and Kabul. The growth of the Afghan national security forces would be accelerated so that they could hold the cleared areas in the south. In phase two, lasting from 2012 to 2013, the Afghan national security forces would hold the major population centres in the south after they had been cleared of insurgents, leaving coalition troops free to be sent to the east. A much smaller coalition force would be left behind to advise and assist the Afghan forces in the south.

With enough troops in the east during the second stage, the counter-terrorism strategy would convert to a counter-insurgency strategy to clear insurgents from major population centres which would then be handed over to the Afghan security forces. The Afghan national security forces would continue to grow until they were capable of holding not just the south and the east but the whole of Afghanistan by the end of 2013, allowing a large number of coalition troops to withdraw by 2014, leaving only a force of about

10,000 to 20,000 troops to assist and advise the Afghan national security forces and conduct counter-terrorism operations.[22] The obvious complication with the implementation of the 2009 plan was that the insurgents would move away from an area where there is a strong presence of US/NATO troops, build up in another area and come back when the coalition troops withdrew. By mid-2011, though most of the south had been cleared, areas in northern Helmand and Kandahar are still contested. The east is still contested by the Haqqani network which has also infiltrated Ghazni, Zabul, Logar and Wardak. The situation in the northeastern provinces of Kunar and Nuristan has deteriorated since the coalition troops began withdrawing troops from the region. Though sparsely populated, it has been infiltrated by the Taliban, Al Qaeda and other groups, and is now largely controlled by them. They have set up bases and have staged attacks into adjacent areas in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the northern provinces of Kunduz, Baghlan and Takhar, the Taliban and allied Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan have expanded their influence and established safe havens. Suicide training camps have also been identified in Samangan and Sar-i-Pul.

In June 2011, Obama announced that the withdrawal of US troops would begin in the present year instead of 2014 and that all the troops used for the surge, which comprised more than 30,000, would be withdrawn by September 2012. The second phase of the 2009 plan, which is the conversion of the counter-terrorism strategy to the counter-insurgency strategy in the east, will not take place. It will be the responsibility of the Afghan armed forces to take charge of the fighting which would not include clearing the area of insurgents. Instead, what is expected is a long-drawn battle of attrition between the Afghan forces and the Haqqani network which would last longer than phase one of the 2009 plan.[23] It is doubtful if the Haqqani network would fight a linear campaign against the Afghan state in an environment where US Special Forces and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) drones operate in the area as part of counter-terrorism efforts.

22. C.J. Radin, "Analysis: US Military Strategy in Afghanistan Shifts as Forces Draw Down", *The Long War Journal*, August 3, 2011, accessed from http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/08/the_military_strateg_1.php on 1-2012.
23. Ibid.

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Since 2004, the United States has been involved in covert operations in Pakistan targeting the Al Qaeda and Taliban leadership and members, using pilotless Predator and Rapier drones operated by the CIA. The tribal areas on the Pakistan side of the Afghan-Pakistan border, called the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), are being used by the Afghan Taliban and their allies to take shelter, train and rearm and as staging areas for attacks against US/NATO troops in Afghanistan. The US is also concerned about the increasing attacks by Pakistani insurgents against US and NATO logistics most of which passes through Pakistan. The covert air campaign was conducted as the US Administrations under Bush and Obama felt that Pakistan was not actively cooperating in targeting the Afghan Taliban as high ranking officers in the Pakistan Army and Pakistani intelligence, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate continue to see the Taliban as a strategic asset in a post-US withdrawal phase in Afghanistan. The earlier strategy with regard to dealing with the Afghan Taliban sheltering in the FATA areas was to use the 'hammer and anvil' approach, with Pakistani forces closing in on FATA from the east and the NATO/Afghan forces closing in from the west.[24] Obama's surge in troop numbers in 2009 was accompanied by a drastic increase in drone strikes against Taliban and Al Qaeda targets in Pakistan. The CIA also built up an intelligence network within Pakistan for intelligence collection which led to incidents like the Raymond Davis affair but also contributed to the assassination of Osama bin Laden in May 2011.

MILITARY STRATEGY AND TACTICS OF THE TALIBAN AND AL QAEDA

Organisational Structure of the Taliban and Allied Groups: Strategy and Tactics

Apart from the Afghan Taliban known as the Quetta Shura Taliban, other

24. Michael O'Hanlon and Bruce Riedel, "Plus A-Minus for Afghanistan", *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 1, Winter 2011, p. 127.

groups like the Hezb-i-Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and the Haqqani network are involved in the insurgency against US and NATO troops in Afghanistan. While the Haqqani network accepts Mullah Muhammad Omar as its spiritual leader, it conducts its operations independently from the main Afghan Taliban in their area of influence. There is no unity and not even good relations between the leadership of the Taliban and Hezb-i-Islami but there is cooperation at the tactical level. This is because some local Hezb-i-Islami commanders work closely with the Taliban or also because certain ex-Hezb-i-Islami commanders or their relatives are presently commanders of the Taliban.[25] Below the leadership level i.e. Amir Mullah Muhammad Omar, and the Leadership Council that direct day-to-day operations in certain geographical areas, there are four insurgents' councils. They are the Quetta Shura for "Greater Kandahar" and the areas further west up to Herat, the Peshawar Shura for Eastern Afghanistan, the Haqqani-led Miramshah Shura for Loya Paktia and provinces north towards Kabul, and a separate Shura for the north and northeast.[26] Commanders operate at the regional and provincial levels.

Below the top-level command and control structure, the insurgency is divided into civilian support, the underground, guerrillas and front commanders. The civilian support includes individuals who assist the guerrillas by acquiring supplies, conducting intelligence campaigns, operating medical facilities, recruiting new guerrillas or supporters, operating the communications system and acquiring and maintaining equipment. The underground includes the insurgency's political and financial network. The guerrillas are the armed insurgents who conduct the military and paramilitary operations. The front commanders provide strategic command while tactical and operational control is given to the guerrilla units. The foreign Islamist radicals are also organised like the other insurgents, with the smaller units having tactical and operational autonomy,

25. Mohammad Osman Tariq Elias, "The Resurgence of the Taliban in Kabul, Logar and Wardak" in Antonio Giustozzi, ed., *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field* (London: HURST Publishers Ltd, 2009), p. 53.
26. Thomas Ruttig, "Loya Paktia's Insurgency: (i) The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity" in Giustozzi, ed., Ibid., p. 61.

while taking strategic guidance from senior Al Qaeda commanders. While most Taliban and Hezb-i-Islami insurgents are part-time fighters and do civilian jobs by day, the foreign Islamist radicals are professional fighters. The foreign fighters are much better equipped, trained and motivated than the other insurgents.[27]

The Haqqani network mainly operates in the Loya Paktia or Greater Paktia region. The Loya Paktia consists of the provices of Paktia, Paktika and Khost. The Afghan Taliban has no influence in the Loya Paktia region. On the other hand, in contrast to the Taliban and the Hezb-i-slami, the Haqqani network did not have influence beyond the southeast. But there has been a change in this situation at least since 2008 when the Haqqani network began launching spectacular commando-style terrorist attacks against targets in Kabul, including the Serena Hotel and Indian Embassy.[28] This is because Loya Paktia is the Pashtun region closest to Kabul. The network uses the Shah-i-Kot mountains as a hideout and staging area. This range of mountains links the Afghan areas to Pakistan allowing the network to maintain relations across the border. The Haqqani network has among its members not just Pashtuns but also Uzbeks, Pakistanis, Chechens, and Arabs in contrast to the more national orientation of the Afghan Taliban which is predominantly Pashtun. The Haqqani network was originally led by the veteran Afghan Islamist and Mujahideen commander Jalaluddin Haqqani. Due to his old age and illness, Jalaluddin's son Serajuddin Haqqani has taken over the day-to-day operations of the network from his father.[29]

The Haqqani network in the 1970s developed close relations with the Pashtun tribes of the FATA area of Pakistan, the Pakistan Army and ISI, and various Pakistani Islamist political parties. These links were reactivated after 2001. After the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, Jalaluddin Haqqani retreated to Pakistan where he resided in a suburb of the town of Miramshah in North Waziristan in the neighbourhood of the Pakistan Army's 11th Corps

27. Jones, n. 18, pp. 116-117.
28. Ibid., pp. 58-59.
29. Ibid., p. 63.

HQ with its ISI office.[30] Jalaluddin Haqqani was the first Afghan Mujahideen commander who welcomed and incorporated Arab *jihadi* volunteers into his group during the Afghan War of the 1980s. He also had close relations with wealthy Saudis and the Saudi intelligence service. One of Haqqani's two wives comes from the United Arab Emirates. The network also has strong links to Kashmiri and sectarian Punjabi *jihadis*. It receives a large portion of its financial support from the Arabian Peninsula and Pakistan. The Haqqani network mainly uses terrorist and guerrilla tactics and only exceptionally engages in open combat operations. They have frequently used Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and suicide bombings. The Haqqani network is the typical Afghan resistance group that emerged during the Afghan War of the 1980s that had close relations with a variety of actors unlike the Afghan Taliban that emerged in the specific conditions of southern Afghanistan during the early 1990s. This has implications for the kind of insurgency that is currently being fought in Afghanistan and the turns that it can take in the future. This will be explored in the last section of this paper.

The Afghan Taliban and the Hezb-i-Islami have different political objectives in Afghanistan. While both groups wish to drive out the foreign troops from Afghanistan and topple the present Afghan government led by Hamid Karzai, their ultimate political objectives are different. While the aim of the Afghan Taliban is to reestablish the Islamic theocratic government with Mullah Muhammad Omar as *Amir-ul-Mominin* or leader of the faithful, the Hezb-i-Islami wishes to establish an Islamic republic with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar as the leader. The military strategy for attaining these objectives included attacking US and NATO troops in the Pashtun dominant areas of south and southeast Afghanistan, preventing reconstruction efforts, attacking Afghan Army troops and police, government representatives including provincial and district Governors, and threatening the local population against cooperating with the government or coalition forces. Once the surge in US and NATO troops took place in 2009, the Afghan Taliban shifted their attention to attacking soft targets like government development programmes and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

30. Ibid., p. 66.

As a part of undermining government influence, the Taliban have begun establishing their own judicial system in areas where they dominate and have targeted schools and educational institutions.

The war in Afghanistan had not ended with the fall of Kabul to the Northern Alliance. Sporadic action by the insurgents against the US forces, separate from the major US initiated campaigns like Operation Anaconda, had continued even after the main Taliban force had been decimated. Examples of such attempts include the attack on a US helicopter near Gardez, capital of Paktia province, and the rocket attack on Khost air base which was held by US troops. Both these attacks took place in March 2002, and the first incident resulted in the deaths of six US soldiers.[31] It is understandable that the frequency of attacks against US and NATO troops has increased only since 2006. The Taliban needed more time to regroup, gain new recruits to replace those who were killed and develop base camps in a sanctuary away from the main area of fighting. The insurgency led by the Taliban has adapted according to the changing conditions. In 2004, US and coalition forces noticed a change in the size of the guerrilla units, from large bands of up to a hundred fighters to much smaller units of less than ten. This has enabled the guerrillas to evade detection by coalition forces and allowed them to blend into the population when necessary. But in 2006, it was noticed that there was again a change from the hit-and–run tactics by small groups of guerrillas to frontal assaults on government security posts by groups of more than 100 fighters.[32]

There are certain differences between the Afghan War against the Soviets of the 1980s and the present Afghan insurgency. The Afghan Mujahideen of the 1980s received the support of a superpower i.e. the US and a coalition of nations. In contrast, the Taliban do not receive the overt support of Pakistan. This is because of the fear the Pakistani military elite have regarding the political and military consequences of providing direct support to the Taliban against US and NATO forces. This does not mean that Pakistan has

31. Sreedhar, "The Taliban-Al-Qaida after One Year of War", *Aakrosh*, vol. 5, no. 17, October 2002, pp. 57-62.
32. Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan", *Orbis*, vol. 51, no. 1, Winter 2007, p. 81.

abandoned its policy of gaining strategic depth in Afghanistan. It provides covert support to the Taliban, the nature of which is discussed in the next section. Because of this reason, the Taliban do not have access to sophisticated weapons systems like the shoulder-launched Stinger air defence missiles unlike the Afghan Mujahideen. But the effectiveness of the Stinger missiles should be measured in terms of the limitations placed on the anti-guerrilla operations of Soviet air assets rather than the number of Soviet fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft shot down.[33] US and NATO helicopters are also vulnerable to ground fire in the present Afghan insurgency. The differences in circumstances also mean that the Taliban did not receive all their weapons from a single source. There is a significant rise in the price of weapons in the arms bazaars in northern Afghanistan when the Taliban conduct the spring offensives in the south and east. There are also reports that Northern Alliance militias have sold new weapons to the Taliban through arms dealers as they get little in return for surrendering weapons to the central government and the US/NATO forces. The Taliban also get access to arms and ammunition from the arms markets in the NWFP of Pakistan.[34]

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The lack of nation-state support for the Taliban has been compensated by assistance from the global *jihadist* network. The increasing expertise of radical Islamist groups in conducting insurgency operations is having its impact on the conflict in Afghanistan. The Al Qaeda in Iraq has gained plenty of expertise in conducting attacks against US troops. It is now understood that these skills are being passed on to the insurgents fighting in

33. The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, translated and edited by Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Gress (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2002), p. 222.
34. Guistozzi, n. 13, pp. 25-26; Maqbool Ahmed, "Awash in Weapons", *Herald*, vol. 38, no. 3, March, 2007, pp. 70-71.

Afghanistan. Afghan insurgent groups are using this assistance to construct increasingly sophisticated IEDs, including remote control detonators. There are Al Qaeda-run training facilities and IED factories in North and South Waziristan. There is also evidence that a smaller number of Pakistani and Afghan militants have received training in Iraq. The insurgents usually slip behind NATO frontlines and set off these roadside bombs.[35] Another effective device that is used is the 'TV bomb', first developed by Iraqi groups. It is a shaped-charged mechanism that can be hidden under a bush or debris on a roadside and set off by remote control from more than 300 metres away. A major tactic of the insurgents is suicide bombing which was not the norm in Afghanistan. This tactic has been used in major cities like Kandahar and Kabul.[36] The number of suicide attacks increased from one in 2002 to two in 2003, six in 2004 and 21 in 2005. There were over 100 suicide attacks in Afghanistan in 2006, more than the total committed in the entire history of the country. Suicide attacks allow the insurgents to achieve maximum impact with minimum resources. Such attacks have increased the level of insecurity among the Afghan population.

Guerrilla Warfare and Military Swarming in the Afghan Context

During the Afghan War of the 1980s, the Afghan Mujahideen mainly fought a guerrilla war against the Soviets. Tactics consisted of ambushes, raids, shelling attacks, mining roads, sabotage and terrorist attacks along with defensive and offensive actions.[37] Swarming also played a role during the war. According to John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, the Soviet Red Army conducted a lot of swarming by fires, while the Mujahideen regularly implemented swarming by force.[38] While this is right with regard to the Red Army, it is doubtful if the Mujahideen actions can be described as military swarming. In his more detailed explanation of the characteristics of swarming, Sean J. A. Edwards refers to a convergent attack by many units

35. Alastair Leithead, "Long Haul Fight to Defeat the Taliban", *BBC*, accessed from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6237290.stm on 11-1-2012.
36. Brian Glyn Williams, "Suicide Bombings in Afghanistan", *Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst*, September, 2006, p. 7.
37. n. 33, pp. 62-65.
38. Arquilla and Ronfeldt, n. 9, p. 37.

as a primary manoeuvre from the start of the battle and not encirclement that occurs because of some other manoeuvre like linear warfare of even guerrilla warfare. The Mujahideen mainly fought a guerrilla war and encirclements would have taken place as a result of Soviet positions being overrun. At the same time, Arquilla and Ronfeldt are right in claiming that the Soviets tried swarming by force while the Mujahideen attempted swarming by fire. Soviet Special Forces tried to conduct swarming against the insurgent forces. The Mujahideen set up "Stinger traps" for the Soviet fighters and helicopters in the rough, mountainous terrain of Afghanistan. The Stinger missiles would be fired from all directions upon enemy aircraft that strayed into their fire traps.[39]

The withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1989 brought a change in the situation. As the opposing forces became more balanced after the Soviet withdrawal, non-linear warfare changed over to linear warfare. It was ISI Director Hamid Gul who decided that the Mujahideen should move from guerrilla tactics to linear or conventional warfare. The first target was the city of Jalalabad, on the road from the Khyber Pass to Kabul. The siege that followed was a terrible mistake. The Afghan Communist Army held off the Mujahideen and the Pakistani effort was a massive failure.[40] Nevertheless, the Afghan conflict after this event continued to be of the linear type. After the defeat and downfall of the Afghan Communist government of Najibullah in 1992, the civil war between the various Mujahideen militia groups was of a linear nature, with shifting frontlines and massive bombardment of Kabul and other cities by rockets. Whoever put greater numbers and more firepower on the field would have the upper hand. When the Taliban emerged, Pakistan's ISI provided munitions, fuel and food to the militia. The Pakistan Army and Air Force fought in Afghanistan along with Taliban forces.[41] Pakistan's strong support to the Taliban reduced the area controlled by the opposing

39. Ibid., p. 38.
40. Bruce Riedal, *Deadly Embrace: Pakistan, America, and the Future of the Global Jihad* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2011), p. 39; Vinod Anand, "Pakistan as a Factor in Afghan Stability" in R.K. Sawney et al, eds., *Afghanistan: A Role for India* (New Delhi: Centre for Land Warfare Studies, 2011), p. 146.
41. Seth G. Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2010), p. 63.

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Northern Alliance to a small sliver of territory in the Panjsher valley in northcentral Afghanistan. This was the situation on the ground on the eve of the US invasion of Afghanistan in the end 2001.

The present Taliban insurgency predominantly follows the classical guerrilla style of warfare. This could be because the Taliban continue to receive advice and intelligence from serving and retired Pakistani ISI and Army officers. These officers have had long standing experience with regard to the Afghan situation from the 1980s and even before that period when they trained the Afghan Mujahideen against Afghan government troops. This has led to the Taliban following traditional guerrilla tactics in comparison to the insurgents of Iraq.[42] Military swarming in the 20th century, be it in Somalia, Chechnya or Iraq, has been mostly conducted in urban environments. In the Afghan context, be it during the 1980s or the present insurgency, the insurgents mostly left urban population centres to the occupying force while fiercely contesting the countryside. Here, it is necessary to at least briefly compare the insurgencies of Iraq and Afghanistan to understand how varied military, political and social environments lead to very different kinds of insurgencies against foreign occupying forces. The Iraqi insurgency is especially important for the Afghan context because of the influence that the former has over the latter through the medium of foreign Islamist fighters.

When the Americans planned for the invasion of Iraq in 2003, they expected the Iraqi Republican Guards to be the main opposing force capable of putting up a tough fight. But Saddam Hussein, in anticipation of several Iraqi uprisings breaking out against him when the invasion began, had prepared the Baath Emergency Plan. It was expected that the Saddam Fedayeen, led by Saddam's son, and other militias would contain any uprising long enough for the Republican Guard units to arrive and crush the opposition.

42. Giustozzi, n. 13, p. 25.

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Each village, town, and city would become a small semi-independent citadel. Fedayeen local weapons caches included light weapons like AK-47s, machine guns, mortars, and RPGs under close guard by the Baathists. With the melting away of the Iraqi Republican Guards and other Iraqi Army units in the face of the invasion, the Fedayeen would turn out to be the core of the insurgency against the Americans.[43] Iraq had no dearth of infantry weapons even after the Gulf War of 1990-91 as it had become the fourth largest army by the end of the Iran-Iraq War due to weapons supplies from a wide variety of sources. The Fedayeen had a decentralised command and control structure which was fit for swarming operations. Its base of operations was dispersed throughout the towns and cities of Iraq.[44]

There were other factors that contributed to the spread of the Iraqi insurgency. The Coalition Provisional Authority that was formed by the US to govern Iraq immediately after the invasion released the de-Baathification order that led to the disbanding of Saddam's army and regulations which prohibited ex-officers of the rank of Colonel and above from joining the newly formed Iraqi armed forces.[45] The joblessness and alienation of almost 300,000 Iraqi troops, including highly skilled officers, led to the rapid spread of the insurgency. Besides, the Iraqis, several hundred trained Syrian paramilitary troops were allowed by the Syrian government to cross the border and support the Iraqi government to fight the invasion force. The insurgency, though mainly led by ex-Baath military and paramilitary forces later on, included Sunni Arab tribes, radical Islamist groups, with members from Iraq and Arabs from other countries and the Mahdi Army of the Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr. All these disparate insurgent groups gained access to the weapons buried in different parts of the country. The Bush Administration failed to keep Iraq's several weapons depots secure.

43. Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Tainor, *Cobra-II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), p. 505.
44. Ibid., p. 499.
45. Ibid., p. 484.

The Taliban movement, mainly composed of seminary students, is only now being trained to fight an insurgency against a foreign occupying force after mainly fighting linear battles against rival militias during the 1990s.

Many were left unguarded for months after the invasion. The insurgents helped themselves to a huge supply of explosives, mortars, and artillery shells.[46]

This means that swarming operations in the Iraqi context were conducted by highly trained and motivated personnel who had access to a wide range of weaponry. Swarming need not be always conducted by highly trained military personnel as was proved by the attacks by untrained Somali militias against US peace-keeping forces by using the urban terrain to their utmost advantage. We have already seen how the Afghan insurgents have limited access to sophisticated weapons in comparison to the Afghan War of the 1980s. The Taliban movement, mainly composed of seminary students, is only now being trained to fight an insurgency against a foreign occupying force after mainly fighting linear battles against rival militias during the 1990s. Unlike the decentralised nature of the command and control in Iraq where different insurgent groups and cells operated in their respective locations, making swarms more effective, the command and control of the Afghan Taliban is more centralised in nature. On the other hand, the logistics systems and weapons depots of the Taliban resembled those of the Iraqi insurgents. Weapons and ammunition would be stored beforehand in different areas and the insurgents would infiltrate the region later without carrying weapons and using the main roads. This was unlike the Mujahideen of the 1980s. The Taliban depended on a thick network of small bases, where heavier weaponry such as heavy machine guns, recoilless rifles, and mortars as well as ammunition would be stored, allowing the fighters to move around without cumbersome equipment and maintain a high degree of mobility.[47] This could have been done to evade US and

46. Zaki Chehab, *Iraq Ablaze: Inside the Insurgency* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2006), p. 57; Peter W. Galbraith, *The End of Iraq: How American Incompetence Created a War Without End* (London: Simon &Schuster Ltd., 2006), p. 180.
47. Giustozzi, n. 13, p. 101.

NATO detection capabilities which are more advanced than those of the Soviets rather than a plan to fight an insurgency in a more decentralised fashion.

This does not mean that swarming has not been used in the Afghan context. The Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters are described as having used swarming tactics against US forces in Shah-i-Kot valley in March 2002 during Operation Anaconda.[48] This could be possible because of Al Qaeda's close relations with Somali and Chechen insurgents and even limited participation in the respective insurgencies. It should be kept in mind that this was even before foreign *jihadi* fighters had gained experience in Iraq. Instead of conforming to American expectations that insurgents would flee the valley during battle, insurgent fighters kept flooding into the area.[49] Operation Anaconda was the last major battle which was fought together by the Taliban and Al Qaeda. The Taliban and Al Qaeda commanders and fighters who fled Shah-i-Kot valley, fled to different areas of Pakistan. While the Taliban fled to areas surrounding Quetta and other parts of Baluchistan, Al Qaeda sought shelter mainly in the South Waziristan and North Waziristan tribal agencies of FATA.[50]

Al Qaeda developed close relations with the Pashtun tribes of FATA and also with the Haqqani network which was operating in southeast Afghanistan from the very areas where Al Qaeda had settled in FATA. The result was that the first swarm operations in Afghanistan were conducted in Kabul against the Afghan government and foreign installations by the Haqqani network which was soon followed by the Quetta Shura Taliban in other parts of Afghanistan. Even during the Afghan War of the 1980s, Haqqani was considered the most impressive battlefield commander by CIA officers in Islamabad. The CIA relied on Haqqani to experiment with new

48. Edwards, n. 1, p. 6.
49. Richard Kugler, *Operation Anaconda in Afghanistan: A Case Study of Adaptation Battle*, Case Studies in Defence Transformation, No. 5 (Centre for Technology and National Security Policy, National Defense University, Washington, 2007), p. 7, accessed from http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA463075 on January 2, 2011.
50. Anne Stenerson, "Al-Qaeda's Allies: Explaining the Relationship Between Al-Qaeda and Various Factions of the Taliban After 2001", *New America Foundation*, April 2010, Counterterrorism Strategy Initiative Policy Paper, p. 1, accessed from http://counterterrorism.newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/stenersen2.pdf accessed on January 13, 2012.

tactics and weapon systems.[51] The Haqqani network, as mentioned earlier, is more prone to using suicide attacks and terrorist strikes than the main Afghan Taliban movement. In most of these attacks, a group of attackers, armed with assault rifles, grenades and suicide bomber vests, blast their way into the installation through the main gate or side walls. The remaining fighters enter the building and fan out in different directions to inflict maximum casualties. The first of such spectacular attacks was conducted in 2008, after which the Taliban commanders, with close relations to Al Qaeda, conducted their own attacks in Kandahar, Zaranj, which is the capital of Nimroz province in southwest Afghanistan, and other locations. In later attacks, more than one target was attacked simultaneously by separate groups of attackers.

Swarming, as it is used in Afghanistan, has not been exploited to its utmost advantage as most of the targets are fixed or stationary and not mobile like the units of the US/NATO troops. But used as a part of terrorist attacks, it has helped in creating maximum impact and drawing international attention to the war in Afghanistan. Many high-profile terrorist attacks in Afghanistan are conducted using suicide-car bomb blasts not involving swarm type attacks by armed insurgents. The main campaign in Afghanistan continues to be fought by the insurgents using guerrilla tactics though this can change as the Afghan Taliban gain more experience and receive better help from foreign militants of Al Qaeda and Pakistani militant groups like the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba. In some ways, the cooperation between the Afghan insurgents and foreign Islamist *jihadis* can be seen as a symbiotic relationship. The Afghan War of the 1980s provided the first opportunity for radical Islamists from different parts of the Islamic world to establish relations with each other and establish extremist organisations at the national and transnational levels. Presently, the skills that these fighters have learnt in different conflicts are being passed on to the Afghans and it can be expected that military swarming will also be used more commonly in the future.

51. Jones, n. 41, p. 104; Ruttig, n. 26, p. 73.