

THE NEW FIND-FIX-FINISH DOCTRINE

By ERIC ROSENBACH *and* AKI PERITZ

It was a crisp and clear morning on August 5, 2009, the last day of Baitullah Mehsud's life.¹ The grimly efficient leader of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)—more commonly known as the Pakistani Taliban—was responsible for Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's assassination and dozens of gruesome suicide attacks in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. On that particular day, Mehsud was not planning attacks but was instead lounging on the roof of a house in South Waziristan when two Hellfire missiles launched from an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) incinerated him and his wife.² Two days prior, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officials stationed some 7,000 miles away in suburban Washington had identified Mehsud in Predator drone surveillance footage and ordered the lethal strike.³ After the dust settled, the live video feed showed that Mehsud was sliced in half by the strike and was unquestionably killed. A week later, President Barack Obama reported that “we took out” Mehsud, confirming it was indeed the United States that felled the Taliban commander.⁴



Special Forces Soldiers and Afghan National Police engage insurgents near Hyderabad, Helmand Province

U.S. Marine Corps (Brian Kester)

In contrast to the many sanitized Hollywood storylines of American officials ordering efficient strikes against dastardly terrorists, eliminating Mehsud was a lengthy, messy process of lethal trial and error for the U.S. Government. *The Washington Post* called finding Mehsud an “obsession” for CIA officers; this was the 16th drone strike that the agency, with explicit White House approval, had executed attempting to neutralize him.⁵ In this high-stakes game of whack-a-mole with one of Pakistan’s most dangerous militants, the United States had killed an estimated 200 other individuals—militants and noncombatants alike—since 2008.⁶ Not trusting just one method, U.S. officials began taking a parallel approach in early 2009, advertising a \$5 million bounty for information leading to Mehsud’s death or capture—a sum that subsequent to the August strike might have been collected by unknown individuals.⁷

The United States demonstrated not only the capacity to hunt individuals in the remote badlands of Pakistan but also that it could execute the hunt without committing ground forces to the area. The strikes further illustrated U.S. willingness to allocate resources—in this case, 18 months, multiple airstrikes, significant analytical and operational capital, and countless personnel hours—to finding and killing one man.

The United States adapted and learned from this experience. The tenure of the next TTP head, Hakimullah Mehsud, lasted less than 5 months, his time cut short by another UAV strike. More importantly, the drone strike that incapacitated Hakimullah occurred only 5 days after a video surfaced on al Jazeera television showing the new TTP leader sitting beside a Jordanian militant who had just killed eight CIA officers in a suicide bombing in Khost, Afghanistan. The quick turnaround time from the video’s emergence to Hakimullah’s neutralization sent a clear message: the United States was rapidly perfecting its capability to eliminate those who seek to harm America.

Such a national security capability did not exist a decade before, yet it now stands

as a core component of the strategy that the Nation leverages to defeat its adversaries. Some of this capability was born from extensive experience gained by intelligence personnel and U.S. special operators in Iraq and Afghanistan. The recipe for success represents a new doctrine for national security based on dramatically improved drone technology, close cooperation both within civilian and military organizations and with host-nation intelligence services, lethal operators, and a modern interpretation of the law of war that allows for the targeting of militants.

The 9/11 attacks radically shifted policymaker attitudes about using the tools necessary to protect the Nation from the protean threat of international terrorism. The attacks on that Tuesday morning were indeed the catalyst for a radical restructuring of America’s attitudes toward security and stability, especially toward the protean threat of international terrorism. The revolution in counterterrorism operations began in earnest in 2001 with the invasion of Afghanistan, which demonstrated the power of coordinated intelligence and special forces operations. Later, both Afghanistan and Iraq served as laboratories for illuminating the legal and policy issues associated with quickly evolving counterterrorism operational capacity.

The Colossus Shifts His Footing

For much of American history, the Nation has focused on the menace of state actors. With rare exceptions—such as when Thomas Jefferson sent naval forces to battle the Barbary Pirates in the early 19th century, or when Woodrow Wilson authorized the Army to (unsuccessfully) hunt down Pancho Villa in Mexico in the early 20th century—the United States has been more concerned with nation-state adversaries as the primary threat to its security interests.

No longer. For a generation, the United States has stood astride the globe as a military colossus, making it difficult for other nation-states to compete. America’s existential threat since World War II, the Soviet Union, has faded into the history books. Russian military capacity has atrophied to such an extent that, although Moscow bullies peripheral geographical spaces such as Georgia and Chechnya, it has acted with some lethargy and difficulty and much loss of life. Although the overall quality and operational capabilities of the Chinese military have significantly improved over the

past decade, most serious military analysts recognize that the Chinese will not have the capacity or intent to confront the United States in the foreseeable future.⁸

While interstate conflicts continue elsewhere in the world, America’s overwhelming conventional strength serves to dissuade foreign governments from attacking the United States. It would be suicidal for another nation-state—and more importantly for its government—to challenge and engage the United States in direct, sustained military combat. Had the protagonists in Peter Sellers’s 1959 film *The Mouse That Roared*—whose medieval knights and archers declared war on the United States in order to collect American postwar reconstruction benefits—indeed decided to engage the United States militarily, the results would have likely been less than comedic. Given U.S. military planning, the “Duchy of Grand Fenwick” would have been reduced to smoldering ruins by American incendiary devices before its surviving citizens received American aid.

the invasion of Afghanistan demonstrated the power of coordinated intelligence and special forces operations

Still, the conventional strengths that served the United States so well in the 20th century are not suitable to combat the threats of the 21st in defending the homeland and protecting U.S. interests abroad. The 9/11 attacks brutally exposed an inability to detect and disrupt a small, highly disciplined, well-trained group of individuals bent on massive destruction. Understandably, America’s efforts in the decade since have been re-focused on targeting people and small groups who seek to find ways to undermine its advantaged position.

Targeting substate actors, however, has had implications for U.S. national security strategy beyond the immediate concern of eliminating the so-called terrorist threat. Developing the capability to target individuals has proven a critical component of achieving other national security priorities. The extensive debate about the future of Afghanistan policy that occurred within the Obama administration in September 2009 represented the formal arrival of a new strategic option: focused, small-footprint

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counterterrorism operations aimed at crippling al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan. In the end, President Obama chose to pursue a more expansive counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy that sent 30,000 additional troops into Afghanistan and invested in the population-centric strategy of clear, hold, and build. But while COIN represented the strategy for the main effort, targeted counterterrorism operations have increased dramatically on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. As COIN operations in Afghanistan bog down in places such as Kandahar, and the Nation's enthusiasm for a long-term engagement in Afghanistan wanes, President Obama may indeed decide to pursue a different strategy that focuses on finding, fixing, and finishing the adversaries who threaten U.S. national interests. This shift was also harmonized with the continued targeting of al Qaeda leadership and Taliban forces by military special forces and intelligence personnel, a strategy aimed at providing a safe space in which to accomplish COIN operations. Meeting the challenge of effectively eliminating substate actors is thus not only a national security goal in itself but also a means to accomplish other aspects of American strategy.

The COIN strategy in Afghanistan or some variant, while appropriate to achieving a long-term solution to a conflict, required—more than guns, troops, or briefcases of cash—long-term enthusiasm and stamina on the part of the domestic political class. Polling in 2010 suggested that public interest and commitment to the fight seemed to be waning.

Find, Fix, and Finish

Former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in 2006 framed this challenge in terms of the doctrine described in military parlance as *find, fix, and finish*, noting, “In the future we must better ascertain where the enemy is going next, rather than where the enemy was—to be able to ‘find’ and ‘fix,’ as well as be able to ‘finish.’” Although the language has remained the same for decades, the dynamics of find, fix, and finish have changed for the military and intelligence communities, as Rumsfeld’s statement implies.

The doctrine of find, fix, and finish emerged well prior to the reign of Secretary Rumsfeld. The paradigm first joined the firmament of national security thinking in the 1950s when General Matthew Ridgway rallied his demoralized troops during the Korean War by repeatedly exhorting his command-

ers to “Find them, Fix them, Finish them.”⁹ Ridgway reportedly based his maxim on his study of General Ulysses S. Grant, who stated, “The art of war is simple enough. Find out where your enemy is. Get him as soon as you can. Strike at him as hard as you can as often as you can, and keep moving on.”¹⁰

Following the Korean War, General Ridgway’s exhortations evolved for the national security warriors engaged in larger Cold War hostilities. In short, it meant:

- Find: locate the enemy
- Fix: ensure the enemy stays (is fixed) in that location
- Finish: defeat the enemy.

The find-fix-finish mantra helped shape the Cold War worldview of the adversary: the Soviet Union and its proxies. A bipolar world was a simple world, and intelligence

But after 9/11, the calculus had clearly changed, and substate actors were viewed as the main threat. The rules of engagement that had evolved under the bipolar system of nuclear powers—deterrence, containment, reassurance—were less relevant. There was no tangible adversary, no uniformed army, no arsenal regulated by carefully negotiated arms agreements, and no state leader with whom to negotiate. As former Counterterrorism Chief Richard Clarke stated, the problem for the administration was that the “American people wanted to go to war because we’d been attacked. And you want, therefore, to see U.S. troops marching and taking things over—something like a World War II response to Pearl Harbor. And yet the enemy is not a country; the enemy is a shadowy terrorist network.”¹¹

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officers knew that the long-term goal was to defeat the Soviet Union, or at least hold Soviet hegemonic power in check. The Intelligence Community knew its targets and its mission: finding and fixing upon Red Army divisions, strategic bombers, nuclear assets, and the like. Of course, locating the enemy was the easy part; the Soviets had a nation-state with cities, citizens, and interests to defend. The difficult aspect for the United States was the inability to finish them in any meaningful way, as a frontal assault on the Soviet Union would likely have led to the eventuality of mutually assured destruction.

This bipolar world crudely suited national security organizations’ worldview as well, even as the mission—to stem and roll back the onslaught of worldwide communism—became ethically and philosophically murkier, as the United States would later discover in Vietnam and Central America. Perhaps the last great “pure” conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union occurred in the mountains of Afghanistan during the 1980s between the Red Army and U.S.-backed mujahideen proxies. There, in that graveyard of empires, the find-fix-finish doctrine was clear, even if the methods used and the alliances forged were less than orthodox.

Cold War—that neither side wanted to risk annihilation—was null and void, since the terrorists were willing to take their own lives and become “martyrs.” Since the adversaries had changed, the find-fix-finish doctrine had to evolve as well. In fact, at this point it was turned on its head. Now, finishing the enemy was relatively simple, but finding and fixing an individual or small cell became devilishly hard in an interconnected world of 6 billion people.

A number of intelligence professionals have begun to draw attention to this shift in strategic thinking. In 2007, former CIA Director Michael Hayden stated:

For most of, certainly, my professional life, most of our work was out there on fix and finish. . . . The world has turned upside down. . . . The finishing is relatively easy. . . . In this world it’s the finding that’s the hardest-to-do function, it’s the intelligence thing. And we now have to treat those sources and methods with the same almost sacred respect we treated the secrecy of troop movements and operational plans in the ‘40s, ‘50s, ‘60s, ‘70s, and ‘80s, because it’s those things at the front-end, the fine point, that have become the critical piece of that “find, fix, finish” equation.¹²

The current Director of National Intelligence (DNI), General James Clapper, went further on this point in mid-2009:

Many aspects of the intelligence community today, including some investments and practices, are legacies of the Cold War era and anachronistic. . . . Nowadays, with the kind of targets being pursued, the antithesis is true. Today's targets are very elusive and therefore quite hard to find, yet once they are found, they are very easy to finish. This reality has a very profound effect on the way intelligence is done today.¹³

Find. Finding potential threats—that is, figuring out who they are and where they are—is a core requirement of the new doctrine, but it is exactly this task that has proven the most difficult aspect of counterterrorism.

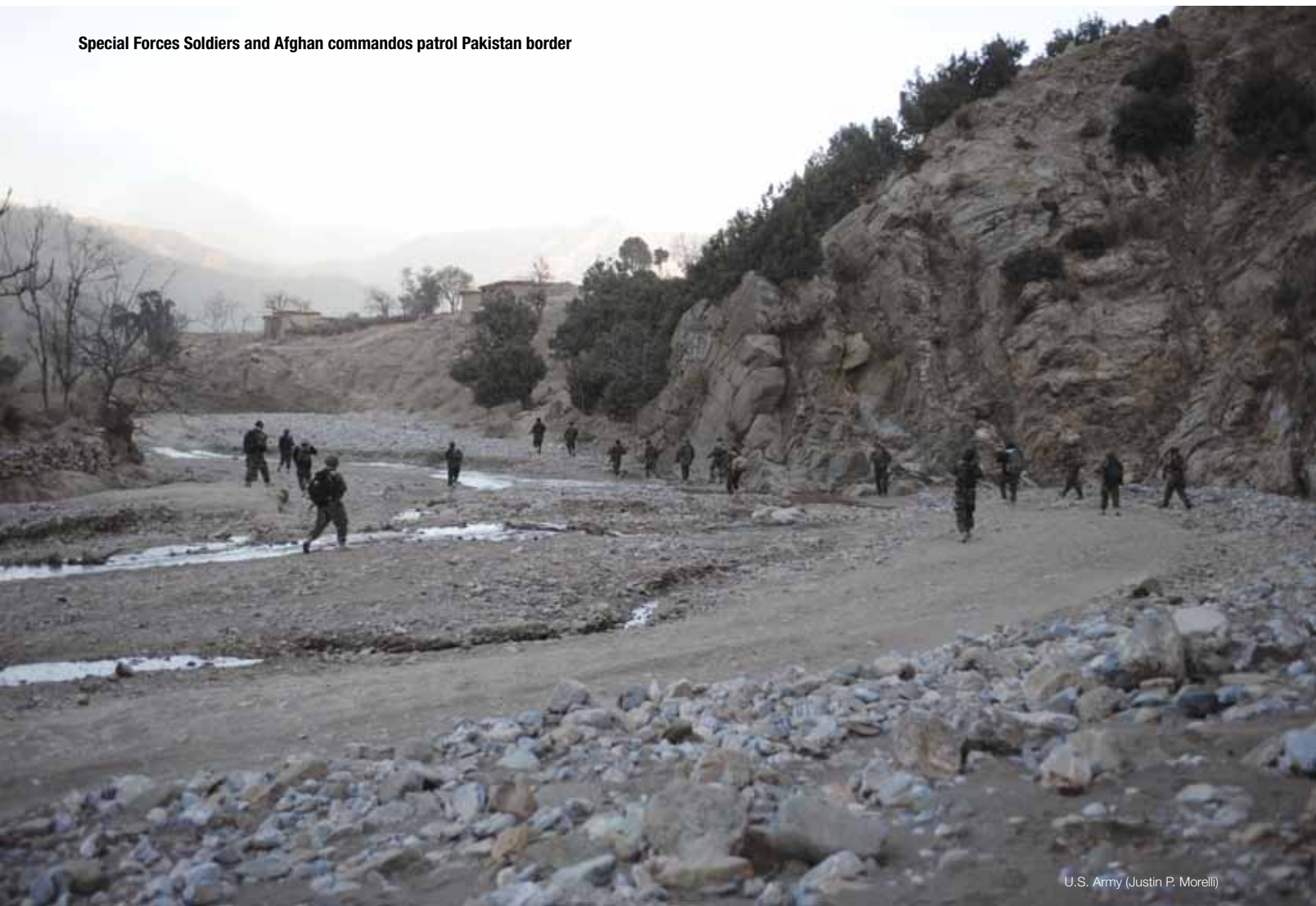
The intelligence and law enforcement communities have struggled to find regular criminals even within U.S. borders. Internationally, locating threats proves an even greater task: How the United States, for example, can discover the identities and intentions of the ranking members of an extremist organization based in rural Yemen. The inability of U.S. intelligence and military forces to find Osama bin Laden despite nearly a decade of sustained effort clearly demonstrates the challenge of finding the Nation's most important adversaries.

This is not to say that the United States has not had successes in finding terrorists. In September 2009, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) arrested Afghan national and U.S. legal permanent resident Najibullah Zazi, who pled guilty in February 2010 to using weapons of mass destruction within

the United States. Originally flagged by the CIA after he traveled to Pakistan, where he trained at a terrorist training camp, he was tracked by the FBI from Colorado to New York City and back to Colorado before his arrest.¹⁴ Abroad, the United States has also had significant successes, identifying time and time again the third-ranking member of al Qaeda, behind Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. Since 9/11, these individuals have mostly met with either incarceration or aerial incineration.

To accomplish these goals, however, the intelligence, military, and law enforcement communities have evolved significantly—but not painlessly—in both mindset and allocation of resources since 2001. Within American borders, the new nature of the threat has led to the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and a radical restructuring of the

Special Forces Soldiers and Afghan commandos patrol Pakistan border



U.S. Army (Justin P. Morelli)

Intelligence Community, including the establishment of the new National Counterterrorism Center and the position of DNI. New powers have—not without controversy—been given to law enforcement officials in the areas of electronic and physical surveillance.

Internationally, and despite some domestic criticism, intelligence officials have taken steps to strengthen working relationships with other nations' intelligence and national security services, arguing that the United States cannot eliminate the global terrorist threat alone. In 2005, CIA Deputy Director for Operations Jose Rodriguez told Congress that nearly every capture or killing of a suspected terrorist outside Iraq since

ment. The operational necessity for extensive electronic surveillance of individuals in the United States who have connections to terrorists abroad is clear; however, the murky legality of the Bush-era Terrorist Surveillance Program resulted in political controversy that detracted national security professionals from their core mission. Finding the enemy is appropriate, but not if it comes at too high a political, moral, or legal price.

Fix. With the United States engaged in a global war against small groups of extremists, it now more than ever places a premium on “actionable intelligence” and has developed new mechanisms and pathways to develop and refine its dissemination. Whether this

instigator of sectarian carnage in Iraq from 2003 until mid-2006. Although U.S. officials knew his general identity, strategic outlook, plans to direct attacks against American and Iraqi forces, and desire to expand his jihad into neighboring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and elsewhere, intelligence tended only to indicate where he had been, never where he would be. The fix never occurred until June 2006, when the United States succeeded in isolating his position and, subsequently, calling in the fatal airstrike.

This success, however, was the result of years of trial and error that demanded a massive bureaucratic and resource shift that has not been completed. During the Cold War, the Intelligence Community relied heavily on expensive satellite systems that provided clarity on the capabilities and intent of U.S. adversaries. Despite the enormous cost of these systems, which was disproportionate to the utility provided in terms of counterterrorism efforts—that is, locating individuals and small groups—the Intelligence Community has struggled over the past decade to reallocate resources and budgets away from these Cold War-era reconnaissance assets.

Technical methods can generate excellent intelligence, but imagery assets and electronic surveillance cannot see into men's souls or oblige them to divulge the details of their exact location. Thus, human intelligence is a crucial aspect of the effort to fix substate actors, and the United States has significantly improved its capacity in this area over the past decade. In 2001, the CIA had limited, if any, ability to operate in the most significant terrorist hotspots, including Afghanistan, Lebanon, Somalia, and Yemen. By the late 1990s, for example, the United States still had not replaced intelligence officers in Afghanistan, all of whom departed during the evacuation of the Embassy in Kabul in 1989.¹⁷

But over the past decade, the Intelligence Community has dramatically bolstered the cadre of collectors and assets in the toughest parts of the world. Their work focuses on developing the local sources that help operators attack cells from the inside out and provide the granular, actionable details necessary to support capture or kill operations.

The capability to act on this information is also rapidly evolving. For example, the military has recognized the need for incisive and focused military action in combating smaller targets—leading to a rise in importance of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC)



Human Intelligence Collection Team member greets Afghan child at camp for returnees who fled during Taliban takeover

PRT-Ghazni, Public Affairs (Sarah R. Webb)

9/11—more than 3,000 in all—was the result of CIA cooperation with foreign intelligence services.¹⁵ One CIA official who worked with Pakistan claimed in late 2009 that the country's Inter-Services Intelligence has captured or killed over 600 U.S. targets alone.¹⁶

Implementing changes and navigating the new challenges to find terrorists have not proven painless for the Nation. Revelations that the George W. Bush administration launched controversial counterterrorism programs, such as a warrantless electronic surveillance program, strongly exacerbated an already tumultuous political environ-

perishable information comes from signals intelligence or imagery analysis, from drone-based cameras or from a human asset's lips, U.S. forces require precise input to achieve national security goals. Since the targets are not large, lumbering armies, but rather are individuals who may move quickly around the globe, the current nature of the threat requires speed to generate and synthesize this information much more rapidly than in the past.

For example, the United States and other countries struggled for years to “fix” Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian militant who arguably became the single most important

and counterterrorism task forces drawing from a wide range of military and intelligence resources. For example, JSOC, with significant assistance from the CIA, has developed and exploited the capability to use on-the-ground technical analysis of cell phones, computer hard drives, and documents in combination with the debriefing of captured militants to quickly locate new targets for attack.¹⁸ It was through this painstaking work—as well as some measure of luck—that the United States was able to find, fix, and ultimately eliminate Zarqawi and numerous others involved in anti-U.S. activities in Iraq and elsewhere.

Finish. U.S. decisionmakers have struggled to establish not only a new paradigm for finding and fixing terrorists, but also new strategies for finishing them. The Nation now attempts to neutralize its targets using special military forces, an integrated operator and analytical cadre, high technology, and severe legal sanctions—a mixture that ensures U.S. and civilian casualties are kept to a minimum while still accomplishing the objective of eliminating threats. The actual mechanics of finishing terrorists may include a combination of lethal action, physical detention, and prosecution. Terrorist suspects are successfully finished not just when killed by military strikes or covert action, but when they no longer represent a physical or ideological threat to U.S. interests.

In fact, many intelligence and military officials argue that detaining and interviewing terrorist suspects is the most effective manner of finishing them, for they can then provide information that will allow the find-fix-finish cycle to begin again. Their debriefings aid in locating, isolating, capturing, or killing other terrorists. For example, after 9/11 mastermind Khalid Shaykh Mohammed was arrested in Pakistan and rendered to American custody for incarceration and interrogation, he quickly provided actionable intelligence that was used to arrest the leader and several top members of Jemaah Islamiyah, an extremist group in Southeast Asia.¹⁹ Still, the circumstances under which Khalid Shaykh Mohammed provided certain information—for example, after being tortured—proved controversial.

Also notorious was the case of Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi, a Libyan militant captured by the Pakistani military and turned over to the United States, which finished him by guaranteeing that he remained confined for the rest of his life within U.S., Egyptian, and Libyan facilities. While al-Libi is better

known for providing the erroneous information that Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda had a high-level relationship prior to Operation *Iraqi Freedom*, he did provide actionable intelligence about pending attacks against U.S. interests at the beginning of his detention.

Lethal action, as in the case of Baitullah Mehsud, and rendition, as with Khalid Shaykh Mohammed and al-Libi, may indeed be necessary tools by which certain individuals can be removed from the global battlefield and prevented from harming U.S. citizens and interests. Lethal action and rendition may also disrupt ongoing or imminent terrorist planning, as critical individuals are removed from future plots.

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In certain respects, finishing terrorists is an easier task today than it was during the Cold War, when defeating the Soviet Union appeared possible only through global nuclear war. Once U.S. officials know the location of a terrorist suspect or group of suspects, they can engage in lethal or nonlethal military action. Still, deciding which option to choose—and then the method by which to accomplish it—can prove to be legally, ethically, and politically complicated.

Ironically, these hard choices increase when utilizing nonlethal methods, as the cases of al-Libi and Khalid Shaykh Mohammed demonstrate. Once a terrorist suspect is in custody, U.S. officials are faced with the question of how to proceed with his incarceration. One option would be to bring the terrorist suspect to trial, but this obliges American officials to provide some sort of legitimate legal process with which to try him and to ask basic legal questions about the classified evidentiary base necessary to convict him. A second option is to detain him indefinitely, which, beyond its likely unconstitutionality, begs thornier questions of where and under what conditions. Finally, U.S. officials could deport a detainee to a third country, which has been the path the Nation has taken for numerous individuals, including bin Laden's driver Salim Hamdan, who, after his time in the detention center at Guantánamo Bay

Naval Base, was deported and is today living quietly in Yemen. Of course, this third option may also allow these freed individuals—no longer under continuous American surveillance—to then reengage in terrorism or militant activity, as was the case for former Guantánamo Bay detainees Said Ali al-Shihri, who became an al Qaeda in Yemen leader, and Abdullah Ghulam Rasoul, who became a Taliban commander.²⁰

American attempts to forcibly evolve the find-fix-finish paradigm have not been without high political costs. The Bush administration famously stated that the war on terror should not be fought as a law enforcement exercise; at the same time, President Bush claimed that al Qaeda would be “brought to justice.” Still, if we measure justice in terms of fair trials and convictions, the United States has fallen a bit short of that standard. Despite over 300 convictions for terrorist-related offenses in civilian courts but only 6 in military commissions since 9/11,²¹ the Nation has yet to place a single member of al Qaeda's leadership on trial, let alone hand down convictions and sentences. Moreover, the ongoing fractious debate inside and outside the Obama administration about whether to try al Qaeda and Taliban militants in civilian or military courts—as well as other festering issues, such as the ongoing inability of the White House to shutter Guantánamo Bay—is indicative of the hard decisions policymakers need to make in determining the appropriate way to finish the threat. As the United States continues to grapple with these thorny political and legal problems while simultaneously prosecuting two major conflicts, answers must be found in order to maintain our legal and ethical footing in such uncertain political terrain.

In Search of Monsters

This new shift in national security posture will outlast the al Qaeda menace. Hence, it is critical that U.S. policymakers recognize and internalize the revolution in national security in order to defend the country from foreign and domestic enemies, protect the blessings of liberty in a manner consistent with the rule of law, and avoid the excesses and mistakes of the past that corroded the usefulness of the new tools and techniques in the U.S. arsenal.

Some might argue that America's new national security paradigm allows it to be the nation that President John Quincy Adams

warned against in 1821—one that goes abroad “in search of monsters to destroy.” Whether the United States has the foresight to cease, as he said, from involving itself “beyond the power of extrication, in all the wars of interest and intrigue, of individual avarice, envy, and ambition, which assume the colors and usurp the standard of freedom” remains up for debate. In this interconnected world, however, the United States is not going abroad in search of monsters to destroy; rather, the monsters have journeyed here in the form of international terrorism.

The intent—if not the capability—of some organizations to create societal havoc should not be underestimated, especially when some have indicated the strong desire to procure chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. Bin Laden himself stated in 1998 that it was his obligation in furthering jihad to acquire weapons of mass destruction; this public statement followed al Qaeda’s various attempts to procure uranium since the early 1990s.²² Beyond al Qaeda, other terror groups, such as Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Jemaah Islamiyah, Aum Shinrikiyo, and Lashkar al Tayyib have indicated some intent and experimentation to acquire these types of mass-casualty weapons.²³ Indeed, the possibility of weapons of mass destruction—most significantly, nuclear weapons—falling into the wrong hands is, as then-Senator Barack Obama stated in 2008, “the gravest danger” the United States faces.²⁴

Still, eliminating a small group or a single individual rarely requires a full-scale military intervention in a foreign country. Therefore, to confront a new threat to U.S. security, policymakers will think twice about embarking on open-ended, ill-defined military adventures. The experience in Iraq—costly in the thousands of dead, hundreds of billions of dollars wasted, and the undermining of American power—has chastened a generation of U.S. military leaders, intelligence officers, and policy leaders. While Iraq now seems to be on a fragile path toward some degree of political stability, it remains unclear whether the costs incurred in that country since 2003 actually advanced core American interests and kept the Nation safe from attack. While the United States will use large-scale military forces in the future to achieve security goals, the Iraqi venture will likely cause

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reluctance to unleash them unless the threat affects vital security requirements.

National security resources are finite, so the United States must make hard choices in finding, fixing, and finishing targets. There are a multitude of threats facing the United States, but there is only enough policymaker

time, experience, and interest to counter a few of them at once. Moreover, in a crisis, usually only one issue will dominate policymakers’ attention. Hence, prioritizing issues requires minimizing the importance of perfectly legitimate policy topics.

This is not to say that the new find-fix-finish paradigm is the only component of securing the national interest. Given current U.S. commitments in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, and despite our enhanced man-hunting capabilities, the United States cannot, as General David Petraeus once wryly noted, “kill [its] way out of an insurgency.” Fighting a war requires a comprehensive strategy; understanding the new find-fix-finish dynamic is nonetheless critical to successfully winning them. What the United States has realized over the last several years is that a robust COIN strategy must be coupled with effective counterterrorism work to achieve measurable successes against substate adversaries. COIN cannot succeed without counterterrorism actions. This was most evident in the American successes in sharply reducing militant violence in Anbar Province and the geographic belts surrounding Baghdad in 2007–2008. The American experience since 9/11 has clearly shown that the find-fix-finish paradigm has become a critical component of achieving the secure “breathing spaces” for more stable, longer term political successes.

Pursuing an effective national security strategy abroad in the post-9/11 era also requires a new approach to political consensus at home. Given the controversial nature of many of the tools now routinely used by the U.S. Government to protect and defend its interests, it is critical to receive the buy-in of Congress and the public at large. Additionally, to confront the new security threats of the 21st century, the United States requires a much more nuanced approach and sensitivity to the world, as foreign liaison relationships, particularly with Middle Eastern countries, become more important to isolating and ending terror networks. A standoffish attitude toward international laws and norms needlessly jeopardizes international relationships and the Nation’s moral standing. Furthermore, using the new tactical tools in a sloppy manner—such as rendering people to noxious countries such as Syria, or firing Hellfire missiles into dwellings in Pakistan without regard to civilian casualties—will ultimately undermine these methods politi-



FBI wanted posters of Amer El-Maati, sought in connection with possible terrorist threats, and others

cally and morally, and make protecting U.S. interests much more difficult.

In the end, effectively protecting U.S. interests and managing risk are the ultimate goals of the new find, fix, and finish doctrine of national security. **JFQ**

NOTES

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