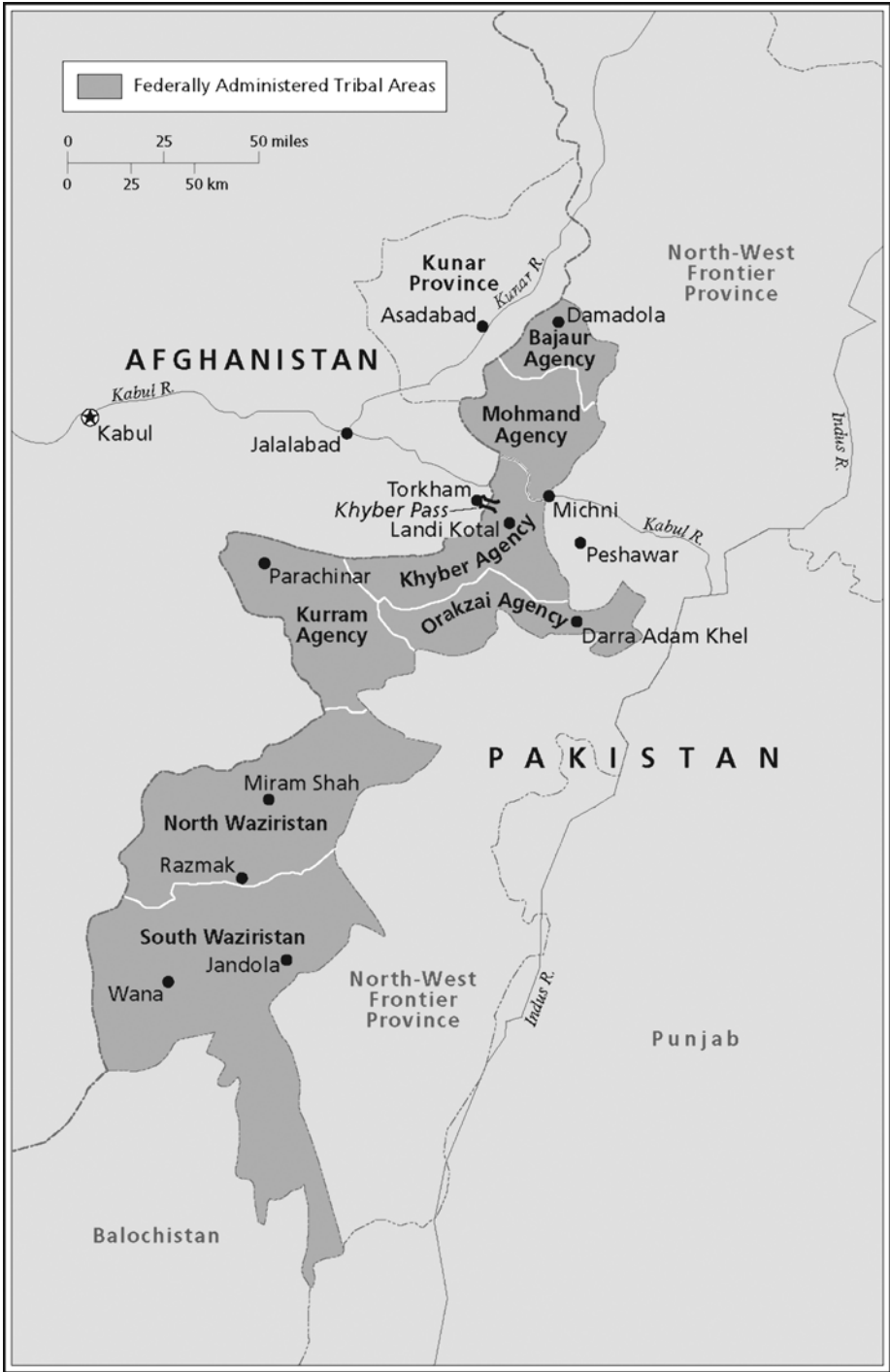


group [in this context, the United States] tried to come in and threaten our religion, we would rise up against them—naturally.⁹⁶

Thus, we have observed an internal intervention-rejection cycle driven by a harsh Thai government crackdown in the South, which has created a certain number of accidental guerrillas fighting alongside the insurgents—due to coercion or intimidation, in the hope of financial gain, or to defend their way of life against external encroachment; these are the classic motivations of the accidental guerrilla, as we have seen. But on a broader level, the lack of direct Western intervention in this case seems to have avoided “closing the loop” and thus starting the cycle of external intervention, societal immune response, infection by global terrorist entities, and contagion into the broader region. This does not mean that such an infection might not already be happening covertly, or might not happen in the future if the insurgency remains unresolved. At the same time, the fact that Western forces—especially ground troops and police—have stayed out of southern Thailand may demonstrate that an indirect approach, working through local partners and adopting the least intrusive approach possible, is preferable to large-scale intervention. Western partners have urged restraint on successive Thai governments, rather than pushing Thailand prematurely into large-scale military intervention or launching unilateral strikes. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for my next example, Pakistan.

Terrain, Tribes, and Terrorists: Pakistan, 2006–2008

“The two main factors for you will be the terrain and the tribes. You have to know their game and learn to play it, which means you first have to understand their environment.” It was May 2006, and the late-afternoon sun was slanting through the windows of my cluttered office on the second floor of the State Department building in Washington, where I was deep in discussion with Professor Akbar Ahmed. We were poring together over air photos, tribal gazetteers, and topographic maps, laid out across my desk and spilling onto the floor: a panorama of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Frontier at one-to-a-million scale in the muted cartographic colors of British India. These were modern Pakistani maps, but not enough has changed on the Frontier to justify redrawing the old colonial mapmakers’ work.



Map 4.3 Pakistan's federally administered tribal areas.

Ahmed, whom I mentioned in chapter 2, as well as being a noted anthropologist, diplomat, and filmmaker, is professor of international relations and chair of Islamic studies at American University. More to my purpose, he had served half a lifetime in the District Management Group, the elite cadre within the civil service of Pakistan that administered the tribal agencies on Pakistan's Frontier until disbanded by General Musharraf in 1999. In the 1980s—during the Soviet-Afghan War, when the United States, the Pakistani intelligence service (Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate; ISI), and groups like those supported by the young Saudi militant Usama bin Laden were running separate networks for the *mujahidin* from safe houses in different parts of Peshawar—Akbar Ahmed had been political agent of South Waziristan: then and now, a stronghold of insurgency and tribal warfare. He had walked the Durand Line, the still-contested border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, when Soviet troops were operating just a few miles away and MiGs were overflying the Frontier. I listened intently to his advice. I was leaving for the North-West Frontier in a few days—and a stint on the Frontier concentrates the mind.

In the field, with military and civilian teams and local people in locations across Afghanistan and Pakistan at various times through the next three years, the wisdom of Ahmed's insight came home to me again and again. The fact is that the terrain and the tribes drive 90 percent of what happens on the Frontier, while the third factor, which accounts for the other 10 percent, is the presence of transnational terrorists and our reaction to them. But things seem very different in Washington or London from how they seem in Peshawar, let alone in Bajaur, Khyber, or Waziristan—in that great tangle of dust-colored ridges known as the Safed Koh, or "White Mountains." This is a southern arm of the Hindu Kush, the vast range that separates Afghanistan (which lies on the immense Iranian Plateau, which stretches all the way to the Arabian Gulf) from the valley of the Indus, the northern geographical limit of the Indian subcontinent. The locals call the area "the hills." Their highest peak is Mount Sikaram, just under 16,000 feet—a trifling height beside the nearby Hindu Kush and Himalayas, but a big mountain anywhere else. The terrain is barely believable: razor-backed ridges, precipitous goat tracks, near-vertical foot trails, deep ravines where the sun scorches the midday rock and you seem to struggle in a furnace, rivers that are gravel gullies nine months of the year and roaring torrents the other three, winter passes deep in snow where vehicles bog, mountain winds slash your face, and pack animals sink to the belly. And yet there are

lush river valleys with magnificent *chenar* trees, where the fertile green of crops and orchards and the sparkle of flowing water soothes the eyes. And there is a scent to the Frontier: a mixture of hot granite, dry grass, wood-smoke, and pine—an aromatic, dusty, sun-baked scent that never leaves you once you have smelled it.

The people, Karlanri hill-tribes of the Pashtun ethnic group, are as harsh and handsome as their hills. Most men carry rifles from boyhood; women are rarely seen and never heard in public, though some (particularly those of elite status)⁹⁷ are privately influential. Fierce pride, unyielding self-reliance, and exacting reciprocity (the Pashto word for “revenge,” *badal*, can also mean “exchange”) are key assets in the struggle for life. The hill-tribes regard warfare and pillage as forms of extreme sport, and tribal solidarity, the code of Pashtunwali (discussed already in the Afghan context in chapter 2) and *shari’a* law are the only standards that count. The harshness with which men treat women and adults exploit children is often simply astonishing to outsiders. Yet these are also some of the kindest, liveliest, most humorous, hospitable, and resilient people I have ever met.

Villages are tight clusters of dwellings and compounds, often located in valleys. Every house is a fortress, surrounded by its crenellated stone or mud-brick wall, with rifle loopholes instead of windows, and every approach is covered by observation and fire. Many compounds have a 20-foot-tall watchtower or thick-walled central keep, and some have a fortified gatehouse.⁹⁸ Some clans have traditional ambush sites, passed from father to son like favorite fishing spots in a Western family. The young Winston Churchill, campaigning here in 1897, wrote that “all along the Afghan border every man’s house is his castle. The villages are the fortifications, the fortifications are the villages. Every house is loopholed, and whether it has a tower or not depends only on its owner’s wealth.”⁹⁹

“ALL THE WORLD WAS GOING GHAZA”

Churchill was describing the operations of the Malakand Field Force around the village of Damadola, in Bajaur Agency, during the Great Frontier War of 1897—a tribal uprising inspired and exploited by religious leaders who co-opted local tribes’ opposition to the encroachment of government authority (an alien and infidel presence) into their region. This intrusion was symbolized by the building of roads into Gilgit, Chitral, and Dir, bringing British military garrisons closer to Bajaur, which borders on Afghanistan’s Kunar valley, which I discussed



Figure 4.3 Pakistan, May 2006—Fortified village in the federally administered tribal areas.

Photo: David Kilcullen

in the context of another road-building program in chapter 2. Ironically, this increase in government presence was driven by British fear of Russian expansionism across the Pamir ranges, not by a desire to control the independent tribes. Members of tribal society were, in effect, pawns in a classic Great Game conflict driven by a geopolitical contest between imperial Russia and British India on the one hand and on the other, indigenous religious leaders (most notably Hazrat Sadullah Khan, from Buner in Swat, known to the British as the Mad Mullah) striving to cement their positions of influence. A very similar situation applies today.

The Malakand Field Force fought several major battles in the valleys around Damadola, killed hundreds of tribal fighters, and destroyed dozens of houses in the village, many by burning and others through heavy artillery bombardment.¹⁰⁰ Following the military campaign, political officers accompanying the force conducted punitive negotiations with the tribes, according to Churchill's eyewitness account:

Mr. Davis [the political officer] conducted the negotiations with the Màmunds. On the 26th a Jirgah from the tribe came into camp [at Inàyat Qala, just under 3 miles from Damadola]. They deposited 4000 rupees as a token of submission, and brought in fifty firearms. These, however, were of the oldest and most antiquated types, and were obviously not the weapons with which so many soldiers had been killed and wounded. This was pointed out to the tribal representatives. They protested that they had no others. . . . The political officer was firm, and his terms were explicit. Either they must give up the twenty-two rifles captured from the 35th Sikhs on the 16th, or their villages would be destroyed. No other terms would he accept. To this they replied, that they had not got the rifles. They had all been taken, they said, and I think with truth, by the Afghan tribesmen from the Kunar Valley [who had participated in the battle of September 16, 1897, alongside the Mamunds]. These would not give them up. Besides—this also with truth—they had been taken in “fair war.” . . . They admitted to having sent their young men to attack the [British Forward Operating Bases at] Malakand and Chakdara. “All the world was going *ghaza* [becoming warriors for the faith],” they said. They could not stay behind. They also owned to having gone five miles from their valley to attack the camp at Markhanai. Why had the Sirkar [government] burnt their village? they asked. They had only tried to get even—for the sake of their honour.¹⁰¹

All the elements of Churchill’s account will immediately be familiar to anyone who has served in Afghanistan or Pakistan in the “War on Terrorism.” Honor (*nang*)–driven behavior, tribal solidarity, cultural institutions of revenge, generalized reciprocity and balanced opposition, placement of immense value on weapons, the *jirga* pleading an inability to account for the actions of its young men or to control its tribal allies, crossborder raiding, advancement of religious justification for tribal militancy, coalescing of rival tribes in a temporary alliance against external intrusion, and a harsh and alienating government response—all these elements of “Frontier tradition” are strongly in evidence in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) today.

Indeed, the elders’ comments to the British political officer in 1897 echo the words of the Afghan villagers interviewed by Americans in 2006 after the ambush I described in chapter 2, who argued that “it would have shamed them to stand by and wait the battle out.” Back in 1897,

negotiations eventually failed, and in consequence the British “destroyed all the villages in the centre of the valley, some twelve or fourteen in number, and blew up with dynamite upwards of thirty towers and forts. The whole valley was filled with the smoke.”¹⁰²

Punitive raiding, collective punishment, and destruction of houses and villages¹⁰³ are still features of life on the Frontier, though the means have changed. More than 110 years since being burned by the British, the same village of Damadola was the scene of an alleged CIA airstrike on January 13, 2006, using armed MQ-1 Predator uninhabited aerial vehicles (UAVs) against suspected AQ militants, which destroyed a house and killed 18 people, provoking widespread violent protests across Pakistan.¹⁰⁴ The strike was launched against a dinner party celebrating the Muslim festival of Eid ul-Adha, the Festival of Sacrifice, one of the two holiest feasts of the Sunni Islamic calendar.¹⁰⁵ Though initially there were claims that Ayman al-Zawahiri was in the house and that one of his close relatives was killed in the attack, Pakistani and U.S. officials later admitted that no senior militants were present and that only local villagers were killed, including women and children.¹⁰⁶

A few months later, on October 31, 2006, the Pakistani army, again allegedly supported by multiple strikes from armed Predator UAVs, once more attacked and destroyed a *madrassa* outside Damadola, killing about 85 local people—most alleged to be militants—in a predawn airmobile assault led by attack helicopters. An army spokesperson later claimed the military had received “confirmed intelligence reports that 70 to 80 militants were hiding in a *madrasa* used as a terrorist-training facility” at Chingai, near Damadola, but admitted that “no high-value target was present at the time of the attack.”¹⁰⁷ Some local residents and opposition politicians said that children had been in the school, and contended that American warplanes had participated in the attack.¹⁰⁸

In May 2008, Damadola was hit yet again by another alleged Predator strike targeting Abu Suleiman al-Jazairi, an Algerian AQ trainer and explosives specialist involved in a range of European terrorist networks. At least 16 people, including Al-Jazairi, died when the house they were staying in, believed to belong to former Afghan Taliban defense minister, Maulvi Obaidullah, was completely destroyed. Members of Obaidullah’s family, again including women and children, are thought to have died in the strike.¹⁰⁹

Perhaps unsurprisingly to anyone who realizes that Western powers have repeatedly been blowing up this particular village since at least the

nineteenth century, Damadola is known as a center of militant activity, a Taliban base area, and a stronghold of Tehrik-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi, an organization that has recruited thousands of Pakistani tribesmen and militants to fight with the Taliban in Afghanistan. The entire Mamund area (tehsil) of Bajaur Agency has been a key area of militancy and crossborder infiltration into Afghanistan.¹¹⁰ Damadola is also allegedly a base area for Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s Hezb-I Islami Gulbuddin (already discussed in the Afghan case study) and the Pakistani Taliban movement (Tehrik-e-Taleban Pakistan) led by Beitullah Mahsud, who is alleged by some in Pakistan to have been responsible for the murder of former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto on December 27, 2007.¹¹¹ One might argue that as an extremist stronghold, the village deserves what it gets. But which came first, the extremism or the punitive attacks by external powers? Clearly, the two are cyclic and mutually reinforcing.

A few months after the January 2006 strike, I spent several hours in conversation with a local politician from the Damadola area, associated with the Jema’ah Islamiyah (JI), a pro-Taliban, antigovernment, Deobandi¹¹² Islamist political party. At this time, JI had some representation in the National Assembly and held 14 seats in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) Assembly (though the party was subsequently trounced by the secular Pashtun-nationalist Awami National Party in the January 2008 elections). This local leader vociferously denied any possible justification for the government attacks on the village, and rejected the implicit paternalism (akin to the “internal colonialism” noted in the southern Thailand example), which he saw as inherent in the traditional government approach to the FATA:

I live only 2 kilometers from the place [Damadola], and I was there within hours of the attack while they were still pulling bodies out of the rubble, including children. All the bodies were of innocent local people, there were no al Qa’ida. The people don’t want to be ruled under the old system by the *maliks*. Rather they want an elected legislature at the FATA level. FATA is the fifth unit of Pakistan (the others being NWFP, Baluchistan, Sindh, and the Punjab) and the others are all governed by elected democratic representatives: FATA should be, too. The people should have the freedom to elect their own representatives. America’s war against the Soviets in Afghanistan exploited and used these people then abandoned them. They don’t trust America, or the central government, which has been very harsh in its operations in Waziristan.¹¹³

These several incidents at the one village of Damadola, extending over more than a century, illustrate some of the enduring characteristics of life on the Frontier. After 9/11, some Western planners and policy-makers approached engagement in Pakistan and Afghanistan with only a scant understanding of the colonial and postcolonial history of the area, let alone of the cultures and societies in this part of the world and the deeply corrosive impact of the Soviet-Afghan war, the Afghan civil war that followed it, and the rise of the Taliban.¹¹⁴ Well-meaning attempts were made to establish control over the putatively “ungoverned space” of the FATA safe haven through a program of benevolent modernization backed by modern, high-tech military force.

But there are dozens of places, and dozens of tribes, on the Frontier with problematic histories similar to that of Damadola. To think that modern Western technology, superficial “hearts-and-minds” activities, short-term development projects, or large-scale military intervention can reverse this history overnight, win over the population, and integrate them into “modern” Pakistani society without some major political and cultural transformation is simply naïve. Moreover, the idea that extending the reach of government into the area is the solution to all its problems is misguided, since external government (as distinct from self-governance by informal but robust tribal institutions) is both alien and abhorrent to many tribal Pashtuns, and its encroachment into their culture area has been a key trigger for violence and warfare since the nineteenth century, and arguably through all of recorded history.¹¹⁵ Similarly, to imagine that killing or capturing Usama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, or any of the other AQ leaders thought to be hiding in this area will help stabilize the situation is also unrealistic: intrusive actions, especially punitive raiding and air strikes targeting AQ senior leadership, may or may not be justified on other grounds, but their effect on local stability is unarguably and entirely negative. For stabilization and reconstruction measures to have any effect at all, they would have to take place in the context of a comprehensive political solution to complex and intractable problems—something that is unlikely to occur in the foreseeable future.

THE ANCESTRAL HOME OF THE ACCIDENTAL GUERRILLA

As I recounted in chapter 1, I first began to notice the accidental guerrilla syndrome during fieldwork in West Java in 1996, but its full importance only hit me 10 years later, during a field trip to the Khyber Agency, a few



Figure 4.4 Pakistan, June 2006—Complex terrain near the Khyber pass.

Photo: David Kilcullen

miles south of Bajaur. The FATA, indeed, is the ancestral home of the accidental guerrilla and the place where the syndrome is visible in its purest and most classic form.

The majority of people who actually think in concrete terms about the whereabouts of Usama bin Laden tend to describe him as hiding, “holed-up,” harried, fugitive, pinned down, in a hideout in the FATA and eking out a hunted existence in a cave. Indeed, the ideologically satisfying notion of bin Laden and the senior AQ leadership as infernal troglodytes, plotting fanatically against the West from an underground lair like demons in a mythical netherworld, seems to have entered the Western popular imagination since 9/11. The reality is very different. Movement in and out of the FATA to and from Afghanistan and other parts of Pakistan, is relatively easy, and life can be comfortable and pleasant. Most of the area is a no-go zone for government forces; the local population, while almost impossible to hide from, are also highly unlikely to turn in any fugitive to the authorities. If bin Laden is actually in the FATA, this is by choice rather than necessity: he is not hiding but veiled, cocooned in a protective network of local allies and trusted relationships.

The FATA's population is about 3.25 million, and adding the people who live across the Durand Line in eastern Afghanistan gives a population of almost 10 million along the FATA border with Afghanistan: the central sector, about 1,200 kilometers long, of the Frontier, which is 1,640 miles (2,640 kilometers) long. The FATA is theoretically governed under a loose form of indirect rule, and law and order are administered under a system called the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR), first established in 1848 and revised in 1901. This system works through officials called political agents, who deal with *maliks* (government-endorsed tribal representatives), and applies collective punishments when tribes overstep the bounds, but levies no taxes and imposes little law and order beyond the internal tribal governance system. Indeed, government authority under the FCR does not apply to any area more than 100 yards from a road. This traditional system has largely broken down since the Pakistani military, responding to Western pressure, began to intervene in the FATA in 2004. Several tribes straddle the Frontier, with branches in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Most of these run smuggling or other criminal activities. South Asia analysts Thomas Johnson and Christopher Mason commented on this in a 2008 article:

The Durand line, which was negotiated and formalized in 1893, was drawn by a team of British surveyors, led by Sir Mortimer Durand, to create a boundary between colonial British India and Afghanistan. To a great extent, the line followed the contours of convenient geographical features, as well as the existing limits of British authority, rather than tribal borders. It divided the homelands of the Pashtun tribes nearly equally between Afghanistan and Pakistan, effectively cutting the Pashtun nation in half. This largely imaginary boundary has been viewed since its inception with contempt and resentment by Pashtuns on both sides of the line. As a practical matter, the border is unenforced and unenforceable. In some places the position of the line is disputed; in others it is inaccessible to all but trained mountain climbers; in still others it cuts through the middle of villages and even through individual homes. The majority of the Pashtun tribes and clans that control the frontier zones of eastern and southern Afghanistan along the Durand line have never accepted the legitimacy of what they believe to be an arbitrary and capricious boundary.¹¹⁶

As Afghanistan expert Barnett Rubin told me in mid-2008, to think of Afghanistan and Pakistan as separate countries divided by a normal

international border, or to conceive of Pakistani Taliban in Afghanistan, or Afghans in Pakistan, as foreign fighters is to fundamentally misunderstand the mental geography of the Pashtun nation. Rubin argues that Pashtuns see both the Afghan and Pakistani states as foreign interlopers in their culture area, and regard crossborder tribal cousins as fellow members of the real though yet unachieved nation of Pashtunistan.¹¹⁷ As I noted in my Timor and Thailand examples, the definition of “foreigner” is elastic and rests in the eye of the beholder.

INFECTION AND CONTAGION

Al Qa’ida presence is a long-standing phenomenon here, dating back almost 30 years. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 eventually drew up to 25,000 Arabs to Afghanistan to fight on the side of the *mujahidin*. These included Usama bin Laden and the Maktab Khadamat al-Mujahidin al-’Arab (Afghan services bureau), which he supported and eventually led, and which subsequently became the nucleus of AQ.¹¹⁸ Apart from a few years in Saudi Arabia and Sudan in the 1990s, the AQ leadership has been in the Afghan-Pakistan frontier region for a generation,¹¹⁹ and the Arab *takfiri* presence in the FATA has been nearly continuous. During the same period, the Taliban—originating in Afghan refugee camps in or near the FATA and growing through a network of tribal connections, as well as support from ISI under successive Pakistani regimes—has established a strong presence in the same areas.¹²⁰

During that time, both AQ and the Taliban, as well as AQ-allied foreign fighters, including Chechens, Uzbeks, Uighurs, and others, have burrowed deeply into tribal society, through activities such as intermarriage with local tribes, co-opting of local leaders, purchase and operation of businesses and other services, charity activities, sponsorship or partnership with *madrassas*, and settling of local disputes. In doing so, they have in many areas displaced the traditional tribal governance structure (described as the tribal governance triad in chapter 2) and have undermined and dispossessed both the tribal establishment and the traditional form of governance by political agents and *maliks* under the FCR. In parts of the FATA where the traditional tribal structure still functions, it does so on the sufferance of local Taliban or AQ leadership.

This is absolutely typical of the infection phase of the accidental guerrilla syndrome: the basic structures of tribal society, damaged and weakened by war and population movement, allowed an opening for an

extremist presence. Extremists then co-opted some members of local society, intimidated others, and created a safe haven for their own activities in the area. They created resentment against themselves over time through their intimidatory behavior, but they also effectively bought off local opposition through political alliances (sometimes through marriage), bringing economic benefits to the local area, and appealing to religious identity and their status as guests and allies under Pashtunwali. Thus, by the turn of the twentyfirst century, the *tafkiri* presence in the FATA was well established, with strong local allies, embedded in the fabric of local society.

According to local people and government officials I talked to, tribal fighters allied with AQ have a very distinctive appearance and manner. They typically wear their hair long, and they sport Thuraya satellite phones, load-bearing vests designed to carry grenades, and well-maintained modern weapons.¹²¹ They often drive four-wheel-drive SUVs, sometimes of extremely recent Japanese make, are often accompanied by Arab “mind-ers,” and behave with swagger and arrogance. An illustrative incident that occurred in Kurram Agency highlights the interaction of these AQ-allied tribal fighters with local people.

In March 2006, a local staff member from the U.S. Embassy’s Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS) was working in Kurram Agency with a survey team, developing a road and a microhydroelectricity program to improve government access to the area. One NAS official described the program, and the incident, as follows:

NAS supports roadbuilding in the FATA, a program the Pakistani army values greatly as it improves their mobility and access. They complain loudly any time there is talk of cutting the program, but local contractors are too frightened to actually build the roads in the more threatened areas, and so less than 20 percent of projects are on track. Also, the local tribes reject the road program because it brings government access and army presence to their areas, so NAS supports miniature hydroelectric projects to encourage locals to accept the roads—as a “sweetener,” effectively. A couple of months ago, a local NAS staffer and a survey team were in the Kurram Agency working on a road and hydro program when they were bailed up [accosted] by a threatening and heavily armed group of tribesmen. These men were accompanied by several foreigners, possibly Arabs or Chechens, who were very hostile and spoke no Pashtu. The tribesmen warned the project team to

leave the area, desist from planning the project, and never come back: “Otherwise we will kill you.” The team left, the project is stalled, and NAS teams have not been back to Kurram since.¹²²

Another NAS official told me that there were about 40 tribesmen in the group, with four foreigners who shook hands with the team but then said nothing during the incident. They carried Thuraya phones, and both they and several of the tribesmen wore vests complete with grenades. The incident occurred in the part of Kurram Agency right opposite Tora Bora, and the warning included a threat to shoot on sight any work teams seen in the area. The same official commented that the Pakistani army response took approximately 48 hours to mount, consisted of a two-battalion sweep of the area, commanded by a full colonel, and found nothing—a further example of the uselessness of large-scale sweep operations in this type of environment.¹²³

Since 9/11, there has been continued growth in Taliban strength and influence in the NWFP, with some areas now completely under Taliban domination. There has also been a distinct contagion effect, with “Talibanization” of many areas in the FATA, as well as in the Frontier Regions—the portions of the NWFP that border on the FATA. Staff at the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad in mid-2006 assessed Bannu, Tank, the boundary area of Dera Ismail Khan District, and other parts of the province as effectively Taliban controlled, remarking that embassy officers “have little or no access to the field, their teams have not been able to move freely in the FATA for at least a year, they have not been able to visit an actual agency or see conditions on the ground at first hand. Their projects are lagging because local staff are too frightened to go into the field, the local tribes have become hostile and have warned them off projects, and the security situation is deteriorating.”¹²⁴ Major Pakistani cities are now subject to Taliban influence, and there have been high-profile militant strikes in Islamabad (the Red Mosque siege of August 2007, discussed below), Rawalpindi (the assassination of Benazir Bhutto in December 2007), and Karachi (a series of deadly bombings). The Pakistan army has applied a heavily “kinetic,” firepower-based approach to suppressing the insurgency in this area, which has alienated the tribes, helping the Taliban recruit. The Taliban have also killed hundreds of *maliks* and other tribal leaders in the FATA, to intimidate the others and bring local tribes onto their side. Meanwhile, extremist influence has spread into the National Assembly and other legislative bodies.

This increase and spread of Taliban and AQ influence was exacerbated and, in some ways, driven by the Pakistani army's intervention in the FATA—urged on by the United States and other Western governments—and by the societal rejection of the army's presence.

INTERVENTION AND REJECTION

In July 2002, under strong pressure to support the international community in the so-called “War on Terrorism,” the Musharraf government deployed the Pakistan Army into the Tirah valley in upper Khyber Agency. The army's primary mission was to deal with AQ and Taliban remnants who had fled into Pakistan following the fall of the Taliban regime and the escape of AQ senior leaders after the battle of Tora Bora (Spin Ghar), which had occurred in December 2001 on the Afghan side of the frontier about 10 kilometers from the FATA. Following negotiations with reluctant tribal leaders, the army also entered North Waziristan, and later South Waziristan, in a similar effort to mop up AQ and Taliban remnants.

This intervention prompted an immediate societal immune response, with local tribes (especially the Zali Khel of the Ahmadzai Wazirs in Waziristan Agency, and later the powerful and well-organized Mahsuds to their south) perceiving the military presence as an attempt to suppress and control them. Attempts to force the tribes to surrender foreign militants to the government backfired badly, as did other heavy-handed tactics, so that by early 2004 the tribes were in open revolt across key parts of the FATA, in the largest tribal uprising since the Great Frontier War more than a century earlier. Heavy fighting first erupted at Azam Warsak, near Wana in South Waziristan, leading to a major pitched battle in March 2004 between the Pakistani army and up to 400 tribal fighters. Fifty-five tribal fighters were killed and 149 captured in the battle, which cost the Pakistan army 93 soldiers killed, wounded, or captured.¹²⁵

Importantly, the Pakistan army's entry into the Tirah Valley in 2002 was the first time that the regular army (as distinct from the Frontier Corps and tribal levies) had entered the FATA on operations since Pakistan's independence in August 1947. As such, not only was it an act with extremely inflammatory potential but it also undermined the tacit social compact on which the FCR and traditional Frontier governance systems had been based. The implicit agreement that underpinned the FCR system was that if the tribes sat down quietly under the political agents, *maliks*, and Frontier Corps, then they would be left alone to govern themselves, and the central

government and the army would stay out of their affairs. Now the army had broken the government’s end of the deal, attempting (at the behest of *kafir* foreigners, no less) to force the tribes to break two key tenets of Pashtunwali: *melmastia* (hospitality to a guest) and *nanawatei* (protection of a defeated combatant seeking refuge). Tribal honor and Islamic principle, especially the Qur’anic injunction against siding with any infidel against any fellow Muslim, alike combined to ensure that the tribal leaders would utterly reject these demands. The army, also, had first broken the deal, not the tribes: why then should they remain quiet? By the end of 2004, the tribes were in a full, though undeclared, frontier war against the government. By early 2005, heavy army casualties in the FATA had forced the government to alter its strategy from confrontation to negotiation.

The Government of Pakistan signed the Shakai Peace Agreement, the first of three peace agreements with the tribes, in South Waziristan in April 2004. This peace agreement had been negotiated with former Taliban commander Nek Muhammad Wazir, but it broke down almost at once, and he was killed in mid-June 2004, allegedly by a U.S. Predator UAV strike.¹²⁶ As BBC News Peshawar correspondent Rahimullah Yusufzai reported at the time, the peace deal did not result in any lasting reduction in violence, but it altered local power structures, empowering militants like Nek Muhammad, who were seen as negotiating with the government from a position of strength, while marginalizing traditional tribal leaders:

Mohammad had his moment of glory when Lt Gen Safdar Hussain, commander of the forces battling the militants in South Waziristan, publicly embraced him in the presence of several thousand tribesmen to announce a reconciliation. Though Mohammad renounced militancy in return for an amnesty from the military, the deal raised his stature in the eyes of tribal people. The subsequent media limelight made the long-haired, black-bearded militant a familiar face and a household name in Pakistan. But it was not long before disagreement over the terms of the unwritten agreement once more pitted Mohammad against the armed forces. He said he was unable to produce fugitive foreign militants before the authorities for registration. The military retaliated by revoking his amnesty. Orders to kill or capture him were issued as the military launched its biggest operation against al-Qaeda-linked foreign militants and their Pakistani supporters on 11 June. A week later, Nek Mohammad was dead.¹²⁷

The same pattern has been evident in subsequent peace deals, with Nek Muhammad's successor, Beitullah Mehsud, in February 2005, and in the North Waziristan agreement of September 2006. In each of these agreements, the army negotiated from a position of weakness, obtaining at best minimal temporary reductions in violence, at the cost of empowering militant leaders over tribal elders, further disrupting the fabric of society in the FATA. Such deals also increased the freedom of action for militants in the FATA, creating a de facto Taliban safe haven in the area, and resulting in a spike in Taliban infiltration into Afghanistan: seasonally adjusted, infiltration into Afghanistan from the FATA after the North Waziristan Agreement over the winter of 2006–2007 rose by 400–600 percent.¹²⁸ These peace agreements were formally abrogated in August 2007 after the Lal Masjid episode, in which militants occupied the Red Mosque in Islamabad and brought violence out of the FATA into the Pakistani capital, leading to violent protests all over the country (a further example of the contagion effect).

The broader approach, described by some as “back to the Raj,”¹²⁹ that Pakistani military and political leaders advocated—that is, falling back on “proven” methods from the colonial era to regain control of the FATA—also incorporates two strategic flaws. First, British methods were designed to preserve the FATA as an ungoverned space, in order to create a buffer zone against encroachment from Afghanistan. The British approach was not intended to govern the FATA but merely to keep it quiet by preventing tribal unrest.¹³⁰ Falling back on these methods, in the face of an organized insurgency, is unlikely to succeed by itself, since the Pakistan government's fundamental strategic aim is different. In essence, it is hard to see how one could use a system that was designed to *create* an ungoverned space as a means to *control* such a space to government control. Second, as we have seen, British methods used the regular army as an implied threat or tacit sanction. The tribes were pressured to cooperate with local administrators and paramilitary forces, or else the regular military would be deployed and crush them. This bluff has now been called; the army was deployed in large-scale operations from 2004, but has failed to crush the insurgents, destroying the deterrent effect of army operations.¹³¹ The tactic sanction was called upon, the Army invaded the tribal areas—and far from crushing the recalcitrant tribes the Army itself was defeated. Thus, the implied threat on which the old system relied is no longer available as a means to underpin this approach.

WEAKNESSES IN THE ARMY’S

COUNTERINSURGENCY APPROACH

Why did the army do so poorly against the insurgents? Based on field assessments with the Pakistani army in 2006, and on my reading of media and unclassified analytical reporting since then, I believe there are nine key reasons.

First, Army operations have been enemy-focused, aimed at hunting down and killing or capturing key enemy personnel (high value targets; HVTs) and attacking armed insurgents in the field. Army and Frontier Corps operations are focused on insurgent fighters and aimed at eliminating HVTs and insurgent units. Protecting and winning over the population are strictly secondary to the aim of destroying the insurgents. This is contrary to best-practice counterinsurgency,¹³² which is to focus on the population—an approach that, counterintuitively, has been shown to produce quicker, more effective results than targeting insurgents directly.

Second, operations have tended to be large-scale, multiunit activities. Contrary to best practice, most army and Frontier Corps operations are at least battalion size, with the majority of operations being conducted at brigade level or higher.¹³³ There has been little attempt at small-unit operations (i.e., company size and smaller), local patrolling, or presence operations to dominate population centers and the countryside. Instead, more attention has been given to large-scale sweeps.¹³⁴

Third, again contrary to best practice, the majority of Pakistan army and Frontier Corps units are deployed in static garrison, checkpoint, or asset protection tasks.¹³⁵ This is exacerbated by a lack of appropriate mobility assets; there is a particular shortage of helicopters¹³⁶ and mine-protected vehicles that are proof against improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Typically, units are deployed in forward operating bases (FOBs) of half-battalion to battalion size, or larger brigade garrison positions. They adopt a defensive posture, rarely leaving their positions.¹³⁷ This leaves few troops available for operational reserves (although some local quick-reaction forces are maintained), so that Pakistani forces cannot flexibly deploy troops to deal with insurgent activity (as commanders acknowledge).¹³⁸

Fourth, this has contributed to an overextension of military forces. The lack of reserves and the pattern of large-scale static deployment indicates that the Pakistani army is overextended—units lack flexibility, have little maneuver room, and are forced to rely on kinetic strike (using aircraft and artillery) to react to incidents or deny areas to insurgents. Simultaneously

the Frontier Corps has been forced to concentrate troops in high-threat areas, leaving other parts of the FATA unsecured. Several incidences of overreliance on kinetic means, driven by lack of available manpower, were highlighted in media reporting in 2006, as well as in my discussions with Pakistani Army and Frontier Corps personnel, local administrators and community leaders in the field.¹³⁹ For example, on June 5, 2006, a Frontier Corps convoy was ambushed several miles outside Miran Shah using a rocket attack and possible IED, and the insurgents disappeared after the attack. Two Frontier Corps soldiers were killed in the ambush; the Pakistani army response was to bombard built-up areas in the town of Miranshah with heavy artillery fire, destroying several hotels, markets, and houses and killing several civilians in the process. No ground-based follow-up was mounted: the response was primarily kinetic suppression (or retaliation), leading to alienation of the population.¹⁴⁰ Again, this is contrary to counterinsurgency best practice and is evidence of the tactically precarious position in which the army finds itself.

Fifth, indeed, the overall pattern of operations is highly kinetic. Because the Pakistani army has little maneuver reserve, except its Special Services Group (SSG)—a “black” (covert) special operations force unit trained in direct action, that is, unilateral strike operations, rather than unconventional warfare tasks involving close cooperation with the population¹⁴¹—it tends to mount kinetic punitive raids in response to information or in reaction to incidents. The Chingai incident of October 2006, discussed above, is a good example of this. But because there is little small-unit patrolling or local presence, such information is often wrong, resulting in collateral damage and civilian casualties that alienate the population. Significant effort is going into medical civic action, school construction, road-building, and health extension,¹⁴² but the “hearts-and-minds” benefits of these activities are continually undermined by the resentment created by this kinetic focus.

A sixth problem is the discounting, by regular Pakistani army officers, of local assets, including Frontier Corps, levies, and *khassadars*. This attitude arises partly from the army’s kinetic approach, which leads some army officers to judge local forces as lacking capability due to their limited firepower and mobility. Regular officers have also sometimes tended to discount the value of local knowledge, cultural understanding, and local contacts. Indeed, the very local characteristics that make irregular troops effective—their close connectivity to the local community, their

understanding of local people’s grievances and issues, their knowledge of key local figures and cultural norms—make some regular officers doubt the loyalty of local forces.¹⁴³ While this could be ameliorated by training, regular officers have tended to exclude Frontier Corps commanders from planning and maneuver operations, leaving them to static guard duties.

Seventh, helicopters are lacking. As noted, only 19 trooplift helicopters were forward-deployed in the FATA in 2006, leaving only about 12 available at any one time because of maintenance requirements.¹⁴⁴ This represents a company-size airlift capability—sufficient to respond to a small-scale insurgent incident of no more than about a platoon-size enemy (30 fighters or so), but insufficient for extended or large-scale operations. It means that helicopter lift (essential in mountainous terrain with a limited road network, such as the FATA) is limited to SSG raids, because the helicopter base is located in the same place as the SSG FOB. The traditional mountain warfare security techniques of “crowning the heights,” picqueting routes, and area surveillance become extremely difficult without helicopters, and are therefore rarely done, though they are recognized as essential tactics in mountain warfare against insurgents.¹⁴⁵

Eighth, the lack of mine-protected or IED-proof vehicles (especially in Frontier Corps units) makes convoy movement difficult and dangerous, and is another major problem for Pakistani military operations.¹⁴⁶ Vehicles are frequently attacked by IEDs, and the response is usually to spray the surrounding area with “suppressive” (i.e., untargeted) fire.¹⁴⁷ This tendency is exacerbated by the fact that most IED attacks cause casualties, due to the lack of protected vehicles, and so troops are angry and frightened, leading to a harsher attitude toward the local population and their increased alienation because of the army’s overreaction to IED attacks.

Ninth, a perhaps counterintuitive problem that has hampered the army’s performance is a desire to copy U.S. methods. Army and Frontier Corps leaders I dealt with in the field frequently expressed a desire to copy U.S. methods as used in Afghanistan and Iraq. They characterized these as “sting” operations, but they seemed to be describing preplanned air assault raids, based on intelligence, rather than patrol-based area-dominance and population-security operations.¹⁴⁸ Army leaders argued that such operations would be better because they would “remove forces from contact with the people, decrease resentment and allow a focus on HVTs.”¹⁴⁹ This was worrying, for several reasons: U.S. methods, as noted,

rely on extremely sophisticated surveillance, intelligence, targeting, and mobility systems—none of which Pakistan has or is likely to acquire; U.S. methods such as these actually proved counterproductive in Iraq and Afghanistan, and (as noted) the United States itself has moved away from them toward a small-team, presence-based approach.¹⁵⁰ Pakistani officers also seemed motivated in part by the prestige involved in technologically advanced operations rather than by their effectiveness in countering the local insurgency. And given Pakistan's strategic focus on India, such capabilities were often more likely to be applied to eastern Frontier operations than to current operations in the FATA.

IMPLICATIONS

It is clear from all of this that the campaign in Pakistan, since well before 9/11 but even more so since then, is a classic example of the accidental guerrilla syndrome. During and after the Soviet-Afghan War, AQ and other extremists moved into an already disrupted social framework in the FATA, infecting an existing problem of poor governance and societal weakness. The contagion effect from their presence (most obviously the 9/11 attacks themselves) brought a Western-prompted intervention by the Pakistan army into the FATA. The use of heavy-handed, overly kinetic tactics by troops who were mainly lowland Punjabis, culturally foreign to the area where they were operating and untrained in counterinsurgency, contributed to a societal immune rejection response. The tribes coalesced and rose up to drive out the intrusion, resulting in the perpetuation of destructive patterns of what Akbar Ahmed called “resistance and control” on the Frontier, and undermining the established, if loose, local governance system. Pumping additional assistance into Pakistan, without a fundamental rethinking of political strategy, is therefore likely to be highly counterproductive in the long run.

Radicalization in Europe

I have examined the accidental guerrilla syndrome in Afghanistan, Iraq, and several other conflicts around the world, but it would be a mistake to see the accidental guerrilla as solely a phenomenon of remote, underdeveloped frontier areas. On the contrary, if we consider the situation among immigrant communities in Europe, it is apparent that a variant of the syndrome operates there also.¹⁵¹