

**Politics and Threat Perception:
Explaining Pakistani Military Strategy on the North West Frontier**

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Abstract: Analysts and policymakers agree that the Pakistani military has engaged in selective repression of and collusion with armed groups. Yet beyond this general observation, fine-grained theory and evidence do not exist to systematically explain patterns of military strategy across groups and over time. This paper provides a theoretical framework for explaining regime perceptions of armed groups and the strategies state security managers pursue toward different types of groups. It then probes this framework using a combination of new medium-N data on military offensives, peace deals, and state-group alliances in Pakistan’s North West with four comparative case studies from North and South Waziristan. We argue that that the Pakistani military – the key state institution in this context – has assigned armed groups to different political roles reflecting both their ideological affinity with the military and the operational benefits they can provide to the army. This mixture of instrumental and ideological motivations has created a complex blend of regime threat perceptions and state-group interactions across space and time. A clearer understanding of how the military views Pakistan’s armed political landscape can inform policy debates about the nature of Pakistani counterinsurgency, as well as broader theoretical debates about order and violence.

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Introduction

Pakistan's North West frontier has been dotted with armed groups over the last two decades.¹ Many of them claim to be Islamist, many of them have targeted the state, and many of them have refused to accept demobilization into mainstream politics. Yet despite key similarities, there is striking variation in how the Pakistani military has dealt with these groups: some are attacked, some are cooperated with, others are left to their own devices. Existing explanations have assumed that the military simply represses those groups that attack it, or attributed army strategy to limited military capacity.

Yet these accounts leave important puzzles. Pakistan's army, which dominates internal security policy, has repeatedly attempted cooperation even with groups that have directly attacked security forces, while sometimes cracking down on small, materially weak armed actors. In other contexts, however, it has targeted very powerful groups and tolerated or worked with weak groups. Moreover, the military has created new repressive capacity and adapted to new challenges, rather than being constrained by a fixed stock of preexisting doctrine and capability. There is remarkable variation and fluidity

Instead of pure capacity and functional approaches, we argue for a more richly political explanation of both Pakistani strategy and of state-armed group interaction in general. Ideology shapes regime threat perception, driving assessments of the relative hostility, tolerability, and compatibility of non-state armed groups.² The Pakistani military uses ideological and symbolic cues to try to assess the "type" of armed groups, evaluating how the political claims that groups

¹The scope of the analysis is Pakistan's North West comprising of the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). These are two different administrative units; while Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is one of Pakistan's four provinces, FATA is a special administrative region governed under a special constitutional arrangement called the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR).

² Straus 2015, Author, Boudreau 2004, Fair 2014.

make relate to the army's vision of Pakistani nationalism. This provides the deep structure of threat perception, categorizing groups along a spectrum of alignment and opposition.

Military power and tactical considerations remain important, however. We theorize how ideological and military-functional incentives interact to drive patterns of state strategy. Waging counterinsurgency, targeting neighboring international rivals, and governing distant peripheries all pose serious military challenges. Armed groups with distinctive capacities for achieving these goals are operationally useful to states, and this utility often exists even when there are ideological differences between the government and group in question. The combination of operational utility and ideological compatibility creates six distinct political roles that guide state strategy.

In the Pakistani case, this theoretical approach is compatible with the broad analytical consensus that the military selectively represses, cooperates, and tolerate groups in an effort to manage “the dual challenge of containing some militant proxies while instrumentalizing and supporting others.”³ We move beyond this consensus in two important ways. First, we systematically theorize how the Pakistani military assesses threat. Rather than simply looking backwards to identify state-groups relations after the fact, we provide a clearer theoretical basis for generating falsifiable claims.⁴ We specify the basic ideological outlook of the Pakistani army and the kinds of armed group symbols and demands that clearly align, directly clash, or exist in tension with this political project. We also identify the primary operational goals of the Pakistani state and which types of groups should be most/least useful in pursuing them. These generate predictions about the expected patterns of state strategy. A key innovation here is integrating

³ Fair 2014, 81. See also Tankel 2016, Ganguly and Kapur 2010.

⁴ Cf. Tankel 2016.

ideational and military logics together – neither alone is sufficient to explain the variation, but we identify how they interact to influence state policy-making.

Second, we use new medium-N and case study data to carefully identify where these predictions work and where they fail. Fine-grained information about state-armed group relations combines systematic coverage across twenty groups with in-depth studies of four cases.

Pakistan's military does not simply attack all groups that attack it, or the weakest or strongest groups, but instead responds to the *political* stances of armed groups. Careful measurement of state strategy helps to move beyond a simple dichotomy of repression vs. accommodation, providing a more realistic picture of the landscape of armed politics on the North West frontier.⁵ We transparently identify cases in which our theoretical argument fails, and use them to identify future research directions.

Our findings suggest that Pakistani military discrimination toward armed groups is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future, even in the face of substantial international pressures for a more thoroughgoing purge of militant actors. We show that military has truly cracked down only when groups ideologically radicalized against the military and began making unacceptable political demands, rather than in response to outside pressure or a change in core military preferences. Pakistan's military appears entirely comfortable with a fractured monopoly of violence, as long as it functions on the military's political terms.

These claims have implications beyond Pakistan. The study of political violence needs to become more explicitly political. Dominant approaches take state preferences and perceptions as given and static, but they are in fact historically constructed and variable. As Davenport has argued in the context of state repression, “at present, researchers treat behavioral challenges as

⁵ This sidesteps debates about how to measure overall strategic postures by favoring more nuanced and precise measurement. See Lalwani 2015 on major transformation and Fair 2015 on total stasis.

though they were straightforward, but they are not.”⁶ This paper uses new theory and evidence from an important and puzzling case to identify how challenges are perceived and responded to.

1. Patterns and Puzzles on Pakistan’s North West Frontier

There have been numerous armed actors in North Western Pakistan. Following 9/11, the most prominent ones ranged from transnational jihadis like Al-Qaeda and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) to more local factions of Nek Muhammed, Abdullah Mehsud, and Commander Nazir in Waziristan, as well as groups with roots in Afghanistan, like the Haqqani Network and the Gul Bahadur group. In the ensuing period, a dozen new groups emerged with sizable fighting forces, like the factions of Maulvi Faqir Muhammed in Bajaur Agency, Mullah Fazlullah in the Swat valley, and the militia of Mangal Bagh in Khyber Agency. Over the last decade, the armed landscape has been dominated by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP; also known as the Pakistani Taliban), an alliance of many smaller groups from across the North West.

Pakistan’s strategy of dealing with these groups has been decidedly mixed. Pakistan has confronted a selection of the groups, like Al-Qaeda, IMU, and TTP, in sustained campaigns of counterinsurgency. But the more notable feature of Pakistani strategy has been its varied accommodation of formidable groups. Pakistan has provided the Haqqani Network with both sanctuary and aid, despite international calls for targeting the group. Other groups, like Hafiz Gul Bahadur’s group and Commander Nazir’s faction, have been accommodated through live-and-let-live arrangements and formal peace deals. Pakistan has sometimes resorted to deal making in the aftermath of failed military campaigns. For example, the Nek Muhammed group was offered a peace deal in 2004 after a failed military offensive, which culminated in the (in)famous Shakai peace agreement. The Pakistani military has also conducted joint offensives with a number of

⁶ Davenport 2007, 8.

groups in the region, like the *Lashkar* of the Salarzai tribe in Bajaur Agency and the Ansar-ul-Islam in Khyber Agency.

We draw on novel data on peace deals and military operations to more systematically show the variation in how the Pakistani state's security apparatus has dealt with these actors. We consider only groups with a reported size of more than 200 foot soldiers, leading to a focus on twenty such organizations.⁷ From 2002-2013, the Pakistani state, primarily led by the Pakistan Army, but on rare occasions by the provincial government, struck at least 24 peace deals with 9 of these groups. The Pakistan Army launched at least 57 large-scale military operations against 13 of the groups.⁸ It carried out joint operations with at least 6 armed groups during this period.

Several groups targeted in military operations have also been offered peace deals, while other groups have only been targeted by military operations and have been offered no peace deals. IMU and Al-Qaeda received no peace deals and were targeted in military operations. The Haqqani Network, by contrast, received one peace deal and no military offensives. The TTP has had both the most peace deals *and* largest number of military offensives against it. The breakaway faction of Turkistan Bhattani and forces of Momin Afridi and Shah Sahib have received active support from the Army, beyond peace deals. More than 80% of the peace deals and military operations have taken place in the FATA region, though violence has been higher in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province than in FATA.⁹

⁷ Our estimates suggest that there are 22 armed groups in the North West with a size of 200+ foot soldiers. See appendix for details on all 22 groups. We restrict our analysis to 20 of them. There is little information on the interaction of the Noor Islam Group and Asmatullah Shaheen group with the Pakistani state.

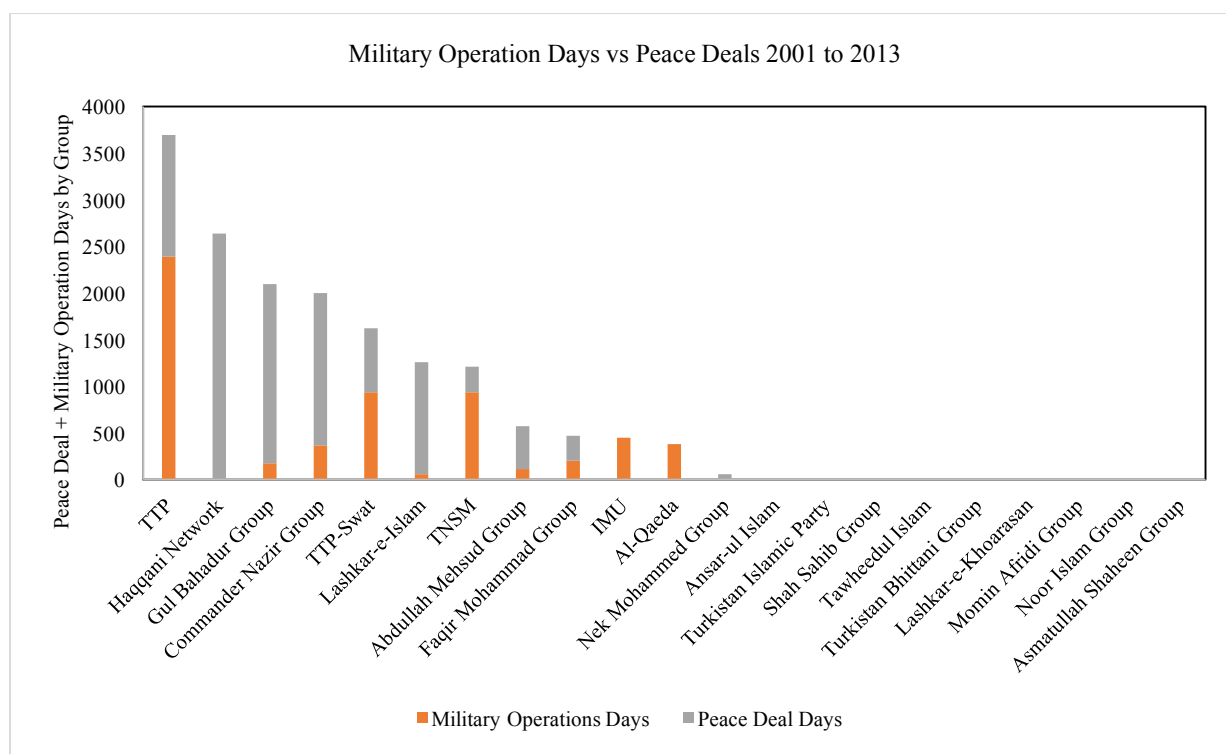
⁸ This is an extremely conservative estimate. The Pakistan Army does not release information on its military campaigns. We have tried to use secondary sources to triangulate information on military operations. See Section III below for details on data collection methodology.

⁹ KP has had 30% of violence in Pakistan compared to 26% of its violence in FATA from 2007 to 2014, according to Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies data.

There have also been changes over time within state-group dyads. The TTP was first offered peace deals, which were then followed by a growing series of military offensives. Conversely, the Abdullah Mehsud group went from being targeted with intense offensives to being becoming a partner in limited cooperation with the Army, and the Ansar-ul Islam similarly was initially attacked but then later cooperated with (against Lashkar-e-Islam).

Figures 1 and 2 summarize armed groups by peace deal days and the number of military operations of which they were targets, while Figure 3 shows yearly distribution of violence and peace deals and military operations in FATA.

Figure 1¹⁰. Armed Actors, Peace Deal Days, and Military Operations



¹⁰ A military operation is an announced campaign of military activity by a division sized force, or greater, which is not in response to an attack by the armed group on the military's defensive positions. We coded the operation by the announced targets of the military operation. We also coded the announced start and end dates available for military operations. A peace deal is a reported agreement between the Pakistani state (represented by the Pakistan Army, Political Agent, FATA secretariat, the provincial government or the federal government); announcement of an agreement suffices. For peace deals, we coded a reported start and end data of peace agreement.

Figure 2. Armed Actors, Peace Deal Days, and Military Operations

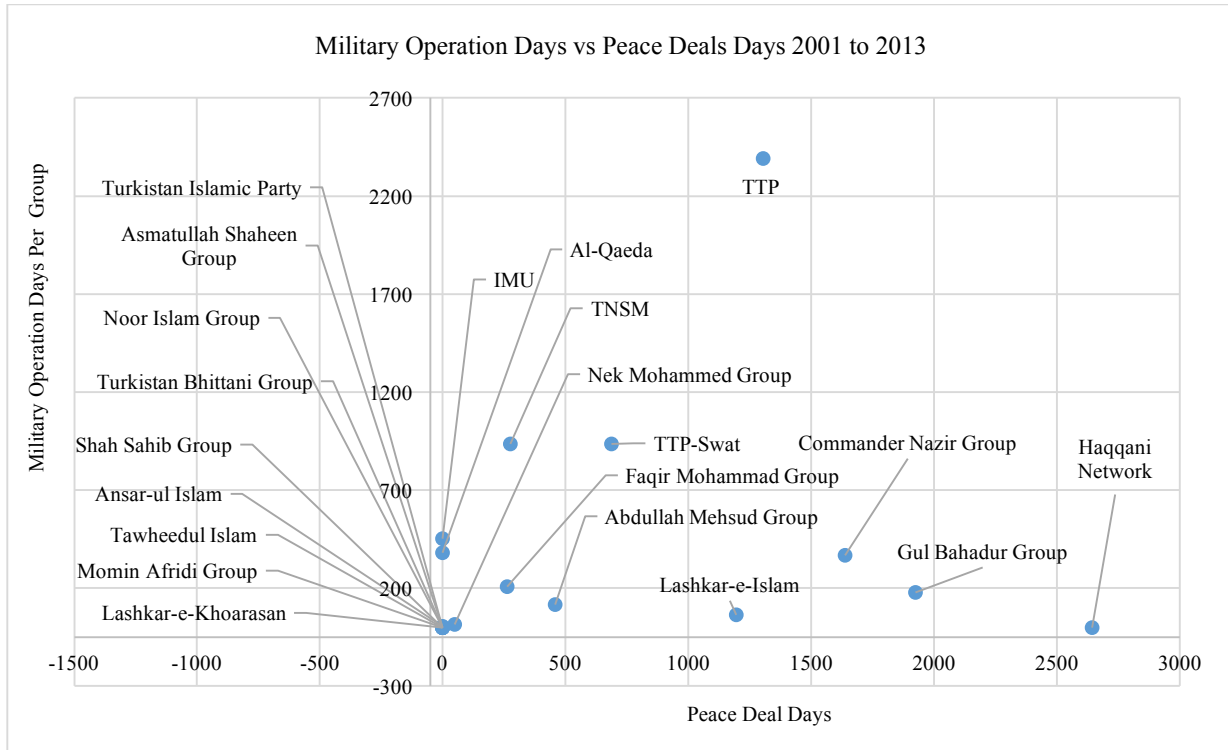
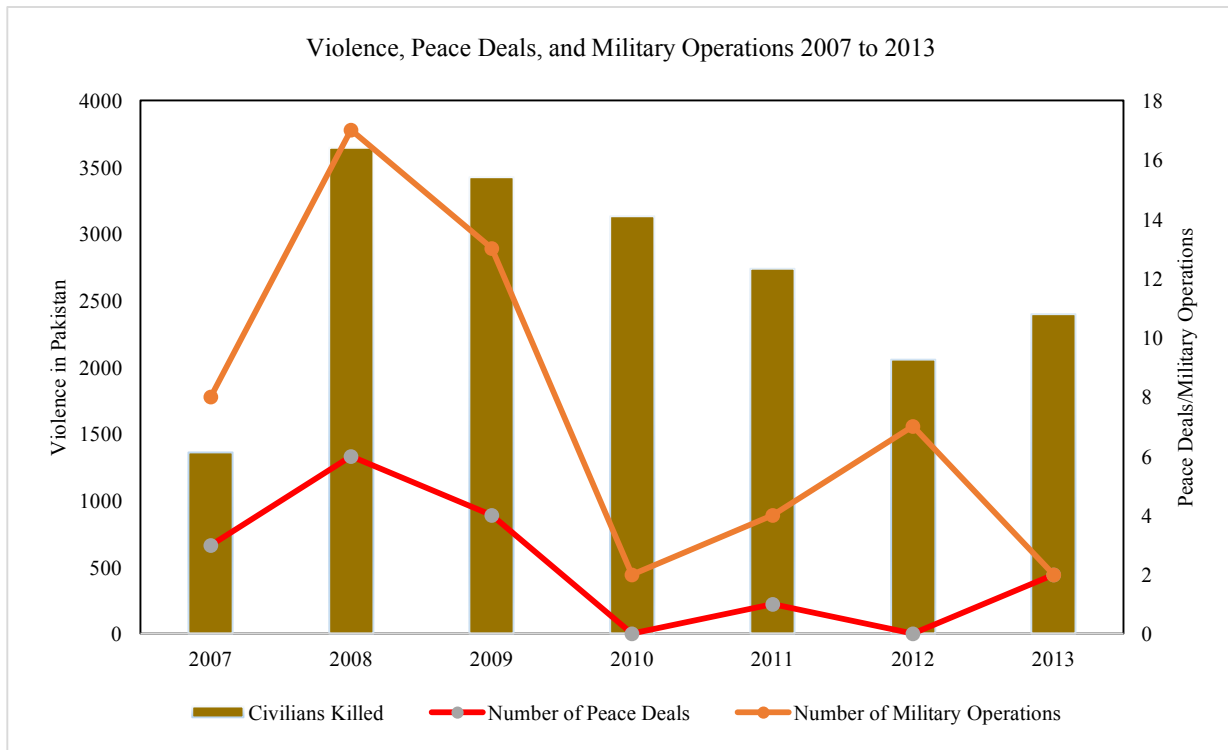


Figure 3. Violence, Peace Deals, and Military Operations



Puzzles for the Literature

These patterns present puzzles for existing research on state-armed group relations. First, important theories of state strategy toward armed groups do not apply to the Pakistani context. Most notably, Walter's influential work on state responses to ethnic separatists does not address non-separatist groups like those that dominate North Western Pakistan.¹¹

Second, violence by armed groups – surprisingly – does not drive military responses. The military has not automatically responded to violence with counter-violence. As shown in Figure 3, neither repression nor collusion have been correlated with levels of violence against civilians. For example, in 2008, peace deal and military activity increased as violence against civilians increased. But in 2010, despite violence levels being largely similar, peace deal and military activity dropped. Strikingly, groups' violence *against the state machinery itself* has sometimes triggered efforts at peace deals. For instance, the Nek Muhammed group, Abdullah Mehsud group, and later the TTP were offered deals (including as late as 2013) despite having undertaken extensive violence against the state and civilians. Conversely, Ansar-ul-Islam and the Turkistan Islamic Party have been targeted in military operations even though they have not undertaken substantial violence against the state. State strategy is not a simple function of reciprocating militant violence, especially in the short- and medium-term.

Third, arguments that center on state capacity as an explanation for state strategy are incomplete in Pakistan. There is no doubt that Pakistan's military faces constraints in where and how it can deploy forces. Nevertheless, this is not a weak or failed state unable to summon coercive capacity.¹² The Army is a well-equipped, large, and highly cohesive organization built to fight wars. When it decides to do so, the Army can deploy extremely high levels of coercion

¹¹ Walter 2009.

¹² Cf. Reno 1998, Fearon and Laitin 2003, Bates 2008, which focus on civil wars in weak/failed states.

against the groups of its choice, as in Swat in May 2009, where it deployed two divisions of infantry forces. Since 2009, there has been large-scale adaptation and effort devoted to counterinsurgency. Despite this substantial increase in capacity and improvements in doctrine, we continue to see selective repression. For instance, the major Zarb-e-Azb offensive of 2014 did not target many groups in North Waziristan, including the Haqqani Network and Asmatullah Muawiya's Punjabi Taliban faction. Simply having capacity does not explain what the military chooses to do with it.

Fourth, the power and organizational structure of the armed groups themselves does not appear to map onto strategy, in contrast to important claims in the literature about how governments use group structure to discriminate in their policies.¹³ The powerful TTP and Haqqani Network have been treated in radically different ways by the military. Similarly, the weak Ansar-ul-Islam and TNSM have each faced different strategies. Organizational variables are surely relevant to state decision-making, but at least on initial examination they do not straightforwardly predict strategies.

Finally, variation over time within state-group dyads show the limits of a purely ideological explanation¹⁴: while the core orientation of the Pakistan Army has not changed, its specific strategies toward groups have sometimes changed. Similarly, broad national-level incentives for collusion with armed groups have not varied dramatically within the time frame of our study: poverty, inaccessible terrain, lack of consolidated democracy, and a conflictual international environment all remained largely constant during the period in study.¹⁵

¹³ Cunningham 2014.

¹⁴ Cf. Fair 2014.

¹⁵ For more on how these kinds of macro-level variables can shape state-armed group cooperation, see Carey et al 2013, 2015; Stanton 2015, Eck 2015; Roessler 2005.

This does not mean that the existing literature is generally wrong. It does mean, however, that fine-grained variation in state strategy on Pakistan’s North West provides an opportunity to identify new insights and empirical approaches for studying state strategy toward armed groups.

2. How Governments Evaluate Armed Groups

Our approach to explaining this variation merges ideological and military-functional variables. Governments categorize armed groups into *political roles* based on their ideological fit and operational utility (Table 1).¹⁶ Ideas shape the deep structure of regime threat assessments and determine the political space governments perceive for bargaining with different types of groups. Military-functional incentives then explain crucial decisions *within* these broad ideological categorizations. These are distinct variables – some useful groups are ideologically distant and may refuse to cooperate even if the state offers cooperation, while many ideologically proximate groups will have little of value to offer the government.

Each political role is associated with specific, observable patterns of state strategy: even if the state’s ultimate goal is not achieved, we can observe security apparatuses’ strategic behavior. This is essential for generating falsifiable predictions and allowing room for armed group agency. Table 1 predicts how these variables map onto state strategy (political roles are italicized).

Table 1. Group Political Roles and State Strategies

		Operational Utility	
		High	Low
	Aligned	<i>Armed Ally</i> Observable Policy: Facilitation/No action with sanctuary, active support through of weapons and/or training	<i>Superfluous Supporter</i> Observable Policy: Demobilization
Ideological Fit	Gray Zone	<i>Business Partner</i>	<i>Undesirable</i>

¹⁶ For an earlier version of this framework, see Author.

		Observable Policy: Joint offensives and/or peace deals without demobilization offered	Observable Policy: Small-Action
	Opposed	<i>Strange Bedfellow</i> Observable Policy: No-Action; Sustained cease-fires	<i>Mortal Enemy</i> Observable Policy: Sustained Repression

Leaders who control the security apparatus assess how groups relate to their ideological project. These projects are beliefs about the desirable boundaries of the political community and, consequently, the appropriate relations between citizens and state.¹⁷ They identify the key political threats to ruling elites: some focus on the specter of communist insurrection, others the threat of counterrevolution, and yet others the dangers of ethnic division. Ideological projects emerge from long-run historical processes of mobilization, institution building, and “value infusion”¹⁸ that create a “common sense”¹⁹ about who constitutes the nation and what kinds of political demands and behaviors are more and less compatible with that vision. They can be compared across regimes and over time within them.

The symbols, rhetoric, and demands of groups provide clues about their intentions that are hugely valuable, even if far from foolproof, in the face of deep uncertainty about the future.²⁰ Rather than power calculations alone, governments try to assess which groups they can politically tolerate, which are sympathetic, and which are existential threats.²¹ We identify three corresponding ideological positions: aligned, opposed, and “gray zone.”²² *Aligned* groups make political demands compatible with the basic political goals of the government and its beliefs about the appropriate structure of politics. *Opposed* groups deploy symbols and demands that

¹⁷ On ideology and political community, see Hanson 2010; Straus 2015; Yashar 2005; Lieberman 2002; Staniland 2015a, 2015b.

¹⁸ Selznick 1957.

¹⁹ Laitin 1986.

²⁰ On the importance of intentions in the international context, see Walt 1987 and Glaser 2010.

²¹ Cf. Christia 2012.

²² Auyero 2007.

directly challenge the legitimacy of the state and its ruling regime. These groups may be formidable or weak, but they represent a core threat to the perceived interests of the security apparatus. Enemies are commonly framed as subversives, fifth columns, and anti-national elements with maximalist war aims.²³ *Gray zone* groups exist in between these extremes. They are not radically anti-state, but they do have distinct political goals from the ruling party, military, or regime. Their politics are neither desirable nor unacceptable.

These assessments determine the broad political space security managers perceive for dealing with armed groups. But state elites also have direct, instrumental goals they hope to pursue at home and abroad. Existing research has pointed to militarized elections, cross-border insurgencies, the need for local allies in counterinsurgency, and the management of unstable peripheries as contexts that can create powerful *operational incentives* for seeking to cooperate, in some form, with useful groups.²⁴ These are functional arenas, in which governments need to accomplish discrete political tasks.

A group's operational value is determined by whether it possesses distinctive capabilities that could help the government achieve its goals, generally in issue-areas (like elections or counterinsurgency) or physical spaces (especially social or geographic peripheries) where the state comparatively lacks these capabilities. Embeddedness in specific social networks and regions, detailed information about other armed groups, striking capacity across borders, and the ability to generate votes (or suppress the votes of others) are all capabilities that can be highly attractive to governments. Sometimes governments need help against other armed groups, but armed actors can be valuable in targeting neighboring other states, attacking unarmed dissidents, winning elections, or forging variants of "indirect rule."

²³ On assessments of enemies and their ability to be accommodated in the interstate context, see Weisiger 2013.

²⁴ Staniland 2015b.

These regime goals can certainly reflect ideological preferences, and it is likely that under most circumstances truly daunting challenges will be required for a regime to try to cooperate with an opposed group. However, group capabilities often have little to do with their political position, allowing for substantial distance between these variables. Even ideologically gray zone or opposed actors may have operationally useful capabilities, while ideologically aligned groups may have no distinctive capabilities beyond those that the regime already possesses. This sets up the potential for important, sometimes counterintuitive, mixtures of regime incentives, in which ideological and operational value may point in opposite directions. Groups can reject cooperation, forcing governments to recalibrate their strategies. Group agency of this sort is most likely to be exercised by powerful groups that are autonomous of regime patronage networks.²⁵

We focus on operational value because group power on its own is often indeterminate: some groups with lots of men and arms simply replicate existing state capabilities, while groups that are objectively fairly small or weak may be unusually well-suited to a particular goal. We take seriously the military and functional challenges that governments face – but they are not easy to read directly off the material balance of power.

This combination of ideology and instrumental needs creates a spectrum of six armed group *political roles* that map a given regime's threat perception. Armed allies, business partners, and strange bedfellows all are operationally valuable roles, but have different levels of ideological affinity that shapes the extent and nature of cooperation. Armed allies should be closely cooperated with. At minimum, they are protected from both domestic and international repression, and at maximum they receive active training and resources. These are valuable

²⁵ Cf. Reno 2011.

partners in targeting international rivals or domestic foes, or providing local stability in hard-to-govern regions.

Business partners are not as ideologically compatible with security managers' project. Enduring political tensions exist between the state and groups in this role. They are targeted for limited cooperation, including live-and-let-live deals, ceasefires, and informal coordination that prevents major conflict and focuses on narrow but important mutual interests. Strange bedfellow is a much rarer political role. Such actors are deeply opposed to the regime's political foundations, but able to help state security managers advance a core interest. Perceptions of strange bedfellows are most prevalent in complex multi-party conflicts, where opposed groups may fight both each and the state, leading states to pursue the possibility of thin tactical alignments of convenience in the face of desperate circumstances.²⁶

Groups that are not operationally useful to security managers are targeted for incorporation, low-level hostilities, or intense military suppression. Superfluous supporters are ideologically aligned but do not offer concrete instrumental benefits. They are targeted for incorporation. These types of groups can be relatively easily demobilized and integrated into the state, ruling party, and/or "mainstream" political arena, especially if they are reliant on regime patronage networks and support.

Undesirables have little to offer the security apparatus, but are also not a pressing political threat. They are tolerable, if unwelcome. The government accepts ongoing, but low-level, military hostilities in a form of "containment." Sporadic military offensives dominate to limit armed group influence without committing to the military and political costs of full-scale suppression.

²⁶ Christia 2012.

Mortal enemies make demands that are unacceptable to security managers' ideology of the polity. These are not groups that the state believes it can bargain with in a serious way, and they do not offer any operational benefits to the regime. Even if objectively militarily weak, such groups are targeted with intense coercion and sustained campaigns: they are seen carrying dangerous ideas and representing subversive or disloyal social groups. Sustained campaigns of military offensives should result.

Pathways of Change

These strategies are not set in stone. Four broad pathways are likely to drive change. First, regime operational incentives can shift, driving fine-grained variation along the horizontal dimension of Table 1: counterinsurgencies come to an end, elections are won or lost, and interstate rivalries wax and wane. Second, armed groups can exert agency to force regimes to abandon their most preferred strategies. Powerful, cohesive groups are best equipped to impose unexpected costs on governments, forcing them to abandon their most preferred strategy.

Third, groups can shift their ideological positioning over time. Endogenous radicalization or moderation can emerge as a result of the actions of the state (towards that particular group or others), or of internal processes, like coups and factional competition.²⁷ Fourth, governments can shift their ideological position. Regime changes are the most visible and dramatic forms sources of such a change. These latter two mechanisms can move a group's political role along the vertical dimension of Table 1. Armed group change is much more likely than substantial changes in government ideological project, however. Regimes' projects tend to be deeply rooted and central to a broad range of political positions: rapid change on basic questions of national boundaries and hierarchies would throw into doubt the core goals and commitments of the

²⁷ Pearlman 2011, Krause 2014, Goodwin 2001.

government. Though change is certainly possible, it is most likely to occur as a result of unusual, dramatic events that bring into power a very different political movement than the prior regime, such as military coups or democratization.

3. Applying the Framework to Pakistan

This analytical framework can be deployed broadly and comparatively, but its specifics are contextual: what counts as a gray zone group in India may be very different than in Russia or the United States. We operationalize this framework in the Pakistani case by exploring how the Pakistan Army views ideology and operational interest.²⁸ This lets us make clear predictions about how the military tries to work with allies, manage gray zone groups, and attack enemies. We focus on the army in this context because frontier management has been largely dominated by the military, while civilians, at times, have influence over security policy toward sectarian groups and armed political parties in Karachi and Punjab.²⁹ Even after the 2008 democratic transition it has remained the key player in crafting internal security policy on the North West.

There are obvious limits to a single-conflict research design. However, this case selection strategy has unusual advantages. It allows a comparison of state strategic campaigns without major confounders such as the structure of the state, nature of the war, per capita GDP, geography, or other fundamental differences. It also makes it possible to study state-armed group interactions in greater detail than in aggregated cross-national studies, while tackling broader

²⁸ Taniel 2016 offers a descriptive typology of Pakistani armed groups (similar to Staniland 2015b). It is very valuable, but lacks the “gray zone” category that this paper provides, a theoretical framework with confirmable/disconfirmable predictions, or ex ante operationalization of variables. See Fair 2004 for an earlier overview of Pakistani armed groups.

²⁹ According to Shah, “the Taliban insurgency in Pakistan has in fact allowed the military to position itself as the principal agency for deciding ‘the quantum, composition and positioning’ of military efforts against militancy” (Shah 2014, 269), and paramilitary forces are “officered by active-duty army personnel who are part of the regular military chain of command. This strategic prerogative over internal security provides the military with an additional layer of control over the domestic use of force” (Shah 2014, 268).

political dynamics than the standard micro-level focus on variation in violent events.³⁰ There are no indications of deep factional cleavages in Pakistan's Army, in sharp contrast to periods of military fragmentation in other Asian countries, making this close to a unitary actor.³¹ Finally, all of the groups in question view themselves in some way as "Islamist" actors, allowing us to much more carefully identify which actual strands of ideology trigger threat perceptions. We very briefly explore our argument's scope in other parts of Pakistan in Section 6 to hint at broader generalization.

Caveats are necessary. The army's contemporary archives are not open to researchers and therefore we are forced to rely on public statements, past historical patterns, and the existing literature's claims to specify these perceptions. Future work will hopefully use direct evidence from within the military itself. The best we can do at present is show a plausible correspondence between our predictions and military behavior, laying the basis for subsequent research.³² The ideological project of the military does not represent any kind of societal consensus or "national culture": the meaning and boundaries of the Pakistani nation are deeply, often violently, contested.³³ This cannot provide a definitive test of any theory, given concerns about external validity and the limits of publicly available data, but it can usefully improve our confidence about the explanatory power of the argument.³⁴ Finally, we do not claim that Pakistan is a unique case – many other countries have been willing to tolerate armed actors, from the KKK in post-Reconstruction America to Hindu vigilantes in contemporary India. What we seek to explain are

³⁰ Excellent violent events data in Pakistan can be found in Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2014.

³¹ Nawaz 2008, Cohen 2004.

³² Genuine, unbiased access to the internal records of the Army is exceptionally difficult for researchers. Some individuals have been able to embed themselves for periods with the military, but under clear conditions. See Schofield 2011.

³³ Jaffrelot 2002, Shaikh 2009.

³⁴ Bennett 2007.

the specific *contours* of violence management in Pakistan – which groups the military views as tolerable, aligned, and unacceptable.

Table 2a outlines key criteria that we use to operationalize our independent variables in this context. Each of these is discussed below.

Table 2a. Coding³⁵ Ideological Fit and Operational Value in North West Pakistan

Ideological Fit		Operational Value	
Aligned	Acknowledges Army's importance; supports basics of Constitution; uses "acceptable" appeals to Islam	High	Able to maintain Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan (observable: embedded in Afghanistan) and/or act as local ally in stabilizing peripheral zones of Pakistan (observable: breakaway faction of a bigger group or competitor of an opposed group in the region (competition over resources, manpower, or history of a feud))
Gray Zone	Criticizes state policy but does not call for destruction of foundational principles, like the Army's role; may have links to but does not tightly align with opposed militant groups; pursues ethno-linguistic autonomy	Low	Incapable of projecting Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan and/or act as local ally in stabilizing peripheral zones of Pakistan
Opposed	Advocates end of Constitution; overthrow of state; targets Army's role rhetorically; allies tightly with other militant groups; pursues ethno-linguistic separatism; Communist		

Table 2b outlines key criteria that we use to operationalize our dependent variable in this context of North West Pakistan.

³⁵ On sequencing of coding, see supplement

Table 2b. Coding³⁶ State Strategy in North West Pakistan

Political Role	Observable State Response	Note on Coding
Armed Ally	Facilitation	Identified if no action is observed with reports of sanctuary, material support, and protection for the group
Superfluous Supporter	Demobilization	Group is disarmed and/or demobilized
Business Partner	Joint offensives and/or peace deals	Peace deals under this strategy do not take place following military failures and tend to be highly sustainable; Joint offensives are easily observed in press reporting
Undesirable	Small Action	Isolated military operations and/or raids; often leadership is arrested, or the tribe that the group draws from is subjected to collective punishment
Mortal Enemy	Sustained targeting	Large-scale military offensives; tend to be announced, involve a division/formation+ troops; there may be short peace deals with targeted groups in the event of military losses
Thin Collusion	No-Action	No full-scale political settlement; state avoids, sometimes calls for cessation of hostilities; live-and-let-live arrangement

The Ideological Project of the Pakistan Army

The military has publicly enunciated and internally socialized its personnel into a particular vision of the nation and state in Pakistan. It highlights Islam as a crucial source of national cohesion, but one that must be directed by the military in its commanding role as guardian of the polity and interpreter of the Constitution. As Ayres argues, “whether the country was under civilian or military rule, one common thread has been the insistence with which central leaders, and central institutions, have indulged religious leaders, in some cases some of the most illiberal Islamists available. . . . Pakistan’s leaders have coopted Islamism in order to capture and retain control of the discourse of legitimacy.”³⁷ This means that armed and unarmed

³⁶ On sequencing of coding, see supplement

³⁷ Ayres 2009, 36.

actors deploying “Islamist” symbols are often acceptable, though they should grow increasingly ideologically opposed to the extent that they link this rhetoric with challenges to the military and the formal structure of the Pakistani state. Ethno-linguistic mobilization is seen as the most severe threat to the unity of the nation: “In this exclusionary view of nationhood, recognizing intra-Muslim differences would mean the symbolic undoing of the Pakistan project.”³⁸

These ideological commitments have deep historical roots: “even before Partition, Jinnah’s project was that of a unitary state. . . . and in 1947 the citizens of the new country were required to identify not only with one religion – Islam – but also with one language – Urdu.”³⁹ Nation, language, and religion were fused together in the nationalist identity advanced by ruling elites. At independence the Muslim League “while largely secular or ‘mainstream’ in outlook. . . . viewed Islam as an acceptable (if untried) vehicle for nation-building.”⁴⁰ This was an outgrowth of the simultaneously genuine and instrumental deployment of the two-nation theory prior to Partition, which held that South Asia’s Muslims constitute a fundamentally different nation than its Hindus.⁴¹ After seizing power in 1958, military dictator Ayub Khan, despite himself not being religious, “considered that religion was the only foundation for national unity.”⁴²

By contrast, ethnic and linguistic claims have been seen by both army and civilian leaders as threatening to undermine the nationalist project from within, by fracturing the solidarity of subcontinent’s Muslim homeland.⁴³ Rulers have articulated a “deeply embedded language ideology which structured the national imagination of Pakistan’s creation.”⁴⁴ Deep suspicion of

³⁸ Shah 2014, 56.

³⁹ Jaffrelot 2002, 9.

⁴⁰ Cohen 2004, 167.

⁴¹ Dhulipala 2015; Jalal 1985.

⁴² Jaffrelot 2015, 454. See also Fair 2014, 73-76.

⁴³ Jinnah saw “appealing to the language and rhetoric of Islamic universalism as a means of defeating the tribal, racial and linguistic affiliations that threatened to ruin his Muslim nationalist project” (Shaikh 2009, 43).

⁴⁴ Ayres 2009, 33.

Bengali, Pashtun, and Sindhi sub-nationalism has been driven by this fear of linguistic cleavages shattering the idea of Pakistan. This is a sharp contrast to Indian leaders' willingness to accept language as a legitimate basis for political claim-making.⁴⁵ The Left was also seen as an un-Islamic force inimical to Pakistani nationalism, and it was preemptively crushed in the 1950s and 1960s.⁴⁶

The army, however, added to this elite project in the 1950s and 1960s a clear assertion of its own role as guardian of the nation, a political preference that has become institutionalized over time.⁴⁷ In combination, this "strong political centralization and an over-reliance on the military as a means to 'hold' the country together further exacerbated the national emphasis successive rulers placed on the necessity of creating a singular national Islamic culture, with Urdu as the centerpiece."⁴⁸

These foundational principles have evolved over time within the military: under Zia al-Haq, the use of Islam shifted from being the complement to a (failed) authoritarian developmental state under Ayub Khan toward being embraced as a fuller set of precepts for political organization.⁴⁹ Indeed, "the relationship between the army and the Islamists also changed dramatically under Zia,"⁵⁰ opening greater space for both behavior and discourse that was previously viewed less favorably. In the ensuing decades the military has not embraced theocracy, but the changes of the 1980s have had a long-lasting impact on Pakistan's armed political landscape.⁵¹ Under Chiefs of Army Staff Pervez Musharraf, Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, and

⁴⁵ Stepan et al. 2011; Fair 2014, 68-70; Saez et al. 2012, Brass 1974.

⁴⁶ On state repression against the left, see Cohen 2004, 72; Shah 2014, 75; Jaffrelot 2015, 635.

⁴⁷ Shah 2014, 2.

⁴⁸ Ayres 2009, 34.

⁴⁹ On differences in the deployment of Islam under Ayub Khan and Zia-ul-Haq, see Ayres 2009, 38-40; Cohen 2004, 84; Fair 2014.

⁵⁰ Shah 2014, 157.

⁵¹ On Zia's legacy, see Jaffrelot 2015, 460, 479; Nasr 2000; Nawaz 2008, 359-360.

Raheel Sharif, the Army has remained a Muslim-nationalist institution, rather than the transnational Islamist army envisaged by more radical Islamists.⁵² Ashfaq Kayani clearly articulated the Army's vision of the role of Islam in the national project: "Let me remind you that Pakistan was created in the name of Islam and Islam can never be taken out of Pakistan. However, Islam should always remain a unifying force."⁵³

This has forged a political arena in which Islamist armed actors are often perceived as aligned or in the gray zone. The Army has, nevertheless, distinguished friendly and tolerable Islamist armed groups from unpalatable actors. There are serious efforts at ideological sorting *within* the general category of "Islamist." The Army has paid close attention to demands, rhetoric, and symbols of Islamist appeals of armed actors to determine the cleavages they evoke and the goals they pursue. Some Islamists seek to fundamentally alter both Pakistani nationalism and the political role of the military, reflecting much deeper historical cleavages in how Islam and nation are to be combined.⁵⁴ This vision of a universalist Islamic nationalism de-centers traditional state institutions and defines the nation in terms of actual religious practice, not just religious identity. By contrast, other self-described Islamists do not demand major political changes, and explicitly place themselves within the framework of nationalism acceptable to the Pakistani Army.⁵⁵ A number of groups straddle these positions of pure revolutionary opposition and contentment with the status quo: they draw heavily on Islamist rhetoric, symbols, and demands, without directly seeking to alter the basic contours of the Pakistani political system. Calls for reform, for instance, neither directly challenge nor support the military elite.

⁵² On recent Army Chiefs and their use of religion, see Jaffrelot 2015, 528-535.

⁵³ Ali 2013.

⁵⁴ Shaikh 2009, Jalal 2010.

⁵⁵ Jaffrelot 2015 is structured around this tension between forms of Pakistani nationalism.

These historical processes have forged the army's perceptions of which kinds of armed groups are threatening, manageable, or aligned. A fractured monopoly of violence is perfectly compatible with the military's political project: the key question instead is *who* is allowed to carry guns, not *whether* anyone is. Simply being attacked or facing some degree of violent opposition is not equivalent to being ideologically beyond the pale: the Army has done business with a number of groups it has also clashed with. As long as they continue to operate within the military's broad vision of the polity, there is political space to continue bargaining even with organizations that are simultaneously imposing costs on the army.

This worldview is reproduced by powerful mechanisms of training and monitoring “to ensure cohesion and adherence to standards across the ranks of the force,”⁵⁶ reproducing the “dominance of certain institutionally enforced ideological perspectives on politics.”⁵⁷ In Cohen's words, “the promotion system ensures continuity in the social and ideological makeup of the army.”⁵⁸ It is therefore reasonable to consider the military a relatively coherent, unitary actor with a broadly shared – though of course never fully unanimous or uncontested – assessment of threats and interests. These provide a way to measure armed group acceptability *ex ante*, allowing disconfirmation and falsification of our claims.

Operational Incentives

We should see broad patterns of state strategy that correspond to these general ideological categorizations. Yet the army also has important instrumental interests related to geopolitics, counterinsurgency, electoral violence, and periphery management.⁵⁹ While

⁵⁶ Fair 2014, 33.

⁵⁷ Shah 2014, 23.

⁵⁸ Cohen 2004, 99.

⁵⁹ In Karachi, sustained levels of violence around electoral competition have created varying incentives for both collusion and crackdowns Staniland 2015a.

obviously informed by ideological goals and visions – particularly its fixation on Kashmir⁶⁰ – these also have functional roots in managing politics at home and influencing it abroad that are not unique to Pakistan or its military. There is analytical distance between the capacity and strengths of groups and the military’s ideological sympathies. The question becomes how these instrumental incentives intersect with the military’s ideological project.⁶¹

Most relevant to the North West are the army’s objectives in Afghanistan and managing its own restive peripheries. The military has attempted to exert influence in Afghanistan since independence, and began actively backing Afghan armed actors in 1973. This interest has endured, creating powerful incentives to work with groups that can project power into Afghanistan. Operationally useful groups have some base of support in Afghanistan and substantial military power that can be used against Afghan security forces. This does not mean that such groups need to have perfectly aligned preferences with the Pakistanis. Though not our focus in the North West, Pakistan has also relied on militant proxies as tools of warfare against India since the first Kashmir war after Partition.⁶² Regarding both Afghanistan and India, “the army continues the practice, begun by Yahya and perfected by Zia, of using Islamic political parties and radical Islamic groups as pawns in domestic and international politics.”⁶³

Finally, the army aims to manage the periphery. Pakistan’s North West – especially FATA – is geographically daunting, socially distinct from the country’s “core,” and traditionally both well-armed and out of the direct reach of the Weberian state.⁶⁴ The military, as well as

⁶⁰ Ganguly 1997.

⁶¹ It is important to note, however, that civilian Pakistani rulers have also pursued similar objectives, whether Zulfikar Bhutto’s backing of Afghan rebels from 1973 or Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto’s support for the Taliban and Kashmir-oriented militants.

⁶² Whitehead 2007.

⁶³ Cohen 2004, 113. According to Shah 2014, 164, “Zia consolidated a parallel process of using Islamist militancy as an instrument of national security policy”; also see Jaffrelot 2015, 438.

⁶⁴ Rashid 2008, 265-267; Naseemullah 2014.

civilian governments, have continued a long pattern of indirect rule. Armed groups are useful stabilizers in these areas when they have strong local roots and are able to discipline and control mobilization in a particular area. They are even more valuable when they can be used as a counterbalance against a government's local enemy. Foreign groups should be less useful because of their lack of local embeddedness.⁶⁵

4. Probing the Argument: Medium-N Evidence from North West Pakistan, 2002-2013

The rest of the paper provides a detailed plausibility probe intended to assess whether we should be more confident in the core argument after examining comparative evidence from North West Pakistan.⁶⁶ If so, the argument should have broader purchase beyond this particular context.

Data

This section offers an analysis of a new medium-N dataset of the state strategies and changes over time. We code each group's ideological affinity with and operational utility to the Army and compare this coding to the military's strategic campaigns. This is a new empirical contribution that maps the full range of armed groups and their relations with the military. However, it remains a limited operationalization of the theory, especially the coding of operational utility. To make up for these limitations, we then use a small-N comparative strategy to study these processes in more detail, including change over time, continuity, and mis-predicted cases. These case studies, "nested"⁶⁷ within the medium-N analysis, provide a way to more carefully unpack state-group interactions.

⁶⁵ On local embeddedness, see Staniland 2014.

⁶⁶ George and Bennett 2005; Bennett 2007.

⁶⁷ On nested case studies, see Lieberman 2005.

We have measured Pakistani strategic campaigns over time toward each group in our sample of 20 armed groups. These are drawn from numerous sources on the militant groups and commanders of Pakistan's North West and on state interactions (deals and offensives) with these various groups over time. We rely heavily on Pakistani media reports, military press releases, and secondary specialist studies, and have done our best to cross-check these different sources against one another. To our knowledge, this is the most comprehensive dataset on Pakistan's offensives, ceasefires, and peace deals in the North West. The full list of peace deals and military offensives is listed in the (included) supplemental Appendix with sourcing information.

There is no doubt that we have missed important political-military activities, but by focusing on large-scale state policies we avoid needing to measure day-to-day tactical operations or low-level/back channel negotiations, which are even more difficult to get reliable information on. This unit of analysis is different from the standard focus on individual violent events, and more appropriate for assessing actual state strategy. Military offensives and peace deals may be accompanied by *either* a reduction or an increase in observed violence, which means that using events data as a proxy for broader political dynamics can be problematic. The major weakness in our data is its coding of military offensives. These codings rely heavily on military press releases and constrained journalistic reporting. We are more confident about our peace deals and ceasefires data, which are identifiable, discrete events that tend to attract substantial attention.

Initial Group Roles and State Strategies

Table 3a and 3b summarize initial political roles of and state strategies toward the 20 armed groups in Pakistan's North West (we consider changes below). The *initial* assigned political roles have been coded based on the operationalization of ideology and operational utility over the first two years of a group's interaction with the state in the 2002-13 period. In the

four case studies below, we extend analysis through 2015. The medium-N sample does not extend that far, in large part because systematic, reliable data on which groups were actually targeted in the 2014 Zarb-e-Azb offensive is problematically scarce and because the ongoing splintering of the TTP makes it difficult to know which groups are actually operating, where, and to what extent.⁶⁸ The Appendix provides details on coding rules. The primary determinant of operational utility is the ability of the group to balance against local enemies or international rivals; this limits our ability to assess the indirect rule explanation for limited cooperation, but we discuss this in the case evidence.

These codings of state response focus on *campaigns* over a 24-month period following group emergence. This is important because the same actions may have different strategic goals depending on the context in which they occur. For instance, an armed group which is a target of state suppression is likely to be subject to military operations first, and only then offered peace deals if the group is able to impose very high, unexpected costs that force the state into a stalemate. If the ceasefire offer follows a military operation in which the insurgent inflicted high losses on the state, the state strategy continues to be of suppression as the motive for the peace deal is to temporarily reduce losses and not settle the dispute. By contrast, a campaign that begins with an immediate peace deal offer likely has a different underlying motivation.

Table 3a. Summary of Initial Role Assignment

Ideology Operational Utility	High	Low	Total
Aligned	2		2
Gray Zone	4	6	10
Opposed	1	7	8
Total	7	13	20

⁶⁸ Jaffrelot 2015, 605-606.

Table 3b. Initial Role Assignment and State Strategy

Group	Ideology	OU	Predicted Initial Political Role	Predicted Observable	Actual Political Role	Observable State Response in 24 months
Nek Mohammed Group	Opposed	Low	Mortal Enemy	Sustained Targeting	Mortal Enemy	Sustained Targeting
TTP	Opposed	Low	Mortal Enemy	Sustained Targeting	Mortal Enemy	Sustained Targeting
TTP Swat	Opposed	Low	Mortal Enemy	Sustained Targeting	Mortal Enemy	Sustained Targeting
Commander Nazir Group	Gray Zone	Low	Undesirable	Small Action	Undesirable	Small Action
Abdullah Mehsud Group	Opposed	Low	Mortal Enemy	Sustained Targeting	Mortal Enemy	Sustained Targeting
Gul Bahadur Group	Gray Zone	High	Business Partner	Joint Offensives/Peace Deals	Undesirable	Small Action
Haqqani Network	Aligned	High	Armed Ally	Facilitation	Armed Ally	Facilitation
TNSM	Gray Zone	Low	Undesirable	Small Action	Undesirable	Small Action
IMU	Opposed	Low	Mortal Enemy	Sustained Targeting	Mortal Enemy	Sustained Targeting
Al-Qaeda	Opposed	Low	Mortal Enemy	Sustained Targeting	Mortal Enemy	Sustained Targeting
Faqir Mohammad Group	Gray Zone	Low	Undesirable	Small Action	Undesirable	Small Action
Ansar-ul Islam	Gray Zone	Low	Undesirable	Small Action	Undesirable	Small Action
Lashkar-e-Islam	Gray Zone	Low	Undesirable	Small Action	Undesirable	Small Action
Tawheed-ul-Islam	Gray Zone	High	Business Partner	Joint Offensives/Peace Deals	Business Partner	Joint/Peace Deal
Lashkar-e-Khoarasan	Gray Zone	Low	Undesirable	Small Action	Undesirable	Small Action
Turkistan Islamic Party/ETIM	Opposed	Low	Mortal Enemy	Sustained Targeting	Undesirable	Small Action
Turkistan Bhattani Group	Aligned	High	Armed Ally	Facilitation	Armed Ally	Facilitation
Shah Sahib Group	Gray Zone	High	Business Partner	Joint Offensives/Peace Deals	Business Partner	Joint/Peace Deal
Amar bin Maroof	Opposed	High	Strange Bedfellow	No Action	Strange Bedfellow	No Action
Momin Afridi Group	Gray Zone	High	Business Partner	Joint Offensives/Peace Deals	Business Partner	Joint/Peace Deal

The medium-N analysis shows reasonable support for the framework: initial state strategies largely map onto the political roles we predict. It suggests that the theory can be operationalized *ex ante* and confirmed or disconfirmed in particular cases. Our broad predictions

seem to be generally borne out, according with Jaffrelot's assessment of "great ambivalence" in military strategy toward armed groups after 9/11.⁶⁹

The Pakistani Army has engaged in several alliance relationships in the North West, including the Haqqani Network, Turkistan Bhattani group, Tawheed-ul-Islam, Shah Sahib group and Momin Afridi group. These groups have had no action against them. The army has also not attempted to demobilize them in a way that we can measure. At least at a very crude level, alliances are associated with a combination of ideological and operational concerns. In addition to holding the Pakistan Army in high esteem, Haqqanis have been useful to exert influence in Afghanistan and to manage the unstable periphery. Other allies, like the Turkistan Bhattani group, have professed respect for the state and also had a rivalry with the TTP that made them valuable local allies. These are the "good" militants on the North West frontier in the military's eyes. We explore alliance dynamics in more detail through the Haqqani Network case study below.

At the other end of the spectrum, groups with opposed ideologies and low operational utility have been treated as mortal enemies, distinguished by the state response of sustained military targeting. For example, we code the TTP, Al-Qaeda, Nek Muhammad group, and IMU as ideologically opposed to the Pakistan Army. They have generally – but not exclusively - faced a series of sizable military offensives over time. Al-Qaeda stands out for the consistency with which it has been targeted in the post 9/11 period. Al-Qaeda's senior leadership like Khalid Habib, Khalid Sheikh Muhammed, Abu Yahya, Al Libi, and other influential cadres have all been rolled up by Pakistan, and the military has been supportive of US drone strikes against the

⁶⁹ Jaffrelot 2015, 535.

group.⁷⁰ Assigning a group to the enemy category has not precluded the possibility of attempting peace deals with such groups after unexpected military setbacks. Crucially, these deals have been very short-lived and embedded within a broader trajectory of state suppression efforts that are clearly different than the strategies adopted toward aligned and gray zone actors. Initial policy reactions were of suppression; only after these first offensives failed do we see forms of limited cooperation explored by the military, followed by a return to crackdowns. In the case studies, we examine approaches to the TTP from late 2007 through 2014 in greater depth.

Ideological gray zone groups form the plurality of the sample. This is important because it shows the limits of a simple binary between “good” and “bad” militants: the political spectrum is complex and state policy often involves neither full accommodation nor brutal repression, but instead degrees of toleration and oscillations among containment and limited cooperation. We code ten groups as slotting into either business partner or undesirable political roles. These groups were considered to be tolerable, and sometimes useful. Political tensions and major differences in goals existed, however. State responses toward these actors have been a mix of no action, deals, and sporadic military offensives. Peace deals with business partners have been much more durable than those with ideologically opposed groups, lasting on average longer than 12 months, showing their different strategic significance. Groups offering no utility have been targeted in isolated military operations.

There are two clearly mis-predicted cases of initial role assignment and military strategy. The Gul Bahadur group faced a military offensive, despite our coding that it should have been seen as a business partner. We explore this complex case below, which shows other flaws in our theoretical model: Bahadur has moved in and out of various ideological positions, operational

⁷⁰ The question of who knew what about Bin Laden specifically, as opposed to Al Qaeda in general, remains open. See Gall (2014) and Levy and Scott-Clark (2017).

profiles, and insurgent alliances in ways that our framework has difficulty tracking. The second failure is the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP). Though we do see offensives against a related group, the TIP has been largely ignored in terms of large-scale, publicly-broadcasted military offensives, despite our prediction that it should have been treated as a mortal enemy group.

Can we reduce these patterns to a purely military-functional explanation? Table 2 shows that focusing on operational utility alone is inadequate to explaining the variation across our six distinct observables of state strategy. There are 7 cases of high operational utility groups and 13 cases of non-useful groups. *Within* each of these categories, there is extensive variation. For example, in the high operational utility category, we are unable to distinguish the 2 groups that face no action from the 2 that become participant in joint offensives/get peace deals and the 2 that receive facilitation. Similarly, in the low operational utility category, we see marked variation in the nature of the repression directed towards a significant number of armed group: while 7 groups face small action, 6 groups are targeted in sustained targeting through large scale military operations.

Table 4. State Response & Operational Utility

State Response\Operational Utility	High	Low	Total
Facilitation	2		1
Joint/Peace Deal	2		3
No Action	2		2
Small Action	1	7	8
Demobilization			
Sustained Targeting		6	6
Total	7	13	20

Changes Over Time

While many initial political role assignments have survived, we expect changes driven by shifting assessments of group ideology and operational utility. To trace these changes, we code

ideology and operational utility of armed groups over time. When armed groups reveal an ideological position or revise it, changes in ideology and operational utility were recorded and the expected new political role was identified in Table 5. The new political role was then compared against the state response toward the group in the 12 months following the change in political role. It is important to note that while some groups had only one change in political role, other groups, like the TTP and the Hafiz Gul Bahadur's group, had more than one change in political role. The TTP and Hafiz Gul Bahadur case are given particular attention in the qualitative analysis below.

Table 5. Changes Over Time

Group	Updated Ideology (Year of Update, if any, in bracket)	Updated OU (Year of Update, if any, in bracket)	Cause of Shift	Predicted New Political Role	Actual Political Role	State Response after updated political roles (Initial Response to Updated Response)
Commander Nazir Group	Gray Zone	High (2006)	Against IMU	Business Partner	Business Partner	Small Action to Joint/Peace Deal
TTP	Opposed	High (2008) to Low (2009)	Support against India post Mumbai	Strange Bedfellow	Strange Bedfellow	Sustained Targeting to No-Action to Sustained Targeting
Abdullah Mehsud Group	Aligned (2008)	High (2008)	OU after fragmenting from TTP; also announces commitment to Pakistan	Armed Ally	Armed Ally	Sustained Targeting to Facilitation
TNSM	Opposed (2009)	High (2008) to Low (2009)	Local stabilizer in Swat; allies with TTP-Swat to become largest group; also denounces constitution	Business Partner and Mortal Enemy	Business Partner to Mortal Enemy	Small Action to Joint/Peace Deal to Sustained Targeting
Faqir Mohammad Group	Opposed (2008)	Low	Backs TTP's call for jihad against Army	Mortal Enemy	Mortal Enemy	Small Action to Sustained Targeting
Lashkar-e-Islam	Opposed (2008)	Low	Enforces Shariah	Mortal Enemy	Mortal Enemy	Sustained Targeting

Ansar-ul Islam	Gray Zone	High (2008/2009)	Munir Shakir's militia/ Lashkar-e-Islam	Business Partner	Business Partner	Small Action to Joint offensives/Peace Deal
Turkistan Bhattani Group	Aligned	High to Low (2009)	OU changes after group moves to TANK, becoming biggest group in the district	Superfluous Supporter	Superfluous Supporter	Facilitation to Demobilized
Gul Bahadur Group	Gray Zone to Opposed (2007) to Gray Zone (2008)	High (2006)	Part of TTP alliance which declares jihad against Army in 2007 but distances himself in 2008	Business Partner to Strange Bedfellow to Business Partner	Undesirable to Strange Bedfellow to Strange Bedfellow	Small Action to No Action

In several of these cases, we see armed groups shifting their ideological positions by changing their public rhetoric, the goals they espouse, and the symbols they deploy. Changes move both toward and away from the state: Abdullah Mehsud group and Gul Bahadur group at points very explicitly renounced maximalist war aims and acknowledged the basic precepts of Pakistani military's desired polity (though to different degrees), while the Faqir Mohammed group, Lashkar-e-Islam, and TNSM radicalized in opposition to the military. These dynamics were driven by a variety of factors, including behavior of groups in other districts, intra-group factional competition, feuds and rivalries between armed groups, and rise and fall of individual leaders. They were clearly not purely endogenous to state policy, and in some cases they moved directly against the military's preferences. The army was forced to respond to the shifts, leading to changes in political role reassessment and in turn state response.

As with initial role assignment, the predicted changes we see in the Gul Bahadar group do not align with theoretical expectations. We expect a major crackdown in late 2007/early 2008

after it formally became part of the TTP, but its rapid disavowal of the TTP and Baitullah Mehsud appears to have allowed it to escape this re-categorization and ensuing repression. Our case study on Bahadur discusses his distinctive pattern of shifting alignments and positions.

5. Comparative Case Studies: North and South Waziristan

The medium-N analysis is valuable, but data constraints impose serious limitations. This section complements this analysis by comparing cases to show how these processes play out in more detail. We trace patterns of state strategy toward four armed groups: the Haqqani network, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Mullah Nazir group, and Gul Bahadur group. This small-N research design more carefully measures variables of interest and tracks interactions over time. We extend it through 2015, unlike the broader medium-N study, which ends in 2013.

We select a case sample that our theory predicts should generate a wide variety of outcomes, based on variation in groups' ideological fit and operational value.⁷¹ They are relatively data-rich cases, allowing for greater confidence in measuring the variables and in their sequencing and interaction over time.⁷² They are all within North Waziristan (Bahadur and Haqqanis) or South Waziristan (TTP and Mullah Nazir), providing a reasonably bounded comparative context that reduces the array of confounding variables at work. Since we already know that there is substantial variation in army strategy – reflecting its broader “ambivalence vis-à-vis Islamist groups”⁷³ – we are not selecting cases with a radically different profile than the broader sample. This combination of tight comparisons and rich data cannot definitely prove or disprove the argument, but it can increase or decrease our confidence in the theory.⁷⁴

Haqqani Network: Continuity as Armed Allies

⁷¹ King, Keohane, and Verba 1994.

⁷² George and Bennett 2005.

⁷³ Jaffrelot 2015, 606.

⁷⁴ Bennett 2007.

The Haqqani Network has been the most consistently cooperative ally of the Pakistani state since 9/11.⁷⁵ As early as December 2001, the chief of ISI reportedly met Jallaludin Haqqani in Islamabad.⁷⁶ Since then, to the extent that outside observers can tell, the Haqqani Network has been largely untouched in its base areas in North Waziristan, with the possible exception of displacement during Zarb-e-Azb in 2014. Military operations targeting Al-Qaeda and other foreign militants have generally avoided capturing or even harming Haqqani commanders in their sweeps. At other times, intelligence officers have tipped the Haqqanis off to raids. All available evidence suggests that the Haqqani network is perceived as an armed ally whose goals and behaviors are compatible with the military's project, and that the group is seen as a valuable operational partner for both managing an unstable frontier and striking deep into Afghanistan against rival governments and armed groups.

What are the roots of this alliance? First, the Haqqanis are conspicuous in their support for the Pakistani state. Azaz Syed reports former ISI head Ehsan Ul Haq quoting Jalaludin Haqqani from this period: "Jalalluddin was very positive about Pakistan even at that time when we had announced to support the Americans. He (Haqqani) knew that we (Pakistan) could not do anything for them." Ehsan recalls Haqqani saying, "Don't worry about us. We understand your problems. Please take care of your country, Pakistan, as we think this is our home."⁷⁷

They have never been party to jihadi edicts directed against the Pakistani state by various other armed actors. In fact, they have issued edicts to stop other armed groups from attacking the Pakistanis and tried to direct other militants toward fighting American and Afghan, rather than Pakistani, forces. In 2006, for instance, Sirajuddin Haqqani issued a circular saying that 'jihad'

⁷⁵ The Haqqanis have pledged allegiance to the Afghan Taliban, but predate the Taliban's origins and have a relatively loose operational relationship with the Quetta Shura. See Gopal et al. 2013, 137-139.

⁷⁶ Mazzetti 2012.

⁷⁷ Syed 2014, 62.

against the United States and Afghan government was to continue “till the last drop of blood” but fighting against the Pakistan Army was not jihad.⁷⁸ Jalaluddin Haqqani, father of Siraj and the leader of the Haqqani network, added that “It [attacking the Army] is not our policy. Those who agree with us are our friends and those who do not agree and (continue to wage) an undeclared war against Pakistan are neither our friends nor shall we allow them in our ranks.”⁷⁹

Second, as Brown and Rasler note, the Haqqanis are a “strategic asset. . .through which Pakistan can shape and secure its interests along the Durand Line.”⁸⁰ From the 1990s onward, the Army and Haqqanis have shared enemies in Afghanistan’s Northern Alliance, with its backing from India, Russia, and the US. Jaffrelot argues, “For the Pakistan Army, it [the Haqqani network] was a particularly useful resource to combat India’s presence in Afghanistan.”⁸¹ After 9/11, Jalaluddin Haqqani explicitly highlighted the group’s utility: “Let me remind you that on Pakistan's Eastern border is India -- Pakistan's perennial enemy. With the Taliban government in Afghanistan, Pakistan has an unbeatable 2,300 km strategic depth, which even President Pervez Musharraf has proudly proclaimed. Does Pakistan really want a new government, which will include pro-India people in it, thereby wiping out this strategic depth? I tell you, the security and stability of Pakistan and Afghanistan are intertwined. Together, we are strong but separately we are weak.”⁸²

The Haqqanis have their own independent combat and terror capabilities, and they have also provided direct assistance to the Afghan Taliban.⁸³ The Pakistan Army acknowledges that the Haqqanis play a valuable role as a tool of influence in Afghanistan. This is a long standing

⁷⁸ Khan 2006.

⁷⁹ Gopal et al. 2013, 143.

⁸⁰ Brown and Rasler 2013, 122.

⁸¹ Jaffrelot 2015, 539.

⁸² Khan 2001.

⁸³ Philip 2006.

evaluation: “The Haqqani network has proven useful to the Pakistani state for three decades by functioning as a reliable partner which can provide strategic depth (in case of total war with India) and added military capacity in the tribal areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and do so with a measure of plausible deniability.”⁸⁴

The group’s border-straddling networks give it the ability to operate in Afghanistan but to find shelter in Pakistan, which provides a role as a “power broker and the primary facilitator of a cross-border system of violence.”⁸⁵ It has been “capable and determined,”⁸⁶ clearly placing it in the category of operationally useful. Beyond its striking and facilitating power in Afghanistan, the Haqqanis have had the ability to help broker negotiations, prisoner exchanges, and ceasefires between the military and various militant groups, helping to manage military “indirect rule” on the periphery as “effective interlocutors between militants and the Pakistani state.”⁸⁷

This combination of ideological affinity and operational value has led to an armed order of alliance throughout the time period under study. The Pakistani military “has consistently refused to move against the Haqqani network precisely because the organization is immensely valuable,”⁸⁸ and this “continued support and protection” has “exasperated the Obama administration.”⁸⁹ At least until 2014, the network was “left largely unaffected and free to consolidate its influence across North Waziristan”⁹⁰ in a spheres-of-influence arrangement with the central state; in David Rohde’s words the military provided “de facto acquiescence.”⁹¹ The military has also allegedly tipped off Haqqanis ahead of US strikes and operations, helping to

⁸⁴ Brown and Rasler 2013, 152.

⁸⁵ Brown and Rasler 2013, 130.

⁸⁶ Brown and Rasler 2013, 125.

⁸⁷ Fishman et al. 2009, 130.

⁸⁸ Brown and Rasler 2013, 152.

⁸⁹ Gall 2014, 260.

⁹⁰ Brown and Rasler 2013, 165.

⁹¹ Rohde 2009.

protect the organization from American efforts at degrading it⁹², in addition to providing it with “an invaluable safe haven.”⁹³ The 2014 Zarb-e-Azb offensive in North Waziristan appears to have, at most, geographically shifted some of the network’s activities, but did not involve repression of the organization.

Despite such overt support, the Haqqanis have not been perfectly aligned with the Pakistani state. Allies can create principal-agent problems and do not perfectly align with all state strategic interests – and Haqqanis are a prime case of how. Through their base of support in North Waziristan, the Haqqanis have indirectly aided and incubated a number of Pakistan’s enemies, like elements of the TTP and IMU: indeed, a number of later TTP commanders first gained experience under the Haqqanis.⁹⁴ The Pakistani state has never considered this reason enough to alter its state strategy toward them, in part because the Haqqanis have consistently tried to redirect militants away from Islamabad toward Kabul. State officials have often expressed fears that certain offensive actions, such as an invasion of North Waziristan just to target the TTP, could prompt this stalwart ally to defect and join hands with the Pakistan’s enemies in Afghanistan. This relationship is thus not locked in stone, precisely as our theory would suggest: “when the Haqqani network is no longer seen as reliable and/or relevant to the ISI and its interests Pakistan may have less of an incentive to continue its relationship with the group.”⁹⁵ Nevertheless, it has shown a remarkable continuity over time in its political role and relationship with state power.

⁹² Aid, 108.

⁹³ Gopal et al 2013, 146.

⁹⁴ Brown and Rasler 2013, 141.

⁹⁵ Brown and Rasler 2013, 141.

TTP – Shifting Political Roles

The TTP is a much more complex case both because of its looser organizational structure over time. The TTP was officially formed in December 2007 out of a collection of armed factions that had been involved in both conflict and cooperation with Pakistan’s security forces; this includes the Gul Bahadur group discussed below. A number of these factions originated as “gray zone” actors in the eyes of the state, such as the faction led by Baitullah Mehsud. In the years after 9/11, the military classified them as business partners or undesirables, attempting to either cut deals with them or use sporadic offensives to limit their reach. For instance, in early 2005 a military offensive in South Waziristan was launched that led to a peace deal in February 2005.⁹⁶ The Peshawar corps commander declared that “Baitullah Mehsud is a soldier of peace.”⁹⁷ This deal eventually broke down, but the army’s efforts to construct it show that these groups were seen as tolerable and manageable. By the summer of 2007, however, such attempts were bearing increasingly little fruit and the factions that were to constitute the TTP were signaling growing opposition to the state.⁹⁸ This process of ideological radicalization took on greater speed after the Lal Masjid siege of July 2007: it “would alter B. Mehsud’s priorities. He turned his weapons against the Pakistani state and to this end organized the TTP under the auspices of Al Qaeda.”⁹⁹

Baitullah Mehsud spearheaded the new TTP coalition, and it was eventually re-categorized as an opposed group as it continued to escalate its direct, public challenge to the state. The creation of the TTP in late 2007 marked a major change in ideological position for this coalition of militants. Their growing radicalization and more clearly and explicitly anti-state

⁹⁶ Mahsud 2013, 190.

⁹⁷ Report 2005.

⁹⁸ Jones and Fair 2010, 57.

⁹⁹ Jaffrelot 2015, 573.

attitude placed the TTP into the ideologically opposed category. This placement along the spectrum was not immediate or seamless, especially because splintering and internal dissension made it hard to know exactly who spoke for the TTP. Here we focus on the “core” TTP led by Baitullah Mehsud, Hakimullah Mehsud, and, more recently, Mullah Fazlullah.

A statement by Baitullah’s spokesman Maulvi Omar on Dec 13, 2007 stated that the sole objective behind creating TTP was to unite the Pakistani Taliban to wage a ‘defensive jihad’ against the Pakistani forces, carrying out military operations in the North West.¹⁰⁰ Baitullah confirmed this statement in an interview in January 2008, criticizing the Pakistan Army for “playing the different tribes and regions off of one another. In area X it is in peace talks or has a truce in place, and then in area Y it is in a state of war. Then the roles change, and it is in combat against area X and talking peace with area Y.” He referred to the “Pakistani army’s war in the tribal areas as an American war.”¹⁰¹

Given this political position, the TTP posed a formidable challenge to the Pakistani military. Burke further notes that the group’s “rhetoric and ideology were informed by a socially revolutionary agenda” at the local level, mobilizing against local power-holders.¹⁰² President Musharraf declared Baitullah Mehsud “public enemy number one” as early as January 2008. The TTP launched an “unprecedented spate of attacks on the Pakistani military itself through the autumn of 2007 and on into 2008,” constituting a “direct assault on the core of the Pakistani political and security establishment.”¹⁰³ Our argument suggests that the Army should have quickly re-categorized it as ideologically opposed and responding accordingly. There is clear evidence that by 2009 “the army became aware of the challenge the entire Islamist sphere

¹⁰⁰ Mir 2009.

¹⁰¹ Zaidan 2008.

¹⁰² Burke 2011, 374.

¹⁰³ Burke 2011, 390.

(including what it heretofore considered as “good Islamists”) posed to its authority and Pakistan’s territorial integrity.”¹⁰⁴

A series of military operations ensued in 2007-2009, including Zarga Khel in North Waziristan, Operation Tri-Star in South Waziristan, Operation Eagle Swoop, Operation Labbaik, and Operation Eagle Swoop II. These were not very successful: as in its battles with the Nek Mohammed group in 2004, the Army was poorly prepared and knocked back on its heels. As a result of recurrent military setbacks, the military also sought peace deals to minimize losses in 2008 and early 2009.¹⁰⁵

These occasional efforts at deal-making clearly show that our argument does not seamlessly explain the case: this was not an immediate flip of the switch and not a simple success for the theory. Part of the explanation was a temporary conciliatory policy between late November 2008 and early 2009: the TTP became a strange bedfellow as the army sought to pacify the periphery during an India-Pakistan crisis. The November 26, 2008 Mumbai attacks led to heightened tensions between India and Pakistan, with the Indian government pledging a surgical response inside Pakistan.

Though we do not code a major ideological shift, the TTP briefly became a strange bedfellow, with limited cooperation being useful for stabilizing restive areas of the North West to free up military capacity for a confrontation with India. This was accompanied by a rhetorical shift by the Army, in a dramatic turn around, which declared TTP to be “patriotic” Pakistanis. A senior official of the ISI told a group of senior journalists that “We have no big issues with the militants in Fata. We have only some misunderstandings with Baitullah Mehsud and Fazlullah.

¹⁰⁴ Jaffrelot 2015, 595.

¹⁰⁵ Mahsud 2013, 190-191.

These misunderstandings could be removed through dialogue.”¹⁰⁶ This may also have been related to efforts to encourage splintering by TTP factions (such as the Bahadur group, discussed below), seeking to use deals as a tool for fragmentation.¹⁰⁷

This turned out to be cheap talk. Though the cease fire between Pakistan Army and TTP lasted until the tensions with India lasted, soon after the crisis died down we see a return to conflict. The group used this as an opportunity to further consolidate its gain in both FATA and Swat. Ongoing, and by 2009 escalating, offensives suggest that the army did not see enduring space for a deal with the TTP, unlike with the various gray zone groups it was cutting deals with (Mullah Nazir, Bahadur, Abdullah Mehsud) in the same period. There was “fighting on an unprecedented scale”¹⁰⁸ with the TTP that suggests a much more resolved effort to crack down on the group. There were serious military setbacks in battles in the North West, with “extremely high soldier-to-insurgent loss ratios.”¹⁰⁹ These operations focused on “clearing the TTP strongholds of Ladha, Makin, and Sararogha.”¹¹⁰

The change in political role from perceived business partner to mortal enemy between 2005 and 2009 culminated in a state strategy of suppression against the TTP, signified by the launch of Operation Rah-e-Rast in South Waziristan Agency, in which the Army sought to “regain its control over South Waziristan.”¹¹¹ 30,000 combat forces went into SWA in Operation Rah-e-Nijat (Path to Salvation) in October 2009.¹¹² The TTP was a consistent target of the military from 2009 onward, as we would expect from a perceived mortal enemy. The army

¹⁰⁶ Mir 2008. See also Wilkinson 2008.

¹⁰⁷ On arguments about peace deals and fragmentation, see Stedman (1997); Kydd and Walter (2002); Cunningham (2014).

¹⁰⁸ Jaffrelot 2015, 572.

¹⁰⁹ Lalwani 2013, 207.

¹¹⁰ Jones and Fair 2010, 72.

¹¹¹ Jaffrelot 2015, 596.

¹¹² Mahsud 2013, 191.

worked during operations with several groups that had either always opposed the TTP or that splintered from it.

Civilian governments attempted negotiations again in 2013, after the drone strike killing of Hakimullah Mehsud, which highlights how civil-military divisions can undermine our army-focused argument.¹¹³ Nevertheless, after these talks failed, the military returned to targeting the TTP aggressively. COAS Kayani was “most reluctant” to accept TTP demands and his successor Raheel Sharif was “even more determined.”¹¹⁴ As 2014 marched on, “the army intensified its strikes”¹¹⁵ and then launched Operation Zarb-e-Azb into North Waziristan.¹¹⁶ As we noted above, the Haqqanis do not appear to have actually been hit in any serious way in this assault, but the TTP was, showing the ability of the military to discriminate in its targeting. Interestingly, when power feuds over succession within the TTP led a group of Mehsuds to defect in the wake of Hakimullah’s death, they moderated their ideological position and became business partners of the military against the remaining Fazlullah-led core TTP.¹¹⁷

Not every period matches our expectations, particularly in late 2008/early 2009 and early/mid-2013, when we see efforts at limited cooperation. Civil-military complications, residual ambiguity about how to classify the TTP, and the byzantine splintering of the group all add complexity to the case that we transparently acknowledge. Nevertheless, the basic trajectory is very different from that of otherwise similar state-group dyads and is generally in line with our basic theoretical predictions. The military was happy to tolerate or do business with TTP precursor factions until they explicitly turned against the state and made demands that simply

¹¹³ Jaffrelot 2015, 601.

¹¹⁴ Jaffrelot 2015, 601.

¹¹⁵ Jaffrelot 2015, 602.

¹¹⁶ Jaffrelot 2015, 603.

¹¹⁷ Jaffrelot 2015, 600.

could not be granted without shattering the military's political project. Once that shift in symbols, discourses, and patterns of behavior occurred, the army slowly but surely re-categorized the group and launched sustained, often brutal, attacks against it.

Life and Death in the Gray Zone: Mullah Nazir & Hafiz Gul Bahadur

The Haqqanis are a clear case of an armed ally political role, while the TTP broadly represents a mortal enemy. This section addresses two “gray zone” groups, led by Mullah Nazir (in South Waziristan) and Hafiz Gul Bahadur (in North Waziristan). We consider them together because they both represent gray zone groups and because they have often operated in close proximity to one another. Both groups have operated in more ambiguous space with regard to the Pakistani military, particularly Bahadur, then either the TTP or the Haqqanis.¹¹⁸ They reveal the complexity of armed politics in Pakistan, where simply being an armed group has no fixed political meaning. They also show the limits to cooperation when armed groups do not line up with the Army's ideological project. With both groups, we see a general trajectory of limited cooperation (though with several shifts in the case of Bahadur): “Pakistan cultivated Mullah Bahadur and Maulvi Nazir in an attempt to counter the anti-state elements of the TTP generally and Baitullah and Hakimullah Mehsud in particular.”¹¹⁹

We begin with the somewhat more straightforward case of the Mullah Nazir group. He became the head of a militant group in Wana in 2004¹²⁰, tightly linked to the Afghan Taliban and with a base in the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe.¹²¹ Nazir had a deep distaste for Uzbek militants who were operating in South Waziristan, and expelled them; they ended up aligned with Baitullah Mehsud. Mullah Nazir preferred to focus on Afghanistan rather than attacking the Pakistani

¹¹⁸ Tankel 2016 refers to them as “frenemies.”

¹¹⁹ Fair 2014, 252.

¹²⁰ Rehman 2013.

¹²¹ Rehman 2013.

state, which drove further divisions between him and the emerging TTP of Baitullah.¹²² Brief attempts at rapprochement between Nazir and Baitullah in 2009 and 2011 failed almost immediately. He did not actively and publicly support the Pakistani state or serve as its strike arm in Afghanistan, unlike groups such as LeT and the Haqqanis. This autonomy included maintaining links with Al Qaeda, an enemy of the state.¹²³ Classifying his group as a gray zone actor is therefore appropriate, straddling the lines of alignment and opposition.

Nazir's rivalry with Baitullah led to clashes from early 2008 with the TTP, and made him operationally very valuable to Pakistan's military, which was in this period beginning to mobilize against Baitullah's organization. We expect him to be viewed as a business partner armed group and thus be targeted for limited cooperation. This is exactly what happened: in the years prior to his killing by an American drone in 2013, "Pakistan's military and Nazir's faction were operating under a non-aggression pact, and violent incidents between the two were rare."¹²⁴ Indeed, "the Pakistan Army sought to bolster Nazir against Baitullah Mehsud, who was protecting the Uzbeks."¹²⁵ Jones and Fair argue that "the Pakistani government likely provided support to Mullah Nazir for a number of reasons, including to help balance against the Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan in South Waziristan and to ensure some Pakistani oversight over Nazir's group."¹²⁶

Though Nazir's links to Al Qaeda likely limited a full embrace, the military and Nazir group had mutual interests in denying territory to the TTP and in trying to splinter Baitullah and Hekimullah's group.¹²⁷ Nazir was killed by the US in 2013 because of his close links to the

¹²² Jaffrelot 2015, 572.

¹²³ Mahsud 2013, 185.

¹²⁴ Rehman 2013.

¹²⁵ Jaffrelot 2015, 572.

¹²⁶ Jones and Fair 2010, 58.

¹²⁷ Confirmed by Maulvi Nazir in an interview with Syed Saleem Shahzad. See: Shahzad 2011.

Afghan Taliban and Al Qaeda, but his successor, Bahawal Khan, appears to have continued a collusive relationship with Pakistan's military.¹²⁸ As with the Mehsud splinter of the TTP, the Mullah Nazir group has continued to operate as a warlord force on the frontier, showing that the simple fact of a fragmented monopoly of violence is politically unproblematic for the Pakistani military - as long as the right kinds of armed groups fracture that monopoly. It also shows that the Army's political support remains limited if the group does not profess ideological precepts acceptable to the Pakistani state.

Gul Hafiz Bahadur's group has had a more labyrinthine trajectory. Like the Mullah Nazir group, Pakistani forces cut deals with Bahadur to limit the TTP's reach in the FATA.¹²⁹ Yet Bahadur was actually briefly part of the TTP in 2007-8 and in 2014 broke his ceasefire with the military in the run-up to Operation Zarb-e-Azb. As with Nazir and his links to Al Qaeda, this track record of both linkage and competition with the TTP makes the Bahadur group fall squarely into the gray zone. Bahadur emerged from the same militant milieu as many other leaders, based in North Waziristan and with experience in Afghanistan and connections to the Haqqanis and Afghan Taliban. As with Baitullah Mehsud and other groups in what became the TTP, he began to clash with the Pakistani military in the mid-2000s; the Haqqanis helped to broker a ceasefire between him and the military in 2006, "which had been fighting an on-again, off-again war for almost two years."¹³⁰ Bahadur both fought against and signed peace deals with the army in 2006 and 2008.

Bahadur was a deputy in the TTP when it formed in December 2007. Yet unlike Baitullah Mehsud, he was uncomfortable with foreign militants and broke from the TTP when Mullah

¹²⁸ Rehman 2014.

¹²⁹ Jones and Fair 2010, 73.

¹³⁰ Gopal et al 2013, 140.

Omar, Afghan Taliban leader, opposed its formation as a distraction from the battle in Afghanistan. He split from the TTP in 2008, staking out a position as “a pragmatist, maintaining constructive relations with a host of militants in North Waziristan and beyond while avoiding confrontation with the Pakistani state that might initiate a powerful crackdown.”¹³¹ According to Jaffrelot, Bahadur “dissented [from TTP line] – partly because of the old rivalry between Wazirs and Mehsuds, partly because the Pakistani Army had wooed him, playing on this rivalry, partly because Wazirs resented the role of the Uzbeks in the TTP – but then fell back in line in 2009.”¹³² He left the TTP in July 2008, and aligned with Mullah Nazir as groups emphasizing the war in Afghanistan over that against the Pakistani state.¹³³

These perambulations continued into early 2009, when Bahadur agreed to join a coalition with Mullah Nazir and Baitullah Mehsud to try to unify the factions of the North West frontier (under pressure from Mullah Omar to try to rationalize the militancy). This alliance, however, quickly fell apart over enduring disagreements about how to deal with the Pakistani state. As a result, from 2009-2014 Bahadur “hedged his bets and seems to have largely allowed Pakistani troops to pass through North Waziristan”¹³⁴ and “quickly distanced himself from the TTP and its leadership. . . . Bahadur focuses exclusively on US and NATO forces in Afghanistan.”¹³⁵

Limited cooperation, via a ceasefire, with Bahadur was useful to the army as a way of minimizing its military challenges and constraining the spread of the TTP. Though party to another abortive united front effort in late 2011 and early 2012, Bahadur and the TTP could never settle the key question of “whether or not to attack the Pakistani state.”¹³⁶

¹³¹ Gopal et al 2013, 147.

¹³² Jaffrelot 2015, 574.

¹³³ Gopal et al 2013, 148; Mahsud 2013, 169.

¹³⁴ Gopal et al 2013, 148.

¹³⁵ Fair 2014, 246.

¹³⁶ Gopal et al 2013, 152.

This limited cooperation order came to an end in 2014 when Bahadur declared an end to his ceasefire with the Pakistani government. The limited cooperation that had held for half a decade prior collapsed, and it appears that Bahadur's group may have been targeted in the Zarb-e-Azb offensive of 2014-15, including rumors of his death.¹³⁷ It is not clear what triggered Bahadur's decision to break from limited cooperation and to forthrightly reject the military's authority, which should have led him to being re-categorized as a mortal enemy in the eyes of the army. Until further data becomes available, it is difficult to know what drove his decision to adopt a radically different ideological stance.¹³⁸

6. State-Group Relations in Pakistan beyond the North West

Our argument may also help explain broader patterns of Pakistani violence management. Ruthless military crackdowns against Baloch insurgents have a very different profile than the patterns of selectiveness and discrimination we see in the North West.¹³⁹ This makes sense in our framework: Baloch mobilization is seen as more threatening by the military since it mobilizes ethno-separatist cleavages that are perceived as less manageable than the gray zone and aligned groups that deploy Islamist rhetoric and symbols potentially compatible with the military's version of Pakistani nationalism. Like Bengali regionalists in 1970-1, Baloch mobilization makes claims on the state that highlight ethnic and regional difference and contest the central role of Islam as a binding force of the nation.¹⁴⁰

The military's tight embrace of Lashkar-e-Taiba similarly accords with our argument. The group maintains a distance from Al Qaeda¹⁴¹ while consistently and publicly signaling its

¹³⁷ There has been no confirmation of his death, but rumors were first reported in December 2014: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/803848/datta-khel-air-strikes-rumours-swirl-about-death-of-haqqani-networks-ally/>.

¹³⁸ Iqbal 2014.

¹³⁹ International Conflict Group 2007.

¹⁴⁰ On East Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh, Rose and Sisson 1991.

¹⁴¹ Fair 2014, 250.

“commitment to the integrity of the Pakistani state and its diverse polity.”¹⁴² Combined with its operational usefulness as a strike arm against India, this makes it an armed ally of the military, similar to the Haqqani Network. Consequently, Jaffrelot suggests that “as long as the LeT does not attack Pakistan, the army is likely to protect the movement in order to use it again.”¹⁴³ Political goals and fears guide the allocation of coercion and compromise in Pakistan. The contrast with Al Qaeda, which operates both in the North West and beyond it, is instructive – the Pakistan military has both attacked Al Qaeda and assisted American operations against the group, while largely leaving LeT alone. Unlike LeT, AQ has directly challenged the right to rule of the Pakistani military and state, and articulated a radically different understanding of the relationship between nation and Islam than the Lashkar. Despite having far weaker military power than LeT, AQ has borne the brunt of far more severe repression.¹⁴⁴

The claims and findings help us put into perspective the long-awaited Pakistani military operations in North Waziristan, which began in June 2014, and the future of military policy on the strategically crucial North West frontier. Operation Zarb-e-Azb was rhetorically hailed by Pakistani leaders as a full-fledged assault on non-state militancy. Yet the evidence from our case studies strongly suggests a continuing pattern of selective violence toward and tacit (at minimum) cooperation with armed groups. We have already discussed the case of the Haqqani Network. A breakaway faction of the TTP, the Punjabi Taliban group led by Asmatullah Muawiya, after moderating its ideological positions in 2014, seems to have been accommodated, even though the group was involved in lethal attacks, including one on the Sri Lankan cricket

¹⁴² Fair 2014, 256.

¹⁴³ Jaffrelot 2015, 608.

¹⁴⁴ It remains unclear what the Pakistani military knew about Osama Bin Laden’s location. What is clear, however, is the decimation of Al Qaeda in Pakistan.

team.¹⁴⁵ This kind of discrimination is likely to endure into the future: Pakistan's military has shown a willingness to directly defy, or to work around, international efforts to force more broad-reaching repression, instead prioritizing domestic political goals and interests.¹⁴⁶ Pakistan's security elite will continue to pursue violence management rather than violence monopolization.

7. Implications for Policy and Research

Political and military elites need to sort through the armed political landscapes they face. They are confronted with hard decisions about how to allocate coercion and cooperation. Our theory and evidence have several implications for the study and practice of internal security. First, we need to move beyond binaries of war and peace to instead identify important variation in armed orders.¹⁴⁷ Some formally "insurgent" groups may be seen as implacable enemies even as others are viewed as gray zone business partners or even allies of governments. Similarly, militias or armed political parties can oscillate between different political roles. Scholars need to study the entire range of relationships between states and armed groups, rather than assuming that such interactions necessarily take the form of civil war, and to unpack the underlying political logics of armed politics.

Second, policymakers' decisions about how to categorize and respond to armed groups rest in large part on fundamentally political evaluations: beliefs about which types of groups, political claims and symbols, and repertoires of behavior are more and less acceptable. Simply

¹⁴⁵ See Khan (2010) for involvement of Punjabi Taliban involvement in violence against the Army and civilians. Information gathered through field work suggests that Asmatullah Muawiya is based out of Peshawar with the permission of the Pakistani security agencies.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Ladwig 2016, who finds greater success for international pressures than we have found in Pakistan.

¹⁴⁷ Staniland 2017.

measuring the balance of power between states and armed groups or counting the number of group factions is insufficient for explaining fine-grained patterns of state response.

What we see in Pakistan are careful assessments to evaluate the political aims of armed groups, based both on their behavior and their rhetoric. This is certainly not a unique case. Most states, most of the time, do not automatically deploy their full repressive capacity at all non-state armed groups. Instead they pick and choose which to try to contain, cooperate, incorporate, or annihilate. This is true even in the rich countries of the industrial West.¹⁴⁸ A total monopoly of state violence is the exception, not the rule. The key for scholars and policymakers is to understand the political criteria that are used to classify and respond to groups.

Third, we need to pay far more attention to the historical roots of ideological projects and the importance of political ideas in shaping the contours of state-armed group relationships.¹⁴⁹ Regime threat perception has been badly under-studied, despite remarkable variation in how governments perceive objectively-similar armed actors.¹⁵⁰ The way Pakistan's military evaluates internal security is likely to be quite different than India's or Indonesia's. These perceptions are frequently historically contingent, rather than natural or obvious reactions to straightforward, objective conditions. This does not mean that we cannot generalize across cases, but it does require systematically understanding this variation. A blend of comparative research design, contextual country knowledge, and security studies analysis is necessary for pursuing this research agenda.

Finally, a crucial research frontier is armed group decision making. Some of the groups in our study rapidly shifted their ideological positioning (most notably the Gul Bahadur group),

¹⁴⁸ Katzenstein 1996 on Japan; Obert 2014 on the US.

¹⁴⁹ Straus 2015.

¹⁵⁰ Boudreau 2004.

while others clung to a particular set of demands even in the face of serious military pressures. Some of this may have reflected strategic efforts to hide true war aims, while in other cases there may have been a deep commitment to hold a particular line despite intense costs. Even leaving aside these broader political positions, there was also variation in the willingness of groups to tactically cooperate with the state. While a state-centric approach tells us important things, the next step for research on state-group relations is exploring why groups stake out and change political positions.

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