The Politics of Pakistani Strategy on the North West Frontier

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Abstract: Analysts and policymakers regularly argue that the Pakistani military has engaged in selective repression toward and collusion with armed groups on the country's soil. Yet beyond this general observation, theory and fine-grained evidence do not exist to make systematic sense of patterns of state strategy and changes over time. This paper offers a theoretical framework for explaining regime perceptions of armed groups and the strategies state security managers pursue toward different types of groups. It then assesses this framework using a combination of new medium-N data on military offensives, peace deals, and state-group alliances with 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 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.

Acknowledgments: Margarita Konaev, Chris Clary, Vipin Narang, and participants at the 2014 APSA Annual Meeting provided generous feedback. We are deeply grateful for the excellent research and technical assistance of Saalika Mela, Chris Price, and David Henderson.

Introduction

Pakistan's military has pursued a dizzying mixture of peace deals, cease fires, active cooperation, benign neglect, and military operations on its north west frontier.[1] Ostensibly allied foreign governments have been puzzled, and often infuriated, by these patterns of conflict and collusion. In 2009, for instance, British Foreign Secretary David Miliband voiced his concerns by saying, "The way the Pakistan authorities have pursued their counter-insurgency strategy, which has essentially been to move from a series of deals three or four years ago to a very heavy handed military strategy and in some cases to flip back, has not got the right recipe for delivering a significant [outcome]."[2] US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton echoed similar sentiments on the eve of Pakistan's peace deal with the Swat faction of the Taliban in 2009, calling it "abdicating to the extremists."[3]

This paper uses new theory and data to describe and explain these patterns. Various insurgents, militias, local armed groups, "peace lashkars," criminal networks, and state security forces have operated in the North West.[4] Our findings support existing claims that the military selectively chooses its strategies, rather than seeking to monopolize violence. We move beyond this analytical consensus, however, to better understand how the military balances "the dual challenge of containing some militant proxies while instrumentalizing and supporting others."[5] First, we clearly theorize the ideological and instrumental determinants of military threat

[1]The 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] Naughtie 2009.
[3] Kressler 2009.
[4] While in Sindh and Punjab the Pakistan Army wields substantial influence over internal security policy, state and national politicians sometimes are able to influence security policy, particularly when linked to electoral competition. In FATA and KPK, the Army has been the lead security institution and there is comparatively little civilian influence.
[5] Fair 2014, 81.

perception, the range of possible state strategies and resulting armed orders, and the causes of change in state assessments of groups. Second, we use new medium-N and case study data to precisely measure the variation in state strategy and to identify shifts over time that existing accounts struggle with.

The Pakistan Army has a historically rooted, institutionalized idea of Pakistan that determines the ideological threat or alignment it perceives when evaluating armed actors.[6] We argue that these deep politics of Army categorization sort groups into levels and types of political affinity and enmity. Some armed groups are unproblematic allies, others make demands that are seen as totally unacceptable, and a number of groups exist in a "gray zone"[7] between these extremes. Yet ideology alone is insufficient to explain fine-grained patterns of strategy, especially rapid changes. *Within* ideological categories, some groups are useful in targeting India, exerting Pakistan influence in Afghanistan, and/or acting as local business partners to stabilize areas of unrest, and these groups are cultivated for some form of collusion. Others have little to offer the military, and are instead targeted for containment, incorporation, or destruction. The operational value of armed groups can change dramatically over time. It interacts with groups' ideological position to determine how the military perceives and responds to them.

The combination of ideology and operational incentives leads to six armed group *political roles*: allies, superfluous supporters, business partners, undesirables, strange bedfellows, and mortal enemies. Distinct armed orders have resulted that broadly correspond to these political roles, including alliances, military hostilities, and enduring limited cooperation arrangements. Our argument provides a new way of mapping Pakistan's armed political

[6] Cohen 1998, Shah 2014.
[7] See Auyero 2007 on grey zone groups.

landscape while theorizing and measuring this variation. It further allows researchers to study both changes and continuity.[8]

We provide a variety of empirical evidence as a plausibility probe supports our theoretical framework. There are cases, however, that our argument does not explain, and we transparently identify and discuss them. In some cases, our predictions about which groups the military should assign to a particular political role are empirically inaccurate, while our explanations of change over time remain incomplete. We use these shortcomings of the project to identify future research directions.

The findings suggest that patterns of discrimination toward armed groups are unlikely to radically change in the foreseeable future. Policy makers and analysts can use our framework to sort through the armed landscape of Pakistan and gain a clearer sense of which kinds of groups are likely to be attacked, tolerated, or colluded with. Our findings also have implications beyond Pakistan. The study of political violence needs to become more explicitly political. Dominant theories of state strategy take regime and military preferences as given, but in reality these political interests and ideological perceptions are historically constructed and differ radically from one another. As Davenport has argued in the context of state repression, "at present, researchers treat behavioral challenges as though they were straightforward, but they are not."[9] Our framework can be applied beyond the Pakistani case to compare how security establishments respond to armed actors.

The paper proceeds in six sections. We first lay out the basic puzzle motivating the project: the variation across groups and over time in their relations with the Pakistani military. We use data on this variation to identify the limits of existing theories. Second, we outline a

[8] This sidesteps debates about how to measure overall strategic postures by favoring precise measurement. See Lalwani 2015 on major transformation and Fair 2015 on total stasis.
[9] Davenport 2007, 8.

simple framework for "mapping" armed groups onto political roles that predict state strategies. Third, we operationalize the theory for the Pakistan case, specifying how the Pakistan Army should assess ideological affinity and operational utility. Fourth, we expand on our medium-N data on military offensives and peace deals in North West Pakistan to show in more detail the patterns of strategy, including cases of change over time. We code different groups according to our theoretical framework and assess the theory's broad usefulness in predicting strategies and consequent armed orders. Fifth, we use four comparative case studies from North and South Waziristan to more precisely measure state-group interactions and compare their outcomes to the theoretical predictions. Finally, we conclude with implications for both research and policy.

I. Patterns and Puzzles on Pakistan's North West Frontier

According to Pakistan's Interior Ministry, there are 62 armed groups banned by the Government of Pakistan. But there are numerous other groups that are not banned by the state.[10] We focus on 20 groups with a presence in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province (KP) and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) during the period 2002-2015. We do not examine armed groups exclusively based in Sindh, Punjab, or Balochistan, though we make reference to these other cases as relevant.

There are obvious limits to a single-conflict research design, most importantly the validity of the findings beyond North West Pakistan. However, this case selection strategy – focusing on the North West border - has unusual advantages. It allows a comparison of state strategic campaigns and armed orders without major confounders such as the structure of the state, nature of the war, per capita GDP, geography, or other fundamental contextual differences. It also makes it possible to study state-armed group interactions in greater detail than in

[10] The notification has since been removed from the Ministry of Interior's website. See: "Nacta removes list of banned outfits from website." *The Nation*, Jan 23, 2015. Accessed March 20, 2016. <http://nation.com.pk/editors-picks/24-Jan-2015/nacta-removes-list-of-banned-outfits-from-website>.

aggregated cross-national studies, while tackling broader political dynamics than the standard micro-level focus on variation in violent events.[11]

The shock of post 9/11 developments in Afghanistan provides a starting point for assessing military strategy in the region. This strategy is primarily the domain of the Pakistan's military leadership. The complexities of political authority in Punjab and Karachi are absent, and thus we can focus solely on Pakistan Army's behavior and threat perception, since it was the dominant institution from 2002-2008 during Pervez Musharraf's rule. After the 2008 democratic transition it has remained the key player in crafting internal security policy on the North West: indeed, in recent years this predominance has even grown under Chief of Army Staff Raheel Sharif. 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.[12]

Mapping Variation

Systematic differences in state approaches to armed groups can be seen in data we have gathered on peace deals, military offensives, and cooperative operations (a binary category) between the Pakistani military and twenty armed groups. There are more than 20 groups in Pakistan's North West, and we consider only groups with a reported size of more than 200 foot soldiers.[13] 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

[11] Excellent research that seeks to explain variation in violent events data in Pakistan includes Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2013 and Johnston and Sarbahi 2016.
[12] Bennett 2007.
[13] 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.

groups.[14] It carried out joint operations with at least 6 armed groups during this period. As we discuss in Part III in greater detail, these are substantial under-counts of an extremely murky set of phenomena, but they highlight the complexity of state-group relationships.

Several groups targeted in military operations have also been offered peace deals, while other groups have only been targeted by military operations and have had no peace deals. IMU and Al-Qaeda have had no peace deals and been targeted in military operations. On the other hand, the Haqqani Network stands out for having had one peace deal and no military offensives against it. The TTP has had both the most peace deals *and* largest number of military offensives against it. The breakaway faction of Turkistan Bhittani and forces of Momin Afridi and Shah Sahib have received active support from the Army, beyond simply 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.[15]

We can also see changes over time within state-group dyads. The TTP was first offered a series of 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).

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

[14] This is a very 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.

[15] 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.

Figure 1. Armed Actors, Peace Deal Days, and Military Operations

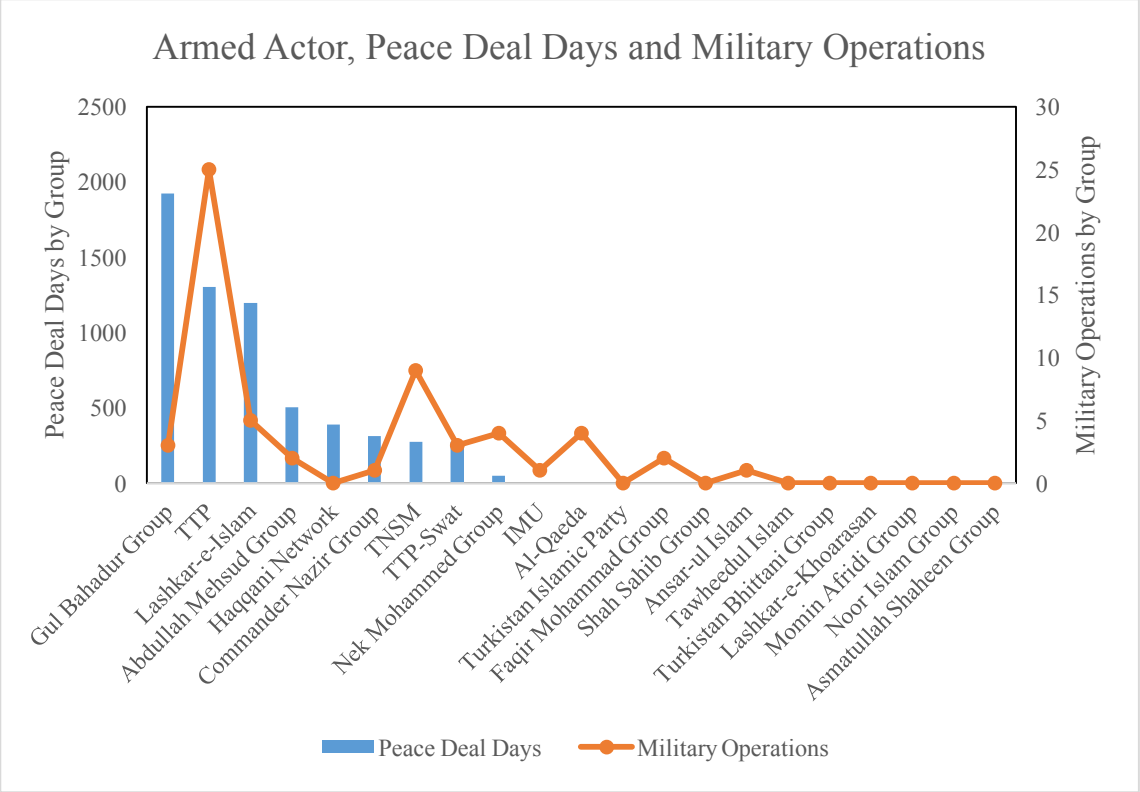

Figure 2. Violence, Peace Deals, and Military Operations

Puzzles

These data present a series of puzzles for existing arguments. First, many theories of state strategy toward armed groups simply do not apply to the Pakistani context. Walter's important work on state responses to ethnic separatists does not address non-separatist groups like those that dominate North West Pakistan's politics.[16] Boudreau focuses his theory on the threats that authoritarian regimes face upon taking power, but the 1999 Army seizure of power in Pakistan had nothing to do with the later North West insurgencies and thus cannot help explain the variation we see.[17] Second, existing literature tends to assume that states either co-opt armed groups or attack them.[18] In Pakistan, by contrast, state-armed group relationships are remarkably multi-faceted. We see efforts at containment, collusion, incorporation, and destruction, not just accommodation or repression.[19]

Third, the use of violence by armed groups does not straightforwardly drive military responses. Most of the armed groups have undertaken violence inside Pakistan, yet this has not led to any single state response. Even violence against the state machinery itself has sometimes triggered efforts at peace deals. Some groups that target the state are offered deals, while others are not; the same is true of groups that do not target the state. For instance, Hafiz Gul Bahadur group was offered a peace deal in 2006 despite not being complicit in violence, while the Abdullah Mehsud group and later the TTP were similarly offered peace deals (including as late as 2013) despite having undertaken extensive violence against the state and civilians. Ansar-ul-Islam and the Turkistan Islamic Party have been targeted in military operations even though they

[16] Walter 2009.
[17] Boudreau 2004.
[18] For explanations centering on co-optation or coercion, see: Mitchell 2004; Roessler 2005; Reno 2011; Acemoglu, Robinson, and Santos 2013; Biberman 2013; Carey, Mitchell, and Lowe 2013; Carey, Colaresi, and Mitchell (2015); Cohen and Nordas 2015; Eck 2015.
[19] Staniland 2015b.

have not undertaken substantial violence against the state. Regions with similar civilian targeting by militants have had variable state responses. Kurram Agency, despite having the highest number of civilian casualties and second highest number of violent incidents, has had little to no state response. It has had four small scale military operation and no peace deals. Yet Swat, where civilian targeting was also high, was home to both peace deals and military operations.

Fourth, arguments that center on state capacity as an explanation for state strategy struggle with Pakistan. The Army has high levels of coercive capacity that it chooses to use or not to use: this is not a simple story of a weak state with resource constraints, but instead a powerful and often ruthless military.[20] When it decides to do so, the Army can deploy extremely high levels of coercion: it is a well-equipped, large, and highly cohesive organization built to fight wars, rather than the kind of fragmented and under-resourced security apparatus that occupies much research on civil war.[21]

Fifth, the power and organizational structure of the armed groups themselves does not appear to map onto strategy.[22] The relatively powerful TTP and Haqqani network have been treated in very different ways, while the comparatively weak IMU and TNSM have also 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, the over-time variation within state-group dyads challenges existing approaches. It shows the limits of a purely ideological explanation: while the core orientation of the Pakistan Army has not changed, its specific strategies have varied in fine-grained ways. Similarly, the broad national-level incentives for collusion with armed groups that existing work on state-group cooperation focuses on did not change: poverty, inaccessible terrain, elections that involve

[20] Reno 1998, Bates 2008.
[21] Day and Reno 2014.
[22] Cunningham 2014.

violence, lack of institutionalized democracy, and a conflictual international environment all remained largely constant during the period in study.[23]

II. How Governments Evaluate Armed Groups

These puzzles suggest the need for a new approach. We argue that governments categorize armed groups into political roles that drive state strategies. They hinge on a group's ideological fit with and operational value to a state's security managers.[24] Ideological fit is determined by how group symbols and goals mesh with the regime, party, and/or military's ideological project, which defines the boundaries of the political community and the acceptable claims that citizens can make on decision-makers. Operational utility is then determined, within these broader political categorizations, by whether groups are willing and able to help security managers achieve pressing political tasks, like winning militarized elections and targeting cross-border rivals.

Political Roles, State Strategies, and Armed Orders

Security managers assign political roles in very different ways depending on regimes' underlying ideologies of the polity; we cannot assume that "states" have similar preferences or fears. This helps to explain why governments can treat seemingly similar types of groups in such radically different ways: what is an existential threat to one may be perceived as an inconvenience or ally by others.

Each role is associated with a desired outcome: either the construction of an 'armed order' of alliance, limited cooperation, or military hostilities, or with the end of an armed order through the collapse of the group or its demobilization in "normal" politics. These desired goals

[23] For more on state-armed group cooperation, see Carey et al 2013, 2015; Stanton 2015, Eck 2015; Roessler 2005.
[24] For an earlier version of this framework, see Staniland 2015**b**.

are associated with specific, observable patterns of state policy: even if the ultimate goal is not achieved, we can observe security apparatuses' strategic behavior.

Table 1. Group Political Roles and Armed Orders

		Operational Utility	
		High	**Low**
	Aligned	*Armed Ally* Preferred Order: Alliance Observable Policy: Either no action (protection/sanctuary) or active support (providing weapons/training)	*Superfluous Supporter* Preferred Order: Incorporation Observable Policy: Peace deals with demobilization
Ideological Fit	**Gray Zone**	*Business Partner* Preferred Order: Limited Cooperation Observable Policy: Joint offensives, cease-fires, and/or peace deals without demobilization offered	*Undesirable* Preferred Order: Low-Level Hostilities Observable Policy: Sporadic military operations
	Opposed	*Strange Bedfellow* Preferred Order: Limited Cooperation Observable Policy: Cease-fires offered	*Mortal Enemy* Preferred Order: Intense Hostilities Observable Policy: Sustained military operations

Table 1 identifies how these variables should map onto state strategy, and the intended outcome of these strategies. Political roles are italicized. Leaders who control the security apparatus assess how groups relate to their ideological project. Ideological projects are beliefs about the desirable boundaries of the political community and, consequently, the appropriate relations between citizens and state.[25] They identify the key political threats to ruling elites: some fear the specter of communist insurrection, others the threat of counterrevolution, and yet others the possibility of ethnic division. Ideological projects tend to emerge from long-run historical processes of mobilization, institution building, and "value infusion"[26] that create a "common

[25] On ideology and political community, see Hanson 2010; Straus 2015; Yashar 2005; Lieberman 2002; Staniland 2015a, 2015b.
[26] Selznick 1957.

sense"[27] about who constitutes the polity – usually the nation – and what kinds of political demands and behaviors are more and less compatible with that vision. These vary by context, making it possible to both compare across regimes and over time within them while taking seriously their contingent political origins.

For the sake of tractability, we identify three broad ideological positions: aligned, opposed, and "gray zone."[28] Being categorized within one of these positions carries political implications for how a state will perceive and deal with a group. *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 directly challenge the legitimacy of the state and its ruling regime. These groups may be militarily formidable or weak, but they represent a core threat to the interests of the security apparatus. Enemies are commonly framed as subversives, fifth columns, and anti-national elements with maximalist war aims. *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.

Ideological fit is not the only factor that influences how states try to interact with armed groups. Security managers 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 are contexts that can create powerful *operational incentives* for seeking to cooperate, in some form, with useful groups.[29] States will pursue alliance and limited cooperation armed orders when groups can help them achieve these goals. Ideologically aligned groups may not be useful, while gray

[27] Laitin 1986.
[28] Auyero 2007.
[29] Staniland 2015b.

zone or even opposed groups may be very helpful. There is analytical distance between ideology and operational value.

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 groups reproduce, rather than undermine, the regime. They are valuable partners in targeting international rivals and providing local stability in peripheral or hard-to-govern zones.

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 with for a much more limited form of cooperation, specifically 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. These actors are deeply opposed to the regime's political foundations, but able to help state security managers advance a core interest. Strange bedfellows are most prevalent in complex multi-party conflicts, where multiple opposed groups may fight both each and the state, leading to thin tactical alignments of convenience.[30]

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

[30] Christia 2012.

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, though unwelcome. The government accepts ongoing, but low-level, military hostilities in a form of "containment." Sporadic military offensives dominate as a way to limit armed group influence without committing to the military and political costs of full-scale suppression. Their political threat does not require a massive, sustained response.

Mortal enemies are groups that 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 they are militarily weak, they 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 political evaluations are not set in stone. While specific dynamics of change can only be established in individual cases, three broad pathways are likely. First, regime operational incentives can change and groups can refuse to cooperate with state strategies. This will drive variation along the horizontal dimension of Table 1. Second, 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.[31] Third, governments can shift their ideological position. Regime changes are the most visible and dramatic forms sources of such a change.

III. Applying the Framework to Pakistan

[31] Pearlman 2011, Krause 2014, Goodwin 2001.

Though the broad analytical framework can be deployed broadly and comparatively, 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.[32] This lets us make clear predictions about how the military tries to deal with "dual challenge"[33] of working with allies and managing gray zone groups while simultaneously identifying and attacking enemies. We focus on the army in this context because while civilians, at times, have influence over security policy toward sectarian groups and armed political parties in Karachi and Punjab, frontier management has been largely dominated by the military.[34] This is a consequence of the continuing civil-military imbalance in the country, combined with the absence of direct civilian oversight over the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

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.[35] 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.[36] The ideological project of the military does not represent any kind of societal consensus or "national culture": the

[32] Tankel 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 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.
[33] Fair 2014, 81.
[34] 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 "offered 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.
[35] This approach aims to draw on rich, valuable South Asia area studies research while linking it to more abstract theoretical and comparative debates.
[36] 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.

meaning and boundaries of the Pakistani nation are deeply, often violently, contested.[37] Table 2 below outlines key criteria that we use to operationalize our variables in this context.

Table 2. Coding Ideological Fit and Operational Value in Pakistan

Ideological Fit		Operational Value	
Aligned	Acknowledges Army's importance; supports basics of Constitution; uses "acceptable" appeals to Islam; does not ally or have strong links with opposed militant groups	**High**	Able and willing to maintain Pakistan influence in Afghanistan, target India, and/or act as local ally in stabilizing peripheral zones of Pakistan
Gray Zone	Criticizes state policy but does not call for destruction of foundational principles; does not target Army; may have links to but does not tightly align with militant groups; pursues ethno-linguistic autonomy	**Low**	Unable and/or unwilling to maintain Pakistan influence in Afghanistan, target India, 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		

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."[38] This means that armed and unarmed 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

[37] Jaffrelot 2002, Shaikh 2009.
[38] Ayres 2009, 36.

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."[39]

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 we required to identify not only with one religion – Islam – but also with one language – Urdu."[40] 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."[41] 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.[42] After seizing power in 1958, military dictator Ayub Khan, despite himself not being religious, "considered that religion was the only foundation for national unity."[43]

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.[44] Rulers have articulated a "deeply embedded language ideology which structured the national imagination of Pakistan's creation."[45] Deep suspicion of Bengali, Pashtun, and Sindhi sub-nationalism has been driven by this fear of linguistic cleavages shattering the idea of Pakistan. There are important strands of overlap between elite civilian and military visions of the nation when it comes to fearing linguistic politics and privileging religious

[39] Shah 2014, 56.
[40] Jaffrelot 2002, 9.
[41] Cohen 2004, 167.
[42] Dhulipala 2015; Jalal 1985.
[43] Jaffrelot 2015, 454. See also Fair 2014, 73-76.
[44] 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).
[45] Ayres 2009, 33.

discourse and symbols, a sharp contrast to Indian leaders' willing to accept language as a legitimate basis for political claim-making.[46] The Left was also seen as an un-Islamic force inimical to Pakistani nationalism, and it was preemptively crushed in the 1950s and 1960s.[47]

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.[48] 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."[49] The polity is viewed in terms of religious cohesion and threats to it are seen coming from linguistic groups, the Left, and those actors who challenge the military's role as guardian embedded within the state.

These foundational principles have evolved over time within the military: under Zia al-Huq, 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.[50] Indeed, "the relationship between the army and the Islamists also changed dramatically under Zia,"[51] 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.[52] Under Chiefs of Army Staff Pervez Musharraf, Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, and Raheel Sharif, the Army has remained a Muslim-nationalist institution, rather than the

[46] Stepan et al. 2011; Fair 2014, 68-70; Saez et al. 2012, Brass 1974.
[47] On state repression against the left, see Cohen 2004, 72; Shah 2014, 75; Jaffrelot 2015, 635.
[48] Shah 2014, 2.
[49] Ayres 2009, 34.
[50] On differences in the deployment of Islam under Ayub Khan and Zia-ul-Haq, see Ayres 2009, 38-40; Cohen 2004, 84; Fair 2014.
[51] Shah 2014, 157.
[52] On Zia's legacy, see Jaffrelot 2015, 460, 479; Nasr 2000; Nawaz 2008, 359-360.

transnational Islamist army envisaged by more radical Islamists.[53] Nevertheless, it has bred a political arena in which Islamist armed actors are often perceived as aligned or in the gray zone.

Though only a brief survey of a vastly more complex topic, it is clear that 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.

This worldview is reproduced by powerful mechanisms of training and monitoring "to ensure cohesion and adherence to standards across the ranks of the force,"[54] reproducing the "dominance of certain institutionally enforced ideological perspectives on politics."[55] In Cohen's words, "the promotion system ensures continuity in the social and ideological makeup of the army."[56] 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. Crucially, within the political system it is "the most powerful and well-organized in the country today."[57]

Operational Incentives

These are the deep political foundations of how Pakistan's military understands the content of Pakistani nationalism and, consequently, the kinds of non-state actors that are more and less acceptable to it. We should see broad patterns of state strategy and armed order that correspond to these general ideological categorizations. Yet the army has also has instrumental interests related to geopolitics, counterinsurgency, electoral violence, and periphery

[53] On recent Army Chiefs and their use of religion, see Jaffrelot 2015, 528-535.
[54] Fair 2014, 33.
[55] Shah 2014, 23.
[56] Cohen 2004, 99.
[57] Nawaz 2008, xxxv.

management.[58] While obviously informed by ideological goals and visions – particularly its fixation on Kashmir[59] – 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 space between the capacity and strengths of groups and the military's ideological sympathies. The question becomes how these instrumental incentives intersect with the distinctive project of the military.[60]

Most relevant to the northwest are the army's objectives in Afghanistan, India and Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir, and 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, substantial military power that can be used against Afghan security forces and the foreign presence in the country, and a willingness to cooperate at least loosely with the Pakistani security services. This does not mean that such groups need to have perfectly aligned preferences, but groups that clearly do not fit this profile are not operationally useful for the Afghanistan theater.

Similarly, Pakistan has relied on militant proxies as tools of warfare against India since the first Kashmir war after Partition.[61] It views two kinds of groups as particularly useful: those able to consistently inflict losses on Indian forces and civilians in Kashmir and those that engage in terrorist attacks in urban India. Outside of the case sample we study in this paper, these

[58] In Karachi, sustained levels of violence around electoral competition have created varying incentives for both collusion and crackdowns Staniland 2015a.
[59] Ganguly 1997.
[60] It is important to note, however, that civilian Pakistani rulers have also pursued similar objectives, whether Zulfiqar Bhutto's backing of Afghan rebels from 1973 or Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto's support for the Taliban and Kashmir-oriented militants.
[61] Whitehead 2007.

incentives have driven collusion with the Lashkar-e-Taiba, factions of Jaish-e-Mohammed, and the Hizbul Mujahideen. Thus, 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."[62] Some groups are unable to project power or unwilling to cooperate with the military, and they are treated according to their ideological position.

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.[63] The military, as well as 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.[64]

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

As we demonstrated above, the Pakistani military has exhibited significant variation in how it deals with armed groups inside its borders over time. Because the theory was developed with some broad knowledge of these cases (though with a focus on the India-Pakistan cross-national comparison) and because we cannot make substantial claims about external validity, this is not a firm test of the theory.[65] Instead it is a detailed plausibility probe intended to assess whether we should be more confident in the core argument after examining comparative

[62] 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.
[63] Rashid 2008, 265-267; Naseemullah 2014.
[64] On local embeddedness, see Staniland 2014.
[65] Staniland 2015b.

evidence from North West Pakistan.[66] If so, the argument may have broader purchase beyond this particular context.

Data

This section offers an analysis of a 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 very crude operationalization of the theory, especially the coding of operational utility. To make up for these limitations, later in the paper 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 these state-group interactions.

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

[66] George and Bennett 2005; Bennett 2007.
[67] On nested case studies, see Lieberman 2005.

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 violence, which means that using events data as a proxy for broader political dynamics can be problematic. The key weakness in our data is its coding of military offensives. These codings rely heavily on military press releases and constrained journalistic reporting. We are much more confident about our peace deals and ceasefires data, which are identifiable, discrete events that tend to attract substantial attention. The offensives measures provide only a rough, suggestive measure of state repression.

Initial Group Roles and State Strategies

Table 3 summarizes 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.

[68] Jaffrelot 2015, 605-606.

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 3. Initial Role Assignment and State Strategy

Group	Ideology	Op. Utility	If high, utility against?	Predicted Political Role	Actual Political Role	State Response in first 24 months
Nek Mohammed Group	Opposed	Low		Mortal Enemy	Mortal Enemy	Military Operation
TTP	Opposed	Low		Mortal Enemy	Mortal Enemy	Military Operation
TTP Swat	Opposed	Low		Mortal Enemy	Mortal Enemy	Military Operation
Commander Nazir Group	Gray Zone	Low		Undesirable	Undesirable	Arrested
Abdullah Mehsud Group	Opposed	Low		Mortal Enemy	Mortal Enemy	Military Operation
Gul Bahadur Group	Gray Zone	High	Al-Qaeda/IMU/Abdullah Mehsud/TTP	Business Partner	Undesirable/Mortal Enemy	Military Operation
Haqqani Network	Aligned	High	India and non-Pashtuns in Afghanistan	Armed Ally	Armed Ally	No Action
TNSM	Gray Zone	Low		Undesirable	Undesirable	Arrested and imprisoned
IMU	Opposed	Low		Mortal Enemy	Mortal Enemy	Military Operation
Al-Qaeda	Opposed	Low		Mortal Enemy	Mortal Enemy	Military Operation
Faqir Mohammad Group	Gray Zone	Low		Undesirable	Undesirable	Military Operation
Ansar-ul Islam	Gray Zone	Low		Undesirable	Undesirable	Military Operation
Lashkar-e-Islam	Gray Zone	Low		Undesirable	Undesirable	Military Operation
Tawheed-ul-Islam	Gray Zone	High	Lashkar-e-Islam	Business Partner	Business Partner	No Action
Lashkar-e-Khoarasan	Gray Zone					No Action
Turkistan Islamic Party/ETIM	Opposed	Low		Mortal Enemy	Undesirable	Isolated Military Operation
Turkistan Bhittani Group	Aligned	High	TTP	Armed Ally	Armed Ally	No Action
Shah Sahib Group	Gray Zone	High	TTP	Armed Ally	Armed Ally	No Action

Amar bin Maroof	Opposed	High	Local Pacifier	Strange Bedfellow	Strange Bedfellow	No Action
Momin Afridi Group	Gray Zone	High	Local Pacifier	Business Partner	Business Partner	No Action

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 Bhittani Group, Shah Sahib Group and Momin Afridi group. These groups have had no action against them – the army has neither carried out a military operation nor signed a peace deal. The army has also not attempted to demobilize them 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 Bhittani 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 operations. 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 military offensives over time. Assigning a group to the enemy category has not

[69] Jaffrelot 2015, 535.

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 nine 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 an initially quite substantial military offensive, despite our coding that it should have been seen as an undesirable facing containment policies. 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 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.

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 4. 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 most groups had only one change in political role, the TTP had more than one change in political role: it went from being a mortal enemy to a strange bedfellow to a mortal enemy once again. This case is given particular attention in the qualitative analysis below.

Table 4. Changes Over Time

Group	Updated Ideology	Updated Op. Utility	If high, utility against?	Updated Political Role	State Response after updated political roles
TTP	Opposed	Low to High (Dec 2008) to Low (Jan/Feb 2009)	India	Mortal Enemy to Strange Bedfellow to Mortal Enemy	Military Operations to Cease Fire to Military Operation
Commander Nazir Group	Gray Zone to Aligned (2006)	Low to High (2006)	IMU/Abdullah Mehsud Group	Armed Ally	Arrested to No Action
Abdullah Mehsud Group	Opposed to Aligned (2005)	Low to High (2005)		Mortal Enemy to Armed Ally	Military Operation to No Action
TNSM	Gray Zone to Opposed(2009)	Low (2002) to High (2008) to Low (2009)	TTP-Swat	Undesirable to Business Partner to Mortal Enemy	Arrested to Peace Deal to Military Operation
Faqir Mohammad Group	Gray Zone to Opposed (2011)	Low (2007)		Undesirable to Mortal Enemy	Sporadic Military Operation to Military Operation
Ansar-ul Islam	Gray Zone	Low to High (2012/13)	Munir Shakir's militia/ Lashkar-e-Islam	Undesirable to Business Partner	Military Operation to Joint offensives
Turkistan	Aligned	High to Low	TTP in Tank to none	Armed Ally to Superfluous	No Action to

Bhittani Group		(2009)		Supporter	Demobilized
Gul Bahadur Group	Gray Zone to Opposed to Gray Zone (2007, 2008)	High	TTP; local stabilizer in NWA	Business Partner to Mortal Enemy to Business Partner	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: the Mullah Nazir group, 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 and TNSM radicalized in opposition to the military. These dynamics were driven by a variety of factors, including 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 results of intra-group and intra-movement contestation, leading to political role reassessment and strategic shifts.

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.

V. 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-i-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.[70] They are relatively data-rich cases, allowing for greater confidence in measuring the variables and in their sequencing and interaction over time.[71] 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"[72] – 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.[73]

Haqqani Network: Continuity as Armed Allies

The Haqqani Network has been the most consistently cooperative ally of the Pakistani state since 9/11.[74] As early as December 2001, the chief of ISI reportedly met Jallaludin Haqqani in Islamabad.[75] 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

[70] King, Keohane, and Verba 1994.
[71] George and Bennett 2005.
[72] Jaffrelot 2015, 606.
[73] Bennett 2007.
[74] 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.
[75] Mazzetti 2012.

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 telling, "Don't worry about us. We understand your problems. Please take care of your country, Pakistan, as we think this is our home."[76]

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' 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.[77] 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."[78]

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."[79] From the 1990s onward,

[76] Syed 2014, 62.
[77] Khan 2006.
[78] Gopal et al. 2013, 143.
[79] Brown and Rasler 2013, 122.

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."[80] 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."[81]

The Haqqanis have their own independent combat and terror capabilities, and they have also provided direct assistance to the Afghan Taliban.[82] The Pakistan Army acknowledges that the Haqqanis play a valuable role as a tool of influence in Afghanistan. This is a long standing 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."[83]

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."[84] It has been "capable and determined,"[85] clearly placing it in

[80] Jaffrelot 2015, 539.
[81] Khan 2001.
[82] Philip 2006.
[83] Brown and Rasler 2013, 152.
[84] Brown and Rasler 2013, 130.
[85] Brown and Rasler 2013, 125.

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."[86]

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,"[87] and this "continued support and protection" has "exasperated the Obama administration."[88] At least until 2014, the network was "left largely unaffected and free to consolidate its influence across North Waziristan"[89] in a spheres-of-influence arrangement with the central state; in David Rohde's words the military provided "de facto acquiescence."[90] The military has also allegedly tipped off Haqqanis ahead of US strikes and operations, helping to protect the organization from American efforts at degrading it[91], in addition to providing it with "an invaluable safe haven."[92] 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

[86] Fishman et al. 2009, 130.
[87] Brown and Rasler 2013, 152.
[88] Gall 2014, 260.
[89] Brown and Rasler 2013, 165.
[90] Rohde 2009.
[91] Aid, 108.
[92] Gopal et al 2013, 146.

enemies, like elements of the TTP and IMU: indeed, a number of later TTP commanders first gained experience under the Haqqanis.[93] 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."[94] Nevertheless, it has shown a remarkable continuity over time in its political role and relationship with state power.

TTP – Shifting Political Roles

The TTP is a much more complex case both because of its looser organizational structure and its evolving ideological position 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 groups originated as "gray zone" actors in the eyes of the state, such as those led by Baitullah Mehsud and Abdullah Mehsud. In the years after 9/11, these were the groups that the military had classified 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.[95] This deal eventually broke down, but the army's efforts to construct it show that these groups

[93] Brown and Rasler 2013, 141.
[94] Brown and Rasler 2013, 141.
[95] Mahsud 2013, 190.

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.[96] 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."[97]

Baitullah Mehsud spearheaded the new TTP coalition, and 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 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.[98] 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

[96] Jones and Fair 2010, 57.
[97] Jaffrelot 2015, 573.
[98] Mir 2009.

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."[99]

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.[100] 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."[101] 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 (including what it heretofore considered as "good Islamists") posed to its authority and Pakistan's territorial integrity."[102]

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.[103]

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

[99] Zaidan 2008.
[100] Burke 2011, 374.
[101] Burke 2011, 390.
[102] Jaffrelot 2015, 595.
[103] Mahsud 2013, 190-191.

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. These misunderstandings could be removed through dialogue."[104] 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.[105]

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"[106] with the TTP that suggests a much more resolved effort to crack down

[104] Mir 2008. See also Wilkinson 2008.
[105] On arguments about peace deals and fragmentation, see Stedman (1997); Kydd and Walter (2002); Cunningham (2014).
[106] Jaffrelot 2015, 572.

on the group. There were serious military setbacks in battles in the northwest, with "extremely high soldier-to-insurgent loss ratios."[107] These operations focused on "clearing the TTP strongholds of Ladha, Makin, and Sararogha."[108]

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 "regain its control over South Waziristan."[109] 30,000 combat forces went into SWA in Operation Rah-e-Nijat (Path to Salvation) in October 2009.[110] The TTP was a consistent target of the military from 2009 onward, as we would expect from a perceived mortal enemy. The army 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.[111] 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."[112] As 2014 marched on, "the army intensified its strikes"[113] and then launched Operation Zarb-e-Azb into North Waziristan.[114] 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

[107] Lalwani 2013, 207.
[108] Jones and Fair 2010, 72.
[109] Jaffrelot 2015, 596.
[110] Mahsud 2013, 191.
[111] Jaffrelot 2015, 601.
[112] Jaffrelot 2015, 601.
[113] Jaffrelot 2015, 602.
[114] Jaffrelot 2015, 603.

of Hakimullah's death, they moderated their ideological position and became business partners of the military against the remaining Fazlullah-led core TTP.[115]

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 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.[116] They reveal the complexity of armed politics in Pakistan, where simply being an armed group has no fixed political meaning. 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

[115] Jaffrelot 2015, 600.
[116] Tankel 2016 refers to them as "frenemies."

Nazir in an attempt to counter the anti-state elements of the TTP generally and Baitullah and Hakimullah Mehsud in particular."[117]

We begin with the somewhat more straightforward case of the Mullah Nazir group. He became the head of a militant group in Wana in 2006[118], tightly linked to the Afghan Taliban and with a base in the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe.[119] 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 state, which drove further divisions between him and the emerging TTP of Baitullah.[120] 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.[121] 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."[122] Indeed, "the Pakistan Army sought to bolster Nazir against Baitullah Mehsud, who was

[117] Fair 2014, 252.
[118] Mahsud 2013, 184.
[119] Rehman 2013.
[120] Jaffrelot 2015, 572.
[121] Mahsud 2013, 185.
[122] Rehman 2013.

protecting the Uzbeks."[123] 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."[124]

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. Nazir was killed by the US in 2013 because of his close links to the Afghan Taliban and Al Qaeda, but his successor, Bahawal Khan, appears to have continued a collusive relationship with Pakistan's military.[125] 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.

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.[126] 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

[123] Jaffrelot 2015, 572.
[124] Jones and Fair 2010, 58.
[125] Rehman 2014.
[126] Jones and Fair 2010, 73.

broker a ceasefire between him and the military in 2006, "which had been fighting an on-again, off-again war for almost two years."[127] 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 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 initiative a powerful crackdown."[128] 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 bavk in line in 2009."[129] He left the TTP in July 2008, aligned with Mullah Nazir as groups emphasizing the war in Afghanistan over that against the Pakistani state.[130]

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 northwest 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"[131] and "quickly distanced himself from the TTP and its

[127] Gopal et al 2013, 140.
[128] Gopal et al 2013, 147.
[129] Jaffrelot 2015, 574.
[130] Gopal et al 2013, 148; Mahsud 2013, 169.
[131] Gopal et al 2013, 148.

leadership. . . . Bahadur focuses exclusively on US and NATO forces in Afghanistan."[132] 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."[133]

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.[134] 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.[135]

VI. 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. Their 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. This approach politicizes political violence, directing our attention to the historical roots of ideological projects and the importance of political ideas in

[132] Fair 2014, 246.
[133] Gopal et al 2013, 152.
[134] 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/.
[135] Iqbal 2014.

shaping the contours of state-armed group relationships.[136] It also highlights the full range of possible relationships between governments and armed actors, moving beyond binaries distinguishing war and peace to instead identify important variation in armed orders.

This argument has important implications for the study of political violence. Commonly used terms like militia and insurgent may not be analytically useful. Some "insurgent" groups may be seen as implacable enemies and others as gray zone business partners or even allies of governments, while some 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 order. Understanding how these orders emerge and evolve requires integrating instrumental and ideological processes to gain a fuller understanding of how security managers assess and evaluate armed groups.

Our argument may also help explain broader patterns of Pakistani violence management. The ruthless military crackdowns against Baloch insurgents certainly have a very different profile than the patterns of selectiveness and discrimination we see in the North West.[137] This may be because the Baloch mobilization is seen as more threatening 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 militants in 1971, 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.[138]

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[136] Straus 2015.
[137] International Conflict Group 2007.
[138] On East Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh, Rose and Sisson 1991.

The military's tight embrace of Lashkar-e-Taiba similarly accords with our argument. The group maintains a distance from Al Qaeda[139] while consistently and publicly signaling its "commitment to the integrity of the Pakistani state and its diverse polity."[140] 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 on the western front. 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."[141] Political goals and fears guide the allocation of coercion and compromise in Pakistan.

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 operations on the 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. Despite substantial international pressure, this politics of discrimination is likely to endure into the future: Pakistan's security elite will continue to pursue violence management rather than violence monopolization. The framework we have offered in this article can help predict the ways groups are evaluated by the military and the politics that should flow from these categorizations.

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[139] Fair 2014, 250.
[140] Fair 2014, 256.
[141] Jaffrelot 2015, 608.

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