Leadership Targeting and Drones: An Effective Counterterrorism Strategy?

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SPEAKERS
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Dr. Jenna Jordan 00:05
The Importance of Being clear about what it is that you're trying to do is critical. Right? So people that are developing counterterrorism policies, you can't just say things like, Oh, we want to degrade and defeat an organization. Right? That becomes essentially meaningless. You know, single counterterrorism measures alone are unlikely to work.

Dr. Asfandyar Mir 00:30
This is a domain in which warfare is likely to be unending. So instead of thinking about a binary victory or defeat, or you know, total political debt or these of these kinds of adversities, think about managing them.

Nick Lopez 00:53
I'll come back to the irregular warfare podcast. In this episode, we will explore counterterrorism policies and strategies over the past 19 years. We also welcome another teammate to the podcast, Shawna Sinnott.

Shawna Sinnott 01:07
Thanks, Nick. So today we tackle the question, how should we be thinking about leadership targeting as a means of counterterrorism effectiveness, and will then look to see if there are any lessons we can draw from leadership targeting in the global war on terror to influence and shape future counterterrorism policies,

Nick Lopez 01:23
Doctors Jenna Jordan and Asfandyar Mir will help us dig into the implications of policies that lead to the strikes such as the 2006 Zarqawi operation.

President George W. Bush clip 01:33
At 6:15 Baghdad time special operation forces, acting on tips and intelligence from Iraqis confirms our colleagues location and deliberate justice to the most wanted terrorists in Iraq. Zarqawi was the operational commander of the terrorist movement in Iraq.

Nick Lopez 01:56
Dr. Jenna Jordan is an associate professor at the Sam Nunn School of International Affairs at Georgia Tech, and the director of the program on emerging technology and International Security. She is the author of the book leadership decapitation, strategic targeting of terrorist organizations. Jenna's book will serve as a foundation for our conversation today.

Shawna Sinnott 02:17
Dr. Asfandyar Mir is a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Standford University. His most recent research focuses on counterterrorism policy and drone warfare.

Nick Lopez and Shawna Sinnott 02:30
I am Nick Lopez and I'm Shawna Sinnott,

Nick Lopez 02:32
and this is the irregular warfare podcast a joint production of the Princeton empirical studies of conflict project and the modern war Institute at West Point dedicated to bridging the gap between scholars and practitioners to support the community of irregular warfare professionals. Here's our conversation with Jenna and Asfandyar. Dr. Jenna Jordan and Dr. Asfandyar Mir, we appreciate you both joining us today. It'd be great to dive right in and start off with with Asfandyar, can you tell us about your research and what motivated you to study counterterrorism?

Dr. Asfandyar Mir 03:07
Nick, Shawna, thanks so much for having me today. Really excited to to be here and to be in conversation with with Dr. Jenna Jordan. So, for the last many years, I've been working on us counterterrorism operations using air power surveillance technologies, special operators, local allies, or a combination thereof in safe havens and weak states. And the main motivation for this research agenda. When I started working in it was that many analysts, practitioners, scholars were deeply skeptical of this form of warfare, arguing that these kinds of campaigns provide short term gains at best, or more likely tend to be counterproductive. And indeed, it was a major debate during the Obama years on which even key national security principles clashed but openly. For example, then senior adviser to the President on CT and later CIA Director John Brennan came on one side of this issue, and his his one of his national security, principal peers, Director National Intelligence then Dennis Blair, offered a very different perspective. And then this question came up again during the counter ISIS campaign when the efficacy of a hard charging counterterrorism campaign was was put on the table. So, when I was starting out grad school, I was very intrigued by this debate, I wanted to understand it better and inform it with high fidelity data. So, the last five years my research has tried to empirically and theoretically understand both the causes and consequences of USCT warfare in theatres such as Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia. And I also have some ongoing work on us missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. And across this research agenda, the key outcome or benchmark I tried to evaluate is the

benchmark that the US government has set out for itself. which is meaningful disruption and degradation of off target organizations.

Shawna Sinnott 05:05
And Asfandyar, you focus specifically on drones, which many would characterize as very symbolic of counterterrorism initiatives in the post 9/11 era. What drew you to specifically evaluate this tool?

Dr. Asfandyar Mir 05:19
Sure, so ds drones at one point in time was the preferred mode of warfare, given that the United States government was facing threats from various places where it could not deploy forces on the ground. And that, you know, this form of warfare started in Pakistan, but then was adopted in Somalia and Yemen during the Obama years. And given the salience of these campaigns, given the fact that the one of the main reasons the US government was interested in this kind of campaign was to mitigate the threat of international terrorism from these places, and how, you know, drones were seen as an antidote to the problem of deploying forces. And I, you know, I thought this was a really important question. And, and we needed to sort of understand in what respects drones were were unique or not.

Nick Lopez 06:15
That's great Asfandyar, thanks for that. And we will come back to your findings a little bit later on. If I could transition over to Jenna. I would also like to mention Jenna's book that she released last fall "Leadership Decacapitation, Strategic Targeting of Terrorist Organizations." It provides an interesting look at counterterrorism policy by using three different case studies, Hamas, the Shining Path, and Al Qaeda. So, I'll turn it over to you Jenna, what got you into researching counterterrorism.

Dr. Jenna Jordan 06:46
So, I started grad school a long time ago. And actually, I started right after 9/11. So just a couple of weeks later, and I took a class on on terrorism, by with Dr. Dr. Bob Pape. And it was fascinating. And I found it really interesting, because so much of the literature in international relations was focused on states, right interstate relationships, and all of a sudden, the framework for thinking about the world fundamentally changed, because you all of a sudden had a non-state actor that had a huge influence in the foreign policy, not just the US, but like of countries globally. And so, I felt at that point that, you know, there was this emerging literature in the field of terrorism, but there was still a lot of space. And there was a lot of work that needed to be done. And theoretically, I felt like there was a lot of interesting opportunities for thinking about non state actors within the context of international politics. So that was how I got into it. I think part of it was timing. And part of it was just general interest in non-state actors. So, I was really interested in this question of leadership targeting, right, when thinking about counterterrorism, like a spondee, I was really interested in counterterrorism policy, kind of specifically, rather than thinking about motivational factors, right? Why do terrorists do what they do? Which of course, is part of that question. But I was really interested in it from a policy perspective, like why are you know, what are the what why do states make the choices that they make about counterterrorism policies? And what are the impacts of those policies? Do they work? Do they not work? And why? What explains the resilience of organizations, so what I ended up doing was coming at it from an organizational perspective and saying, what makes a particular group more or less likely to suffer at the hands of particular counterterrorism policies. So, I decided to focus on this one policy of leadership

targeting because at the time, this was seen as like a kind of silver bullet, right, like if we kill the leader or arrest the leader, the organization is not going to be able to function. And so I wanted to understand whether that was, in fact, the case.

Nick Lopez 08:55
The different cases that you took a look at what organizations stood out in terms of resilience, and why?

Dr. Jenna Jordan 09:03
Yeah, so basically, what I did was I started collecting data, and I, you know, look at including, you know, going through 2016, I've looked at close to, I don't know, 1400 cases of leadership targeting. And so, what I wanted to do was take a look at that data and say, which groups were more or less likely to fall apart after or not even fall apart? Right, we can talk about the nuance of how you're measuring the efficacy of this particular policy. But whether certain groups saw a decline in activity, or an increase in the lethality of attacks or a decline in their overall survival rate. So, I sort of looked at these different measures of efficacy, and tried to understand why and so I started with saying, Well, what do I think might make a particular group more or less susceptible to targeting? So, I started there and I sort of identified like particular features that I thought might make a group more or less resilient, and so I thought groups that might be highly bureaucratized or groups that At had a particular ideology or groups that had support. And I'm happy to go into those variables a little bit more and unpack that. But I sort of started there and thought, Okay, let's think about these particular characteristics. So I looked at things like a group's age and a group size, and their organizational type, and different features of the instance that decapitation itself, I looked at other variables as well, like the regime type of the country in which the attack occurred, you know, GDP, things like that as kind of control variables to sort of, you know, get at it a different way. But what I basically found was that, you know, the largest groups, the oldest groups, groups that were separatist groups that were religious, tended to be harder to destabilize, when their leaders were both arrested and killed. And I found actually, not much difference between whether looking at whether or not a leader is arrested or killed doesn't have that much of a difference, but it's really these organizational variables. So, you know, groups like Al Qaeda, right have turned out to be remarkably resilient. Right? ISIS is showing itself to be the same way, the PKK, the TTP, Al Shabaab, right? Some of the really big organizations have tended to be really quite resilient. That's just at a broad level, what I found.

Nick Lopez 11:13
No, that's great. If I could take a step back, because you mentioned organizational resilience and some factors, or I guess, some contributing factors to organizational resilience. Could you unpack those a little bit and then sort of apply them either to Al Qaeda? Shining Path?

Dr. Jenna Jordan 11:29
Yeah, yeah, definitely. So basically, if I know, I'll start with bureaucracy, and it's kind of awkward to think about using the term bureaucracy, when you think about a terrorist organization, right, so that we often we often think of groups as being really highly decentralized. And actually, these aren't mutually exclusive. And I'll go into that in a moment. But, but basically, we can think of bureaucratization as kind of like an internal mechanism that makes the group that can increase its stability, right, it can facilitate clear succession processes, right? It can be a group that has a clear administrative division of

responsibilities, right rules and routines, standard operating procedures, all of these things that characterize what we think of as bureaucracies, you know, bureaucracy, to be more efficient, sometimes they tend to be seen as more legitimate in the communities in which they're operating, right, because they have these kinds of organizational rules, this stability in place. And so that was kind of the first factor. And what I found, interestingly, is that groups that tended to be sort of bureaucratized, that the upper levels of the organization, right administratively, and that at an operational level, were more decentralized, right and operate, you know, at a lower level, that the combination, this hybrid structure, I thought would make a group much more resilient. And in fact, that is kind of what I found. The second factor has to do with support. And I think this is, this is this is a hard one to measure statistically. And so I sort of had to get this by looking in the cases a little bit. But basically, it's the idea that, you know, groups need support at a really basic level just to operate, right? When we think about terrorist groups, we think about, they need, they need members, they need money, right? They need resources, they need places to hide, they need to get fake passports, right? They need like all of these things, that having support in the communities in which they operate, make it possible for them to be able to do so. And so, groups that, you know, I mean, even information, right, it just, I mean, there's so many basic levels. And so groups that are operating in places where they tend to have more support are going to be more likely to sort of withstand shocks and external shocks to the organization. The final variable has to do with ideology, which actually does intersect with communal support in a certain way. And so, what I thought here was that certain kinds of groups are going to be more likely to be resilient. And so, what I started thinking was that religious groups, and separatist groups might be the most the hardest to weaken. And actually, it's interesting when, you know, when people started thinking about leadership targeting, they went back to these models of charisma, right? And there was this kind of standard view that terrorist organizations were headed by charismatic leaders. So, think about someone like Shoko Asahara, who was the leader of Aum Shinrikyo, right? He was seen as this kind of deity, this sort of godlike figure, right, that was imbued with special qualities, you know, you can think about the classic they bury in definition of charisma, right? It's something extraordinary, something that is motivating, it's motivating, exactly. And, and what people argue is that it's fragile, right? It's a fragile basis of authority, whereas the other sort of bases of authority sent tend to be more stable. But then what I found was that all these religious organizations that were headed by what we would think of as charismatic leaders were actually harder to use. stabilize. So, I thought, okay, we need a different model. So when I think about ideology, what I think about is basically the sort of doctrine upon which the group is based, and that groups, religious groups and separatist groups that tend to have grounding in their local communities, right. They're not always representing the entire view. But maybe like, a significant number of people on the ground, don't depend upon the leadership for that re articulation of their ideology, the the ideology can become very entrenched in the communities. And I think this is particularly true of separatist groups, right groups often represent the views of the separatist group from which they emerge. Now, of course, there's variation on tactics, right, how you go about achieving those particular goals, but that ideology is there. And, you know, this is something we saw with ISIS, you know, they were really it was really it was really interesting, right, as ISIS started losing more of its ground, right? You had people like Adnani, who was also a leader was killed, but basically said, well, you could take away our territory, but our ideology is really resilient. And that's going to remain so that's kind of that that variable. So those were the three theoretical ideas that I started with when I when I was thinking of the larger project.

Nick Lopez 16:09
Jenna, I appreciate the explanation of the variables. The idea of tracking organizational resilience is definitely interesting. I want to turn to respond Dr. To talk about the findings with some of his work, one in particular that he co-authored with Dylan Moore that focuses on the use of drones.

Dr. Asfandyar Mir 16:28
Sure, so let me first sort of highlight the broad set of takeaways from from that particular paper that I authored with my University of Michigan colleague, Dylan Moore, as well as a separate paper which is, which is related to the stream of work on the US drone war in Pakistan. And what I find across these two papers is that contrary to widespread skepticism spanning over multiple years, the US counterterrorism operation in Pakistan was very effective in degrading the targeted groups, as well as preventing their recovery for a long period of time, certainly not permanently, but it was sufficiently long and troubling the the battlefield effects were attained, despite the fact that the drone warfare in that region of the world harmed civilians, and three sort of sub findings of this campaign informed this broader view. The first one was that I found evidence of dented organizational trajectories of the two main targets of this campaign, Al Qaeda and its Pakistani ally, that they hate the Talibani Pakistan. These groups suffered starting 2008 after the United States Government surged surveillance and targeted capabilities in this region, you should floss this is their operational capital, similar to some of the things that the general was was just mentioning, you know, the core organizational capital was reduced. The ranks were checked by brought by a growing number of desertions. And finally, and I think this was a very important effect, these organizations fractured politically, their alliances important aligned alliances began to do with it. A second key finding, which informs the broader view is that the while killing of both leaders and rank and file, which took place at an enormous scale, was an important mechanism. But it was not the only mechanism, which really debilitated these organizations instead, another mechanism, which, you know, for the last few years, I think scholars downplayed or didn't understand that well was this heightened sense of fear of being targeted across a variety of empirical materials, I found that both the targets of this campaign was so constrained by this sense of anticipation, this fear of drone strikes, which ended up crippling the routine movement and internal communication, organizational communication, in addition, over a period of time, both leaders in rank and file, they had these came to view each other with the suspicion of being spies for the US drone program, which contributed to their their political fragmentation. And the final major findings from this work was contrary to concerns of many, many skeptics and critics of drone warfare. I did not find much evidence of any tangible increase in recruitment in favor of these targeted groups, especially due to civilian harm that's not dismissed that anger and passion due to sibling harm or loss of in US strikes. It didn't exist, or of that sort. Certainly, that was very real. I think local communities were deeply aggrieved. However, my findings, negated the impression that the group's benefited from a stream of angry recruits, instead of more recurring theme for the later years of the campaign was that these groups experienced desertion and shortages because of the stress of operating under drones. And I also found that these groups struggled to integrate some of their available partners in their organizations because of the fear that that they may be spies for the for the drone program. So, these are sort of the broad set of findings. I can pause here before getting into the implications. But I first wanted to put these these findings on the table.

Nick Lopez 20:20

Before we go any further Asfandyar. You mentioned in your work a system to measure counterterrorism effectiveness. You called it the legibility and speed of exploitation system, we actually email back and forth on this, it seemed very similar to the targeting cycle F3EAD, so find, fix, finish, exploit, analyze and disseminate. See the acronym used and doctrine. Can you explain this two-part system legibility and speed of exploitation?

Dr. Asfandyar Mir 20:52
Right, right. No, that's that's an important question. So, as I looked at these findings, I was trying to make sense of like, what happened, right? This is this is a lot of damage done to some very important organizations, which the United States government or the international community at large, cared deeply about, how might we understand these battlefield effects. And I ended up identifying two major factors. The first factor that I identified was the the United States government here came to develop very deep and extensive knowledge of the civilian population with the armed group is based, or the word I use for this kind of knowledge, depth of knowledge is legibility. And what I found was that the United States Government developed and ended up drawing on large scale meta data collection, or legibility, infrastructures of the civilian populations of this very remote region of the world in mind, you this kind of knowledge is distinct from intelligence, you know, it comes a step before intelligence. And this kind of knowledge is used to generate intelligence leads. And it comes from a population data that the United States Government was able to gather on its own, as well as through data sharing by a local partner, large scale communication interception, and then some really cutting-edge techniques like, like Patterns of Life analysis, detailed pattern of life analysis of targeted regions, to separate the armed group from the civilian population. But that's only just one thing is one side, one dimension of the story. Another dimension that I think the United States Government exerted a lot of effort on was its ability to exploit available needs glean from this kind of knowledge of the human population in a timely manner. So, I think this is where the F3EAD part comes in. You know, I think all CT practitioners know understand that, that members of targeted armed groups, you know, when being chased in CT operations are consistently trying to escape detection. Most intelligence has a very limited shelf life, it, it tends to change fairly quickly. As a result, the capability to act quickly becomes really important. And this requires some really unique bureaucratic capacity to process intelligence, you require a sophisticated form of analysis, you know, deep centralized decision making for targeting becomes really important as well. And then the final piece, which is where the armed drones come into play, you know, rapid striking capabilities are absolutely essential. So that's the exploitation piece. And together, you know, when you piece this legibility and speed, you know, together I think they, they think come to constitute a via a very powerful set of capabilities, a system almost.

Shawna Sinnott 23:42
So, in terms of applicability, does your model makes sense, both in situations where drones are being used unilaterally, and where they're used in conjunction with forces on the ground and other counterterrorism tools?

Dr. Asfandyar Mir 23:53
So, the United States Government certainly has developed the capability to, or has acquired modes of deploying this capability in a unilateral fashion, as in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, over a period of time, there's been a surge in these kinds of capabilities, you see deployment in parts of the Middle East

Africa, which are geared towards unilateral deployments. But then, if you look at surge era, Iraq, again, you see strong shades of this particular system, and then the way the system is deployed, or the kind of resources that are mobilized are some of the tactics that are adopted. Those tend to be systematically different. However, at a conceptual level, you again, to an effort to really deeply understand the civilian population, and then act upon information that's generated from this kind of knowledge of the civilian population fairly quickly. So so again, the US Government's become very powerful as implementing this system in different ways in different kinds of operational environments.

Shawna Sinnott 24:58
Right and I wonder when you start dissecting many of those nuances if this may, in fact, actually reinforce some of Jenna's findings.

Dr. Jenna Jordan 25:05
Do you mind if I ask a quick question as founder, I, your research is so interesting. And I love the nuance of your findings. And I love you thinking about this idea of like information collection and the sort of the ability to capitalize on this, I think that is just a really fantastic way of thinking about it. But I wonder if there's a distinction between, which is I'm thinking about, you know, sort of how our two works can fit together, right, and that my work tends to focus at the leadership level, I'm not looking at the targeting of operatives at, you know, sort of not just top leader, but you know, members of the upper echelon, but I'm not looking at targeting of like the sort of operational level, the lower level, even lower level commanders. And so, I'm wondering if you found in your research, a distinction there. And so thinking about things like the sort of fear of targeting or the lack of increases in recruitment or the desertions and shortages of resources and things like that, if that primarily kind of came from that repeated targeting at that lower level, right, where lots of you think about to like, lots of information and things would be coming from maybe that level and not from so I'm just kind of wondering if you found the distinction between that. And in your...

Dr. Asfandyar Mir 26:18
Totally, I think there is, you know, I think of our works as more more complimentary, as opposed to, you know, sort of debating but the same same point. And the compliment that directly comes from the fact that I think the, as I read, the key outcome variable that your work is focused on is kind of political debt. I think leadership targeting is premised on this idea that it can bring about a political collapse of these, these target organizations. And on the other hand, when you look at some of these US CT strategies at the level of specific theaters, they tend to move away from this notion of political death and focus on something a little bit more immediate, which is just organizational destruction, maybe there's a city there that, you know, sufficient levels of organization, destruction or degradation will lead to political death. But that assumption really varies. You know, for instance, I don't think policymakers held that view regarding the campaign in Pakistan. But one of the key groups in in campaigns that I've thought about to, to sort of think through these dynamics is the Afghan Taliban in Afghanistan. I think the United States Government has brought to bear some of these these same kinds of capabilities. At a fairly large scale in that country over a long period of time, you see an effort to cause attrition of the rank and file of the lower echelons similar to Pakistan, as well as sporadic leadership targeting, you know, whenever the US Government has had the opportunity, and yes, you don't see the same kind of degradation, or disruption, either in the at the peak of the surge era, you know, from 2010 to 2013. or more recently,

you know, under under President Trump when he once again, searched the CT effort starting 2017. And so why is that? I think I think that's a I still don't have a good answer. But I think the best answer appears to be that there is that some of the variables that you highlight in your work community support bureaucratization, perhaps for, for a group like Afghan Taliban that is systematically different from some of its peers, like Al Qaeda, or the TTP.

Dr. Jenna Jordan 28:43
So, I wonder if like, a lot of this has to do with how we're thinking about what it is that we're trying, like, like what it is that we're actually trying to explain. So, you know, like thinking about, like, organizational like grip capacity, right. So that has to do with information collection, or that has to do with the impact of desertions, and shortages and things like that has an impact on the capacity of an organization. And in my work, right? I mean, I'm not just looking at political death, I'm looking at changes in the frequency with which groups are able to carry out attacks, or in their kind of survival rate over time, which are different ways of getting at capacity. And so, it makes me even think about for for people, you know, for practitioners or people who are thinking about it from a policy perspective, right thinking about how do we measure the efficacy? So, you know, there was that recent report that came out was like a joint report DIA and sent calm on ISIS. And basically, you know, they were kind of saying, well, ISIS is still active, right? ISIS is still operating, they're still a strong organization, right? They have money, they have recruits, they have resources, they're active, but it's interesting, because if you're thinking about it in terms of them losing territory, right, like, okay, great, that's a win. They've lost lots of territory, but it's but it's getting at this and I think you're Asfandyar, you talked about this idea of like, and I agree, I actually think that your work has much more nuance in terms of that kind of like understanding that operational capacity than mine, I think I'm looking at like a more macro level. But getting at that nuance of what efficacy means is so critical, because that's how you're going to determine the efficacy of different policies and how you can compare different counterterrorism policies, which is something that I actually want to do down the line is be able to compare whether, you know, drone strikes, or whether more conciliatory measures or amnesty, or bringing groups into political processes are all of these different, you know, range of, of policies on sort of a continuum of how coercive they are, like how that affects that measure of what we're looking at. So, I think that's, that's part of the question. I'm sorry, if I took us off course, a little bit, but

Shawna Sinnott 30:52
No, it's actually really helpful, especially as we start looking at what the policy implications are. Because, you know, we just discussed what efficacy looks like, but your research looks more at what the consequences could be, what the adverse effects are of leadership targeting?

Dr. Jenna Jordan 31:08
Yeah, so you know, one thing I actually wanted to go back to us funding, I was saying at the very beginning of our discussion, we'll often talk about is like the adverse, you know, outcomes of of drone strikes, right? People talk about, oh, they're more likely to cause recruitment or, you know, increase kind of maybe sympathy or, you know, for the movement, things like that. And it's really interesting that you, you don't find that to be the case. And I think that's really instructive, because that was a big debate, right? There were people that were just sort of like looking at it very anecdotally, and kind of trying to understand what whether that was something there. So that actually is something that I've thought

about in this work is is does leadership targeting have that kind of effect? Right? Does it cause groups to get more recruits or have more sympathy for the organization. And I think there is something different, when you're looking at the targeting of leaders, versus thinking about, you know, sort of drone strikes more broadly, which can impact all levels of the organization. You know, when you target the leader of an organization, it's something incredibly visible, and incredibly powerful. And so even though I'm, you know, challenging this idea that the charisma of the leader really matters, right, and it's something really important, because I don't actually think that is the big factor, right, I think it's more of an organizational factor, you know, that predicts, or that we can use to understand whether or not groups are more or less resilient. But that said, there's something about the leader, and the visibility of that, that does, I think, have an effect, right. And we've seen and part of that relates to communal support, and so that when you have cases of organizations, where they do have a lot of support on the ground, you know, the the very visible death and even arrest of a leader is very powerful, right. So for instance, actually the case of scenario luminosity of shining path that I have in my, in my book, when, you know, Guzman was arrested, they basically like put him in a striped like, you know, prison out not outfit, attire or whatever, in a Tiger Cage. And like, widely broadcasted this, and this was actually like a very powerful thing. Now, he called upon his followers to, like, lay down their arms and stop there, you know, and, you know, at some point, but but that was a very powerful image. And so, and I think that can have this kind of effect that it can generate sympathy for a particular group. We saw this a lot in the Israeli case, right? When there's high level leaders that are killed, you often see, like really dramatic instances of suicide attacks just in the aftermath. And they'll say, you know, this attack is to avenge the death of particular leader. So, I think those counterproductive consequences are really important.

Nick Lopez 33:58
So just a note for policymakers. What should they be thinking about? When they're looking at CT policy moving forward?

Dr. Jenna Jordan 34:06
Looking at just organizational activity is like a really important variable, right. And if you see an increase in activity, in the aftermath of leaders being killed, to me that signals maybe this isn't the best strategy, right? Maybe, you know, something that increases a group's activity that increases a group sympathy that increases sympathy for an organization, perhaps this isn't the best. And so that's why I really want to start looking at different counterterrorism policies in a comparative framework to see maybe more conciliatory measures are more effective, right, maybe things that are less kinetic, you know, for lack of a better word here are more effective. And so, you know, there haven't been a lot of studies that have compared the efficacy of these different measures. And so I think that's a really important next step for people as you start thinking about how to formulate policy.

Dr. Asfandyar Mir 34:58
No, I just want I need to sort of second the importance of that of that point by Jenna. It's a really great point, specifically, because I think if you look at the campaign's of the past, especially the ones that I've looked at, where the US government is going, after all ident, all identifiable leaders, and then all other identifiable members of the organization, at a, at a large scale at an industrial scale, these campaigns took place in a certain political environment when counterterrorism was extremely serious, when the United States Government was ready to, you know, push all kinds of resources towards these

campaigns. And I think going forward, you're going to not have these kinds of resources available, at least at that scale, which is, which limits the US government's ability to, to manage the fallout of these, these kinds of counterproductive effects of say leadership targeting as might have been managed in the case of Al Qaeda Central's leadership targeting. So so paying a lot more attention to these, these these counterproductive effects on the battlefield, I think is going to be even more important and trying to tell us strategies in the face of resource constraints, and when you're trying to not destabilize a local partner state, in some of these regions, as well as ensure your own security, I think I think that's, that's going to be both hard and important,

Nick Lopez 36:32
especially in an era of great power competition, right? resources moving forward are gonna be tough. There's competing requirements.

Shawna Sinnott 36:40
So, if you've picked something up from your research that you would want to share with practitioners, what would it be?

Dr. Asfandyar Mir 36:45
Right, so if I could provide some some advice in mind you I'm I'm firmly of the view that in this domain, that the tactical and strategic level really bleed into each other. And it is sort of, you know, unlike conventional warfare, or even more latest versions of hybrid warfare, that are now being, say, taught at at NTC. I think that in this domain, the to really come together. And what I see, you know, operators struggling with is the fact that they despite two decades of this kind of work, it is still not reconciling with the fact that victory is not sort of possible, or perhaps even the goal, right? I, I think, given the kinds of efforts many have made, they wonder like, why is this war, this kind of warfare still ongoing. And my point to them would be that this is, this is the kind of this is a domain in which warfare is likely to be unending. So instead of thinking about a binary victory or defeat, or or you know, total political death of these of these kinds of adversities, think about managing them. Your role in this in this enterprise of counterterrorism is to actually help manage the threat that these actors pose to local partners as well as to the the security of the country at large.

Nick Lopez 38:17
That's about all we have time for today. I would like to thank both of you for joining us. This has been a fascinating conversation on counterterrorism and irregular warfare,

Dr. Asfandyar Mir 38:27
to really appreciate the opportunity to be in conversation with both of you and Jenna,

Dr. Jenna Jordan 38:32
thank you so much for having me. This was a lot of fun. I really enjoyed talking with you all. This is great. It's a great dialogue. And, you know, hopefully we can continue the conversation.

Dr. Asfandyar Mir 38:43

Yeah, this is definitely a lot of fun.

Shawna Sinnott 38:49
We will have episodes coming out every other week. Up next, Kyle and I will have a conversation about the effectiveness of training partner forces with Matt can stand at MIT and Steven Biddle of Columbia University. After that, Nick will come back with Kyle to talk to former assistant secretary of defense for special operations and low intensity conflict Mark Mitchell, and former congressional staff member Pete Delano, where they will discuss irregular warfare oversight in DC.

Nick Lopez 39:16
Please be sure to subscribe to the irregular warfare podcast so you don't miss an episode. You can also connect with us on Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn to start a conversation about the past or future episodes we have lined up.

Shawna Sinnott 39:28
One last note, what you hear in this episode are the views of the participants and do not represent those of West Point, the Army or any other agency of the US Government.