
Nexus of Terror: State-Sponsored Terrorism and the Case of Afghanistan

Introduction

Global terrorism continues to be a multifaceted security threat that decisively shapes the policies of political actors worldwide. An important component of contemporary terrorism is the financing mechanisms connected to the activities of terrorist organizations (TOs): TOs have proven apt in diversifying their funding sources and now rely on activities as broad as involvement in organized crime, illicit resource extraction as well as transnational trade in drugs and people. Following the innovation and popularization of modern communication technologies, TOs have also increasingly capitalized on the internet as a space through which to finance their operations, disseminate their propaganda and recruit new members. The financing mechanisms of TOs are subsequently in a process of consistent evolution and are shaped by external factors, thereby producing consistent challenges for State actors to develop their counterterrorist capacities in accordance with the newest trends in terrorist activities.

One of the perhaps most difficult modes of financing to combat is the sponsorship of a TO by another State. Unlike non-State actors, States have access to greater financial resources, operational experience, political legitimacy and political structures that can help in enhancing the capacities of a TO. Albeit also existent prior, State-sponsored terrorism (SST) emerged as a key security phenomenon during the bipolar confrontation between the United States (US) and the Soviet Union in the Cold War as both parties supported TOs in the pursuit of their foreign policy aims. Crucially, supporting the activities of TOs allowed either side to weaken the adversary without directly involving its own forces and escalating the bilateral tensions. This systemic support for non-State actors has changed facets of modern combat: as most (if not all) TOs lack the capacity to defeat the State they target in open combat, TOs end up relying on strategies pertaining to asymmetric warfare, referring to *“conflicts between nations or groups that have disparate military capabilities and strategies”* (RAND Corporation, n.d.). Although asymmetric conflicts are not an inherently modern phenomenon, the last fifty years have seen a growing number of high-scale conflicts between non-State actors and State actors that have seen strategic victories for the smaller, asymmetrically acting actor. The perhaps most notable example of this can be found in the Afghan-Soviet War (1979-1989), ending in the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the incumbent withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan. Clearly, non-State actors, including TOs, have become increasingly proficient in projecting strategic power to an extent that can defeat large-scale military powers.

The proliferation of Islamist non-State actors, ranging from the Sahel region to the Middle East, and the continued support by some States for TOs indicates that SST is not simply a relic from the Cold War but remains existent today. American criticism towards Iran and its sponsorship for terrorism in the Middle East, for instance, continues to taint relations

between Tehran and Washington. Similarly, both India and Pakistan have long accused one another of sponsoring terrorism in one another's countries. The international security community is also consistently reminded of the belligerent potential of State-sponsored TOs: prior to executing the 9/11 attacks, Al Qaeda received State sponsorship from the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Similarly, the 2008 Mumbai attacks were planned by a TO that has long been linked to the Pakistani security apparatus. The salience of SST as a means of financing TOs consequently remains palpable today.

This paper examines SST and is interested in two central tenets: (1) why do States support terrorist activities elsewhere (or sometimes even in their own country)? (2) How does State sponsorship for a TO impact the operations of a TO? To answer these questions, this paper begins by operationalizing and conceptualizing terrorism and SST, hereby differentiating between active and passive State sponsorship. It then examines what political motivations can lead to a State acting in support of a TO and what positive (and negative) implications State sponsorship can yield for both the sponsor and the TO. Lastly, to build on these conceptual observations, the paper examines Afghanistan as a case study of being both a target State of SST (during the Afghan-Soviet War and the Afghan Civil War) as well as a sponsor of terrorism (during the Taliban years). The case of Afghanistan highlights the interplay of different motivations in incentivizing State sponsorship for terrorism while providing an exemplification of the destructive long-term effects of SST.

Defining terrorism and SST

Terrorism is a notoriously difficult concept to define. What constitutes the boundaries between, say, terrorism, rebellion, insurgency and armed militancy? All of these notions imply a political aim (as in a given political situation is to be altered by the terrorists/rebels/insurgents/militants), the actors are all non-State actors that mostly operate in opposition to the State and its institutions, and they all commonly are the weaker actor in political and economic terms. This imbalance then generates a strategic reliance on modes of asymmetric warfare. What is more, is that the concept of 'terrorism' and 'terrorist(s)' is bestowed with a highly negative normative dimension: as put by Lutz and Lutz (2019), "*to label a group or action as terrorist is to seek to imply that the actors or the violence is immoral, wrong, or a violation of basic ethical principles that any reasonable human being might hold*" (p. 7). Contrastingly, if an organization is seen as operating an insurgency, for instance, this assigns them much more political legitimacy than a portrayal as a terrorist organization (although their tactical choices may be indistinguishable in practice). This indicates that the labelling of groups or individuals as terrorists has practical implications in terms of how this group and its members are conceptualized and approached politically. Codifying a group as terrorists rather than, say, rebels, consequently implies a form of moral evaluation and condemnation that is not quite as present in descriptions of groups as rebels, insurgents or militants.

Given that the labelling of a group and its members as terrorist/terrorists implies a form of ultimately normative judgment, the description of groups/individuals as terrorists obtains a

distinctly political dimension. In this context, the idea of *'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter'* rings clear: who is seen as a terrorist by whom depends on the political orientation and interests of the party designating an organization and its members as terrorists. The United States, for instance, includes Cuba, Iran, Syria and North Korea on its list of States that sponsor terrorism (United States Department of State, n.d.). Of course, many of these countries engage (or have engaged) in sponsoring terrorism at some point in time: Iran, for instance, provides active patronage to Hezbollah in Lebanon, while Syria also has strategic interests in sustaining Hezbollah's operations. However, including Iran while excluding other well-established State sponsors of terrorism such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan highlights that geopolitical alignments and interests play a key role in who States officially designate as a sponsor of terrorism and who is not seen as such. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have historically been key American allies in the Middle East and South Asia whereas Syria and post-1979 Iran have not. The inclusion of Iran and the exclusion of Pakistan is hence a reflection of the United States' geostrategic interests in the wider Middle East rather than an objective indication of which State sponsors terrorism. Of course, the situatedness of the notion of terrorism in broader political and historical interests and discourses is present on the other side as well: post-revolutionary Iran views the United States as enabling (and therefore responsible) for the internal violence of the Shah regime prior to 1979 (Pillar, 2013). Who is viewed as a terrorist by whom, then, is a highly political process rather than a necessarily objective description of organizational dynamics.

The political situatedness of the notion of terrorism makes it imperative to establish a working definition of the term. This paper employs the operationalization developed by Lutz and Lutz (2019):

"Terrorism involves political aims and motives. It is violent or threatens violence. It is designed to generate fear in a target audience that extends beyond the immediate victims of the violence. The violence is conducted by an identifiable organization. The violence involves a non-State actor or actors as either the perpetrator, the victim of the violence, or both. Finally, the acts of violence are designed to create power in situations in which power previously had been lacking (i.e. the violence attempts to enhance the power base of the organization undertaking the actions)" (p. 10).

This operationalization includes several ideas commonly utilized in definitions of terrorism. Terrorist activities are always political in nature and often target civilians in order to instill fear in the population and political unit (most commonly the State) that the TO targets. In this understanding of terrorism, it is non-State actors that act as terrorists. To be sure, the point that can be raised that States too can directly operate as terrorists, for instance by intentionally targeting civilian populations in times of conflict (Claridge, 1996) - yet, for the context of this paper the analytical focus shall rest with non-State actors as the primary agents of terrorist behavior. Terrorist organizations (TOs) thus refer to non-State actors. Through employing terrorist tactics (i.e., partially targeting civilians to instill fear), the TO ultimately seeks to offset the structural imbalance between itself (a non-State actor with limited financial, operational and logistical resources) and its opponent (a State or a series of States

that usually have access to higher levels of resources). Terrorism is subsequently generally used by structurally weaker parties to balance the strategic playing field.

If terrorism is predominantly pursued by non-State actors, how are non-State actors linked to States that help to enable terrorist activities by sponsoring them? This paper hereby conceptually distinguishes between the sponsor (the State sponsoring the terrorist activities of one or more TOs), the TO(s) committing terror attacks, and the target State (the State targeted by the attacks). The purest form of State sponsorship is constituted when the sponsor's national intelligence services directly plan the actions, train the operatives, supply them and send them out to carry out attacks (Lutz & Lutz, 2019). Alternatively, States may sponsor TOs via arms, funding, logistics, operational aid and operational training, intelligence, organizational help and a sanctuary in which the TO can establish headquarters and training facilities (Byman, 2012). State sponsorship subsequently exists on a spectrum as the extent and precise form of State support determines what kind of sponsorship is provided: States may choose to provide arms and a sanctuary but provide little or no operational support. These forms of support embody dimensions of active State sponsorship. Active sponsorship must be differentiated from passive sponsorship, which is manifested when (1) a State does not provide support for the TO but knowingly allows other actors in the country to aid TOs, (2) the State does not use its capacity to stop terrorist activities or has not developed its counterterrorist capacity and (3) non-State actors within the country (such as merchants and political parties) support the group, i.e., via funds, arms or forms of political support (Byman, 2005). A State's passive support and/or inactivity can prove vital to enable the activities of the TO in a target State, for example by enabling larger streams of funds being channeled into the TO (Byman, 2005; Byman, 2020; Lutz & Lutz, 2019). In this context, passive support manifests a different form of State sponsorship. By accounting for both active and passive forms of State sponsorship, this paper applies a conceptually broader comprehension of State sponsorship. In contrast, narrow definitions of State sponsorship may only consider direct and active support by the State, for instance via the State's intelligence services, as constituting SST. Applying a broader analytical frame hereby enables an analysis of what broader structural factors help to sustain the operations of TOs against target States.

Establishing working definitions of both terrorism and SST is imperative to avoid conceptual ambiguity and develop an analytical framework through which the different facets of State sponsorship of terrorism can be assessed. The next section turns to the factors that may motivate a State to sponsor a TO. Under what circumstances, then, does a State become likely to sponsor terrorism?

What motivates State sponsorship?

States may opt to become sponsors of terrorism due to a series (and combination) of strategic, ideological and domestic factors. To some extent, lending support to a TO expresses the State's inability or unwillingness to commit significant resources to pursuing its strategic interests in a given context due to strategic, economic and political factors. As mentioned above, supporting TOs as proxies became a way for the United States and the Soviet Union to

challenge one another’s strategic interests without directly escalating American-Soviet tensions during the Cold War. Proxy warfare via TOs is often also a cheaper way of pursuing geostrategic aims. Take, for instance, the Pakistani support for Islamist TOs in Indian Administered Jammu & Kashmir: groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) provide Pakistan with a strategic asset that boosts Pakistan’s strategic position vis-à-vis India without directly engaging the Pakistani armed forces or escalating diplomatic relations. Support for TOs subsequently emerges as a cheaper and more sustainable way of pursuing Pakistan’s foreign policy as it adds a dimension of plausible deniability, rendering it less likely for India to escalate tensions into all-out war. Immediate retribution for the strategic action against the target State is thus avoided (Byman, 2012). However, this does not mean that the regular security forces of the sponsor become any less important - in this context, sponsors may view TOs as augmenting rather than replacing more conventional forms of national power (ibid). In this context, TOs such as LeT have become what Lutz and Lutz (2019) describe as “*indirect agents*” (p. 59) of Pakistan's foreign policy - they are linked to Islamabad’s strategic objectives but concurrently maintain an extent of operational and ideological autonomy. Another example for this is Iran’s current support for the Houthis in the Yemeni Civil War, which weakens Saudi Arabia by concentrating Saudi resources on the conflict in Yemen rather than on directly balancing Iran. As suggested by Byman (2012), State motivations for sponsoring terrorism can be typified in a three-level model that distinguishes between strategic, ideological and domestic motivations:

States’ motives to engage in sponsorship for TOs

Strategic concerns	Ideology	Domestic politics
<i>Destabilize or weaken neighbor:</i> The sponsor boosts the own strategic position vis-à-vis the target State by sponsoring a TO.	<i>Enhance international prestige:</i> The sponsor seeks to improve its own international reputation by supporting TOs that align with its ideology.	<i>Aid kin:</i> The sponsor provides support to members of its national group outside of its own country.
<i>Project power:</i> The sponsor lacks the military means to project power and thus resorts to sponsoring terrorism.	<i>Export political system:</i> The State seeks to export its governance system.	<i>Military or operational aid:</i> States back TOs within their own country to carry out its domestic interests (such as repressing other groups).

<p><i>Change regime:</i> The regime of the target State is viewed as inhibiting or threatening the regime or interests of the sponsor. Supporting a TO can aid in changing the regime.</p>		
<p><i>Shape opposition:</i> The sponsor views the opposition in the target State as non-advantageous for its own strategic goals, thus inserting TOs that protect the sponsor's objectives.</p>		

Source: Byman (2012)

This codification into a three-level system does not mean that different motivations cannot overlap. Projecting power and destabilizing the target State, for instance, may in effect be indistinguishable. Especially strategic and ideological motivations may also interact in practice: the case of the Iranian support for the Houthis, for instance, clearly combines the strategic aim to weaken Saudi Arabia with Tehran's support for the ideological role of Shia-led groups, in itself a result of the 1979 Islamic revolution. Islamabad's and New Delhi's respective Kashmir policies, framed as aiding kin, have definite strategic components and simultaneously help to shore up public support for the government in both countries (Bhatnagar, 2019). In this context, strategic concerns may be disguised as being driven by ideological or domestic motivations (Byman, 2012), and motivations may overlap and be mutually reinforcing in incentivizing sponsorship for a TO. Active State sponsorship may thus be motivated by a combination of strategic, ideological and domestic components.

If strategic, ideological and economic considerations help to shape a State's active support, what informs its passive support? On the one hand, even passive support can directly serve a State's foreign policy aims, for instance when a geostrategic rival is weakened by a TO that the passive sponsor does not directly back. Alternatively, passive sponsorship may be used as a tradeoff to avoid attacks by the TO. In 2018, it was revealed that Italy had made a deal with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the 1980s. To avoid the PLO targeting Italian nationals and targets in Italy, Italy granted PLO members unrestricted mobility throughout the country (Times of Israel, 2018). Although the Italian government thus did not actively contribute to the PLO's terrorist activities, it created a political environment in which the PLO could operate freely and could plan attacks abroad. In this context, Italy evidently considered the PLO as a big enough threat to seek to reduce its activities in Italy. Passive support may furthermore be motivated by three, partially intersecting incentives: (1) domestic sympathy for the TO, (2) the TO posing little threat to the own government, and (3) relatively low costs

of inactions (or even direct benefits) for the passive sponsor (Byman, 2005). Domestic sympathy for the TO may be influenced by diasporic communities or influential ideological groups in the sponsor State. Despite its close strategic ties with Great Britain, the United States, for instance, long provided passive support for the anti-British Irish Republican Army (IRA) due to the sizable Catholic Irish-origin population in the US, much of which was in support of the IRA (Guelke, 1996). Ideologically, alignments may also help to enable passive support: Saudi nationals and organizations have historically been amongst the largest providers of private funds to the operations of Al Qaeda amidst the linkages in ideological orientations (Choksy & Choksy, 2015). As we shall see later, the Saudi government also, for a long time, did not perceive Al Qaeda to be a threat to Saudi Arabia, incentivizing passivity. Illustrative of point (3) is Syria's relation to Hezbollah: although Hezbollah is a mainly Iranian-backed group, the Assad regime has long tolerated Hezbollah's presence in Syria to boost its own interests in Israel and Lebanon (Ali, 2019). Similar to active forms of support, States can thus choose to lend passive support due to a combination of reasons.

Although a State may feel incentivized to actively or passively support TOs, this form of support is not necessarily consistent, and States may choose to stop their support for TOs due to a variety of reasons. The most obvious one is an achievement of the sponsor's political aims, either via the activities of the TO or through other diplomatic channels. A more important factor are the rising economic and diplomatic costs that may be generated by the sponsor's active or passive support for the TO. As mentioned above, plausible deniability is a vital component in SST while SST is also a cheaper way of financing geostrategic aims while limiting the possibility of military confrontation with the target State. If a State loses its plausible deniability, however, this opens up a higher threat perception from the target State that may incentivize retribution. The visibility of Pakistan's support for terrorists in Indian Administered Jammu & Kashmir, for instance, has resulted in a significant deterioration in Indo-Pak ties. Furthermore, the 2019 attack on Indian paramilitary forces in Kashmir by Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), a Pakistan-backed group, resulted in direct retributive air strikes by India on alleged terrorist training camps in Pakistan (Business Today, 2021). Although Pakistan's sponsorship for JeM thus did not escalate in an all-out war, India's awareness of Pakistan's support for JeM limited Islamabad's plausible deniability and invited direct retributive action by India. Pakistan's long-standing support for Islamist terrorists in Afghanistan and Jammu & Kashmir has also detrimentally shaped its diplomatic ties with Washington and has seen the imposition of financial sanctions on Pakistan by the terrorist financing watchdog FATF (Afzal, 2021). Visible sponsorship may consequently also have negative diplomatic and economic implications. This is not to say that sanctions are necessarily effective in halting further sponsorship: indeed, growing pressure on the sponsor may also reinforce the sponsor's perception that its strategic options are limited, which could heighten the extent of the sponsor's support, escalating violence in the process (Byman, 2005). The implications of the operations of the TO on a sponsor are consequently not necessarily linear but run a risk of backfiring on the sponsor, with uncertain consequences for all involved parties.

An additional component that may de-incentivize State sponsorship is if public perceptions of the TO change or the TO becomes a threat to the national security of the sponsor. In the

aforementioned example of support by diasporic communities or like-minded ideological groups, a passive State sponsor may decide to halt its passive support if the diplomatic and economic costs of granting passive support become too high. Alternatively, perceptions by diasporic communities or ideological allies may change, de-incentivizing their support for the TO and thus de-motivating State support for the TO. Moreover, the sponsor may become a target of the activities of the TO itself. The case of Saudi Arabia is illustrative here: during the Soviet-Afghan War, the Saudi government enabled the passive support for their *Mujahideen* in the fight against the Soviets (Steinberg & Woermer, 2013). Some form of Saudi support for Islamism in Afghanistan remained in place throughout much of the 1990s. Following 9/11, however, the diplomatic pressure on Saudi Arabia grew to crack down on private sponsorship of terrorist activities by Saudi nationals. The 2003 Al Qaeda compound bombings in Riyadh that killed 39 people, although mostly foreigners (Prados, 2005), highlighted that Saudi Arabia too had grown to be a target for Al Qaeda. Throughout the 1990s, the Saudi regime had seemingly remained oblivious to Al Qaeda's opposition to the presence of US troops in the country following the First Gulf War, heightening Al Qaeda's perceptions of Saudi Arabia as an apostate regime (Indyk, 2004). As Al Qaeda was not perceived as a significant national security threat until 2003, it was only then that the Kingdom began increasing its counterterrorist capacities (Cordesman & Obaid, 2005). The case of Saudi Arabia and Al Qaeda is interesting to consider as public support for Islamist violence elsewhere still remains high: in 2014, a poll suggested that 92% of Saudis believed that the Islamic State was acting in accordance with Islamic law and traditions (Schmid, 2017). Governments can subsequently face a disconnect between external pressures (such as the threat of sanctions) and internal developments (such as a nevertheless high level of public support for the TO) that can render cracking down on private support for TOs difficult. State support (and the extent and form of State support) is thus shaped by both external and internal factors that are highly context dependent.

One last factor that warrants consideration is a lacking capacity to halt sponsorship, for instance in the context of 'failed' States. In the case of Saudi Arabia, the government did not develop sufficient counterterrorist activities due to a combination of reasons: (1) it had long supported Islamist causes abroad, which seemingly legitimized Saudi Arabia's ideological role, (2) Al Qaeda was not perceived as an immediate security threat, (3) there was less diplomatic pressure to crack down on Al Qaeda prior to 9/11 and (4) popular Islamist support for Al Qaeda and its Saudi members would have put the government against public attitudes. These factors ultimately converged and produced an environment in which the Saudi government lacked the incentive and the public support to develop counterterrorist measures. The obvious mis-conceptualization of Al Qaeda's ideological aims thus heightened the group's ability to strike targets in the country, as it did in 2003. Crucially, however, post-2003 Saudi Arabia had the financial and operational means to develop enhanced counterterrorism measures due to diplomatic support by the United States and its financial reserves. What, however, happens if a State lacks either the diplomatic or financial means to invest in its counterterrorist capacities? As Byman (2020) points out, the central Somalian government, for example, might have the willingness to develop indigenous counterterrorism capacities but simply lacks the means to do so. In this context, failed States or States in which central

governmental control has been historically challenged may emerge as passive sponsors of terrorism without having the capacity to significantly change this. This also helps to explain why TOs such as Al Qaeda are particularly present in conflict environments in which State control is either challenged or absent. Indeed, the absence or presence of government capacity may be the most important indicator determining the geographical base of operations of a TO (Byman, 2020). Here it must subsequently be considered whether governmental absence is intentional (i.e., engineered and thus reflecting a form of support) or unintentional (i.e., being a byproduct of the State's general lack of governance capacities).

To sum up, States may choose to sponsor terrorism due to strategic, ideological and domestic motivations that are likely to intersect in practice. It is notable that it appears more likely for States to sponsor TOs if they lack the conventional means of projecting geopolitical power, i.e., through strategic, economic or diplomatic channels. Despite being an often efficient tool for the sponsor to achieve its short-term aims, support for TOs can hence also be read as an expression of strategic weakness relative to the target State. It has also become clear that States may choose to halt their support for TOs for a variety of reasons, most of which are also strategic, ideological or domestic in nature. Importantly, a State halting its support for a TO evidently does not necessarily mean that the TO also halts its operations, and the case of Saudi Arabia highlights that governments can make grave miscalculations regarding the TO they actively or passively support. This serves as a useful segue to another topic: what is the impact of State sponsorship on the activities of TOs?

Impact of State sponsorship on the activities of TOs

The distinction between active and passive forms of support and the distinguishment between strategic, ideological and domestic motivations highlight that SST is a heterogeneous phenomenon: it is unified in the sense of describing a basic structural constellation (a State sponsoring one or more TOs), yet the extent of or reasons for State sponsorship may differ greatly. Before moving on to the case study of Afghanistan, it is thus worth considering how State sponsorship impacts the activities and durability of a TO.

It would be erroneous to assume that State sponsorship is the central tenet that ensures the survival of a TO, yet the different dimensions of State support can make a TO more or less vulnerable to extermination. As noted by Lutz and Lutz (2019), sponsors commonly start supporting groups that already existed previously - although the sponsor and the TO may (come to) overlap in their political aims, the sponsor is thus likely to insert itself in pre-existent organizational structures. From the perspective of the sponsor, this helps to enhance the political legitimacy of the sponsored TO: as TOs often claim to be fighting for ethnic/national/religious liberation, they are likely to enjoy more legitimacy with the population they are purportedly liberating if they are seen as indigenous rather than as imposed by the sponsor. Yet, while boosting the TO's legitimacy, this also diminishes the ideological sway the sponsor has over the TO: although the sponsor may be able to enact some ideological influence over the TO, the TO is likely to maintain its political aims. This is especially applicable for passive forms of sponsorship that imply a lesser pronounced linkage

between sponsor and TO: Italy's passive support for the PLO, for example, clearly had no impact on the PLO's objective of liberating Palestine from Israeli occupation. Similarly, the private support by Saudi nationals for Al Qaeda did not prevent Al Qaeda from targeting the interests of the Saudi government. More active forms of State sponsorship may thereby be more proficient in shaping the operational and ideological framework of the TO, making the TO more (or potentially less) violent. The exact form of State sponsorship and the depth of the strategic links is thus a decisive variable determining how and to what extent the sponsor shapes the TO.

Indeed, active support speaks to the higher levels of sponsor-TO strategic linkages, and active support is more likely to enhance the operational and organizational capacities of the TO. As previously discussed, active State sponsorship by the State and its security organs can greatly enhance the offensive capacities of the TO, for instance by providing training, arms, funds and operational and organizational support. As Carter (2012) illustrates, the sponsor's provision of arms, funds and an organizational base boosts the TO's standing as the TO often has none or limited combat experience, no consistent revenue stream (especially if it is a novel and/or minor TO) and no organizational base at which to safely plan operations. Arms, obviously, are imperative for the TO to sustain its operations, whereas active State support can also help to ensure a steady stream of recruits, the acquisition of forged documents and a provision of safe houses, all of which aid in sustaining the organizational structure of the TO and enable the TO to continue its fight by avoiding elimination. The extensive support provided by the CIA and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to different factions of the Afghan *Mujahideen* is hereby illustrative: State support by the United States and Pakistan provided the *Mujahideen* with recruits, arms, funds and the organizational support the *Mujahideen* required to fight against the Soviets (Hoodbhoy, 2005). State support can hereby prove decisive to unify splinter/minor groups into a more coherent structure, subsequently boosting the TO's organizational capacities (Byman, 2012). Another exemplification of this is the ISI's creation of the United Jihad Council in 1990 in Jammu & Kashmir, which is designed to facilitate operational coordination between different ISI-backed TOs (Jadoon, 2018). The ISI's role in the Jammu & Kashmir conflict is also indicative of how the shifting interests of the sponsor may shape a conflict as Pakistan has shifted its support over time from ostensible pro-independence groups to pro-Pakistan groups, leading to the demilitarization of the former (International Crisis Group, 2020). Financially, the provision of funds by the sponsor ensures the economic survival of the TO, which prevents members from leaving the TO for economic reasons, consequently avoiding a de-militarization of the group (Carter, 2012). State support can thus have an important impact on TOs in shaping their operations and their ideological framework as well as their ability to sustain their operations.

Besides this form of operational and organizational support, it is especially the role of safe havens that positively influences the TO's capacities. Safe havens outside the borders of the target State can include operational centres through which the TO can organize and plan its operations as well as facilities in which fighters can be trained for future combat missions. Safe havens can be a result of lacking governmental capacities (i.e., in destabilized environments such as Somalia) or of the sponsor directly providing this safe haven, either in its own country or a third country. Hezbollah, for example, enjoys safe havens in Iran (DeVore,

2012) and Venezuela (Humire, 2020) amongst other places. On the most fundamental level, a TO being located outside of the target State's borders significantly reduces the target State's ability to combat the TO's activities as the TO can simply fall back into its sanctuary abroad, placing the TO beyond the reach of the target State (Carter, 2012). Crucially, TOs are statistically more likely to avoid elimination (and ultimately be successful in achieving their political aims) if they have a secure territorial base abroad (ibid). As we shall see later, the ability of the *Mujahideen* and eventually the Taliban to make use of the Pashtun territories on the Pakistani side of the Afghan-Pak border significantly boosted their strategic options by moving the logistical networks out of Afghanistan and making assassinations of leaders significantly more difficult. Confirming the importance of a provided sanctuary, the provision of State support without a safe haven provides more organizational cohesion but does not reduce the statistical risk of the TO being eliminated by the target State (ibid), which helps to partially explain why organizations such as Hezbollah have been able maintain their struggles over decades. Even if a target State has developed comprehensive counter-terrorism legislation and frameworks, the efficacy of these frameworks is limited by the lack of jurisdiction in the terrorists' locality (Byman, 2012). Providing a safe haven is thus key for the sponsor if the sponsor seeks to ensure the long-term survival of the group. The strategic importance of sanctuaries is further reflected in the fact that TOs become more likely to be eliminated once they lose their safe haven (Carter, 2012). The sustained access to one or more safe havens, then, may decisively shape the survival or extermination of a State-sponsored TO.

Although the provision of safe havens on the sponsor's territory strategically benefits both the sponsor and the TO, such sanctuaries also yield disadvantages for both sides. For the sponsor, providing a safe haven to the TO has the potential of undermining the sponsor's claims of plausible deniability, which may lead to retributive action by the target State. One instance of this is the reaction of the United States to the 9/11 attacks, which led to the US declaring war on the Taliban regime in Afghanistan as the Taliban were hosting high-end Al Qaeda operatives. In 2004, Washington also started repeatedly using Predator and Reaper drone strikes to target Al Qaeda and Taliban leaders in Pakistan who had left Afghanistan for Pakistan following the American invasion (Plaw et al., 2011). In both contexts, the obvious providing of safe havens meant that plausible deniability could not be upheld. Obvious State sponsorship may also undermine the local legitimacy of the TO as the TO is not (or no longer) perceived as fighting for the liberation of a given people or region, but as a vehicle for the foreign policy interests of the sponsor. This issue has been present in the case of Pakistan-backed terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir, where groups such as LeT and JeM lack legitimacy as they are perceived as foreign and non-Kashmiri (Anant, 2009). States may also choose to support different TOs simultaneously, which could strengthen the individual groups but concurrently hurt the overall cause due to growing inter-group competition (Byman, 2012). In addition, the link with the sponsor may also produce a dependency of the TO on the sponsor, making the TO vulnerable to shifts in the sponsor's strategic interests and orientations. While a removal of the TO's safe haven does not just heighten the TO's risk of elimination, the TO also becomes exposed to tradeoffs between its sponsor and the target State (Carter, 2012). For example: the sponsor may provide information about the TO and its

safe havens to the target State to extract political concessions or mitigate diplomatic tensions. This has been the case with Pakistan, which has provided information about Al Qaeda leaders to the CIA to alleviate tensions with Washington, allowing the US to conduct their drone operations in Pakistan (Khan, 2018). The TO thus becomes a pawn in the broader strategic relations between two or more countries. Conversely, the sponsor loses most of the ability to sell out the TO if it does not provide a sanctuary, yet the TO may still opt for sponsorship as the logistical support and impact of the sponsor on organizational cohesion is likely to outweigh the disadvantages produced by fickle sponsor behavior (Carter, 2012). State sponsorship of terrorism is thus not necessarily advantageous for either side and can generate extreme pushbacks for both parties.

SST is ever-evolving and is continuously shaped by technological developments in the information and communication technology (ICT) sector and the arms market. In regards to ICT, the expansion and proliferation of cyberspace has allowed TOs to increasingly make use of digital technologies for the sake of financing, recruitment and propaganda. Although counterterrorist programs increasingly focus on governing cyberspace, the very nature of cyberspace renders it possible for SST to be more easily concealed and organized (Byman, 2020). States can hereby also provide virtual safe havens in which the virtual activities of TOs are insufficiently patrolled/intentionally permitted and thereby enabled (ibid). Similarly, the collapse of the arms market in the Soviet Union and the global proliferation of especially smaller firearms since World War II has made it significantly easier for TOs to arm themselves. In the changing landscape of the global arms market and the growing proliferation of highly technologically advanced weaponry, including ballistic missile systems and drones, sponsors may become responsible for supplying advanced weaponry as TOs can rely on illicit trade networks to acquire more conventional arms (Byman, 2020). This changes the form of warfare TOs and terrorists can engage in; the Houthis in Yemen, for instance, have struck oil refinery facilities in Saudi Arabia with a growing frequency in recent years, making use of long-range missile and drone strikes (Hatem, 2021). Although the UN has been unable to confirm this, Saudi Arabia promptly accused Iran of supplying the Houthis with high-scale weaponry (BBC, 2019). In this context, the capacities of TOs to strike targets outside their original geographical realm of operations may increase in the coming years.

Ultimately, the impact of State support on the activities of TOs depends on what kind of support is provided for what reasons. Long-term strategic reasons, for instance for Pakistan in Jammu & Kashmir, are unlikely to be subject to significant modifications over time, whereas domestic constellations may change, incentivizing a higher (or lower) support for TOs. It evidently also is highly relevant whether States provide safe havens for TOs or not, as safe havens enhance the durability of the TO but can also come at the expense of its long-term interests. Coupled with the potential disadvantages of State sponsorship, SST thus remains a complex and heterogeneous phenomenon.

Case study: SST in Afghanistan

Although SST is not just existent in the Middle East and South Asia, it is here that the perhaps most salient examples of SST in recent decades can be found. Almost all States throughout the wider region have been victims of terrorist attacks at some point over the past decades and the region is now home to some long-enduring conflicts (such as the ones in Afghanistan and Iraq) as well as more recently escalated struggles (for example in Yemen). As we have seen above, the wider region is also host to two of the most prominent active sponsors of terrorism, Pakistan and Iran, as well as one of the largest passive sponsors, Saudi Arabia. Both Iran and Pakistan have repeatedly used (and continue to use) TOs in pursuit of their foreign policy objectives. Despite the partial strategic gains made by both countries this strategy has also backfired in many ways by provoking economic sanctions and intensifying their international isolation. The main geographical node in the network of SST, however, has been Afghanistan: from the late 1970s onwards, groups that can be classed as TOs received both active and passive support by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United States in their fight against the Soviet Union. In this context, the State of Afghanistan, supported by the Soviets, emerged as the clear target State of SST. Yet, following the withdrawal of the Soviet Union in 1989 and the subsequent outbreak of the Afghan civil war, which resulted in the establishment and consolidation of the Taliban regime from 1994 onwards, Islamist Afghanistan also emerged as a sponsor of terrorism. The perhaps most notable act of sponsorship was the support for Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda group, which used Afghanistan as a sanctuary from which to plan attacks throughout the late 1990s and, ultimately, the 2001 9/11 attacks. Afghanistan is thus in the distinct position of having been both a target State and a sponsor of terrorism and the phenomenon of SST has invariably shaped modern Afghanistan. This chapter first examines Afghanistan's existence as a target State before discussing its role as a sponsor.

▪ Afghanistan as a target State

The political trajectory of modern Afghanistan is inextricably tied to foreign States sponsoring TOs in Afghanistan from the late 1970s onwards. In 1978, the Soviet-linked People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) had toppled the government of Mohammed Daoud Khan in what became known as the Saur Revolution. Under Soviet influence, the PDPA introduced reforms that sought to modernize Afghanistan, for instance by enhancing literacy and improving the social standing of women. The PDPA's reforms were opposed especially by rural populations, which perceived the governmental programs as un-Islamic and at odds with the traditional ways of Afghan life. Anti-PDPA opposition swiftly began to form and a loose combination of armed opposition groups became known as the *Mujahideen*, literally meaning 'fighters in the name of Allah'. The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979 in support of the PDPA, thereby starting the Afghan-Soviet War.

The Afghan-Soviet War imminently became embroiled in the geopolitics of the Cold War as foreign governments began supporting *Mujahideen* factions for their foreign policy objectives. For the United States, the motivations for supporting the *Mujahideen* were largely

strategic: Washington sought to prevent a Soviet expansion into Afghanistan, strategically located along Eurasia's east-west axis. Moreover, the overthrow of the US-friendly Shah regime in Iran in 1979 had heightened the strategic pressure on the United States in the region. Within this strategic context, the *Mujahideen* provided a counterweight to Moscow's expanding clout in the heart of Asia and were enlisted by the US as a proxy force that could serve America's national interests without escalating tensions with the Soviet Union. In consideration of such short-term interests, the United States prioritized its strategic aims over not lending support for groups that had a fundamentally different understanding of the world compared to the US. Similar to its support for right-wing groups in Central and South America, the strategic Cold War framework under which American decision makers operated thus incentivized this strategic prioritization.

Besides the United States, Pakistan emerged as the main foreign sponsor for Afghan TOs for strategic, ideological and domestic reasons. Strategically, Pakistan had long pursued a 'strategic depth' policy in Afghanistan: firstly, Pakistani strategists sought to prevent Afghanistan from falling under foreign influence, which continued the geostrategic approach employed by Great Britain in its 'Great Game' with Czarist Russia (Parkes, 2019). However, Pakistan's geostrategic post-partition competition with India, further intensified by the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, also created an incentive to regain some strategic leverage and, importantly, establish a strategic space that Pakistan could fall back to if continental tensions with India were to escalate. Moreover, supporting Sunni groups would help to constrain Iran's revolutionary support for Shia groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan, which had heightened following the Iranian revolution (Wolf, 2017). It is notable here that strategic considerations were merged with religious/ideological incentives that connected to the growing Islamization of Pakistan in the latter half of the 1970s. Following the military coup by Zia ul-Haq in 1977, Pakistan had grown closer to Saudi Arabia, and the Zia regime had formulated the aim to transform Pakistan from a (comparatively) secular country into an orthodox Islamic society, in the process also radicalizing the Pakistani Army and the ISI (Shams, 2016; Wolf, 2017). These ideological ambitions also shaped Zia's foreign policy: beyond achieving strategic depth in Afghanistan by shaping opposition and (ideally) establishing a Pakistan-controlled government, the Soviet invasion helped to cultivate a pro-Jihad climate for the Pakistani Army and the ISI (Wolf, 2017). Lastly, incentives also had a domestic character: on the one hand, Pakistan emerged as a major destination for Afghan refugees, and a pacified Afghanistan was imperative to allow for the return of the refugees. Pakistan also has a sizable Pashtun population, especially along the Afghan-Pak border that is divided by the Durand Line. The Durand Line, formally demarcated in 1893, served to divide the Pashtun tribal lands and continues to be seen by many Pashtuns as an artificial border rather than a reflection of ethnic or cultural differences (Kaura, 2017). Close cultural links between Afghanistan's and Pakistan's Pashtun communities have thus prevailed. This ethno-cultural component partially helps to explain Pakistan's eventual support for the Taliban over other *Mujahideen* groups as the Taliban were almost exclusively recruited from the Pashtun community. Whilst the US was driven by primarily strategic considerations, strategic, ideological, domestic and economic factors help to explain why Pakistan decided to support TOs as the Afghan-Soviet War broke out.

How did active State sponsorship for the *Mujahideen* by Islamabad and Washington play out? As we have seen, the sponsor providing a safe haven to the TO is potentially the most decisive factor in determining whether a TO is capable of sustaining its operations in the long run. Pakistani territory in the rugged geographies of the Pashtun borderlands was decisive in this regard, providing sanctuary for different *Mujahideen* groups and placing them beyond the reach of the Afghan forces and their Soviet allies (Waldman, 2010). Close links between the CIA and the ISI allowed the ISI to deliver foreign-funded weaponry and resources to the *Mujahideen* throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Parenti, 2001). Washington alone is believed to have contributed more than three billion US Dollars in support to the *Mujahideen*, not including payments made by the US through concealed channels (ibid). In addition, Pakistan provided logistical and diplomatic support as well as recruits (Wolf, 2017). State sponsorship was key to enhance the *Mujahideen's* capacities relative to the decisively more technologically advanced Afghan-Soviet forces. The perhaps most infamous example of this is the supply of American anti-aircraft Stinger missiles to the *Mujahideen*, which allowed the *Mujahideen* to break the Afghan-Soviet air supremacy and incapacitated the Afghan-Soviet military operations (Kuperman, 1999). In military terms, the supply of the US-produced Stinger systems was thus of decisive importance. Ironically, many of these Stinger missiles later fell into the hands of the Taliban (Khan, 2001). Both Pakistan and the United States were ultimately instrumental in securing the *Mujahideen's* position in the conflict through active support.

Besides such active forms of support, Pakistan in particular also provided passive support and forged an environment in which TOs could flourish. From the late 1970s onwards and in line with Zia's Islamization reforms, Pakistan increasingly encouraged the development of Saudi-funded religious schools, so-called Madrassas, which were teaching hardline interpretations of Islam in Pakistan (Weinbaum & Khurram, 2014). Moreover, the government tolerated (and partially encouraged) the growing role of parallel civil society organizations such as the Islamist Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam (JUI). Bodies such as the JUI provided largely independent educational services and stressed the role of Islam as well as the tribal code of Pashtunwali (Byman, 2012). Pashtunwali incorporates the notion of *melmastia* (Pashto for hospitality), which codifies hospitality as a guiding principle of Pashtun life and implies that "*a guest should neither be harmed nor surrendered to an enemy. This will be regardless of the relationship between the guest and the host enjoyed previously*" (Ali, 2013). The relevance of this tribal code became apparent when the United States demanded the Taliban to hand over bin Laden after he had claimed responsibility for the 9/11 attacks as the Taliban cited Pashtunwali as one of the key reasons why bin Laden could not be handed over (Johnson & Mason, 2008). Through both its active and passive support, Pakistan thus helped to foster an environment in which TOs could ideologically and socially flourish.

Following the strategic defeat of the Soviet Union and its subsequent withdrawal in 1989, State support for the Taliban by Pakistan over other *Mujahideen* groups proved decisive in shaping the outcome of the Afghan Civil War. The Soviet withdrawal had not pacified Afghanistan but resulted in different *Mujahideen* groups turning on another and fighting for political supremacy in Afghanistan. The Taliban, a hardline group that had been founded in 1994 by the cleric Mullah Omar, consisted mostly of young Pashtun Afghans that had grown

up in refugee camps in Pakistan and had been educated in Pakistani Madrassas. The Taliban quickly emerged as Islamabad's favored group. Again, strategic, diplomatic and domestic factors helped to incentivize support for the Taliban over other, more moderate factions: the Taliban seemed capable of uniting Afghanistan whilst remaining close to Pakistan, they aligned ideologically with an increasingly radicalized security apparatus in Islamabad and were an almost exclusively Pashtun group. The increasingly streamlined Pakistani support for the Taliban over other *Mujahideen* factions from 1994 onwards helped the Taliban strategically and legitimized the perception of the Taliban as protectors of the Pashtun community, which had come under pressure amidst growing sectarian tensions during the Civil War. The Taliban captured Kandahar in 1994 and the Afghan capital of Kabul in 1996. Although rivalling factions prevailed and mainly unified in the form of the Northern Alliance (NA), the Taliban had emerged as the most dominant faction in the country and declared the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in 1996. The ultimate strategic win of the Taliban exemplifies how State support by Pakistan was vital in ensuring their victory: the ISI prioritizing the Taliban over other proxies had decisively shaped the outcome of the Afghan Civil War. The Taliban had emerged as agents of Islamabad's foreign policy interests in Afghanistan.

- [Afghanistan as a sponsor](#)

The fall of Kabul to the Taliban in 1996 and their strategic victory in the Civil War turned Afghanistan into a key space for Islamic terrorism as the Taliban regime emerged as one of the largest State sponsors of terrorism, most notably for Al Qaeda. Bin Laden, who had been active as a financier and liaison contact for the *Mujahideen* during the Afghan-Soviet War, had helped to create Al Qaeda in 1988. Al Qaeda was initially based in bin Laden's home country of Saudi Arabia, where bin Laden managed to capitalize on the pro-Jihad and pro-*Mujahideen* climate that had been enabled by the Saudi government throughout the 1980s. Al Qaeda left Saudi Arabia for Sudan in 1991 amidst bin Laden's opposition to the permanent stationing of American troops in the country following the First Gulf War. Saudi Arabia's deepening strategic ties with the United States, as discussed above, hereby helped to create a perception of Riyadh as an apostate regime, which eventually legitimized the 2003 compound bombings. After the Taliban captured Kabul, Al Qaeda moved its operational centre from Sudan to Afghanistan as the Taliban provided sanctuary for Al Qaeda operatives. From its base in Afghanistan, Al Qaeda was capable of planning several large-scale attacks against the US, notably in the context of the 1998 embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, the 2000 attack on the *USS Cole* in Yemen, and, ultimately, the 9/11 attacks. The victory of the Taliban in the Civil War, in combination with their radical orientation, had made the Taliban regime a key sponsor of international terrorism.

The relation between Al Qaeda and the Taliban is an intriguing one as it partially defies the more traditional understandings of how SST plays out. As previously seen, it is commonly the State that provides ideological guidance, financial and material support and recruits to the TO. In the case of Al Qaeda and the Taliban, however, the relation appears to have been reversed in some respects. Of course, the provision of a safe haven to Al Qaeda proved to be of immense strategic importance for the organization, allowing it to plan attacks whilst being

largely safe from elimination. The Taliban's interest in reshaping Afghanistan into a highly orthodox Islamic society also rendered the Taliban regime more immune to outside pressures, protecting Al Qaeda as a result. However, Al Qaeda being based in Afghanistan also yielded direct benefits for the Taliban: the connection of Al Qaeda to private financing networks in the Gulf region helped to ensure a steady supply of private funds coming into Afghanistan, lowering the pressure to socioeconomically develop Afghanistan or accept international aid (Byman, 2012). The fact that many Al Qaeda operatives had previously helped to fight against the Soviets also helped to legitimize their ideological role, and Al Qaeda helped to attract Islamists from other countries that proved crucial to the Taliban's war efforts against the NA from 1996 onwards (ibid). In terms of financial and operational support, the role of Al Qaeda hence disrupted generally present sponsor-TO dynamics.

The relations between Al Qaeda and the Taliban fluctuated over time due to underlying ideological differences. Despite both being Islamist groups, Al Qaeda and the Taliban were not (and are not) ideologically identical. Al Qaeda is ideologically Salafist in orientation and ultimately seeks to reestablish the Islamic world in the way it presumably was during the life of the Prophet Muhammad in the 6th and 7th century AD (Turner, 2014). Jihad becomes the way through which this essentially revivalist ambition is pursued, making Al Qaeda a Salafi-Jihadist group (ibid). Due to this ideological orientation, Al Qaeda seeks to displace the American presence from Islam's holy lands in the Middle East, and its geographical scope is ultimately regional/transnational rather than national. This marks a significant contrast between Al Qaeda and the Taliban, who were schooled in the Deobandi schools the JUI had established throughout Pakistan in the 1970s and 1980s. Deobandi hereby proposes a form of Islamic society that, though conservative, is somewhat more tolerant than the society envisaged by Salafis and partially advocates for coexistence with existing political structures (Metcalf, 2002). Due to their existence as an almost exclusively Pashtun organization, the Taliban are to a significant extent an ethno-nationalist group. This ethnic component is not existent for Al Qaeda. These underlying ideological differences had implications for the strategic priorities of both groups: the Taliban were focused on winning the war against the NA rather than pursuing the global Jihad envisaged by Al Qaeda, and by 1998 Taliban leader Mullah Omar vehemently opposed additional Al Qaeda strikes on US targets (Byman, 2012). The relations between TO and sponsor, then, were hardly consistent or necessarily always positive as their ideological differences produced different strategic priorities.

With time, however, the ties between both groups were strengthened due to the US' growing hostility towards Al Qaeda and, therefore, the Taliban regime. The 1998 embassy bombings had resulted in a growing awareness in the United States for the activities of Al Qaeda, and the administration of Bill Clinton moved to eliminate bin Laden, who was known to be in Afghanistan by then, via air strikes. The subsequent air strikes in Afghanistan did not just fail to kill bin Laden but heightened the threat perception of the Taliban in regard to the US, leading to a further antagonization between Kabul and Washington and increasingly closer ties between the Taliban and Al Qaeda (Phinney, 2007). Al Qaeda used its newly gained influence on the Taliban by pushing them closer towards a Salafi interpretation of Islam, enhancing the training of foreign Islamist groups in Afghanistan and increasingly seeking to 'purify' Afghanistan from allegedly un-Islamic elements (Byman, 2012). Al Qaeda thus grew

increasingly influential in shaping the Taliban's domestic and foreign policy and Al Qaeda also proved instrumental in assassinating NA commander Ahmad Shah Massoud in September 2001 (Bellamy, 2021). The growing ideological connection between both groups, in itself a direct outcome of US foreign policy in the region, thereby ultimately fostered a deep linkage between Al Qaeda and the Taliban. When President Bush demanded bin Laden to be handed over after 9/11, then, the Taliban's decision to do so would have significantly discredited them (Byman, 2012). In conjunction with the cultural code of Pashtunwali and the lacking efficacy of economic sanctions, this consequently created a situation in which the removal of the Taliban regime via military intervention emerged as the seemingly sole way of halting SST in Afghanistan.

Ultimately, it was the military intervention by the US and the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force that brought an end to the Taliban regime and its systemic and structural support for Islamic terrorism. The case of Afghanistan is intriguing to consider as other forms of political pressures (such as diplomatic isolation and economic sanctions) did not have the desired effect, rather pushing the Taliban and Al Qaeda closer together. The relation between both groups is furthermore remarkable as it does not adhere to the classical understanding of SST due to the decisive financial, ideological and operational role Al Qaeda played in shaping the Taliban's domestic and foreign policy. Afghanistan has thus been home to classical forms of State-sponsorship (during the Afghan-Soviet War and the Afghan Civil War) and less traditional forms of State sponsorship (following the victory of the Taliban). What this indicates is that State sponsorship for terrorism is a complex and dynamic phenomenon that adheres to certain central tenets - how these tenets ultimately end up playing out, however, is highly dependent on idiosyncratic contexts.

Conclusion

State-sponsored terrorism continues to be of vital importance for international security and although State sponsorship has changed in some of its facets over the past decades it remains a foreign policy strategy that States will continue to use. Sponsors will continue to exist as long as they lack other strategic means to pursue their foreign policy interests. As we have seen, State sponsorship can yield some significant gains for both the TO as well as for the sponsor: the TO reduces its risk of elimination while the sponsor can hope to attain its strategic, ideological or domestic interests. From a strategic net-gains point of view, State sponsorship thus yields some benefits: Iran, for instance, has expanded its capacity to project power throughout the Middle East through its targeted support for regional TOs. Similarly, Pakistan's support for terrorists in both Afghanistan and Jammu & Kashmir has irreversibly altered the security landscape in both regions. Although much of SST seems to aim at short-term gains, its potentially detrimental effects are nevertheless long-term: in many instances, a sponsor's support for a TO has heightened the sponsor's international isolation, thereby heightening the risk of different sorts of sanctions. The case of Pakistan is also exemplary in illustrating how support for TOs can negatively impact the own national security in the long run: Pakistan now has to deal with anti-Pak Islamist TOs that have been fostered by the same active and passive support used by Islamabad to pursue its strategic interests in Afghanistan.

This, of course, does not even begin to consider the humanitarian devastation decades of conflict and terrorism have created in Afghanistan.

SST, then, remains a double-edged sword. In the case of the Middle East and South Asia, the phenomenon has had destructive long-term effects that have disproportionately impacted civilian populations.

For the international community, finding sustainable solutions to the issue of SST will be a difficult process: naming and shaming sponsors may not be enough, and sanctions could backfire. Terrorism, as well as State-sponsored terrorism, will thus ultimately remain an important political reality over the coming decades.

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