

Research Article

Social Capital and Social Liability in the Fight Against Terrorism: The Case of Pakistan

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Abstract

This paper argues that Pakistan's failure to curb terrorism is rooted not only in institutional weakness but in the strength of informal networks that shape allegiance and enforce loyalty outside the reach of the state. Tribal affiliations, sectarian identities, and religious and familial bonds create a parallel social architecture that often protects extremists, punishes dissent, and neutralizes formal counterterrorism efforts yet challenges the Westphalian notion of sovereignty. Drawing on six real-world case studies from expert witness reports, the paper demonstrates how individuals who defy communal expectations—by marrying outside their tribe, refusing militant demands, or abandoning religious orthodoxy—are targeted not only by extremists but by their own kin and communities. These networks enforce silence, reward complicity, and make cooperation with the state both dangerous and rare. Using a social capital approach, this paper shows that the same personal relationships that provide safety and support in daily life can become dangerous, even deadly, when they are used to protect extremist actors, including terrorists. The result is a counterterrorism landscape in which militants are embedded, not hidden; empowered, not isolated. Unless Pakistan, and other nations facing similar challenges, begin to address the informal systems that shield violent actors, counterterrorism strategies will remain incomplete and ultimately ineffective. The dynamics explored here are not unique to Pakistan. Similar patterns of informal power and communal loyalty have shaped insurgencies in Afghanistan and Iraq. These cases highlight a shared challenge: counterterrorism strategies that overlook the role of informal networks risk failure, regardless of geography. Additionally, by creating overlapping centers of authority and loyalty, these informal networks undermine the Westphalian model of sovereignty, which presumes exclusive state control over territory and non-interference on its internal violence. In Pakistan, sovereignty is not only contested by armed non-state actors but by deeply rooted social systems that command greater allegiances than the state itself. A viable strategy must operate across multiple levels: local actors capable of negotiating community legitimacy, national governments with enforcement capacity, and international partners offering resources, intelligence, and ideological counter-narratives. This multi-level approach acknowledges that defeating extremist protection networks is a matter of restoring social trust and undermining the social ties that sustain violence.

Keywords

Pakistan, Terrorism, Informal Networks, Tribal Society, Sectarianism, Counterterrorism Policy, Social Capital, Social Liability

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1. Introduction

The global fight against terrorism has long identified Pakistan as both a crucial ally and a persistent enigma. Despite being a recipient of billions in counterterrorism aid and publicly declaring its commitment to combating extremist violence, Pakistan remains a country where terrorist organizations not only endure but often thrive. This contradiction has puzzled international observers and policymakers for decades. Why has the state, with its powerful military and intelligence services, failed to decisively dismantle these groups? And why have judges, prosecutors, police officers, and military personnel who oppose terrorism found themselves targeted, unsupported, or even betrayed by their own institutions?

This paper argues that the answer lies not solely in political will or capacity, but in the informal networks that define power and loyalty in Pakistan. These networks—built on kinship, religious affiliation, tribal identity, and longstanding personal relationships—often override official duties and formal institutional roles. Individuals in Pakistan carry contending identities across vertical and horizontal levels that intersect and often conflict with one another - regional ethnic identities (Pushtun, Punjabi, etc) and sub-ethnic identities (Hazaras, Kashmiris, etc); nationalist, sub-nationalist or Islamist sense of being Pakistani; and Islamic or secular way of governance - all which complicate the plurality of Pakistani identities. [1] As a result, individuals within the state apparatus may maintain overlapping ties with terrorist actors, not out of ideological alignment, but because those actors are embedded in their social and familial worlds. This creates a treacherous environment for those who seek to challenge terrorism from within. Judges are assassinated or driven into exile. [2] Army officers are betrayed by their colleagues. [3] Family members of anti-terror officials are kidnapped or killed in retaliation. [4]

Drawing on both sociological theory and real-world case studies, this paper explores the systemic dangers faced by government employees and their families in Pakistan when they oppose terrorism. It examines the historic and ongoing ties between Pakistan's intelligence services and extremist groups and uses firsthand documentation, including expert witness reports I have prepared in support of Pakistani asylum seekers, to illustrate how deeply these informal bonds shape state behavior. These reports involve multiple cases in which judges, military officers, and their relatives were targeted or threatened after resisting terrorist influence. Through this lens, we gain a new understanding of why counterterrorism efforts in Pakistan so often fail—not because of incompetence or unwillingness alone, but because the networks of trust that hold society together are the very same networks that shelter terrorists from accountability. When tribal jirgas, sectarian councils, or kin-based enforcement mechanisms dictate social norms and sanctions, they create a competing legal and moral order. This erodes the

principle of a single, territorially bounded authority and transforms sovereignty from an absolute into a negotiated reality. Counterterrorism efforts in this environment are therefore not simply about defeating armed groups; they are about reasserting the very idea of state supremacy in the face of entrenched parallel systems of power.

This paper applies a social capital framework to these dynamics, exploring how bonds of trust and loyalty, usually seen as social assets, become liabilities in the fight against terrorism. These dynamics mirror patterns observed in Afghanistan during the U.S. intervention, where tribal loyalties and warlord networks undermined state-building efforts, as well as in Iraq, where sectarian militias embedded in kinship networks resisted central authority. Similarly, in northern Nigeria, Boko Haram has leveraged social capital in rural communities to shield its operatives and recruit members. The persistence of terrorism in these contexts underscores a common thread: the strength of informal networks can neutralize formal governance structures, rendering state-centric security strategies insufficient.

2. The Power of Informal Networks in Pakistan

Understanding the persistence of terrorism in Pakistan requires looking beyond formal institutions and into the web of informal relationships that undergird power in the country. In many regions of the world, especially in post-colonial and tribal societies, personal ties often hold more sway than institutional roles or national identity. In Pakistan, these ties, rooted in kinship (*biraderi*), sectarian affiliation, tribal loyalty, and geographic origin, form the basis of trust, access, and protection. They are the connective tissue of society, but they also form the hidden structures through which extremism is often tolerated, shielded, or enabled. [5]

As explored in prior sociological research on social capital, informal networks offer both assets and liabilities. [6] When trust flows within networks, cooperation increases. But when that trust binds individuals to destructive actors, such as terrorist groups, informal ties become a form of social liability, undermining the public good in favor of personal or familial loyalty. In Pakistan, individuals embedded within government institutions, including the military, judiciary, police, and intelligence services, are not isolated bureaucratic actors. They are sons, cousins, tribal elders, or co-religionists. These personal identities are not set aside in the performance of official duties; they coexist with, and often override, the expectations of state service. For instance, police and official state actors customarily accept a *monthly* (adopted from English to refer to a regular bribe accepted by police for protection or to turn a blind eye to corruption); or *through* (also adopted from English, meaning having a spe-

cial connection to an influential person via expensive gifts or bribes). [6] The Pakistani concept of *sifarish*, which is a form of nepotism, or recommendation, [7] exemplifies how deeply these networks shape opportunity and influence. It is expected that those in positions of power will prioritize family and personal acquaintances over merit or law. Similarly, *biraderi*, a broader kinship identity based on common ancestry, creates powerful expectations of loyalty and mutual protection, even when such loyalty undermines the rule of law or national policy. [5, 8]

These informal allegiances extend into the security sphere. Members of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), for example, are not merely intelligence professionals; they are men shaped by the same networks that produce militants. In regions like the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the boundaries between state actor and tribal member, between army officer and cousin of a Taliban commander, can be porous. [7] These overlapping identities have repeatedly allowed extremist actors to find shelter, resources, or silence in the face of their activities. As one case in an expert witness report illustrates, when a military officer attempted to expose terrorist collaboration, he was threatened not only by militants, but by members of his own unit who shared informal ties with the very groups he opposed. From research conducted at the London School of Economics Crisis States Research Centre, “Insurgent commanders confirmed that the ISI are even represented, as participants or observers, on the Taliban supreme leadership council, known as the Quetta Shura, and the Haqqani command council.” [9]

In this context, terrorism in Pakistan cannot be understood solely as an ideological or military phenomenon. It must also be understood as a socially entangled one. The same networks that offer stability and cohesion in Pakistani society also obstruct the pursuit of justice and accountability. Formal structures are often hollow when informal allegiances dictate behavior. For individuals within the system who try to resist terrorism—whether judges, police officers, or military personnel—these ties become deadly. Their attempts to uphold the law are not only professional risks but personal betrayals of a deeper, unwritten code of loyalty. In Pakistan, kinship and sectarian networks operate as quasi-sovereign systems of enforcement and adjudication, which complicates the classical Westphalian assumption that the state enjoys exclusive authority within its borders. These systems blur the lines between state and society, producing a layered sovereignty in which loyalty to tribe or sect often overrides obligations to the nation-state. Similarly, in Iraq, comparable tribal structures offered both protection and bargaining leverage to insurgent groups, complicating U.S. counterinsurgency operations. Likewise, in Afghanistan, the Taliban exploited Pash-tunwali codes of honor and hospitality to gain sanctuary, much like Pakistani militants rely on *biraderi* and sectarian ties. These parallels illustrate that informal social capital can serve as an enduring shield for militant actors across vastly different cultural landscapes.

3. When Social Capital Becomes Social Liability

In the Pakistani context, social capital, the system of deeply embedded trust networks based on *biraderi* (kinship), tribal affiliation, sect, and region, has long served as a stabilizing force. [10] These networks are vital for securing employment, resolving disputes, arranging marriages, and navigating bureaucracy. But in a country where the state apparatus is often weak or distrusted, these informal structures also wield significant power. That power becomes dangerous when it is used to protect those involved in extremist violence, inhibit justice, or punish those who refuse to participate. Leveraging this advantage, some non-state actors like Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Pakistani Taliban, portray themselves as community allies and heroes in order to gain intelligence about security personnel, win political influence in nuclear weapons discourse and access civilian nuclear weapon sites. [11]

What begins as a protective web of belonging can quickly become a trap. In many of the cases I have analyzed, individuals who opposed extremist groups or simply refused to cooperate were marked as traitors—not only by militants but by their own extended families or communities. In tribal areas, it is not uncommon for families to banish or threaten members who are seen as disloyal to group decisions, even if those decisions involve supporting militant factions. Loyalty is enforced not only through persuasion but through fear, shame, and violence. [12]

One man I interviewed, a schoolteacher from Punjab, was branded a collaborator with the government after refusing to allow his classroom to be used for extremist indoctrination. Rather than support him, his own cousins—members of a powerful *biraderi* with ties to a local militant group—turned on him. He fled the region after multiple threats and a violent attack that left him hospitalized. His story is not unique. In another case, a judge who handed down rulings against known militants found himself increasingly isolated within his own extended family, some of whom viewed his actions as endangering their tribal alliances and personal safety. [12]

The concept of *social liability*—the idea that relationships can impose dangerous obligations—is not new. But in Pakistan, where state authority competes with informal loyalties, it becomes especially relevant. *As theorized by scholars of social capital, strong bonding ties within a community can increase cohesion, but they can also enforce conformity and punish deviance, particularly in collectivist or kin-based societies.* [13] Trust, once weaponized, can enable impunity for militants and paralyze those seeking justice. As I wrote in my earlier work, “*Social capital becomes social liability when the bonds of loyalty protect actors whose behavior threatens the public good.*” [12]

In such an environment, counterterrorism efforts are not only about confronting armed groups—they are about navigating the invisible but binding threads of loyalty that under-

gird Pakistani society. Effective counterterrorism requires local inclusion, national authority, and international coordination as complementary forces working together. Unless these threads are acknowledged and addressed, they will continue to hinder both legal accountability and the broader struggle for peace and stability.

4. Case Studies from Expert Witness Reports

The following six anonymized case studies are drawn from expert witness reports I prepared in asylum proceedings. While not all involve direct encounters with militant organizations, each one highlights the same deeply rooted informal systems—biraderi, tribal allegiance, sectarian affiliation, and religious orthodoxy—that protect extremists and obstruct state intervention. These networks enforce loyalty, punish dissent, and create an atmosphere of fear and surveillance. In doing so, they shield violent actors from accountability and paralyze Pakistan's formal institutions in their efforts to confront extremism. The stories below demonstrate how social capital becomes social liability, and how Pakistan's counterterrorism failure is as much about cultural allegiance as it is about state capacity.

4.1. A Marriage That Defied Tribal Authority

A Pakistani couple married across tribal lines, defying the bride's father, a powerful tribal leader. Their union was viewed as a betrayal of family honor. They were forced into hiding for two years, during which the wife suffered a miscarriage from undue stress. Even after fleeing the country, the husband's brother was attacked in retaliation many years later. This case highlights how tribal codes are enforced across generations, across borders, and over decades with retribution meted out by extended networks that function independently of state oversight.

4.2. Sectarian Identity and Collective Abandonment

A Shia professional who married outside his sect was targeted by Sunni extremist groups and socially ostracized by his extended family. As threats escalated, local tribal authorities refused to intervene, and he and his wife were forced to flee. His case demonstrates how sectarianism, amplified by kinship and community ties, isolates individuals and enables militant actors to operate with impunity in areas where social cohesion outweighs state authority.

4.3. Apostasy and the Enforcement of Religious Control

A Pakistani Christian woman from Peshawar was tricked

into signing a conversion and Islamic marriage document. When she sought to annul it, she was abducted, raped, and repeatedly told that apostasy was punishable by death. For nearly two decades, she and her family endured threats, intimidation, and forced religious indoctrination attempts. Her case exemplifies how mosque-linked networks and extended kin groups enforce religious orthodoxy far beyond the reach of the state.

4.4. Social Networks as Instruments of Religious and Familial Enforcement

A woman who secretly practiced Christianity while married to a Muslim man became a target of both her in-laws and local religious militants. One child was kidnapped in an attempt to forcibly reclaim him, and her husband survived an attempted shooting. The threats were delivered and enforced not only by extremist actors but by extended family and neighbors—many of whom refused to intervene. This case illustrates how familial and religious networks operate as mechanisms of ideological enforcement and an entire extended community becomes complicit in moral justification of allegiance to the wrongdoer.

4.5. Targeting the Families of Anti-Terror Officials

A Shia professional from a family of government officials became a target after his father, a judge, and brother, a military officer, took public stances against militant violence. Both were attacked, and the professional himself was monitored by suspected extremists. Appeals for protection were denied by local authorities. His case illustrates how informal allegiances within state structures can neutralize legal authority, leaving even government families vulnerable when social or sectarian loyalties interfere with formal enforcement.

4.6. Generational Punishment for Breaking Tribal Codes

A woman fled Pakistan after refusing an arranged marriage to a cousin and later giving birth to two children out of wedlock. Tribal and family members issued explicit death threats, and her return was described as certain to provoke honor killing. One of her children has autism, a condition that carries heavy stigma in Pakistan and is often treated as a moral failing. Her case demonstrates how informal networks dictate multi-generational codes of punishment that transcend legal norms and render state protection meaningless.

These six cases, though diverse in circumstance, each illuminate how Pakistan's informal networks operate as systems of surveillance, punishment, and ideological enforcement. Whether driven by tribal honor, sectarian loyalty, or religious orthodoxy, these networks often override state law and insulate violent actors from accountability. Individuals

who challenge or fall outside these norms—through inter-tribal marriage, religious conversion, dissent, or professional affiliation—find themselves not only unsupported by the state but actively endangered by their communities. These examples make clear that efforts to combat terrorism in Pakistan in all its forms will remain ineffective so long as these informal systems of loyalty and protection are not addressed directly. This is evident in Pakistan's blasphemy laws which are frequently misused to target dissenters of commonly held traditions and beliefs, leading to extrajudicial killings by both the community and the police. While more common that mob retribution escalates into killing of the blasphemer, In one case in 2024, a man accused of Blasphemy for insulting the prophet Mohammed, was killed by police while in custody. Despite this, the family of the victim forgave them because the accused had hurt the sentiments of Islam. [14]

5. Implications for Counterterrorism Policy in Pakistan

Efforts to counter terrorism in Pakistan have long been framed as a question of institutional reform: improving intelligence coordination, securing borders, regulating madrassas, or enhancing law enforcement capacity. While these reforms are necessary, they are insufficient. What remains largely unaddressed is the invisible but deeply entrenched social infrastructure that enables extremist actors to operate with impunity—and in many cases, with community protection or silence. These cases suggest that Pakistan's struggle is not an anomaly but part of a wider geopolitical pattern. Lessons from other conflict zones reinforce this conclusion. In Afghanistan, billions in international aid and military intervention failed to dismantle insurgent safe havens because strategies focused on technical reforms rather than the tribal and familial networks sustaining the insurgency. In Iraq, the U.S. eventually shifted toward the 'Sons of Iraq' initiative, which sought to realign informal loyalties rather than bypass them.

The case studies presented in this report underscore a critical but underexamined reality: informal networks of kinship, tribe, sect, and religious affiliation not only obstruct formal law enforcement efforts but actively protect extremist actors and punish those who challenge them. These networks do not simply co-exist with formal institutions; they override them.

In tribal and rural areas—as well as many urban contexts—loyalty to one's biraderi, sect, or tribal identity often takes precedence over allegiance to the state. Communities may shield known militants out of fear, ideological alignment, or obligations of family honor. Even when government officials identify and pursue extremist actors, they often encounter resistance not from the militants themselves, but from local elders, clerics, or relatives who see cooperation with state forces as a betrayal of social cohesion.

As the International Crisis Group has documented, "the state's reliance on tribal intermediaries and failure to disrupt

patronage networks has allowed militant actors to embed themselves within social structures" [15]

At the same time, individuals who attempt to resist extremism—whether judges, military officers, teachers, or ordinary citizens—often face isolation, retaliation, or abandonment. Their families may be attacked, their communities may withhold protection, and their institutions may remain silent. As Human Rights Watch has observed, "Law enforcement and judicial authorities often fail to intervene when perpetrators are protected by local or tribal networks". [16] These informal systems effectively suppress dissent and enforce silence.

This dual structure of a visible legal system and an invisible but binding social order has produced a situation in which formal counterterrorism mechanisms are routinely neutralized. One of the most striking examples of this reality was the discovery of *Osama bin Laden living in Abbottabad*, a prominent military garrison town, for nearly six years without detection. Despite being the most wanted man in the world, bin Laden was shielded by silence, complicity, and local social networks that prioritized loyalty and discretion over legal duty. [17] His case underscores the degree to which *informal loyalties can create protective zones even in the heart of the national security establishment*.

The U.S. Department of State has repeatedly noted that Pakistan has made "limited progress" in eliminating safe havens and prosecuting known terrorist groups, in part due to the persistent "local tolerance" and "lack of community cooperation" [18]. The implications are clear: *when militants are embedded in trusted social systems, and when loyalty to those systems outweighs trust in the state, extremists are not merely tolerated, they are structurally enabled*.

Addressing this challenge requires more than technical reform; it requires grappling with the conceptual erosion of sovereignty itself. Pakistan operates within a fractured political order where competing networks of power hold significant autonomy. This stands in contrast to the Westphalian ideal of centralized, indivisible sovereignty and demonstrates that in contexts of strong informal systems, state legitimacy cannot be assumed—it must be continually negotiated.

Any serious counterterrorism strategy in Pakistan must therefore go beyond technical reform. It must confront the informal architectures of loyalty and protection that allow extremism to persist. This means recognizing the role of tribal justice systems, sectarian allegiances, religious enforcement networks, and family honor in shielding violent actors. Without addressing these cultural foundations, any policy aimed at rooting out terrorism will remain incomplete—and ultimately ineffective.

6. Social Capital as a Double-Edged Sword in Muslim Societies

While this paper focuses on Pakistan, its insights are high-

ly applicable to other Muslim-majority countries where informal networks are central to social organization. In such contexts, social capital, defined as the web of trust, mutual obligation, and reciprocal relationships, functions as both a lifeline and a leash. [14, 19] These networks provide resilience where state institutions are weak, but they can also entrench systems of control, hierarchy, and ideological enforcement. Historic distrust of authority and government institutions may partially be the outcome of stronger informal networks that keep local power dynamics and allegiances stronger. One begets the other in a vicious cycle - fear of retaliation and protection from state agencies reinforces stronger community dynamics.

In many Middle Eastern, North African, and South Asian societies, social capital is not merely a social resource; it is the primary form of power. Access to education, employment, housing, protection, and even justice often flows through kinship ties, tribal affiliations, religious networks, and neighborhood alliances. Loyalty to these networks is expected, enforced, and often prioritized over national identity or institutional norms. The same principle applies in Afghanistan's rural provinces, where kinship ties trumped NATO-backed state authority, for instance. Cross-national comparisons emphasize that any counterterrorism strategy must engage not only with armed actors but also with the cultural and social ecosystems that sustain them.

These patterns challenge not only counterterrorism strategies but core assumptions about the nature of sovereignty in the modern state system. The persistence of informal governance in Pakistan, and similarly in Afghanistan and Iraq, exposes the limitations of the Westphalian model in regions where loyalty to kin or sect rivals that of the state. When enforcement power lies outside formal institutions, sovereignty is no longer singular but fragmented, producing what scholars describe as hybrid political orders. Recognizing this reality is essential for any policy framework that seeks to engage with, rather than ignore, the social forces shaping these environments.

This makes counterterrorism uniquely difficult. When extremists are embedded within these trust-based systems, any challenge to them is not simply a legal act—it is a rupture of social fabric. Individuals who cooperate with government forces against militants may be viewed not as heroes, but as traitors to their communities. As seen in Pakistan, this social logic transforms social capital into *social liability*, exposing individuals to violence, ostracism, and intergenerational retribution.

The lesson for policymakers and scholars is clear: security strategies must address the informal social architecture that shapes behavior. Programs that strengthen state legitimacy, build trust in institutions, and create alternative pathways for social mobility may be more effective in the long term than purely militarized approaches. Without this broader lens, counterterrorism efforts in many Muslim-majority societies will remain reactive, brittle, and incomplete.

7. Conclusion

Pakistan's failure to effectively combat terrorism is often framed in terms of governance deficits, weak enforcement, or institutional corruption. While these issues are undeniably real, this paper has argued that they are only part of the story. The more fundamental challenge lies in the enduring strength of informal networks—tribal, sectarian, familial, and religious—that shape behavior, enforce norms, and dictate allegiance across vast segments of Pakistani society.

These networks are not marginal or peripheral to the country's security landscape; they are central. They function as parallel systems of power that often override state institutions, protecting militant actors and punishing those who resist or dissent. Whether in the tribal enforcement of honor codes, the shielding of extremists by sectarian kin groups, or the abandonment of civil servants who confront militant interests, the result is the same: the state is neither feared by terrorists nor trusted by citizens.

This is the paradox at the heart of Pakistan's counterterrorism dilemma. Extremists are not just hiding in remote caves or lawless frontiers; they are embedded in villages, neighborhoods, mosques, and families. They are protected not only by arms, but by silence, by loyalty, and by the deeply ingrained cultural logic of informal power. Until this architecture is acknowledged and addressed, no amount of formal reform will be enough to break the grip of extremism.

This paper has proposed a social capital framework for understanding that structure more clearly. In many Muslim-majority societies, including Pakistan, social capital is not just a cultural feature; it is the dominant currency of power. Kinship, religious affiliation, and tribal ties determine access to resources, protection, and legitimacy. These networks provide stability in weak states, but they also bind individuals to collective identities that resist state authority and protect violent actors.

When these bonds shift from being assets to liabilities, and when they enforce silence, punish dissent, and reward complicity, they transform social capital into social liability. This shift has dire consequences for those who resist terrorism, as illustrated through the expert witness cases detailed in this paper. Judges, teachers, military officers, and ordinary citizens become targets not just of extremist violence but of communal abandonment. The very networks that sustain daily life become mechanisms of repression.

The implications extend beyond Pakistan. In many Muslim societies where informal loyalty networks shape public behavior, counterterrorism cannot succeed without addressing the social forces that enable extremism. Taking a social capital approach allows policymakers to see why military or institutional reforms alone so often fail, and why effective strategies must engage with the deeper social structures in which terrorism is embedded.

To make progress, Pakistan, and others facing similar challenges, must develop strategies that do more than target

organizations. They must also unravel the social protections that allow those organizations to survive. This requires confronting uncomfortable truths about where power resides, who enforces it, and why the state has failed to earn the loyalty of those it seeks to protect. Without such a reckoning, terrorism will remain not just a security problem, but a structural feature of society. Countering informal extremist networks cannot succeed through unilateral state action alone, rather a multi-level governance approach must be employed that mobilizes local, national, and international actors in a coordinated effort involving social and ideological spheres where these networks draw their strength.

Abbreviations

M.	Michael
USA	United States America
ISA	Inter-Services Intelligence
FATA	Administered Tribal Areas
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Author Contributions

Shaul M. Gabbay is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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