Military Pressure as a Factor in Taliban Propaganda Videos

In 2019, Robinson and Dauber developed a matrix for the evaluation of extremist propaganda, and used it to demonstrate that the allied bombing campaign against the Islamic State had a substantial effect on the quality of IS propaganda products (Robinson and Dauber, 2019). The assessment of the technical quality of propaganda, therefore, could also serve as a way to measure the effectiveness of military campaigns. This project inverts that research. Over the last several years, the propaganda materials of the Taliban have taken several obvious jumps in quality. Also over the last several years, there have been key inflection points in terms of external events, US troop draw downs, the appearance of Islamic State in the area, and in terms of technology more capable cell phone handsets and networks available. This study begins the process of a large-scale recreation of Robinson and Dauber’s original process with a proof-of-concept: we will look at 10 videos from after the last major American troop draw down in 2015, evaluating them using the matrix and analyzing the results. It is our hypothesis that the reduction of military pressure on the Taliban gave the space and the freedom to increasingly experiment with producing higher and higher quality propaganda videos, a trajectory that is not likely to reverse with further American troop withdrawals.