

COUNTERTERRORISM STRATEGY INITIATIVE POLICY PAPER

THE BATTLE FOR AFGHANISTAN

Militancy and Conflict in Kandahar

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As Afghanistan's cultural and political heartland, Kandahar is a province of key strategic importance for foreign forces, the Afghan government, and the insurgency.

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Executive Summary

As Afghanistan's cultural and political heartland, Kandahar is a province of key strategic importance for foreign forces, the Afghan government, and the insurgency. A sizable chunk of the Taliban's senior leadership hails from the province, and the cultural and political dynamics of rural Kandahar shape aspects of the movement's character to this day. This study attempts to understand the Taliban of Kandahar by looking at the factors that spurred their rise and the networks and structures through which they operate. The findings include:

- The Taliban's resurgence in Kandahar post-2001 was not inevitable or preordained. The Taliban—from senior leadership levels down to the rank and file—by and large surrendered to the new government and retired to their homes. But in the early years after 2001, there was a lack of a genuine, broad-based reconciliation process in which the Taliban leadership would be allowed to surrender in exchange for amnesty and protection from persecution. Rather, foreign forces and their proxies pursued an unrelenting drive against former regime members, driving many of them to flee to Pakistan and launch an insurgency.

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MAP BY GENE THORP OF CARTOGRAPHIC CONCEPTS, INC.

Once the Taliban leadership decided to stand against the Afghan government and its foreign backers, they were able to take advantage of growing disillusionment in the countryside. In particular, the dominance of one particular set of tribes caused members of other, marginalized tribes to look to the insurgency as a source of protection and access to resources. The weakness of the judiciary and police forced many to turn to the Taliban's provision of law and order, while widespread torture and abuse at the hands of pro-government strongmen eroded government support. At the same time, the heavy-handed tactics of U.S. forces turned many against the foreign presence.

- Despite popular belief, the Taliban in Kandahar cannot easily be divided into an “ideological core” and rank-and-file fighters motivated mainly by material concerns. After 2001, most senior Taliban leaders in the province had accepted the new government, or at least rejected it but declined to fight against it. Most did not invoke the notion of *jihād* as an immediate reaction to the new government. Rather, only after a protracted campaign against former Taliban did many of them feel they had no place in the new state of affairs and began to see the presence of the government and foreign fighters as necessitating *jihād*. And after the emergence of the insurgency, there were a number of attempts by senior leaders to come to terms with the Afghan government, yet at the same time there were very few attempts to do so by rank-and-file field commanders.
- The Taliban have developed an intricate shadow government apparatus. At the top is the shadow governor, who works closely with a body called the Military Commission. In theory, the governor directs strategy, coordinates with leadership in Pakistan, and liaises with other actors in the province, while the Military Commission adjudicates disputes and serves in an advisory role. There is also a detailed district-level apparatus, including shadow district governors and, in some districts police chiefs and district shuras.
- Parallel to this formal structure are numerous informal networks through which the Taliban make decisions and

propagate influence. Although there are detailed mechanisms in place, involving the provincial shadow apparatus, to deal with battlefield strategy or intra-Taliban disputes, many times strategic decisions or punitive actions are taken through informal means. These include cases where senior leaders in Pakistan direct operations through their network of commanders in Kandahar.

- Contrary to popular perception, the Taliban in Kandahar do not appear to receive regular salaries. Rather, each commander is responsible for raising funds for his group, which is typically done through capturing spoils in operations or collecting (sometimes forcefully) local taxes. Some funding also comes from external sources, such as merchants in Pakistan and wealthy donors in the Persian Gulf states.
- In addition to winning support from marginalized communities and offering law and order, the Taliban were able to gain influence through severe intimidation and widespread human rights abuses. Moreover, a brutal assassination campaign against anyone even remotely connected to the government—tribal elders, government officials, aid workers, religious clerics, and others—succeeded in widening the gap between the local communities and the government.
- The Taliban's rise in Kandahar after 2001 can be divided into four periods. From 2001 to 2004, the group was involved in reorganizing itself, resuscitating old networks, and forging new connections. Between 2004 and 2006, the burgeoning movement was focused on consolidating itself, while winning rank-and-file recruits outside those who had worked with the Taliban in the 1990s; it began to amass members in large numbers. A turning point came in the western part of the province in 2006, when the Taliban suffered a major battlefield loss against foreign forces in Operation Medusa. This was one factor that spurred the next phase, asymmetric warfare, between 2006 and 2009. These years were marked by the increased use of suicide bombings and roadside attacks. The year 2010 marks a new phase in the struggle. While the insurgents are still relying heavily on

suicide attacks and roadside bombs, foreign troops are giving unprecedented attention to the province, and violence has escalated to levels not previously seen in this war.

Methodology

The information in this study is drawn from interviews with Taliban members at all levels (including the senior leadership), Afghan government officials (including, but not limited to, district and provincial officials, lawmakers, and intelligence officials), and U.S. and NATO military personnel (including, but not limited to, officers and enlisted soldiers in the field, and intelligence officers). This reporting is supplemented by a variety of publicly available written sources, including news articles, research monographs, and books. Some of the interviews were conducted during my work as a journalist in Afghanistan for more than two years, in which time I visited Kandahar (and many of its districts) many times. This reporting includes many occasions when I traveled with Taliban forces or U.S. troops in the districts, and other cases when I traveled on my own. In particular, many of the interviews were conducted during trips I made to the province in the summer of 2010.

In many instances, sources spoke on the condition of anonymity due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the tense security situation in Kandahar. Every story or anecdote from a source was cross-checked with at least one other independent source. I list the names and positions of Taliban commanders only when this information is widely known in Kandahar, the commanders themselves gave permission to include it, or U.S. personnel indicated that they had knowledge of it.

Introduction

In the early morning hours of July 20, 2010, a group of armed men approached a home in the Mahal-i-Nijat area of Kandahar city. They asked to speak to Ghulam, an

employee of a nongovernmental organization. When he appeared, they declared that he was under arrest by the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan for working with foreigners. They tied him and his cousin to a nearby electric pole, shot them, and left their bodies there under the moonlight, for all to see.¹

It was a move as audacious as it was indicative of the Taliban's growing reach. Unlike in many other urban centers in Afghanistan, the Taliban have been able to penetrate deep into Kandahar city. In 2009 they even set up checkpoints in the heart of the provincial capital, close to the attorney general's office.² The Taliban's growing power—indeed, they now have de facto control of most of Kandahar's districts and parts of the city—prompted plans for a major U.S. offensive in the province sometime in 2010.

Such plans were also an admission of the province's position as the country's political and cultural crucible, a role it has played for centuries. The majority of Afghanistan's rulers in its history—including the current president, Hamid Karzai—have hailed from the sun-baked province. And in 1994, from the dusty riverbeds west of Kandahar city, came a group of religious students bringing a strict version of Islamic justice to the then-warring country. The Taliban, a group of mullahs largely from greater Kandahar, went on to capture most of Afghanistan. When the movement collapsed following the U.S.-led invasion of 2001, in the wake of al-Qaeda's 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington, the insurgency that eventually emerged was led predominantly by these same mullahs. Today, in many ways, Kandahar is the heart of the insurgency, and many believe that progress there is key to the entire war.

The insurgency in Kandahar can only be understood by examining the factors that motivate it and the structures through which it operates. This study aims to do both, and in the process illustrate that the Taliban's resurgence in Kandahar was not at all inevitable, nor was it simply due to

a lack of resources or will from the international community.

Part I: The Taliban in Kandahar: Causes and Motivations

- The resurgence of the Taliban in Kandahar was not preordained simply because the province was their “spiritual home.” Nor was it merely a result of a lack of troop presence in the early years. Rather, it was due to specific policies pursued by the Kandahar government and its American backers. A significant part of the senior Taliban leadership in Kandahar had surrendered or attempted to surrender to the Afghan government. But intense harassment left many of them with the feeling that there was no option but to flee to Pakistan and reorganize their movement. Increased troop presence would not likely have changed the dynamic, since the problem was political—the lack of a reconciliation process—rather than military.
- Once the Taliban’s leadership fled to Pakistan and decided to fight against the Afghan government and foreign forces in the country, they were able to build support in disaffected communities that were excluded from power and resources in the post-2001 world. These include, but are not limited to, second- and third-tier tribal communities such as Panjpai Durrani, victims of government abuse, victims of mistreatment by the foreign forces, the unemployed, and opium poppy cultivators (who were the target of anti-drug campaigns).

Origins

The leaders of today’s insurgency were born into a rural, conservative, and isolated world.^a Almost all of those living outside of Kandahar city were engaged in either subsistence farming or various forms of sharecropping. There was little access to news or other media outside of the city. In village

life, most locals followed the practice of *purdah*, the strict segregation of the sexes. Social mobility was limited and education offered little value to those working the land.³

At the time, the central government was strongest in the city, with traditional notables—maleks, khans, and tribal elders—holding the most authority in the rural areas. Tribal politics was deeply entwined with governance, and tribal membership often influenced one’s ability to access resources and state services. Pashtun tribes such as the Popalzais, Alikozais, and Barakzais formed a sort of tribal aristocracy, with deep ties to the ruling apparatus in Kabul and Kandahar.^b These tribes were often given choice land, and their members usually filled the high ranks of government. In chronically underdeveloped areas like Panjwayi, Zheray, and Maiwand, to the west of Kandahar city, the majority of the wealthiest landowners were Alikozais and Barakzais, while members of the many other less-favored tribes worked their land.

State services were limited and many Kandahari families—especially those in neglected areas like Panjwayi—sent their sons to study in madrassas, the religious schools that offered free room and board and the possibility of employment. This trend accelerated in the late 1970s as Pakistan financed a boom in madrasa construction throughout the border areas. After the rise of the Communists in Afghanistan in the late 1970s, the government’s targeting of tribal elders and the resulting call to *jihad* precipitated a shift in power and prestige toward religious clergy.⁴

^a This study focuses exclusively on the Taliban. Hizb-i-Islami, another major Afghan insurgent group, has today a minimal presence in Kandahar.

^b In particular, the Muhammadzai tribe—sometimes thought of as a clan of the Barakzais, sometimes as an independent tribe—provided a number of rulers.

Commander	Tribe	Origin	Position in the Insurgency
Mullah Muhammed Omar	Hotak	Deh Rawud, Uruzgan	Supreme leader/figurehead
Mullah Beradar	Popalzai	Deh Rawud, Uruzgan	Leader of the Quetta Shura, 2006-2010
Mullah Hassan Akhund	Babar	Soonzi, Arghandab	On-and-off member of the Quetta Shura and military shuras
Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansur	Ishaqzai	Band-i-Timor, Maiwand	Leader of the Quetta Shura, 2010
Tayeb Agha	Sayed	Kandahar	On-and-off member of the Quetta Shura and financial committee, envoy of Mullah Omar
Mullah Dadullah	Kakar	Deh Rawud, Uruzgan	Member of the Quetta Shura, military shuras, frontline commander as well, killed in 2007
Hafiz Majid	Noorzai	Sperwan, Panjwayi	Member of the Quetta Shura, 2010

Figure 1. A Sample of Commanders of Taliban Fronts in Kandahar in the 1980s and Their Positions in the Post-2001 Insurgency

It is partly for these reasons that when the countryside exploded in resistance against the Soviet occupation in 1980, southern Afghanistan—and western Kandahar in particular—saw the emergence of semi-autonomous mullah-led mujahedeen groups. These “Taliban fronts” typically consisted of a mullah and madrassa students and were usually nominally linked to one of the seven major mujahedeen parties.^c Many (but certainly not all) of these

mullah-commanders came from underserved regions like Panjwayi and marginalized tribes like the Noorzais. Some hailed from a long line of mullahs, and some were orphans. As Mullah Abdul Salaam Zaeef, a 1990s-era Taliban official who fought in these fronts against the Russians, explains, the Taliban fronts were often more religiously strict than other mujahedeen factions:

“Fighting alongside the Taliban meant more than just being a *mujahed*. The Taliban followed a strict routine in which everyone who fought alongside us had to participate, without exception. We woke before sunrise to perform the *fajr* or morning prayer in the mosque ... we would recite *Surat Yasin Sharif* every morning in case we were martyred that day. ... Apart from dire emergencies

^c Nationally, these seven parties were made up of four “fundamentalist” groups: Jamiat-i-Islami, led by Burhanuddin Rabbani, Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Hizb-i-Islami Khalis, led by Mawlawi Younis Khalis, and Ittihad-i-Islami, led by Abdul Rasoul Sayyaf; one traditionalist party, Herakat-i-Inqalabi Islami, led by Mullah Muhammad Nabi; and two royalist groups, Mahaz-i-Mill Islami (led by Pir Gailani) and Jabha-e-Najat-e-Milli (by Sibghatullah Mujaddeddi). In Kandahar there was another group, Fedayeen-i-Islam, that eventually broke from the mujahedeen ranks and allied with the Afghan government.

during operations or enemy assaults, the mujahedeen were engaged in [religious] study. Senior Taliban members would teach younger seekers, and the senior *mawlawis* would instruct other older Taliban members. ... Not all the fronts worked in this manner, but we were Taliban and this was our way. We wanted to stay clean, to avoid sinning, and to regulate our behavior.”⁵

Associated with some Taliban fronts were Taliban judges, religious clerics who would adjudicate disputes based on their interpretation of Islamic law, or *sharia*. Given the frequent squabbles between commanders over spoils, the fractious nature of tribal society, and the failure of the state to deliver judicial services to the countryside, the need for an effective justice system was paramount. The Taliban courts were extremely popular for this reason, and they remain so even today.

From the embers of the anti-Soviet insurgency emerged the core leadership of today’s insurgency. Many of those who later served on the Quetta Shura, the movement’s senior leadership body based in Quetta, Pakistan, served in the Taliban fronts, as Figure 1 shows.⁶ Upon the Soviet exodus, Kandahar fell into chaos as mujahedeen commanders from the seven major parties carved up the province for themselves. By 1994, tales of rape and plunder became widespread, prompting Taliban commanders, who had been sitting aside during this civil war, to rise up against these warlords. These Taliban commanders saw their role as restorative (rescuing jihad from the hands of rapacious commanders who were using it for their own ends) and judicial (halting the conflict-fueled breakdown of society by installing their interpretation of Islamic law).

Kandaharis and Afghans from neighboring provinces dominated the resulting Taliban movement and government. To this day, greater Kandahar has provided the bulk of the Taliban’s leadership.

2001-2006: Causes for the Taliban’s Resurgence in Kandahar

The Taliban were initially greeted with enthusiasm from the war-torn south, dominated by the Pashtun ethnic group. The Taliban mullahs were already well respected in rural Kandahari society, as described above. Once the Taliban were in power, some of their strictures went against the grain of traditional rural Pashtun society, such as the banning of music, but others fit neatly with the prevailing culture, such as their approach toward women.

By the close of the 1990s, however, unending war, joblessness, and underdevelopment had eroded the Taliban’s support in rural Kandahar.

By the close of the 1990s, however, unending war, joblessness, and underdevelopment had eroded the Taliban’s support in rural Kandahar. When U.S.-led forces invaded in 2001, the Taliban were little match for the overwhelming American firepower, and the population seemed unwilling to side with the failing government against the foreigners. Kandahar city fell on Dec. 7, 2001, prompting Mullah Omar and other senior Taliban leaders to flee to Pakistan. The former mujahedeen commanders Gul Agha Sherzai, of the Barakzai tribe, and Mullah Naqib, a leader of the Alikozais, feuded for control of the city (much like they had in the early 1990s, before the Taliban’s emergence).⁷ The U.S. forces backed Sherzai, and within two days of Kandahar’s fall he was appointed governor. Over the next few years, Sherzai and his network of commanders would do much to alienate the population and spark the Taliban’s resurgence.

The Victor's Hubris and Failure of Reconciliation

Just as Kandahar was falling, fissures appeared in the Taliban movement. As most of the government was crumbling—Kabul and other major cities had fallen, leaving just Kandahar, Helmand, and Zabul provinces still under Taliban control—some of Mullah Omar's chief lieutenants secretly gathered and decided to surrender to the forces of Hamid Karzai.⁸ This group included Tayeb Agha, at one point Mullah Omar's top aide; Mullah Beradar, a former governor and key military commander; Sayed Muhammad Haqqani, the former ambassador to Pakistan; Mullah Obaidullah, the defense minister; Mullah Abdul Razzak, the interior minister; and many others.

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The group, represented by Obaidullah, delivered a letter to Karzai—then en route from Uruzgan to Kandahar city, one of the Taliban's last standing urban strongholds.^d The letter accepted Karzai's recent selection at the Bonn Conference as the country's interim leader and acknowledged that the Islamic Emirate (the official name of the Taliban government) had no chance of surviving. The Taliban officials also told Karzai that the senior leaders who signed the letter had permission from Mullah Omar to surrender. That same day, Taliban officials agreed to relinquish Kandahar city, and opposition forces successfully entered the city 48 hours later. The surrendered Taliban leaders continued to exchange a number of messages with the new government to work out the terms of their abdication.

^d This event took place on December 5, when Karzai was near the Dahla Dam in Shah Wali Kot district. In addition to receiving the letter, he was also actively negotiating with the Taliban officials about the surrender of Kandahar city.

The main request of the Taliban officials in this group was to be given immunity from arrest in exchange for agreeing to abstain from political life.⁹ At this juncture, these leading Taliban members (as well as the rank and file) did not appear to view the government and its foreign backers as necessitating a 1980s-type jihad. Some members even saw the new government as Islamic and legitimate.¹⁰ Indeed, Mullah Obaidullah and other former Taliban officials even surrendered to Afghan authorities in early 2002.¹¹ But Karzai and other government officials ignored the overtures—largely due to pressures from the United States and the Northern Alliance, the Taliban's erstwhile enemy.¹² Moreover, some Pashtun commanders who had been ousted by the Taliban seven years earlier were eager for revenge and were opposed to allowing former Taliban officials to go unpunished.^e Widespread intimidation and harassment of these former Taliban ensued. Sympathetic figures in the government told Haqqani and others in the group that they should flee the country, for they would not be safe in Afghanistan. So the men eventually vanished across the border into Pakistan's Baluchistan province. Many of the signatories of the letter were to become leading figures in the insurgency. Mullah Obaidullah became a key deputy of Mullah Omar and one of the insurgency's leading strategists, playing an important role in rallying the scattered Taliban remnants to rebel against the Americans.^f Sayed Muhammad Haqqani is an important participant in the Taliban's political activities. Tayeb Agha has been a leading member of the Taliban's financial committee and has served on the Quetta Shura, in addition to being one of Mullah Omar's envoys. Mullah Beradar became the day-to-day leader of the entire movement. Mullah Abdul Razaq, based in Chaman, Pakistan (across the border from Spin

^e In Kandahar, they included the commanders of Gul Agha Sherzai. In Uruzgan, Jan Muhammad Khan (who had been imprisoned by the Taliban) and, in Helmand, strongman and eventual governor Sher Muhammad Akhundzada are in this category.

^f Pakistan arrested Obaidullah in 2007 and released him in a prisoner exchange later that year, only to re-arrest and release him the next year. He appears to no longer have a direct role in the Taliban leadership.

Boldak), is an important weapons and cash facilitator for the Taliban and has ties to the Kandahar insurgency.¹³

The alienation of leading former Taliban commanders in Kandahar would become a key motivating factor in sparking the insurgency there. Kandahar’s governor, Gul Agha Sherzai, had initially taken a conciliatory attitude toward former Taliban figures. But his close ties with U.S. special forces, who often posted rewards for top Taliban

others—became synonymous with abuse. Some of these men had a role in provincial government: Khalid Pashtun was Sherzai’s spokesman, for example, and Karam was an official of Afghanistan’s intelligence agency, the National Directorate of Security (NDS).

These commanders targeted men formerly associated with the Taliban, often torturing them in secret prisons, according to numerous tribal elders, government officials,

Commander	Area of Retirement	Current Area of Operation	Reasons for Rejoining Taliban
Malim Feda Muhammad	Panjwayi	Panjwayi-Zheray and Pakistan	Abused by Americans
Hajji Lala	Kandahar city	Dand, Kandahar city, Maiwand	Harassed by Zheray strongman Habibullah Jan. Lala is believed to have been killed.
Mullah Ahmad Shah	Panjwayi	Panjwayi	Tortured by Sherzai’s forces
Qari Allahuddin	Panjwayi	Panjwayi-Zheray	Brother of Ahmad Shah
Mullah Saleh Muhammad Akhund	Panjwayi	Panjwayi-Zheray	Harassed by Sherzai’s forces
Kaka Abdul Khaliq	Panjwayi	Panjwayi-Zheray	Harassed by Sherzai’s forces
Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansur	Maiwand	National	Harassment of other former Taliban
Mullah Muhammad Akhundzada	Panjwayi	Panjwayi-Zheray	Harassed by Sherzai’s forces
Mullah Rashid	Panjwayi	Panjwayi-Zheray	Harassed by Sherzai’s forces
Mullah Abdul Khaliq	Zheray	Panjwayi-Zheray	Harassed by Sherzai’s forces
Khalifa	Zheray	Panjwayi-Zheray	Harassed by Sherzai’s forces

Figure 2. Taliban Commanders in Kandahar Who Rejoined After Harassment by Afghan Officials or U.S. Forces

leaders, as well as isolated attacks against the government and the possibility of exploiting his position for financial gain, eventually led to a retaliatory approach. The provincial government began to harass former Taliban commanders, usually mid-level military figures, who had remained behind in Kandahar. A group of Sherzai’s commanders—Khalid Pashtun, Zhed Gulalai, Karam, Agha Shah, and

and Taliban members. Famous in the Mushan village cluster of Panjwayi district, for instance, is the case of Mullah Ahmad Shah. Shah, a former Taliban official and military commander who had surrendered, was at home in the early months of the Sherzai government. Karam and his men arrested Shah and some others on charges of having weapons, took them to a Kandahar city NDS prison, and

tortured them. Hajji Fazel Muhammad, who led a group of tribal elders from Panjwayi to the city to try to secure their release, recalled the scene at the prison:

We met them in jail and saw that their feet were swollen. Their hands and feet had been tied for days, and they told us that the prison guards would roll them around on the ground. They also beat them with cables. [The prisoners] were begging us to tell the guards to just kill them so that they could be put out of their misery.¹⁴

Shah was kept in custody for about three weeks, until his family members purchased weapons simply to hand over to the authorities to get him freed. But the men were arrested again and Shah's family was forced to sell all of their livestock so they could pay a bribe to the authorities. A short while later, Shah and others were arrested for a third time and held for 44 days, until immense pressure from tribal elders brought about their release. Shah and his brothers soon fled to Pakistan, joined the burgeoning Taliban insurgency, and returned to Panjwayi as Taliban fighters. Today Shah is the head of the Taliban's main court in Mushan. His brothers Qari Allahuddin and Qari Muhammad Sadiq, along with two other siblings, are also Taliban commanders active in Panjwayi.¹⁵

The failure to grant amnesty to Taliban figures who had abandoned the movement and accepted the new Afghan government had repercussions far beyond the specific individuals targeted.

Similar stories across Kandahar's districts abound. Hajji Lala, a prominent Taliban-era commander who went into retirement after 2001, was repeatedly harassed by Zhed Gulalai, Habibullah Jan (a Zheray strongman), and other government forces for nearly a year. He eventually decided

to flee to Pakistan and join the insurgency, then served as a key commander in Kandahar province until he was killed in action.¹⁶ In some areas this trend was particularly grievous. Elders in Panjwayi district, for instance, estimate that nearly every former mid-level Taliban commander, along with their relatives and friends, fled Afghanistan in the first years of the Sherzai government and are now in the insurgency. Figure 2 lists some of the most prominent insurgent commanders in Kandahar who are in this category.

In some cases, former Taliban members did not survive to be able to fight again. The NDS prison chief Karam arrested Mullah Abdul Razziq Baluch, an imam of a prominent mosque in the Sperwan area of Panjwayi district, and took him in for questioning. Baluch had Taliban sympathies during the previous regime but had accepted the new government. A delegation of tribal elders went to Kandahar city to negotiate his release, but they were simply shown Baluch's discolored, badly bruised body. The prison officials told them that he had committed suicide.¹⁷

The failure to grant amnesty to Taliban figures who had abandoned the movement and accepted the new Afghan government had repercussions far beyond the specific individuals targeted. Soon a sense began to develop among those formerly connected to the regime, from senior officials to rank-and-file fighters, that there was no place for them in the post-2001 society.¹⁸ In the Band-i-Timor area of Maiwand, for instance, former civil aviation minister and leading Taliban official Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansur had accepted the new government and was living at home.¹⁹ But the violent drive against former Taliban by Sherzai's network and U.S. special forces led Mansur to realize it would be foolish to stay in Afghanistan. "He said that this government wouldn't let him live in peace," recalled lawmaker Ahmad Shah Achekzai, who had met him during that time. "It wasn't a surprise to us when he finally fled to Pakistan and rejoined the Taliban."²⁰ Today Mansur is a leading figure in the movement and one of the replacements for captured Taliban leader Mullah Beradar.²¹

Even after fleeing to Pakistan, large segments of the leadership were still open to returning to Afghanistan and abandoning the fight.

Even after fleeing to Pakistan, large segments of the leadership were still open to returning to Afghanistan and abandoning the fight. In 2002, for instance, the entire senior leadership except for Mullah Omar gathered in Karachi, Pakistan, for a meeting organized by former Taliban officials Mawlawi Arsala Rahmani and Mawlawi Abdul Sattar Siddiqi.²² The group agreed in principle to find a way for them to return to Afghanistan and abandon the fight, but lack of political will by the central government in Kabul and opposition from some sections of the U.S. leadership meant that such approaches were ultimately ignored.²³ In each of the following two years another delegation representing large sections of the Taliban leadership traveled to Kabul and met with senior government officials, but again nothing came of these overtures because of the lack of will from the government side.²⁴

Ineffective and Divisive Governance

By 2005, much of the Taliban's old guard—at the leadership and field commander levels—had decided to stand against the Afghan government. During those years, a concomitant process of systematic marginalization of broad sections of Kandahari society led to widespread disillusionment with the government and foreign forces, giving the Taliban leadership a rank-and-file force. Government institutions were predatory and divisive, corrupt to the core, and completely ineffective in meeting basic needs.

One of the biggest social changes following the fall of the Taliban was a reversion to the rule of the traditional tribal leadership.²⁵ Pashtun tribes are generally divided into hundreds of subtribes and clans, with many of the classifications and groupings varying in different parts of the country. The scores of tribes and clans in southern Afghanistan are roughly grouped into two confederations, the Ghilzis and the Durrani, with the latter subdivided into the Zirk and Panjpai confederations.^g In traditional Kandahari society, the Zirk tribes, which include the Barakzais and Popalzais, formed a sort of tribal aristocracy. The years of Soviet occupation and the subsequent Taliban rule had upset this trend—the Taliban included many Panjpai Durrani and Ghilzis in the ranks of leadership.

After 2001, Gul Agha Sherzai's governorship brought many of his fellow Barakzai tribesmen into positions of power. Similarly, the presence in the presidential palace of Hamid Karzai and in Kandahar of his brother Ahmed Wali Karzai, who in the early years formed a second locus of power in the province, led to the promotion of the Popalzais. In certain regions or government functions, particular tribes would dominate. The Alikozais had early influence over the security apparatus, for instance, while certain Achekzais held key positions in Spin Boldak district.^h The Barakzais were heavily involved in the business sector in Kandahar city and neighboring Dand district, a historical trend that was amplified by security and logistics contracts coming from the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to Sherzai's network.²⁶

^g There are other confederations in addition to these in the south, including the Gharghusht (which includes the Kakar tribes). Also, tribal affiliations are not always fixed—different individuals and areas have different notions of tribal taxonomy. Thus the Noorzais are considered by most as part of the Panjpai Durrani group, but some as part of the Ghilzi confederation.

^h Historically the Alikozais have played a role in administering security, including through the use of tribal militias.

Meanwhile, other tribes were largely excluded from positions of power and resources. Figure 3 shows that Panjpai Durrani (Noorzais, Ishaqzais, Alizais, Khogiyanis, and the Mako) make up about 27 percent of the population but account for only 10 percent of the government positions. The numbers are rough, considering the immense challenges in surveying populations in Afghanistan. Regardless of exact figures, there is an acute sense among the Panjpai Durrani that they are being excluded in the post-2001 arrangements. “Show me a single Barakzai in jail,” said one Noorzai elder from Panjwayi. “It’s only our people who get arrested.”²⁷ This may not necessarily be true, but it is born from an observation that Barakzais and Popalzais have more government connections and are able to utilize these networks to free their arrested relatives.

Tribe	Percentage of Government Positions	Percentage of Kandahar Population
Zirak Durrani	69%	61%
Popalzai	24%	20%
Achekzai	19%	9%
Panjpai Durrani	10%	27%
Ghilzai	8%	2%
Other	13%	8%

Figure 3. Tribal Percentages in Government and Population at Large. (Numbers are rounded.)²⁸

The numbers in Figure 3 obscure district- or village-level differences that are most important in understanding the relationship between tribal dynamics and the insurgency. In Panjwayi district, where Noorzais and Ishaqzais make up the bulk of the population, before 2008 every single district governor was a Zirak Durrani. The majority of the chiefs of police were Alikozais. Similar imbalances characterize other key districts, even today.

Although tribal structure has eroded significantly due to 30 years of war, with tribes or clans rarely acting as cohesive units any longer (if ever), tribal identity is still an important

mechanism through which individual interests are negotiated. In southern Afghanistan’s system of largely informal networks, a shared tribal or clan background with the holders of power means access to state services, resources, and more. Thus the privileging of Zirak Durrani at the expense of the rest of the population was a major factor in alienating Panjpai Durrani and others from the center.ⁱ

A disproportionate number of Panjpai Durrani and other alienated groups formed the recruiting base for the Taliban. This continued a historical trend that was briefly described above; Zirak Durrani dominated the governance structures, held access to the state’s services and business channels, and made up a huge share of the landowning class, while second-tier tribes disproportionately produced mullahs and lower-rung jihadi commanders who later become the backbone of the Taliban movement. After the Taliban’s defeat, the Zirak Durrani-dominated government viewed entire tribes, such as the Noorzais and Ishaqzais, with suspicion, which partly fueled their exclusion from power and their harassment by authorities. This in turn led large numbers of individuals from these tribes back to the Taliban.

Although tribal structure has eroded significantly due to 30 years of war, with tribes or clans rarely acting as cohesive units any longer (if ever), tribal identity is still an important mechanism through which individual interests are negotiated.

ⁱ As mentioned above, historically the Zirak Durrani held the leadership at the expense of other tribes, but the Soviet experience, civil war, and the Taliban government led to an inversion of these roles. Many previously second-class citizens joined the Communists, the mujahedeen, or later the Taliban, while many of the traditional leaders tied to the center fled or were killed.

The population of Spin Boldak, for instance, is split nearly evenly between Achekzais and Noorzais, but Achekzais have control over key parts of the border trade and count among their number the influential Border Police commander Abdul Razzik, one of the most powerful men in the province.²⁹ Although Noorzais in the district are not nearly as disadvantaged as they are elsewhere in Kandahar, their weakness in regard to control over the border trade and their second-tier status in relation to the center means that they contribute far greater numbers to the insurgency in the district than the Achekzais. Figure 4 lists the key Taliban commanders active in Spin Boldak district today; nearly all are Noorzais.³⁰

Commander	Tribe	Role
Mullah Abdul Razzaq	Achekzai	Quetta Shura Member
Mullah Ataullah	Noorzai	Commander
Mullah Amin Kamin	Noorzai	Commander
Mullah Jabbar	Noorzai	Former shadow district governor
Mullah Hayat Khan	Noorzai	Commander
Mullah Muhamad Amin	Noorzai	Shadow district governor
Mullah Muhammad Hashim	Noorzai	Commander
Mullah Raouf	Noorzai	Shorabak district governor, Spin Boldak commander
Mullah Muhammad Issa Akhund	Noorzai	Influential commander in a number of districts

Figure 4. Prominent Taliban Commanders Active in Spin Boldak

At times, government policies actively exacerbated tribal tensions and imbalances. In 2005, the provincial government ordered Commander Abdul Razzik’s largely Achekzai militia and police force into the Noorzai-dominated Panjwayi district to quell a growing number of insurgents. The Noorzais and Achekzais have a historical rivalry, probably originating in attempts to control the lucrative border crossing of Spin Boldak.^j News spread quickly of Razzik’s arrival. “People began to say that Razzik was here to kill every Noorzai he could find,” said one Noorzai elder from the district. Noorzai tribesmen rallied to fight against their invading rival; some accounts say that Noorzais from neighboring districts and even Helmand province came for backup. The Taliban quickly amassed a force of their own, portraying their moves as a defense of the Noorzais. The combined force ambushed Razzik’s men as they crossed from the Panjwayi district center toward Sperwan, inflicting many casualties. Razzik’s forces eventually retreated, and the ranks of the Taliban swelled with fresh recruits eager to defend the Noorzais against further government oppression. “In our area, the Taliban went from 40 people to 400 in just days,” recalled Neda Muhammad, a Noorzai elder.³¹

Similar tales made the rounds in local communities. In an interview with journalist Graeme Smith in Quetta, one insurgent explained that “In Kabul, all of the government officials are northerners or Popalzai ... that is why there are problems. There is no justice.” He added: “These tribes took Kandahar by force. ... This is the main reason we fight.”³²

Other factors contribute to the Taliban’s tribal makeup. Traditionally second-tier tribes like the Noorzais and

^jAnother largely Achekzai militia has historical importance in Kandahar. Commander Ismat Muslim led a group in the 1980s that broke ranks with the mujahedeen after receiving payments from the Communist government and frequently feuded with the more Noorzai-friendly mujahedeen parties like Hizb-i-Islami. Abdul Razzik’s uncle was a key commander in Ismat Muslim’s militia and was publicly killed by the Taliban in 1994 during the birth of that movement. Source: interviews in Spin Boldak, April 2010.

Ishaqzais have turned to smuggling and illicit trade because opportunities in the legal realm were meager. Criminality and insurgencies often have a symbiotic relationship, and in the post-2001 years many prominent smugglers developed ties with the Taliban. Also, over the years a large number of clerics and spiritual healers have populated the ranks of the Ishaqzai tribe in western Kandahar, leading them to develop close ties to the traditional religious clergy. These bonds persisted through the anti-Soviet insurgency and strengthened with the emergence of the Taliban. Finally, Sayeds, patrilineal descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, are considered by Afghans a separate tribe, and in southern Afghanistan they have historically played a role in conflict mediation. The role of the Taliban in conflict mediation in the 1980s and 1990s led to a natural alliance and overlap between these groups, and today in Panjwayi and Zheray districts a disproportionate number of Taliban commanders are Sayeds.

It is important to mention that despite these trends, the Taliban is not a tribal movement as such.

It is important to mention that despite these trends, the Taliban is not a tribal movement as such. Some commentators have called the Taliban a “Ghilzai insurgency” or tribal rebellion, but the reality is far more complicated.³³ The movement seeks to win recruits from all tribes and plays upon whichever grievances are relevant in a particular area or moment. Thus in Panjwayi it supported Noorzais against the marauding Achekzai militia, but in Maiwand it supported Khogiyanis against Noorzais when a dispute over land rights emerged and the local government backed the latter group.³⁴ And there are a number of important Zirak Durrani Taliban commanders, such as Kandahar’s current shadow governor, Mawlawi Muhammad Issa (a Popalzai).

Moreover, tribal identity itself is quite complicated: Locals rarely use the names of confederations like “Ghilzi” or “Zirak Durrani” in self-identification.^k Rather, the operational unit of identity is the tribe, like Noorzai, or more often the subtribe, such as Gurg.^l Clashes or rivalries between subtribes can be just as frequent as those between tribes. The Taliban deftly plays on such rivalries, often to its advantage. Indeed, the Taliban in Kandahar should more properly be seen as a nationalist Islamist insurgency that feeds on and manipulates tribal imbalances and rivalries to its own ends.^m

Governance

From the examples of torture and extrajudicial killing given above, it should be clear that governance was a major problem in the post-2001 years. A series of corrupt and predatory government officials, from district governors and police chiefs all the way up to the provincial governor, regularly robbed or imprisoned locals. Asadullah Khaled, who served as Kandahar governor from 2005 to 2008, kept a secret prison and even personally tortured and administered electric shocks to captives.³⁵ Mullah Maqsud, a district governor of Maiwand, joined with U.S. forces in a series of disastrous raids that killed many civilians, and is blamed for the deaths of key figures in the community. Hajji Saifullah, also at one time a district governor of Maiwand and later of Panjwayi, is widely accused of stealing aid funds and destroying the poppy fields of rivals to boost the profitability of his own fields.³⁶

k Moreover, locals sometimes dispute tribal affiliations. Some consider the Noorzais as part of the Panjpai Durrani confederation, whereas others insist it belongs to the Ghilzi confederation. Also, in Kandahar today many don’t like to openly discuss tribal affiliations, which is a sensitive subject.

l For instance, the Noorzai tribe in Kandahar is divided into two branches, the Durzai and the Daudzai, each of which is further divided into another series of tribes.

m Here “nationalist Islamist” means an Islamist movement with national aspirations—in this case to evict foreign forces and capture power throughout the country.

As mentioned above, security officials were notorious for abuse. One Kandahar city resident recalls a scene he witnessed involving Karam, the NDS prisons chief:

Once we were walking on this road [near the center of Kandahar city] when a man on a motorcycle bumped into Commander Karam's vehicle. Karam's men jumped out of the car and started beating this man. He was almost killed, in front of everyone, and then they took him and threw him into the NDS prison. The elders came and tried to convince Karam to release the man but he refused. He spent the night in jail just for bumping his car.³⁷

One Noorzai tribal elder in Maiwand recounted the following story:

Hajji Gul Ahmad, one of my brothers-in-law, was taken by Akhundzada and Manay [two of Sherzai's commanders]. They had arrested him and I went to Kandahar city and met Hajji Niamatⁿ [formerly a Sherzai associate now connected to Ahmed Wali Karzai] and he took me to my brother-in-law. He opened the door and I saw him sitting on the ground. His hands and feet were tied together and he was bruised. He had barely eaten in six days. I went crazy! I said what is this? What crime did he commit? Hajji Niamat said that if I wanted him to be released, I would have to pay. In the evening I paid 2 million Pakistani rupees (roughly \$20,000) and they released him.³⁸

Many Kandahar residents say that the government became even more pernicious after Sherzai left and Ahmed Wali Karzai, President Hamid Karzai's half-brother, consolidated his hold over the province. Many locals accuse him of running Kandahar like a mafia don, saying he vets nearly

all government appointees, dominates the licit and illicit trade networks, and ruthlessly sidelines opponents.³⁹

Poor governance also meant a plodding bureaucracy, riddled with corruption. Even simple administrative tasks would be fraught with difficulty, and many Kandaharis sought to avoid dealing with the government whenever possible. In some cases, fraud and mismanagement had dire consequences. In the southern district of Shorabak, for instance, repeated fraud in the various national elections since 2004 pushed many away from the government. In 2005, one of the most respected leaders of the Bareetz tribe (which dominates the district⁴⁰), Hajji Muhammad Bareetz, ran for parliament. He recalls that:

I won more than 40,000 votes here and even the media announced me as the winner, but Karzai and his family here—I mean his brother—stopped me from going to parliament by using fraud. After this many of my tribesmen got disgusted with the government and joined the Taliban. They even told me to join the Taliban, but I'm too old. I can't live that kind of lifestyle anymore.⁴¹

The experience left a bitter taste in their mouths, and in 2009 the tribal leadership decided to oppose Karzai and support his opponent, Dr. Abdullah. But on election day, provincial officials shut down the polling centers, detained the district governor, and used Abdul Razzik's forces to stuff ballots, robbing the Bareetz tribe of their vote.⁴² Since the election, locals report, provincial officials have not been treating them well, largely because of their attempted betrayal of Karzai in favor of his rival. "So many more people have fled the area or joined the Taliban since then," Hajji Bareetz said.

Policing

Hand in hand with broken government was a notoriously corrupt police force. International actors and the Afghan government generally paid little attention to coordinating

ⁿ Niamat is now head of Kandahar's Peace and Reconciliation Commission, a body tasked with persuading Taliban fighters to lay down their weapons and reconcile with the government.

efforts to build a viable police force in Kandahar in the early years after 2001. While some international agencies and governments did focus on police development, the CIA, U.S. special forces, and others were backing militias (like Sherzai's). Furthermore, lucrative contracts to Sherzai and Karzai, or their associates, funded militias and delegitimized police institutions. An ISAF study estimated this year that only about half of the police forces in Kandahar are under the command of the provincial police chief: "The rest are influenced by Kandahar's powerbrokers and tribal leaders. When the provincial governor recently instructed him to replace a district police chief in Panjwayi, the Provincial Chief of Police's orders were countermanded after local power brokers intervened."⁴³

Another study found that police in Kandahar were typically paid less than private security forces, and what resources they did receive were meager:

On 31 January 2004, 300 ANP [Afghan National Police] were deployed to Kandahar in one of the first deployments of centrally trained police to a province. Within the unit, high levels of optimism about their training and pride for their symbolic representation of the central government were reported. The arrival of the ANP in Kandahar led to considerable disappointment – they were accommodated in the remains of the Kandahar Hotel, given little ammunition and sent to guard UN compounds, rather than engage in policing. The 260 deployed were also undersupplied in terms of weapons, vehicles and accommodation, which prompted 100 to desert.⁴⁴

Under such conditions, police corruption and predation became endemic. There are many legendary tales of police brutality in Kandahar, from simply shaking down motorists at checkpoints to much worse. In one well-known incident in Panjwayi, a police officer demanded goods from a shopkeeper in the district center. When the shopkeeper

refused, the policeman shot and killed him and absconded with the goods.⁴⁵

The Taliban would begin to position themselves as protectors of the population against the police.

The Taliban would begin to position themselves as protectors of the population against the police. At the same time, they cultivated ties with certain police officials, which they exploited to purchase weapons or cooperate in smuggling.

Judiciary

The role of dispute resolution in Pashtun society cannot be emphasized enough. Rural Afghan society is largely informal, meaning that there are few records of land holdings, particularly after decades of war in which documents were destroyed and many people fled, leaving their land behind. Disagreements over land ownership, water access, grazing rights, and other issues are very common, usually between tribes, clans, or family members (such as second cousins). Moreover, under the current circumstances, in which the state is extremely weak, corrupt, or nonexistent (as in much of Kandahar), criminality often goes unpunished. Historically, this has led large segments of the population to support the implementation of sharia, particularly those sections of Islamic law that can be applied punitively or to resolve conflicts.^o The popularity of the Taliban courts of the anti-

^o There are other mechanisms of dispute resolution in traditional society, such as those based on tribal customs. The weakening of tribal structures over the years has helped the Taliban in this regard. Indeed, in those areas where stronger tribal structures exist side-by-side with weaker ones, such as Paktia province, one can argue that the Taliban have been able to penetrate areas with weaker structures more deeply, in part because they offer judicial services that the tribes cannot compete with. Historically, influential or respected individuals in society have also

Soviet insurgency is a good example in this regard. Researchers Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, in their study of the relationship between al-Qaeda and the Taliban, cite one appraisal of the courts:

[T]he Islamic courts were very strict and would even sentence commanders or field leaders if they did something wrong. One time, a battle took place between two commanders so they went to court and asked for its ruling. The judge decided to arrest them both and beat them up before throwing them in jail. This judge and his court gained great respect in the Kandahar area because of that.”⁴⁶

In post-2001 Kandahar, the Taliban’s judicial services (discussed in more detail in the next section) became one of the key advantages the movement had over the state. In some instances, the problem is simply a paucity of judges: In Kandahar city, for instance, there are only nine judges out of 87 possible slots.⁴⁷ Where there are judges, the system is laboriously slow, ineffective, and very susceptible to bribery. Moreover, Taliban threats in recent years have forced many judges to flee to Kandahar city, further eroding judicial services in the districts and increasing reliance on the insurgents.

Coalition Forces Activity

Many Kandaharis insist that the foreign coalition forces have been a source of insecurity. The perceptions of the government mentioned above also fall upon the foreign troops, since foreigners are largely seen as being the real power in the country. Sections of the military, such as the U.S. special forces, actively supported strongmen and militias, undermining state-building efforts. Men like Ahmed Wali Karzai and Gul Agha Sherzai were largely made through the support—financial and political—of the

played a role in dispute resolution; they include Sayeds and, in some cases, khans. Today, some people are said to take their disputes directly to Ahmed Wali Karzai, for instance.

United States. U.S. forces also worked closely with strongmen like Karam, one of Sherzai’s commanders, to hunt down former Taliban, and helped create a perverse incentive system in which such commanders would hand over suspects on dubious grounds or simply arrest people to extract money.⁴⁸ The foreigners were caught in a complex system that they didn’t fully understand and often fell prey to local rivalries. They frequently failed to distinguish between friend and foe, in the process creating many enemies.

Many Kandaharis insist that the foreign coalition forces have been a source of insecurity.

In Panjwayi and Zheray districts, the heartland of today’s insurgency, the case of Malim Feda Muhammad is seared into the consciousness of many Taliban fighters. Muhammad, a schoolteacher when the Russians invaded, joined the mujahedeen and became a famous commander in the greater Panjwayi area. He joined the Taliban movement in its early days and later became a frontline commander in the north. After the Taliban’s fall, he retired from political life back to Panjwayi. But U.S. forces captured him and sent him to their detention facility at Kandahar Airfield, and he was released only after intensive intervention by tribal elders. One NDS official who visited him after his release recalled that:

I went to his home. For weeks he had been hiding in the house, too ashamed to come out and talk to people. Finally I convinced his son to let me see him. He looked like a disaster. He hadn’t been sleeping well. He started to tell his story of how he was humiliated, stripped naked, beaten, and how they put dogs on him while he was in that state. He was crying and asked how he could possibly live in Afghanistan with any dignity.⁴⁹

It is difficult to verify Muhammad's claims, although they fit with other testimonies of abuse at the Kandahar prison from that time. Still, for our purposes—to understand the motivations and ideology of the insurgency—the fact that other Taliban and the community in general *believe* his story is what is important. Many of the Taliban and tribal elders interviewed in Panjwayi repeated his tale as an example of why people were standing against the Americans. Muhammad eventually fled with his family to Quetta, where he rejoined the Taliban and today commands a number of fighters in the Panjwayi and Zheray areas.⁵⁰

In the northern district of Shah Wali Kot, Taliban fighters, locals, and elders tell the story of Mullah Sattar Akhund, a former Taliban official who was living at home during the early years after the movement was ousted. One Taliban commander recalled that:

In that first year of the Karzai government Mullah Sattar was in retirement. But the government kept coming to his house and questioning him or searching his house. Sometimes he was going out during the day and would come home at night to sleep. One of those days the Americans came and searched his house. They came again and again and searched his house, and it turned out to be a big shame for him. The people in his village started to gossip about his family. Finally his mother got very angry and told him, “You are bringing shame upon our family! Either defend us from this or run away. She gave him the family weapon, a *Sakeel*⁵¹ from the old days, and told him to use it. The next time the Americans came he started firing at them, and he got many people in the village to fire at them. The Americans called for an airplane, which finally came and bombed the house. Later on they arrested all of the surviving adult male family members and many were taken to Bagram. They took the heart out of the village. We knew that we had to fight them and so we joined the Taliban.⁵²

Along with the arbitrary arrests and abuse, night raids by special forces and targeted assassinations played a significant role in turning many against the foreign presence. The case of Hajji Burget Khan in particular had lasting negative effects. Khan was one of the best-known leaders of the Ishaqzai tribe, which has hundreds of thousands of members in Kandahar, Helmand, and elsewhere.⁵³ In 2003, U.S. forces raided his home in the Band-i-Timor area of Maiwand, killing him and leaving his son a paraplegic. “They took the women and children and put them in a *bawaray*,” a type of shallow well, recalled one prominent Noorzai elder from the area. “It was a shock to us. We had lost our leader and even the women were mocking us, saying that despite our big turbans we could not protect our community. The Americans also arrested a number of relatives of Hajji Burget Khan and shaved their beards and cut their hair,” a humiliating act for a Pashtun man.

Along with the arbitrary arrests and abuse, night raids by special forces and targeted assassinations played a significant role in turning many against the foreign presence.

The killing of Hajji Burget Khan is often cited as the single most important destabilizing factor in Maiwand district and other Ishaqzai areas. Three Taliban commanders from the region interviewed for this report all mentioned the killing as one of the main factors that led them to join the insurgency. Afghan government officials concede that it had disastrous effects in the area. It is unclear why Khan was targeted; he was very old at the time—most put his age over 70—and was not a member of the insurgency. He had a son who was with the Taliban during the 1990s but had since retired. And like many other Ishaqzai and Noorzai elders in the area, he may have had ties to drug traffickers. But the most likely explanation is that the commanders with whom U.S. forces had allied had seen Khan as a rival.

News of his death even had effects on other tribes and districts. “We heard about Hajji Burget Khan’s murder,” said one elder in Shorabak district. “It was enough to convince many people the foreigners and the government were our enemy.” Khan’s paraplegic son moved to Quetta, where he became a Taliban facilitator, while his brother became a leading commander in Helmand.^p

The killing was notorious throughout Kandahar province, but nearly every district had similar stories. In Zheray, for instance, foreign forces killed two influential religious scholars, Mullahs Abidullah and Janan, causing many of their followers to join the insurgency.⁵⁴

One Taliban commander in Zheray gave his reasons for joining last year:

There were so many examples in the last nine years of the foreigners’ methods. During last Ramadan, it was 12:15 a.m. and the Americans invaded a house of my relatives in Hazaruji Baba.⁵⁵ They killed an innocent 18-year-old boy named Janan who was sleeping under a net. They left his body there while they searched the house, and dogs began to gnaw at him. In the same month, in the Nar-i-pul area, they raided the house of Mawlawi Ahmadullah. They killed him, took one of his brothers with them, and tied the wives to each other and left them as they searched the house. When we arrived later, we could not untie the women with our hands and we had to use a stick [because of Pashtun customs that forbid contact between members of the opposite sex who are not relatives or married]. What were we to do after these sorts of things? So I joined the Taliban.⁵⁶

^p In this paper, “Taliban facilitator” means someone who is not an active military commander but works in other spheres—political, financial, or logistics—to aid the movement.

Furthermore, there were a number of high-profile incidents in which airstrikes killed a sizable number of civilians, such as the 2008 bombing of a wedding party in Shah Wali Kot.

Joblessness, Poppies, and Other Causes

A number of studies have found a positive correlation between low income levels and insecurity.⁵⁷ “Insecurity” here generally means Taliban presence, although areas with just the Taliban (or just pro-government forces) are generally much more secure than areas with both. With few jobs, occasional drought (especially two years ago), and landlessness, many rank-and-file insurgents are at least partially motivated by money.⁵⁸

As the government began to eradicate the opium poppy fields of poor farmers, the Taliban portrayed themselves as these farmers’ protectors. Poppy eradication has played a significant role in pushing locals in Maiwand district, for instance, into the insurgency in order to safeguard their lands and income.⁵⁹ During cultivation season, the Taliban often join with local farmers to expel government agencies like the Poppy Eradication Force, and in areas under Taliban control, locals are usually free to pursue the activity.⁶⁰ In Graeme Smith’s landmark study of the Taliban for the Canadian *Globe and Mail* newspaper, one insurgent explained that previously “they were cutting them [poppies] down, but now those areas are controlled by mujahedeen and now they cannot cut them down.”⁶¹

Sometimes the motivations to join the insurgency are more subtle than those outlined above. As the Taliban grew during the period 2004 to 2007, communities that were not aligned with the insurgents would join the movement simply to protect themselves from insurgents. These communities would then exert pressure on neighboring areas, until they too joined.

In some cases, joining the Taliban allows disaffected young men to step outside of traditional roles in society. Rural Pashtun culture places extraordinary emphasis on age and

experience, so that even 30-year-olds can be considered “youth” and have little or no part in decision-making. But a 25-year-old Taliban commander wields far more power and authority than any elder in the community, which can be intoxicating in such a society.

Finally, some individuals or communities join or temporarily align with the Taliban simply as a means to project power and influence in personal disputes. A family feuding with another might throw its support to the insurgents as a way to gain leverage. In a number of cases, communities have sought an alliance with the Taliban to give them an upper hand in disputes over such issues as land or water rights.⁶² Similarly, communities have been known to use the insurgents to side against Kuchis (Pashtun nomads), whose migration to or settlement in an area typically causes tensions.⁶³ Others use Taliban membership as a means to carry out criminal activity. By no means is all of the violence in Kandahar province due to actual anti-government insurgents; drug mafias, feuding commanders, rival families, and key government power brokers are also sources of instability, although their actions are usually attributed to the Taliban. In short, in a militarized society with a near-complete breakdown of the rule of law and an absence of the state, the Taliban movement is a potent weapon for individuals and communities looking to settle scores and further personal agendas.

In short, in a militarized society with a near-complete breakdown of the rule of law and an absence of the state, the Taliban movement is a potent weapon for individuals and communities looking to settle scores and further personal agendas.

Taliban Ideology

A number of commentators have divided the Taliban into an “ideological core” and a rank and file motivated primarily by material concerns. The actual role of ideology is much more complicated, however, as the recent history of Kandahar shows. Initially, much of the Taliban in the province—from the senior leadership to the rank and file—fell into two categories: They either accepted the legitimacy of the new government, or they rejected it but did not feel that fighting against it was appropriate or possible. Senior leaders like Mullah Akhtar Mansur, who today has a leading role in the Quetta Shura, had made peace with the government in the early years. Scores of others were in similar positions. This indicates that many Taliban did not take up arms simply as an exercise of the principle of jihad or the expulsion of foreigners, as many Taliban would later try to portray it, but rather because it was the only viable alternative for individuals and groups left without a place in the new state of affairs. In other words, initially it was not the existence of a new government per se that drove these former Taliban back, but the *behavior* of that government. Likewise, initially it was not the presence of foreign troops as such that spawned opposition from these former Taliban, but the *behavior* of those troops. This is in contrast to groups like al-Qaeda, which viewed the presence of foreign troops on Afghan soil, *ipso facto*, as justification for jihad. For these reasons, it took some time for the Taliban to regroup, for former leaders to grow disaffected and flee to Pakistan, and for the various factors that alienated communities to play out. Sizable opposition did not emerge until 2003, and the insurgency did not gain significant momentum until after 2004, when community after community began falling to the Taliban.

This is not to say that ideology does not play a role—only to call attention to cause and effect. After finding themselves on the wrong side of the new regime, former Taliban leaders and affected individuals rationalized their misfortunes by beginning to view the government as un-Islamic.⁶⁴ They explained the actions of foreign troops by

viewing them as an occupying force, bent on robbing Afghanistan of its sovereignty, culture, and religion. And many among the rank and file were attracted to the movement because it provided the most viable means of protecting themselves or accessing resources and power. Indeed, a study of insurgents and insurgency-affected areas commissioned by Britain’s Department for International Development (DFID) found that radicalization (i.e., viewing the conflict in jihadist or religious terms) often took place *after* an individual joined the insurgency.⁶⁵ Therefore it is not accurate or helpful to divide the Taliban into “moderates” and “ideological,” as motivations are a complex interplay of material causes (social, political, and economic) and ideological rationalizations. Very few field commanders in Kandahar have reconciled with the government despite growing opportunities to do so in recent years, yet at the same time a number of senior leaders have made approaches to the government.^q

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that the ideological justifications...have little to do with those of transnational jihadist movements.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that the ideological justifications—Islamic culture under attack, foreigners’ desire to convert Afghans, the loss of sovereignty and the desire for self-determination, and so on—have little to do with those of transnational jihadist movements. In interviews with Taliban commanders and senior leaders for this study, not a single person made an appeal to international jihad or pan-Islamism. This reinforces the finding of the DFID survey of Taliban fighters, in which the report’s author writes that opposition to foreign troops is

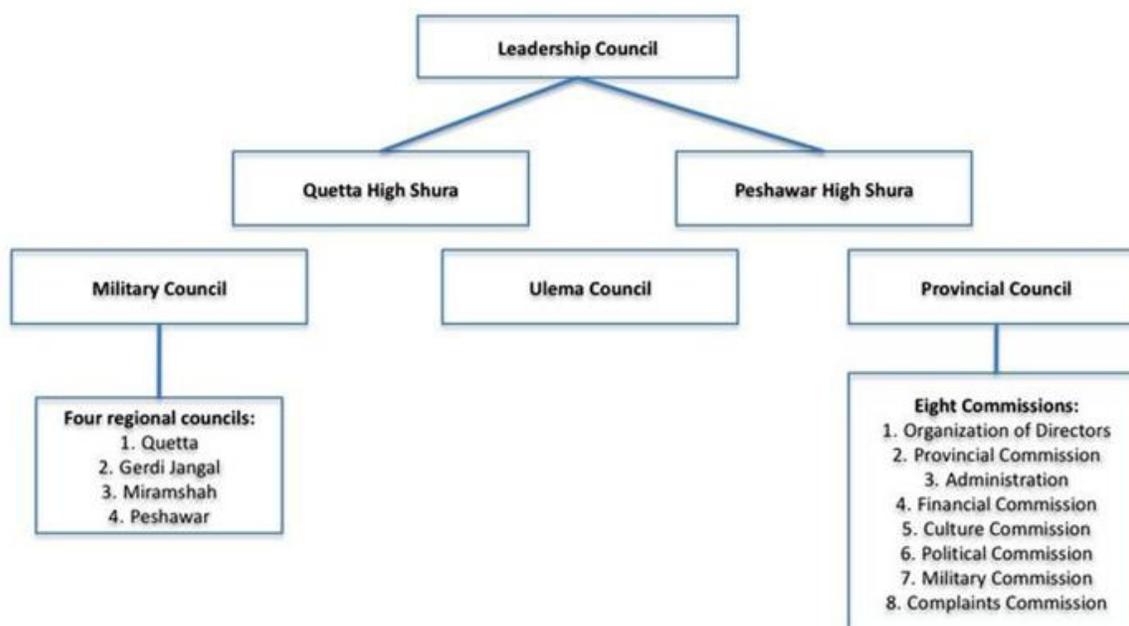
q They include Mullah Beradar and at least six other senior leaders, who were at various times on the Quetta Shura. They made approaches to the Afghan government at various times in the last four years. The others cannot be named here in order to protect their security.

“due to a perceived attack on Islam but it is an attack that is perceived to be happening within the country by foreign forces. There was little evidence of common cause being made with Islamist movements outside Afghanistan.”⁶⁶

Part 2: The Taliban in Kandahar: Structure and Tactics

- The Taliban’s chain of command and decision-making processes are neither simple nor straightforward. A formal network exists in Kandahar, from the shadow governor and Military Commission down to district governors and local judges. In theory, provincial and district political leaders direct military efforts in their respective areas, although actual decisions to carry out small-scale attacks, involving one or a few groups, are left to field commanders. Larger-scale efforts fall under the supposed control of prominent regional commanders and the provincial leadership. In reality, however, most attacks take place with little input from higher levels. Moreover, the Taliban’s formal structure in Kandahar sits in parallel with informal networks that tie commanders back to specific leaders in Quetta. Prominent leaders over the border there have networks of commanders that extend throughout Kandahar province. Many decisions are made through these informal channels, bypassing the formal structures.
- The Taliban’s response to increased Western attention to Kandahar province was to do the same themselves. Assassinations, roadside bombings, and complex attacks have hit record highs in Kandahar in 2010. The insurgent strategy of targeting anyone even remotely associated with the government, and the foreign forces’ strategy of reaching out to tribal leaders and their incipient militia programs, have made it very difficult for locals to remain neutral in this conflict. Many tribal leaders today are left with only two choices: Flee to a government stronghold like Kandahar city or Kabul, or align completely with the insurgents.

Figure 5. Taliban Leadership Structure



Structure of the Kandahar Taliban⁶⁷

While initially accepting the legitimacy of the new Kabul government, or at the very least viewing it as an entity that they could not oppose, Taliban members eventually came to view the actions of the government and the foreigners as necessitating jihad. By 2003, the majority of the old-guard senior leadership had relocated to Quetta or Peshawar, Pakistan, and launched a formal body to oversee the nascent insurgency. That body, which came to be known as the Quetta Shura, would closely direct strategy on the ground, as well as facilitate the transfer of funds, persuade erstwhile comrades to rejoin, and direct propaganda efforts. Over the years, the leadership developed an elaborate structure of sub-shuras and committees to meet the growing organization’s needs, as depicted in Figure 5.⁶⁸

Like other Afghan groups, however, the Taliban operates as much through informal networks as it does through formal ones. It is important to realize the limits of looking at the organization through a purely Western understanding of command and control.

The Shadow Government

The Taliban’s initial anti-government organizing was done entirely through informal networks, but as the insurgency grew it began to develop a formal shadow administration alongside these networks. Today, every province in the country has a centrally-appointed shadow governor, although in some areas (like Panjshir) this is purely a titular role. In theory, the provincial council (see Figure 5) together with the leadership council makes appointments, but often the reality is more blurred. In recent months, senior leader

Mullah Abdul Qayum Zakir, who is mostly involved with military affairs, has also made political appointments, for instance.⁶⁹ The shadow governor's role is to oversee all activities in the province, liaise with Quetta, manage conflicts between commanders, and interact with non-Taliban actors, such as international agencies, government officials, and construction companies. As in the era of the Taliban government, governors are rotated often, and it is rare to find one who has been in his post for more than a year. This is likely done for security reasons, but also to ensure that these governors do not develop an independent power base.

As of August 2010, Kandahar's shadow governor is Muhammad Issa, a Popalzai from the Gawarai area of Arghestan district. During the anti-Soviet insurgency, he fought in a Taliban front under Mullah Muhammad Ghaus, who would later become the Taliban's foreign minister.⁷⁰ In the Taliban government, Issa worked as a finance officer under deputy leader Mullah Muhammad Rabbani. In the post-2001 years, before being promoted to shadow provincial governor, he worked closely with Mullah Beradar and was at one point the district governor of Arghestan.⁷¹

Working with the shadow governor is the Military Commission, a council of four to six members that helps direct provincial affairs. In theory the governor and Military Commission plan operations, but in practice lower-level commanders often take their own initiative and the leadership bodies have more of a ceremonial role. In some areas the provincial leadership wields considerable authority; when two commanders in Wardak province sparred recently, for example, the Military Commission and shadow governor were able to banish them from the province. But Kandahar's proximity to Quetta, and the long-standing ties between its commanders and the senior leadership across the border, mean that most important decisions are made outside of the province.

A number of mawlawis (religious clerics) are supposed to be associated with the Military Commission, which doubles

as the supreme judicial body for a province. "Ideally, the Military Commission should not also do court activities," explained one Taliban commander from Zheray, "but right now it is not possible to separate the two functions." The commission functions as a sort of mobile supreme court, hearing cases that cannot be settled in the lower courts. It also is the likely adjudicator for intra-Taliban disputes. In practice, the commission is often staffed with mullahs or commanders who have not undertaken religious studies, rather than mawlawis, and has a high turnover rate.⁷²

Most districts in Kandahar also have a shadow district governor, and those districts in which the Taliban have complete or nearly complete control also have a "chief of police" and a district shura. The district governor helps manage the forces in his area and in some cases organizes tax collection and even directs expenditures.

Most districts in Kandahar also have a shadow district governor, and those districts in which the Taliban have complete or nearly complete control also have a "chief of police" and a district shura.⁷³ The district governor helps manage the forces in his area and in some cases organizes tax collection and even directs expenditures.^f In theory the chief of police is supposed to enforce the decisions of the district governor and provincial leadership, but in practice the role is largely ceremonial. "They hand out posts like chief of police to please those commanders who didn't get a good title like district governor," explained one Taliban commander who used to have the lesser title.⁷⁴ The district

^r In Taliban areas where there is electricity, residents pay electric bills to the district governor. In a few cases (such as near Muhsan in Panjwayi), insurgents have even paved or graveled some roads with tax money. Foreign forces bombed the Mushan road in 2009.

shura includes the police chief as well as at least one leading cleric, who functions as the head of the judiciary in the district.

The Judiciary

The judicial system forms the backbone of Taliban governance and generally appears to be superior to the official government alternative. In most areas, mawlawis or experienced mullahs run mobile courts that are attached to Taliban groups. One Taliban commander from Zheray explained the process:

They are not at a fixed or given location. When a person wants to solve their problem and he enters a Taliban area, we will stop him and ask him what is he doing. If he says that he has a problem that needs to be solved by the court, we will let him know where the court is at that moment. For instance, we will say go to this fruit farm or that field and you will find the judges there who will solve your problem.

Typical cases taken before these courts include disputes over land rights, water access, and debts. The judges rule based on their interpretation of sharia, or Islamic law, and the verdicts are usually thought of as fair, transparent, and binding, unlike those of government courts.⁸ Even residents in government-controlled areas, such as Kandahar city or district centers, often travel to Taliban territory to use the courts.⁷⁵ In those areas where Taliban control is extensive, such as the Mushan area of Panjwayi or the Garamabak area of Maiwand, there have been fixed courts that move from village to village in the region. In parts where insurgent control is more contested, the courts come at certain points in the week or month, and commanders usually give advance notice to the community.

⁸ It is important to note, however, that even the Taliban courts sometimes have their biases. Some locals complain that the courts unjustly favor its members when in disputes with civilians. However, overall the courts appear to be much more fair than government ones.

The local courts handle most small disputes, but if the disagreement is more substantial, or is between Taliban groups, the case is referred to the Military Commission. This body then orders the local district governor to investigate the matter. The district governor relays his findings back to the Commission, which then delivers a verdict. Thus the Taliban system has its own bureaucracy, with disputants required to collect signatures from officials and move between various courts and authorities. If a disputant ignores the ruling, the Commission orders the chief of police to “arrest” him. There are a number of makeshift prisons throughout western and northern Kandahar for this purpose.

Of course, the reality strays from this model. Commanders often detain people without ever referring their cases to higher bodies, and Taliban court rulings are rarely if ever ignored (for fear of the consequences). Moreover, it appears that a main role of these higher judicial bodies is to adjudicate disputes between the Taliban themselves, as most civilian cases are resolved in the lower courts.¹ And like any institution, the Taliban courts have their weaknesses. Some residents have complained that the courts sometimes favor those connected to the insurgency, mullahs, or others. However, in comparison with the government system, the Taliban courts appear to be far superior.

Military Structure

The Taliban’s smallest operating unit is the *delgai* (diminutive form of *dala*, or group), which in theory consists of 10 men but in reality can have from five to 20

¹ Beginning in 2006, the Taliban also published a code of conduct, meant to govern the behavior of its fighters. Though it was distributed in parts of southern Afghanistan, it does not appear to play a prominent role in day-to-day activities or in the leadership’s attempts to police rank-and-file behavior.

fighters.^u The delgai leader typically collects the men under him by way of kinship ties, informal bonds forged through years of war (known as *andiwal* networks), and sometimes charisma.^v In Kandahar, delgais are usually confined to a specific area, although they are becoming more mobile. Associated with these delgais are various facilitators, such as smugglers and bomb makers. The delgai leader plans assaults, and the group conducts most of the attacks in its area of operation. The majority of such attacks are planned without input from higher levels.⁷⁶ The *andiwal* ties between a delgai commander and his men mean that when a commander decides to stop fighting, all of his men usually do so as well. Similarly, it is rare that individual fighters will leave the Taliban without their commander doing so. Still, at times the commander has to cajole his men into an attack, particularly if it is a dangerous mission. One commander recalled the following story:

We wanted to attack the government headquarters [of an area]. It was a dangerous thing to do because the government would call for the foreigners to help them with airpower very quickly. I convinced another delgai leader, a friend of mine, to join us in the attack. But my men were too scared. I had to spend a lot of time convincing them, and even I had to promise them more rewards if we were successful. Finally they agreed, but they were not happy.⁷⁷

A group of delgais—sometimes 10 or more—falls under a regional commander. In Kandahar, these influential men are the real power in most areas, rather than district governors or clerics. They plan ambitious assaults, coordinate strategy with other regional commanders, and liaise closely with the leadership in Pakistan. The commanders themselves are usually very mobile, particularly in recent months as the U.S. military has

stepped up its campaign against field commanders. The relationships between the regional commander and his delgai commanders are not always as close as that between the delgai leader and his men; much of this varies from case to case. In one instance in Uruzgan in 2007, for instance, a regional commander defected and brought about 10 delgais with him. But such defections at this level are rare, so it is difficult to assess the strength of the vertical ties between delgai and regional leaders. In any event, organizing coordinated attacks at the regional level is not always straightforward. Sometimes a commander will go from group to group to raise volunteers; in other cases he will rely on a small subset of the delgais available in a region.

When a delgai leader is killed or captured, his group usually disbands or is absorbed into other groups.

A large number of regional commanders form a front, or *mahaz*. The modern Taliban structure is not organized into fronts per se, as most regional commanders operate individually or are tied directly to the leadership. However, there have been some famous fronts in recent years—for instance, Mullah Dadullah headed a front of thousands of fighters throughout Kandahar, Helmand, and beyond.⁷⁸ More recently, Mullah Abdul Qayum Zakir, and his deputy Mullah Abdul Raouf Khadem, are said to have also commanded a front in southern Afghanistan.⁷⁹ Fronts are large and varied enough geographically that they do not act as a coordinated unit. Dadullah, however, was able to introduce certain techniques, such as suicide bombing, and disseminate them through his subordinate commanders.

When a delgai leader is killed or captured, his group usually disbands or is absorbed into other groups. But sometimes a brother or cousin will fill his shoes. Regional commanders have deputies, who fill in when the commanders travel to

^u Otaq is also used. This means either a “cell” or a physical base, depending on the speaker and the context. Taliban members in Kandahar tend to use the term delgai more frequently.

^v *Andiwal* means “friend” in Pashto and Dari.

Pakistan or are in hiding. When these commanders are killed, the deputy or a brother usually assumes charge.

Decision-making within the insurgency depends on the context. Local commanders, at the delgai and regional levels, carry out the majority of their attacks without any input from above. Attacks are often undertaken for strategic purposes, but as in any organization there may be other reasons as well. One insurgent commander admitted in an interview that his main motivation for planning a particularly daring raid on a government installation was to increase his standing in the eyes of his superiors, which could one day lead to a promotion.⁸⁰

The Informal Structure

The Taliban's informal networks are likely far more important than anything discussed above. The most important decision-making happens through personal connections between different commanders and the leadership in Pakistan. As of August 2010, three senior Taliban figures from the Quetta Shura—Hafiz Majid, Mawlawi Gul Agha, and Mawlawi Salaam—were responsible for directing the insurgency in Kandahar.

Majid, a Noorzai tribal elder from Sperwan, Panjwayi, was the Kandahar chief of police during the Taliban government. Unlike most of his comrades, he resisted the U.S. invasion until the very end and fled to Pakistan shortly after Mullah Omar did. He is said to have considerable business interests in Quetta, much of which he sold off recently to raise funds for the movement. He is well-respected in parts of his native Panjwayi, where he still maintains ties with the community.⁸¹ Gul Agha, an Ishaqzai from Band-i-Timor, Maiwand, is a childhood friend of Mullah Omar, having studied in the same madrassa with him. He fought in the anti-Soviet jihad in Helmand and Kandahar and later served as Mullah Omar's personal assistant and finance officer during the Taliban government. Considered Omar's most trusted ally, Gul Agha disappeared into Baluchistan just as Kandahar was

falling to Sherzai and the U.S. forces. He later played a key role (along with Mullah Obaidullah) in resurrecting old Taliban networks by persuading former commanders to rejoin the movement. He also was an important fundraiser during the early years. After Mullah Beradar's arrest, he stepped to the forefront for the first time to take an active day-to-day role in the insurgency and has even pushed to be recognized as Beradar's successor.⁸² Mawlawi Salaam, a Kakar from Taloqan, is from a newer generation of Taliban leaders. He is the younger brother of Mullah Baqi, a well-known Taliban commander who was involved in the northern front during the pre-9/11 Taliban government, including the siege of Mazar-i-Sharif. In the post-2001 years, Baqi fought under the Dadullah front in Zheray and was an early advocate for the use of suicide bombers. When Baqi was killed during Operation Medusa in 2006 in Panjwayi, Salaam took over his network. Having graduated to the Pakistan-based leadership, Salaam is responsible today for directing suicide attacks in Kandahar province.

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These and other political leaders wield influence in a number of ways: through the formal Taliban leadership at the provincial and district levels, directly to field commanders by virtue of their position on the Quetta Shura and their stature in the movement, and through informal networks of allies and sub-commanders. The Majid network is an example of influence and command traveling through informal links. A number of commanders in Panjwayi, Zheray, and Maiwand answer directly to Majid, such as Pahlawan Gul Muhammad, Pawlawan Ainudeen, Mawlawi Abdul Sattar, and Hafiz Sharif (Majid's brother). They operate side-by-side with other commanders who answer to other leaders, either in Kandahar or in Quetta and Chaman, across the border from Spin Boldak.

Further complicating issues is the fact that sometimes the provincial or district leadership is in name only. In some cases, the shadow district governors are themselves powerful commanders. In other cases, district governors do not even reside in the district they “govern.” This is particularly the case for areas like Spin Boldak and Dand, where the Taliban’s roots are much weaker. Much of this depends on the personality of the district governor, his roots in the local community, his ties to senior leadership, and the extent of Taliban control in the district. These shadow district governors are also changed quite frequently, making it difficult for them to assert effective command. Thus the most stable links are usually between field commanders and senior leaders based in Pakistan. One Taliban commander in Kandahar city admitted that:

In some places the commander is a battlefield person and the district chief has civil concerns, but in other cases this isn’t true. [The battlefield commanders] are supposed to respect the order of the district governor, but in some places they don’t. They are too powerful, they have 15 or 30 men or more, and they will only listen to senior leaders.⁸³

Sometimes these senior leaders in Pakistan even handle disputes between commanders, especially when the disputants are connected to them or the case is too complicated for provincial figures. Other times the leadership will discipline commanders for acting out of line. This can be done through senior provincial commanders and the Military Commission, but leaders in Quetta often do this directly. Mullah Adam of Maiwand, a notoriously brutal commander, led the killing of nearly two dozen Afghan migrant workers en route to Iran in 2008. The leadership immediately summoned him to Quetta, where he was disarmed and his followers disbanded. It is unclear whether he has been able to rejoin the insurgency.⁸⁴ (Interestingly, in this case a Taliban spokesman defended and took credit for the deadly assault, saying that those targeted were Afghan National Army

soldiers, even though the attack was not sanctioned by the leadership and indeed was frowned upon. This suggests that one method the Taliban uses in its media strategy is to immediately assert responsibility for certain actions and spin them favorably, even if leaders are opposed to them internally.)⁸⁵

One Taliban commander active in Mahal-i-Nijat, a restive region in the southwestern part of Kandahar city, recalls another case:

In Kandahar city lived the sons of Hamid Agha and Fazluddin Agha [former government officials in Spin Boldak]. The Taliban had gotten military uniforms and they entered these people’s houses and kidnapped six members of their family. This was in Mahal-i-Nijat and the whole raid was done by the head commander of Mahal-i-Nijat. Later this commander asked his captives for 50 guns and some money, but the captives refused. An argument ensued and the commander killed one of these six people. When Quetta found out, they were furious. They summoned him to Quetta and demanded to know why he had killed the person. “Who told you to kidnap these people?” they asked. “If you were going to kill one person, you should have killed them all. Or you should have not touched any of them and let everyone go. But you shouldn’t have done this—you are making people hate us.” They were also angry that he asked for money. He was given a warning. He now has no choice but to obey, because if he continues, it would mean death.⁸⁶

Funding

Each commander is responsible for raising funds for his group. This arrangement allows for maximum flexibility and adaptability for the movement, but at the same time fosters criminality and freelancing. One former Taliban

commander, who until 2007 led about 100 men, explained how the process works:

I was always trying to figure out how to raise money for my men. We sometimes got money from our leaders, but it was usually for weapons and it was very intermittent. And the commanders above us would usually keep the money or spend it on weapons and ammunition. We would raise money from the village. Villagers would give us donations sometimes, but they were poor so this was also irregular. Then one day we found a list of NGOs in the area and we told some people [working there] that they had to pay us money. Other times we would capture vehicles and try to sell them. Once in a while a rich person from the village would come and give us money. They believed that this was a holy jihad and is just for God. They would come and tell us, “Please take this, it is 50,000 Pakistani rupees,^w or 100,000 Pakistani rupees. This is our assistance, done in the way of God.”⁸⁷

Despite popular conception, it does not appear that the Taliban in Kandahar (or elsewhere) receive a regular “salary” as such. Funds are irregular, but appear to average the equivalent of at least \$50 to a few hundred dollars a month per fighter. The Taliban commander active in the Mahal-i-Nijat part of Kandahar city gave an example of how this works:

Sometimes people—usually, rich people—would come and say, “Who is the leader of your group? I want to give *zakat* or *ushr*.”^x Or after attacks we

w The Pakistani rupee is a commonly used currency in Afghanistan, especially for large transactions.

x Zakat is the practice, obligatory for Muslims, of giving a small portion of one’s wealth or income to charity, generally to help the poor and needy. Ushr is less standard in the Muslim world and refers to the custom of sharing 10 percent% of one’s earnings with the community. In practice this appears to be limited to earnings on land and as such can be seen as a sort of land

would capture spoils and then sell them. Either way, we divide the money with our men and tell them that this is for your expenses for the coming month. You can use this to survive. We never call it a salary.⁸⁸

Although none of the Taliban commanders interviewed admitted to this, some locals report that insurgents forcibly collected money in the form of *zakat* or *ushr* from the community. Another source of revenue in Taliban areas is the “taxation” of businesses and associated smuggling activities. This includes protection money from construction companies, private security firms, and others.⁸⁹ Opium poppy cultivation falls under this category, as it is a significant source of income for the local population (particularly in areas like Maiwand) and contributes a major portion of funds to the Taliban’s coffers in Kandahar. The insurgents either tax opium production and smuggling or partake in it themselves. Many rank-and-file insurgents, particularly from the western part of the province, are poppy farmers. Moreover, some commanders have links to prominent drug smugglers or are involved in smuggling themselves.

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In parallel with bottom-up efforts to raise money, the Taliban headquarters in Quetta also actively procures funds. Its financial commission (see Figure 5) is involved in raising money from wealthy traders in the Spin Boldak-Chaman-Quetta corridor, other parts of Pakistan, and the

tax. In traditional rural society in southern Afghanistan, the religious clergy survives on *zakat* and *ushr*.

Persian Gulf states. At the same time, individuals such as Mawlawi Gul Agha, who have not always had a formal role, have been involved in the effort. Quetta also levies “taxes” on major projects in Kandahar. There is reportedly even a Taliban engineer who examines contracts and taxes the holder 10 percent of the appraised value.⁹⁰

It is unclear what proportion of funds at the battlefield level comes from Quetta and what proportion is locally raised. Almost all of the current and former Taliban figures interviewed for this report gave the impression that the majority was locally raised, but it is possible that they have reasons to play down external funding sources. Without more visibility in this area, it will be difficult to draw definitive conclusions.

Distribution by District

Only Kandahar’s rugged northern district Mia Neshin is completely under Taliban control—meaning the insurgents occupy the district center. But most other districts are under de facto insurgent control; that is, the government occupies the center and little else, and movements by officials outside of the center are severely curtailed if not impossible without a sizable military escort. The exceptions are areas with strong tribal or patronage ties to government power brokers, such as parts of Dand and Daman districts.

Mia Neshin, Shah Wali Kot, Nesh, Ghorak, and Khakrez districts

Kandahar’s rugged, remote mountainous northern districts are very disconnected from Kandahar city, and the government has limited influence. In fact, areas like Shah Wali Kot were the first to fall to the Taliban in the post-2001 years. The Taliban are firmly entrenched in this region, which functions as a staging ground for pushes into Arghandab as well as a transit corridor between Helmand and the rest of Afghanistan (via Zabul and Ghazni). Indeed, the ring of districts from Kajaki and Baghran in the west, through northern Kandahar to Dai Chopan in Zabul, forms

the largest continuous stretch of Afghan territory that is almost completely under Taliban rule.

Zirak Durrani tribes make up the majority in these areas, but the Taliban has still been able to build significant roots in these communities, largely because of their disconnection from Kandahar city. Moreover, as elsewhere, the insurgents used a combination of appeals to disaffected minority groups (such as Ishaqzais, Ghilzis, and even a small number of Wazirs) and threats against possible government sympathizers. They have also promoted a number of Barakzai and Alikozai commanders in an attempt to make inroads with the majority populations. In Nesh, the main force arrayed against the insurgents is the militia of Matiullah Khan of Uruzgan, which protects convoys en route to Tirin Kot and facilitates the movements of government officials within the district.

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Among the prominent commanders in the area is Mullah Mohebullah, the Taliban-era governor of Takhar province and a former Bagram detainee who has since returned to the frontlines in Shah Wali Kot. Other influential figures there include Mullah Azzam and Mullah Sardar. In Khakrez, Mullah Saif is a regional commander who is also active in Ghorak and Arghandab.

Maiwand, Zheray, and Panjwayi

This region of western Kandahar is the birthplace of the Taliban, the heartland of the insurgency, and one of the key contested geographic areas over the last few years. The Taliban exert almost complete control outside of district

centers. In particular, the regions of Mushan in Panjwayi, Sangesar in Zheray, and Garamabak in Maiwand are strongholds, each with standing courts. While foreign fighters are negligible in the insurgency overall, these three areas are believed to host groups of foreigners, usually Pakistanis.⁹¹

The dynamics fueling the conflict in this area were described above—harassment of former Taliban, the marginalization of certain tribes, poor governance, and so on.

The dynamics fueling the conflict in this area were described above—harassment of former Taliban, the marginalization of certain tribes, poor governance, and so on. Moreover, this region has the special distinction of playing a central part in the Taliban's history. In addition to the role of Taliban fronts here in the 1980s, one of the movement's founding meetings took place in Sangesar, where Mullah Omar was preaching at a mosque at the time.

In Maiwand, important commanders include Mawlawi Khatib, a respected cleric from the Ishaqzai tribe who has served as a Taliban judge, and Mullah Noor Muhammad, a Noorzai from Garamabak. Muhammad is the area's most significant regional commander.⁹²

Zheray boasts more than 30 delgai commanders and almost a dozen regional commanders, which gives a sense of the Taliban's sizable manpower in the region.⁹³ One of the most prominent regional commanders is Mullah Obaidullah (not to be confused with the former defense minister), a Kakar from Nelgham who had worked in the Taliban's interior ministry. Believed to be a major player in the drug trade, he is quite unpopular and cruel, many say. Locals give an opposite assessment of one of his colorful sub-commanders, Kaka Abdul Khaliq. A Baluch who has been an active fighter for almost 30 years, Khaliq was one of

those driven back to the Taliban due to harassment by government officials and foreign forces. He appears to have substantial support from the community, partly because of the ties he forged over three decades of activity in the area. He is famous for taking his small son with him on attacks; the son carries rocket-propelled grenade rounds and dutifully feeds his father ammo during battle. Both Obaidullah and Khaliq were among the first group that infiltrated Panjwayi and Zheray in 2004 and worked to reestablish the old Taliban networks.⁹⁴

Another prominent figure is Mullah Zhedgay, one of the four commanders in charge of Kandahar city, overseeing the western part. An Alizai from Zheray, he was a foot soldier during the Taliban government and has risen in recent years to become a powerful regional commander, with at least four delgais under him. U.S. forces claimed to have killed him and another prominent Alizai commander, Mullah Amir, earlier this year, but Zhedgay is said to be still alive.⁹⁵

Taliban fighters move freely between Panjwayi and Zheray, and to a lesser extent Maiwand.⁹⁶ Malim Feda Muhammad, whose case was discussed above, is a well-known commander in Panjwayi and neighboring areas, but he spends most of his time in Pakistan and has deputies who lead his groups on the ground in battle. Muhammad and his men appear to have support from the community. As mentioned above, members of the Hafiz Majid network are also active here, alongside Mullah Akhtar Mansur's network. One key commander in the latter group is Mawlawi Matee, a Noorzai from Spin Boldak who had worked with Mansur in the civil aviation ministry during the Taliban government. Many Taliban figures from Spin Boldak operate in the more amenable climate of western Kandahar, where there is a large Noorzai population and a weak government.

⁹⁴ Zheray was created in 2005 out of parts of Panjwayi and Maiwand districts to establish an Alizai-dominated district, and therefore its boundaries may seem less than natural to Taliban fighters.

As explained earlier, Sayeds are overrepresented in the Taliban here compared to their overall numbers, and they make up one of the most significant non-Pashtun Taliban populations (along with Baluchis). Important commanders from this group include Mullah Jabbar Agha, a relative of Akbar Agha, who had attempted to launch a Taliban splinter group in 2004 and kidnapped U.N. workers to finance the operation, and Sediq Agha, who is notorious for his brutality and led the infamous attack on Saraposa prison in 2008 that freed hundreds of inmates.⁷ Mullah Janan Agha commands a number of groups in the region and is an example of the new breed of field leadership, having risen through the ranks after serving as a foot soldier during the Taliban government.

While the commanders in this area are predominantly from the majority Panjpai tribes, there are notable exceptions. Mullah Bacha, for example, is a powerful Alikozai commander known for his skill in making roadside bombs.

Kandahar City, Dand, and Daman

In recent years, the insurgents have been steadily increasing their hold over parts of Kandahar city. To date they have managed to assert a degree of control in the southwest (Mahal-i-Nijat area), west (Mirwais Mina area), and north (Loya Wiala area). Indeed, many parts of these areas are now completely no-go at night for those connected to the government, tribal elders, or foreign organizations. Taliban commanders spend one or two months in the city and then rotate to a district or to Pakistan to help ensure their safety. The aforementioned Mullah Zhedgay is a prominent commander here, along with Sheikh Mawlawi Nazar Muhammad and Mawlawi Feda Muhammad (different from the Feda Muhammad profiled above).

The unofficial district of Dand has been one of the most successful areas outside of the city in resisting Taliban takeover, largely due to close links between segments of the local population and President Karzai and Gul Agha Sherzai.^{8a} The Barakzai-majority area is home to many Sherzai-backed militias and some Popalzai strongmen, both of which have resisted Taliban encroachments in recent years. The Taliban therefore lacks a natural base in the population of the sort it enjoys in neighboring Panjwayi. Indeed, Dand's shadow district governor, Mullah Ahmadullah "Mubarak," is based outside of the district, in Panjwayi. Nonetheless, the insurgents appear to have made Dand a strategic priority this year; attacks and instances of intimidation have skyrocketed. A key commander is Qari Khairullah Munib, a Noorzai from Spin Boldak who is an expert in roadside bombs and is connected to the Majid network.⁹⁶

Maruf and Arghestan

The Barakzai majority in Maruf has ties to the government, and the Taliban initially recruited among the marginalized minority communities, including the Alizais and Ishaqzais (who make up about 30 percent of the district's population).⁹⁷ Maruf's long border with Pakistan and Zabul makes it a key transit corridor for insurgents, and the Samaai mountains along the border serve as an important Taliban redoubt. Unlike in most other parts of the province, here a number of tribal elders and maliks became Taliban commanders during the early post-2001 years. By 2006, the Taliban had saturated the non-Zirak areas and began to move into Barakzai strongholds. It promoted a number of Barakzai commanders to leading positions, including Hafiz Hekmatullah, Mullah Bismullah, and Mullah Abdul Sattar, who also serves as the chief judge of the district. The most important commander, who doubles as the shadow district governor, is Mullah Muhammad Nabi, a Barakzai from Arghestan. Despite his duties in Maruf, he is known to

⁷ Akbar Agha's short-lived group was called *Jeish ul-Muslimeen*. He was imprisoned for his role and was released on a pardon from President Karzai earlier this year.

^{8a} The Karzai family hails from Karz, a village in Dand, and the Sherzai family is also from the district.

operate as far afield as Panjwayi. The leading commander from the minority communities is known as Commander Akhtar, an Alizai.⁹⁸

The insurgents' rise in Maruf was aided by the relatively weak ties between Maruf Barakzais and major pro-government Barakzai power brokers such as Gul Agha Sherzai. During the anti-Soviet war, the Barakzai communities in Maruf and other outlying districts developed stronger connections to Hizb-i-Islami than to Sherzai. Today, the Taliban have been able to take advantage of this dynamic, giving them better links with these communities than with those in the Barakzai stronghold in Dand, which is strongly pro-Sherzai.⁹⁹

Neighboring Arghistan also has a sizable Zirk population with whom the Taliban have made inroads. The most prominent commander is Hafiz Dost Muhammad, an Alikozai from the district. The shadow district governor is Mullah Burjan, a Kuchi. In addition to the Taliban, there are a few small, autonomous militias that are opposed to both the insurgents and government forces. Locals say that these militias, which operate in the Wam area, are tied to Abdul Razzaq, a well-known mujahedeen and later Taliban commander (this Razzaq, a Popalzai, is not to be confused with Mullah Razzaq in Chaman or the Border Police commander Abdul Razzik in Spin Boldak).¹⁰⁰

Arghandab

Like Dand, Arghandab has been a key strategic focus for the Taliban, as it provides a second route into Kandahar city after the westerly approach. The Alikozai tribe and the legacy of its late senior figure, Mullah Naqib, dominate the politics of Arghandab. Naqib, the most important commander of Jamiat-e-Islami in Kandahar during the anti-Soviet insurgency, was a key player during the civil war in the 1990s, when he controlled parts of the city. Upon the Taliban's emergence, he stood down, allowing them to take Kandahar. After the 2001 invasion, the Taliban surrendered and gave Kandahar city back to Naqib, but U.S. forces

backed Gul Agha Sherzai (who in their eyes was not tainted by accommodation to the Taliban). Naqib's men were partially absorbed into the Afghan security forces, and his stature and relationship with the Taliban meant that the insurgents made few gains in the district. When he died of a heart attack in October 2007, however, the insurgents were quick to seize the opportunity and invaded Arghandab from Shah Wali Kot and Khakrez, led by Mullah Shukoor.

The Alikozais, already weakened by a number of assassinations of key leaders and internally split between a pro-Jamiat faction and a pro-Karzai faction, were not able to resist the Taliban's pressure. Mullah Naqib's successor was his twenty-something son Karimullah Naqibi, who was seen as weak and lacking his father's force of personality. When the Taliban fighters invaded, they ransacked Naqibi's house and even danced on the roof, openly showing contempt for the old order and signaling the shifting currents. Foreign forces were able to temporarily beat the insurgents back.

The Taliban's approach was aided by the marginalization of the non-Alikozai tribes in the district, including Kakars and Ghilzis.

The Taliban's approach was aided by the marginalization of the non-Alikozai tribes in the district, including Kakars and Ghilzis. The insurgents were able to develop a support network in these communities just as the Alikozai leadership was weakening. Following the Sarposa prison break in the summer of 2008, fighters amassed again in Arghandab. Foreign forces killed Mullah Shukoor and were able to repel the attack once more. A third Taliban offensive, in the spring of 2009, was also eventually repelled. However, locals and Western officials report that the insurgents are now making inroads with the Alikozai community, in particular by forging connections with important leaders and government officials.¹⁰¹ At the same time, the Taliban have given key positions to some

Alikozais, such as Qari Shafiqullah, the current shadow governor for the district. Because a significant number of older field commanders like Mullah Shukoor have been killed in various engagements over the last few years, insurgent ranks in Arghandab are increasingly led by men from Khakrez and Shah Wali Kot and by younger commanders with much less experience, like “Channa” Mullah Asadullah and Agha Wali.

Spin Boldak, Takhta Pul, Shorabak, and Registan

Like Dand and Daman, Spin Boldak is a relatively government-controlled district. Border Police commander Abdul Razzik’s hold on the district and the importance of cross-border trade to both the government and the insurgency appear to have muted the Taliban’s activity. The insurgency here is drawn almost entirely from the Noorzai tribe, as shown in Figure 4. Most of the Spin Boldak Taliban spend at least some time in other districts, perhaps because of the difficult operating conditions in their home area. Across the border, Chaman is a vitally important hub for Taliban activities in Kandahar, as Quetta is for Afghanistan overall. The Achekzai-dominated Takhta Pul district is also under Razzik’s influence, and the Taliban have less of a presence than elsewhere.¹⁰²

As described above, government corruption and attempts to influence the elections were key destabilizing factors in Shorabak district.

As described above, government corruption and attempts to influence the elections were key destabilizing factors in Shorabak district. This extremely underdeveloped, income-depressed area is home to the Bareetz tribe and many locals feel they have been neglected by the central government. Unsurprisingly, the majority of the Taliban here are Bareetz. Key commanders include Mawlawi Wali Jan, Mawlawi Abdul Halim, and Hafiz Sayed Muhammad. Interestingly, however, the shadow district governor is

Mullah Raouf, a Noorzai from the neighboring Spin Boldak district.¹⁰³

Finally, the barren district of Registan is home mostly to Baluchis. This desert area bordering Pakistan is a major smuggling and transit corridor for the Taliban.

Force Size

Estimating the size of the Taliban forces is fraught with difficulties. Fighters often move between Pakistan and their district of operation, and there are a number of facilitators and part-time fighters who may generally tend to their fields or do other work and pick up the gun only during bigger operations or missions with a chance of sizable spoils. Districts such as Dand, Zheray, and Panjwayi are especially difficult to study because fighters there are very mobile.

Estimating the size of the Taliban forces is fraught with difficulties.

Maruf, however, affords a good opportunity to make a guess at force size: The majority of the fighters are based in or near their home villages, while their commanders travel back and forth between Kandahar and Pakistan. Moreover, the natural defenses of the Samaai mountains enable a relatively static insurgent population. According to Taliban members, local officials, and local residents, there are 12 major delgai commanders in Maruf. District officials and Taliban fighters put the number of fighters in each delgai at between 10 and 22, with the exception that Mullahs Mirza Muhammad and Muhammad Nabi and Commander Akhtar appear to have larger groups. If these fluctuations are ignored and an average of 16 fighters per group is used, this means there are close to 200 Taliban fighters in the district. This is likely to be an underestimate, since a number of smaller groups are not included in the count, nor are part-timers or facilitators.

	Afghan National Police	Afghan National Army	NDS	Taliban
Force size	80	0	40	200
Force to population ratio	1 for every 380 people	Not Applicable	1 for every 765 people	1 for every 153 people
Force to male population ratio	1 for every 190 males	Not Applicable	1 for every 380 males	1 for every 75 males
Force to family ratio	1 for every 55 families	Not Applicable	1 for every 110 families	1 for every 22 families

Figure 6. Approximate Force Ratios in Maruf District (ANP and NDS figures are likely to be overestimates.)¹⁰⁴

Figure 6 gives estimated force ratios for three armed groups in the area. The numbers of Afghan National Police and National Directorate of Security personnel are almost certainly overestimates, as they are based on the number officially on payroll rather than the number who may actually be present in the district. Still, Figure 7 gives the best-case scenario from the perspective of the pro-government forces. Of course, this doesn't give nearly the full picture, because the police and NDS are concentrated in the district center while the Taliban are dispersed throughout the district (including the district center). Moreover, in terms of effectiveness, many ANP officers are nonnative, unlike the Taliban, who are rooted in the communities in which they operate.

Foreign Fighters

In the early years of the insurgency in eastern Afghanistan, and to a much lesser extent in the southern region, foreign fighters—al-Qaeda, Central Asian militants, Pakistanis, unaffiliated Arabs, and others—played a training and facilitation role. These groups, particularly the Arabs, were also a likely funding channel for the Taliban. But in recent

years, the importance and relevance of such fighters appears to have diminished greatly. The insurgents are now largely self-sufficient in funding, raising money locally or through their own networks in Pakistan and the Persian Gulf region. Also, the insurgents have developed their own expertise in the technical aspects of warfare, such as building improvised explosive devices (IEDs).¹⁰⁵

Today, areas such as Mushan (Panjwayi), Sangesar (Zheray), Garamabak (Maiwand), the Samaai mountains (Maruf), and the remote northern districts like Nesh have some foreign fighter presence.¹⁰⁶ There do not appear to be any independent foreign commanders as there are in Kunduz or Nuristan; rather, small numbers of fighters are attached to Afghan groups. However, locals and the Taliban do speak of one independent, largely Pakistani group linked to certain Taliban commanders called “the Zarqawis,” presumably in homage to the late insurgent Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian known for his activities in Iraq. A detailed list of 91 IED attacks since April provided by Taliban commander Qari Khairullah Munib, the Dand in-charge for IEDs, included a couple that were carried out by the Zarqawis.¹⁰⁷ The group appears to have emerged in the second half of 2010. There are other fleeting references to this enigmatic group, but for the most part it appears to stay away from the spotlight and does not contribute significantly to the insurgency.

Tactics and Strategy

The Taliban's approach to retaking Kandahar can be divided roughly into four periods.

Resuscitation: 2001 – 2004

When the Taliban leadership first disappeared across the border, they maintained contact with key facilitators in their home villages. These people would usually be mullahs or tribal elders, who would do much to formulate the Taliban's message of jihad in the coming years. In particular, there existed throughout the province an informal network of

mullahs who offered ready condemnations of malfeasance by the government and foreign forces. One Taliban commander recalled those days:

We would meet every week with the mullah. We would talk about the situation, especially about the government and the foreign forces. We had long discussions and the mullah would try to convince us to fight against these people.¹⁰⁸

At the same time, key leading figures like Mullah Obaidullah and Mawlawi Gul Agha would call their former commanders or associates. “Gul Agha called me one day,” recalled one former Taliban commander. “He told me that this is the time to do jihad. He invited me to Quetta so that we could discuss our options.”¹⁰⁹ Some Taliban interviewed for this report said that they were initially reluctant to rejoin the movement but that the state of affairs eventually forced them back.

In these early years, the Taliban’s message resonated with many in rural communities.

In this early period of reorganization, it was vital to bring religious legitimacy to the incipient Taliban project. While the sympathetic mullah networks preached against the foreign occupation, the insurgents also launched an assassination campaign against pro-government religious clerics. In 2003, a number of influential clerics were killed, including Mawlawi Jenab, who was gunned down in Panjwayi.¹¹⁰

In these early years, the Taliban’s message resonated with many in rural communities. The insurgents also realized early that the best way to ensure that locals would be completely dependent on them was to enforce a strict separation between the population and the government. Thus one of the first acts of many newly formed Taliban groups in Kandahar was to demand that all locals cut ties

with the government. The commander quoted above (about mullahs) said:

After some time and a lot of discussion we decided that we should join the Taliban. We formed a small group, and the mullahs advised us. The first thing we did was find those people who were working for the government and tell them that they had one chance to quit. If they did not, we would kill them.¹¹¹

Together with this intimidation, the Taliban began to issue “night letters.” The first came in 2002 in the form of leaflets left overnight at various schools, urging Afghans not to cooperate with the foreign forces. By 2003, they were a regular occurrence.¹¹²

The first of the revived Taliban groups appear to have been based in Shah Wali Kot and nearby, perhaps because these areas north of Kandahar city were the most rugged, remote, and cut off from the center. Moreover, these areas were connected to Zabul and Uruzgan, other sites of early Taliban resurgence. The insurgents targeted those areas where locals were most disaffected; in some cases the locals themselves reached out to the Taliban or formed their own groups and allied with the insurgents.

Consolidation: 2004 – 2006

From Shah Wali Kot and northern Kandahar, the insurgents were able to reconnect with old networks in the Panjwayi-Zheray-Maiwand area, the birthplace of the Taliban. By 2006 most of these areas had fallen completely to the insurgents. Taliban courts were established in western and northern Kandahar, and other elements of the shadow apparatus, such as governorships, began to be assigned.

The insurgents’ ranks swelled during this period, as disaffected former Taliban returned and communities sought protection from predatory officials or the foreigners.

However, it is important to also note the limits of Taliban support. The movement enjoyed greater backing among rural, uneducated, low-stature populations who were thoroughly disconnected from the central government. But urban dwellers, the traditional elite, educated individuals, and those connected through tribal, kinship, or experiential ties to power brokers tended to have little sympathy for the insurgents. It appears that the Taliban's support in Kandahar was greater during these early years of revival and consolidation than it is now, as heavy-handed tactics have disillusioned some of their erstwhile supporters. Moreover, the issue of Taliban support itself is complicated by the insurgency's diverse nature. Some commanders are quite popular, whereas others are reviled. Some people support certain Taliban functions—such as their courts or attacks on foreign troops—but oppose others, such as attacks on schools or government workers. Finally, some communities join with the Taliban simply to protect themselves *from* the Taliban.

As the movement consolidated during this period, the insurgents began to launch more ambitious and coordinated assaults, moving away from reliance on the “pinpricks”—hit-and-run attacks, rocket and grenade assaults, and the occasional car bomb—that had characterized the previous period.

As the movement consolidated during this period, the insurgents began to launch more ambitious and coordinated assaults, moving away from reliance on the “pinpricks”—hit-and-run attacks, rocket and grenade assaults, and the occasional car bomb—that had characterized the previous period. In 2006, mimicking moves from the Soviet war, large numbers of fighters began to assemble in the vineyards of Zheray and Panjwayi, possibly for an assault on Kandahar city. Coalition forces,

led by the Canadians, responded with Operation Medusa, a massive siege of Taliban positions in the river valley of the two districts. It was the closest thing to a conventional battle in Afghanistan since Operation Anaconda in Paktia province in 2002. The Taliban were little match for the foreigners' overwhelming firepower; more than 200 insurgents were killed and scores were captured. Operation Medusa (and similar battles around that time, such as the Battle of Baluchi Pass in Uruzgan) forced the Taliban to rethink their strategy. Instead of preparing for a final push into the main urban centers of Kandahar, which implied taking on the military forces directly, they transformed their approach.¹¹³

Asymmetry: 2006 – 2009

Under pressure from airstrikes and unable to challenge the foreign forces directly, the Taliban shifted to more small-scale tactics. Previously, dozens of fighters would be associated with an insurgent base, or *otag*, but now they began to opt for more and smaller groups.¹¹⁴ Mullah Dadullah, who was leading a major front at that time, pioneered the use of suicide bombs in southern Afghanistan, a tactic that some claim he borrowed from Iraqi insurgents.¹¹⁵ The devastating weapon had the advantage of being able to penetrate the enemy's defenses in ways conventional weapons could not, but it also carried the risk of civilian casualties. Many religious scholars insisted that such methods were proscribed in Islam. The use of such weapons sparked debates in the Quetta Shura, with Mullah Omar reportedly opposed to their use.¹¹⁶ The realities on the ground eventually won out, however, and today the leadership appears to have made a virtue of necessity. The number of suicide attacks skyrocketed after 2006. Bombers attacked district centers, like Dand, and targeted key government institutions, such as the provincial council in Kandahar city. In 2009 the campaign accelerated: Suicide attackers struck the governor's palace, the NDS headquarters, and other sites in Kandahar. Some attacks killed a large number of civilians as well. A bombing at a dog-fighting match in early 2008 killed Alikozai

strongman Abdul Hakim Jan and more than 100 others in the bloodiest suicide strike in Afghan history. The following day, an attack on an ISAF convoy in Spin Boldak killed scores more.

In this period, insurgents also began to employ another deadly weapon: the roadside bomb.

In this period, insurgents also began to employ another deadly weapon: the roadside bomb. Stuffed in culverts and ditches along roads frequented by military convoys, these mines proved to be the most effective killer of foreign troops. The threat became so pervasive that avoiding such bombs became a main preoccupation for foreign troops outside the relative safety of their bases. Though usually cruder than their Iraqi counterparts, these weapons were still capable of considerable destruction. Their use encouraged secondary insurgent groups, whose main focus would be to procure bomb-making materials and help in assembly.

Assassinations of tribal elders and government officials continued to increase in this period. The decisive factor in these targeted killings was whether the target had some connection to the government. The victims included civilians who worked closely with the government, as well as district shura members. One organization found that, from 2001 through July 2010, more than 515 tribal elders had been assassinated in Kandahar.¹¹⁷ In some districts, entire sections of the tribal leadership were either killed or driven away. The killings often followed a pattern: In areas where a particular tribe was seen as closer to the government, that tribe was predominantly targeted. In Spin Boldak, with roughly a 50-50 split between Achekzais and Noorzais and where the former is seen to be much closer to the government, 36 out of 49 assassinations were of Achekzais. In Arghandab, where the insurgents have positioned themselves as protectors of the Ghilzi tribes vis-

à-vis the Alikozai majority, 12 of the 16 killed were Alikozais. (In addition, a number of prominent Alikozai figures around the province have been killed.) But in Panjwayi, with Noorzai and Ishaqzai predominant, most of those killed were also from these tribes.¹¹⁸

In Maiwand, the Taliban were essentially able to shut down the district shura by intimidation. Insurgent threats in 2006 forced all but five of the shura's 22 members to resign. Some who quit joined the Taliban, while the remaining members fled to Kandahar city.¹¹⁹

The insurgents also devised other ways to pressure and isolate the government. Attacks on schools began to intensify by 2005. At the same time, the Taliban issued oral or written warnings to residents not to send their children to school. By 2009, most of the schools operating outside firmly-held government territory had been shuttered. This should not be seen, however, as opposition to education as such. (Indeed, the Taliban have spoken of opening their own schools, and when they captured Musa Qala in Helmand, they allowed schools to function.) Rather, this was an effort to block one of the few services that the state had attempted to provide to rural communities, and in doing so further the separation between the population and the government. For the same reason, there was a discreet but concerted campaign to attack or force the closure of clinics.¹²⁰ In the case of both schools and clinics, however, the Taliban (particularly the older generation) appeared willing to negotiate their existence with the community, so long as the inviolable principle of independence from the government and foreigners was upheld.

In cases where the carrot did not work, the insurgents used the stick. In addition to assassination campaigns and intimidation, the Taliban marked its rise with regular human rights abuses targeting those who stood in their way. These abuses included arbitrary imprisonment, collective punishment, summary execution, beheadings, extortion, and kidnapping for ransom. Because of this, as

mentioned above, individuals or communities joined the Taliban simply to protect themselves from the Taliban.

Escalation: 2009 to present

Two factors led to a shift in Taliban tactics in the past year. First, an increased foreign focus on Kandahar, especially the growing talk of a major offensive there, prompted a renewed Taliban emphasis on the province. This was marked by an effort to pressure the Afghan government via a brutal assassination campaign. The targeting of tribal elders, civil servants, low-level officials, and NGO workers is proceeding at an unprecedented pace. In the first four months of 2010, there were at least 64 assassinations in the province—about one every two days.¹²¹ The pace increased to almost one per day in the summer of 2010. Some of the killings are truly chilling: One Afghan employee of an American contractor received a call while he was visiting relatives in Mahal-i-Nijat. He was told that it was the neighbors and that they needed to speak to him urgently.

When walked out of the house, Taliban fighters abducted him, took to another area, bludgeoned him, stabbed him in the eyes, and left him for dead.¹²²

The insurgents also continued to make a push into Kandahar city, just as foreign forces and the Afghan government made plans to consolidate their presence there by increasing patrols and troop strength, and erecting a security cordon around the city. In the first 3½ months of this year there were 135 security incidents in the city alone, more than one a day. Thirty-three of these were assaults with small-arms fire, and five involved multiple attack methods. Consider a typical one-week stretch in early March: On that Monday around 2 p.m., a suicide car bomber attacked the Afghan National Police headquarters, killing a policeman and wounding 17 other people, including eight civilians. At 10 p.m., in District 4, a man on a motorcycle shot and killed a civilian and escaped into the night. The next day, at 5 a.m. in District 9, a private security vehicle struck an IED, injuring one person. An hour later,

an IED went off in front of the house of an owner of a private security company in District 9, but failed to harm anyone. The next day, Wednesday, a civilian was found shot and hanging from a tree in District 2. That morning a police vehicle hit a roadside bomb in District 9, wounding one civilian. At 7:30 the next morning, gunmen opened fire at a road construction company, killing five workers. Later that day, gunmen raided a civilian's house in broad daylight in District 3, prompting the Afghan National Police to respond. The following day, Friday, the day of rest in Afghanistan, saw no incidents. But on Saturday morning, gunmen attacked a police patrol in District 3, killing one policeman and wounding four civilians. That evening a pair of IEDs went off under police vehicles parked in front of an officer's home, but there were no casualties. Early Sunday morning, gunmen entered the compound of a local NGO, tied up the staff, and set fire to many vehicles before leaving. Insurgents capped off the week by attacking a police foot patrol in District 3 later that morning, killing two policemen but losing one of their own in the process.¹²³

It is very likely that not all of these incidents were due to the Taliban. With entrenched drug mafias, pernicious government officials, family rivalries, and other factors, there are many possible sources of violence. Nonetheless, if even some of these attacks were conducted by the insurgents, they indicate that the Taliban's campaign to force a separation between the government and the population in the city is taking root.

The focus on Kandahar city is part of a general upward trend of insurgent-initiated attacks in the province, as Figures 8 and 9 show. The foreign forces met the growing violence with a series of troop increases, but this escalation was unable to halt the Taliban's growth. In large part this was because key elements of the Taliban operations were outside the traditional military scope: The insurgents' control over an area was not dependent on their ability to physically hold territory, but their ability to influence the inhabitants of that territory. This influence has been spread largely through informal means—mosques, family ties,

tribal ties, connections from the 1990s, and so on. These channels are generally not available to foreign troops. Thus, although coalition forces easily swept through Marjah in Helmand province, displacing many insurgents and forcing others to melt back into the population, they still have not been able to compete effectively with the insurgents for influence over the population.

Nonetheless, one military approach appears to have forced the second major shift in Taliban tactics this year—the concerted U.S. special forces assassination campaign targeting insurgent field commanders. A number of commanders have been killed or captured in recent months, placing unprecedented pressure on the Taliban. As Figures 7 and 8 illustrate, however, this has not diminished the insurgents’ capability to attack or dampened the levels of violence.^{bb} What it has done is force major demographic shifts in the makeup of the insurgency and a concomitant shift in insurgent operating procedures. Until this year, almost the entire field leadership of the insurgency had been active in some capacity during the Taliban government era; when asked, tribal elders, officials, and insurgents could not identify a single pre-2009 commander who was not active himself or connected to someone (such as a brother) who was active during the Taliban era.^{cc} Today, however, a number of younger commanders have risen to replace those killed or captured, and some have no personal ties with the senior leadership. The result has been a steady fragmentation of the insurgency, with smaller and more numerous groups in operation, some of which have only a tenuous connection to Quetta. Insurgents are moving in smaller groups now for safety, as one elder from Panjwayi describes:

These people keep getting killed, but they keep getting replaced. They used to stay in otaqs of 15 or 30 people, but now there are only three or four

^{bb} It could be argued that levels of violence would be even higher absent this campaign, but the effort still has not been able to reverse the trend of worsening violence every year.

^{cc} The same does not hold true for foot soldiers, however.

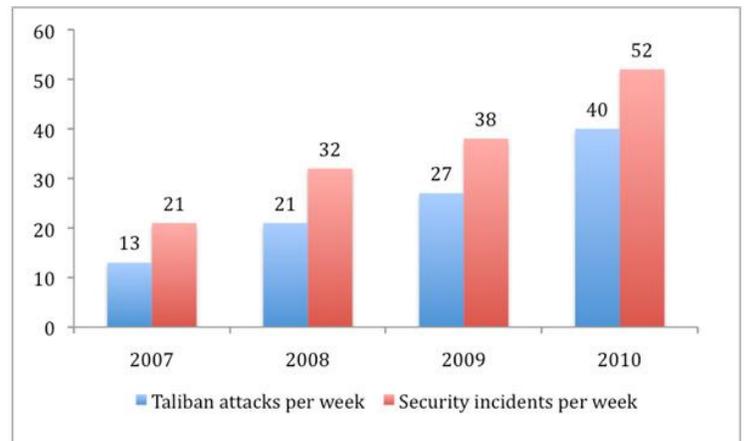


Figure 7. Taliban-Initiated Attacks and Total Security Incidents Per Week in Kandahar Province. (The latter category includes incidents related to foreign forces’ operations as well as crime.)

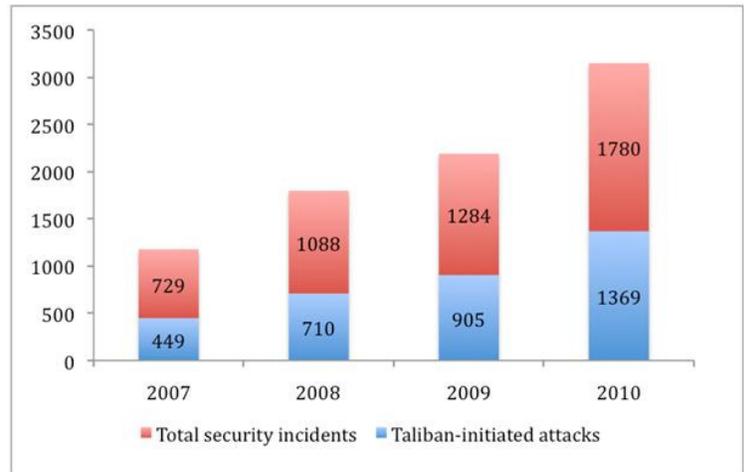


Figure 8. Number of Taliban-initiated attacks and total number of security incidents (including those due to foreign forces’ operations) in Kandahar

people per an otaq. They focus more on placing mines, since that is safer.¹²⁴

It’s too early to say what long-term effects these changes will have on the insurgency. It appears that the pressure is forcing Taliban groups to be more mobile than ever. This has the potential to spark more inter-insurgent conflicts as groups vie for territory. For the time being, it appears that the ability of foreign forces to kill or capture commanders is matched by the insurgents’ ability to replace them. In

Panjwayi, for instance, where before there were a dozen or so strong commanders, now there are two dozen or three dozen group leaders. Mullah Amir (the former shadow governor of Dand) and Ikram “Khadem” are prominent examples of those killed in recent months, and in their place are now a number of lesser-known commanders: Mullah Agha, “Gud” Ahmadullah, Haidari, Misteri, Baghawan, and others.

Conclusion

In the fall of 2010, international and Afghan forces launched a major offensive in Taliban strongholds in Arghandab, Panjwayi and Zheray. U.S. authorities hope this will mark a key turning point in the war, while Taliban members insist they will simply wait out this push as they have previous ones. To gauge the possible outcomes of the battle for Kandahar, it is important to understand Kandahar’s recent history.

The resurgence of the Taliban was not inevitable. A failed reconciliation process, together with perceived abuses by the government and foreigners, fueled the insurgency. Once the Taliban was able to reassert itself in Kandahar, it expertly exploited popular grievances, operating with an understanding of local dynamics unmatched by the foreign forces. Coalition forces have difficulty competing with the insurgents even when they have a distinct military advantage: the Taliban utilize networks that were not available to the foreigners, such as kinship ties, mullah networks, and so on. The Taliban’s structure in Kandahar is a potent mixture of formal, top-down command and informal, bottom-up initiative. The movement is not so tightly-structured that the arrest or killing of top leaders affected its activities, but at the same time it is not so decentralized that coordinated action cannot be taken.

Yet the insurgents have weaknesses. That which they cannot achieve through appealing to local sentiment, they do so through force. So just as they position themselves as protectors of marginalized communities, their harsh rule

can also breed resentment. And their informal structure, which has proven so hardy, relies on bonds between fighters that have persisted for decades. As a newer generation of fighters emerges to replace slain commanders, this informal structure could become an impediment and the leadership’s ability to control its charges could weaken. The Taliban in Kandahar has proven itself resilient, however, and it is too soon to say for sure whether such trends will materialize. But what is certain is that so long as the war continues Kandahar province will remain one of its key fronts, and the Taliban there will continue to be the heart of the insurgency.



1 Interviews in Kandahar city, July 2010. “Ghulam” is a pseudonym.

2 Alex Strick van Linschoten, “Kandahar Timeline,” www.alexstrick.com/timeline

3 Interviews, Kandahar, 2008-2010; Gilles Dorransoro, *Revolution Unending: Afghanistan 1979 to Present* (London, C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2005).

4 Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, *A Bone in the Throat: The Myth of TalQaeda in Afghanistan, 1970-2010*, (London: Hurst, Forthcoming).

5 Abdul Salaam Zaeef, *My Life With the Taliban* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2010), 26-7.

6 Information from interviews in Kandahar and Kabul with former mujahedeem, 2009-2010. It should be noted that these commanders were not very important in the 1980s jihad.

7 See, for instance, Sarah Chayes, *The Punishment of Virtue: Inside Afghanistan After the Taliban*, Penguin Press, 2006.

8 Details of these events are from interviews with Mullah Abdul Hakim Mujahed, Mawlawi Arsala Rahmani, Mullah Abdul Salaam, Abdul Wahad, officials in Hamid Karzai’s office, and officials and Taliban figures in Kandahar province who spoke on the condition of anonymity, 2010. See also Hamid Karzai’s speech at the Afghanistan Consultative Peace Jirga, June 2, 2010.

9 Interview with Afghan government officials, August 2010.

10 Interviews with current and former Taliban and Afghan officials in Kandahar and Kabul, 2010.

11 Bradley Graham and Alan Sipress, “Reports That Taliban Leaders Were Freed Shock, Alarm U.S.,” *The Washington Post*, Jan. 10, 2002. Obaidullah and others were freed by the government but came under criticism from the United States.

12 Interview with Afghan government officials, August 2010.

13 Interviews with Afghan government officials and Taliban figures, 2008-2010. Tayeb Agha is rumored to have been arrested by Pakistan in early 2010, but the Pakistani government has not confirmed this.

14 Interview with Fazal Muhammad, Kabul, August 2010.

15 Interviews with Kandahar government officials and tribal elders, August 2010.

16 Interviews with Kandahar government officials and tribal elders, July 2010.

17 Interviews with Kandahar government officials and tribal elders, July 2010.

18 Interviews with residents and officials in Maiwand and Kandahar city, 2008-2010.

19 Interviews with Kandahar government officials and tribal elders, 2010.

20 Interview with MP Ahmed Shah Achekzai, April 2010.

21 Interviews with Taliban commander and Taliban fighter, Kandahar, July 2010.

22 Interviews with Rahmani, Siddiqi, Abdul Hakim Mujahed, Ali Jalali, Felix Kuehn, 2010.

23 In particular, there was opposition from the Northern Alliance.

24 Interviews with Arsala Rahmani, Abdul Hakim Mujahed, Abdul Sattar Siddiqi and Ali Jalali.

25 We will follow the mainstream English spelling of the tribes (with English plural markings) as opposed to the Latinized Pashto variants.

26 See, for instance: Carl Forsberg, "Politics and Power in Kandahar," The Institute for the Study of War, April 2010

27 Interview with Noorzai elder, Kandahar city, August 2010.

28 Population figures from United Nations Development Program, Afghanistan, Kandahar Anzor, 2009. Government figures are from Kandahar City Municipality and Dand District: District Narrative Analysis, March 30, 2010, from the Stability Operations Information Center, Kabul. Population figures do not include Mia Neshin.

29 For more on Razzik and his role in cross-border trade and smuggling, see Matthieu Aikins, "The Master of Spin Boldak," Harpers, December 2009.

30 Interviews with government officials, intelligence officials, and tribal elders in Spin Boldak, April 2010

31 Interview with Neda Muhammad, in Kabul, and elders from Panjwayi, in Kandahar city, August 2010.

32 Graeme Smith, "The Canadians Try to Kill Everybody," The Globe and Mail, Nov. 27, 2006.

33 See, for example: Thomas Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency," The Naval Postgraduate School, 2006.

34 Interviews with Maiwand elders and government officials, Keshk-i-Nakhud, 2008.

35 See Graeme Smith, "House of Pain: Canada's Connection with Kandahar's Ruthless Palace Guard," The Globe and Mail, April 10, 2010.

36 Interviews with locals, elders, and government officials in Kandahar, 2008-2010.

37 Interview with Kandahar resident in Kandahar city, July 2010.

38 Interview with Maiwand tribal elder, Kabul, August 2010.

39 Interviews with Kandahar residents, 2008-2010.

40 The Bareetz are neither Durrani nor Ghilz. Their members are mostly in Shorabak, Baluchistan, Nimroz, Helmand, and Sindh.

41 Interview with Hajji Muhammad Bareetz, Kandahar, May 2010.

42 See Dexter Filkins, "Tribal Leaders Say Karzai's Team Forged 23,900 Votes," The New York Times, Sept. 1, 2009.

43 Kandahar City Municipality and Dand District: District Narrative Analysis, March 30, 2010, from the Stability Operations Information Center, Kabul.

44 Michael V. Bhatia and Mark Sedra, Afghanistan, Arms and Conflict: Armed Groups, Disarmament and Security in a Post-War Society, (Routledge, 2008), Kindle Electronic Edition.

45 Interviews with tribal elders and locals, Panjwayi, 2010.

46 Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, A Bone in the Throat: The Myth of TalQaeda in Afghanistan, 1970-2010, (London: Hurst, Forthcoming).

47 Kandahar City Municipality and Dand District: District Narrative Analysis, March 30, 2010, from the Stability Operations Information Center, Kabul. The shortage is likely due to a dearth of qualified individuals and the Taliban threats, which keep people away.

48 For examples of special forces working with Sherzai's commanders, see Anonymous, Hunting Al Qaeda: A Take-No-Prisoners Account of Terror, Adventure and Disillusionment. Zenith Press, 2005.

49 Interview with NDS agent, Kabul, August 2010.

50 Interviews with Taliban fighters, tribal elders, and government officials, Kandahar, 2010.

51 A type of PK machine gun.

52 Interview with Taliban commander and elders from Shah Wali Kot, 2009.

53 Interviews with Ishaqzai elders in Helmand, Kandahar, and Kabul, 2009-2010, and Malalai Ishaqzai, lawmaker, 2010.

54 Interviews with Zheray elders, Kandahar, April 2010. Janan was preaching against the foreign forces but was not a fighter himself. Despite his preaching (or maybe because of it), he was very popular and influential in the area.

55 Ramazan is the Persian and Afghan term for Ramadan.

56 Interview with Taliban commander in Kandahar city, July 2010.

57 See, for example: U.K. Department for International Development, Understanding Afghanistan: Poverty, Gender and Social Exclusion Analysis, November 2008. Of course, Taliban presence itself, or insecurity, could also cause joblessness and depressed income levels.

58 This does not mean, however, that the Taliban pay a regular “salary” to their fighters. See the section below on Taliban financing.

59 Interviews with locals, Keshk-i-Nakhud, Maiwand, April 2008.

60 Ibid.

61 Graeme Smith, “Talking to the Taliban,” *The Globe and Mail*, March 22, 2008.

62 One example of this is the Khogiyanis in Maiwand (against the Noorzais, for land rights).

63 And vice versa, where Kuchis use the Taliban against local settled communities.

64 Interviews with Quetta Shura leaders, Taliban commanders, and tribal elders, 2008-2010.

65 Sarah Ladbury in collaboration with Cooperation for Peace and Unity, Kabul, “Testing Hypothesis for Radicalization in Afghanistan: Why Do Men Join the Taliban and Hizb-i-Islami? How Much Do Local Communities Support Them?” Independent report for DFID, August 14, 2009.

66 Sarah Ladbury, et al.

67 The material for this section is based on dozens of interviews with Taliban in Kandahar, 2008-2010, unless otherwise noted.

68 Interviews with Quetta Shura members, 2010.

69 Ibid.

70 According to Alex Strick van Linschoten, a Kandahar-based researcher (interview, August 2010), Mullah Ghaus served under Abdul Razziq, a Popalzai commander with Hizb-i-Islami Khalis (not to be confused with the other Abdul Razziqs mentioned previously in this paper).

71 Interviews with locals from Arghestan, officials, and Taliban figures.

72 Moreover, the term “mullah” is used very loosely by the Taliban. Typically most Taliban commanders take the title “mullah” even if they have not attended a religious school or are not qualified to lead Friday prayers.

73 These include Panjwayi, Zheray, Mia Neshin, Maiwand, Khakrez, Ghorak, and Arghestan.

74 Interview, Kabul, March 2010.

75 See, for instance: Dan Murphy, “Dent in Afghanistan War Strategy: Why Kandahar Locals Turn to the Taliban,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, July 6, 2010.

76 Interviews with Afghan intelligence officials, 2008-2010, and a U.S. intelligence official, 2008.

77 Interview with Taliban commander, April 2010. By “rewards,” he means spoils, such as weapons.

78 Dadullah’s front fell apart after his death in 2007 and the expulsion of his brother from the Taliban.

79 “Zakir” and “Khadem” originated as radio names and have since stuck. Zakir used to be the deputy of Abdul Raouf during the Taliban era, but now the two have

switched roles. Both Zakir and Raouf are former Guantanamo detainees. For more on them, see Anand Gopal, “Qayum Zakir, The Afghanistan Taliban’s Rising New Mastermind,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 30, 2010.

80 Interview with Taliban commander, June 2010.

81 Interviews with Afghan intelligence officials, tribal elders, and Taliban commanders in Panjwayi, Zheray, Kandahar city, and Kabul, 2009-2010.

82 Interviews with Afghan intelligence officials, tribal elders, and Taliban commanders in Kandahar city and Kabul, 2010. For more on Gul Agha’s moves for leadership, see Sami Yousufzai and Ron Moreau, “Taliban in Turmoil,” *Newsweek*, May 28, 2010.

83 Interview with Taliban commander, Kandahar city, July 2010.

84 Adam was part of Mullah Abdul Manan’s network. Manan was a prominent commander who is believed to have been killed by an airstrike in 2007 or 2008. Adam is Ishaqzai by tribe.

85 See Fisnik Abrashi, “More Than 1,000 Afghans Protest Taliban Killings,” *Associated Press*, Oct. 24, 2008.

86 Interview, Kandahar, July 2010.

87 Interview, Kandahar, July 2010.

88 Interview, Kandahar, July 2010.

89 See, for example: Adam Roston, “How the U.S. Funds the Taliban,” *The Nation*, Nov. 11, 2009.

90 In addition, 10 to 20 percent can go to the local commander. Interview with Felix Kuehn, Kabul, July 2010. In

91 Interview with U.S. Army officer, near Sangesar, April 2010, and interviews with locals in Zheray, Maiwand, and Kandahar city, 2010.

92 Interviews with locals, officials, and Taliban fighters, Maiwand, 2008-2010.

93 Interviews with locals, officials, and Taliban fighters, Zheray, 2008-2010.

94 Interviews with tribal elders, Taliban commanders, locals, and Afghan officials in Zheray, Maiwand, and Panjwayi, 2009-2010. Obaidullah is injured and his deputies are now taking the leading role. One news report claimed that Kaka Abdul Khaliq was killed in the October 2010 Kandahar offensive, but this has not been independently confirmed. See Heidi Vogt and Amir Shah, “Afghan: Consult System on Military Ops Not Working”, *The Associated Press*, Oct. 17, 2010.

95 Interviews with local officials and Taliban, 2010.

96 Interviews with Taliban commanders and Afghan intelligence officials, 2010. Munib is also active in Zheray and Panjwayi and is associated with Muhammad Issa, the Noorzai commander from Spin Boldak (not to be confused with the shadow governor).

97 United Nations Development Program, Afghanistan, Kandahar Anzor, 2009.

98 Interviews with locals elders, government officials, and Taliban from Maruf, 2010.

99 Interview with international observer in Kabul and locals in Maruf, 2010.

100 Interviews with locals and elders from Arghestan, 2010.

101 Interviews with locals, elders, Taliban, and government officials in Arghandab, July 2010, and interview with U.S. Army officer, August 2010.

102 Interviews with government officials, Taliban, and U.S. military officials, Spin Boldak, 2008-2010. Takhta Pul is an unofficial district.

103 Interviews with government officials, elders and locals from Shorabak, 2010.

104 Based on a population estimate of 30,600 and a family size of seven, from United Nations Development Program, Kandahar Azor, 2009. Force sizes of ANP and NDS are official figures from Maruf district government and are likely to be exaggerated, since in many districts officials report higher numbers in order to get more resources from the central government. NDS size includes assistants and paid agents.

105 Interviews with Afghan intelligence officials and U.S. military officers, 2009-2010. The expertise appears to have been shared among members, and training appears to take place both within Kandahar and in Pakistan.

106 Interviews with locals, government officials, and U.S. military personnel, 2010. The foreign fighters appear to be mostly Pakistanis, although there are some Arabs and fighters from the Central Asian Republics as well.

107 The list was provided to me in August 2010.

108 Interview with Taliban commander, Kandahar city, July 2010.

109 Interview with former Taliban commander, Kabul, August 2010.

110 Alex Strick van Linschoten, "Kandahar Timeline," www.alexstrick.com/timeline

111 Interview with Taliban commander, Kandahar city, July 2010.

112 Alex Strick van Linschoten, "Kandahar Timeline," www.alexstrick.com/timeline

113 Antonio Giustozzi, Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). Pp. 125-129.

114 Otaq literally means "room" but it appears that insurgents use it to mean a base, either physical or conceptual (as in a "cell"). See also note "u".

115 There were sporadic suicide attacks before this period, but it appears that Dadullah put them into regular use. From interviews with Quetta Shura members, 2008-2010.

116 Interviews with Quetta Shura members and associates, 2008-2010. See also, Sean M. Maloney, "A Violent Impediment: Evolution of Insurgent Operations in Kandahar Province 2003 – 2007," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 19: 2, 201-220.

117 Suleiman Shah Durrani, "Since 2002 Kandahar Has Witnessed the Assassinations of More Than 515 Tribal Elders in Only 13 Districts," *Surghar Weekly*, Aug. 1, 2010.

118 Ibid.

119 Interviews with government officials in Keshk-i-Nakhud, April 2008, and tribal elders in Kandahar city, 2010.

120 Antonio Giustozzi, Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). Pp. 102-107.

121 Statistics from Sami Kovanen of Indiciium Consulting.

122 Interview with locals from Kandahar city, August 2010.

123 Incident reporting from Sami Kovanen of Indiciium Consulting.

124 Interview with a tribal elder from Panjwayi, Kabul, July 2010.



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