

THE INSURGENCY IN AFGHANISTAN'S HEARTLAND

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS	i
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. RISE, FALL, RESURGENCE	3
A. ORIGINS.....	3
B. KABUL WON AND LOST	4
C. COLLAPSE.....	5
1. Operation Enduring Freedom	5
2. Resurgence.....	5
III. STATE OF PLAY	8
A. RECRUITMENT	9
1. Motivation.....	9
2. Mobilisation	11
B. COMMAND AND CONTROL	13
1. Taliban command and control.....	13
2. The Haqqani network and Hizb-e Islami	14
C. TAKING TERRITORY	15
1. Kabul.....	15
2. South of Kabul: Logar, Wardak, Ghazni	16
3. North of Kabul: Parwan, Kapisa, Laghman.....	18
D. COOPERATION AND COMPETITION	19
1. The Taliban, al-Qaeda and the Haqqani network.....	19
2. The Taliban and Hizb-e Islami.....	21
IV. THE CURRENCY OF CONFLICT	22
A. SHADOW GOVERNANCE/SHADOW ECONOMY.....	25
B. PROFIT MOTIVES	26
V. CONCLUSION	29
APPENDICES	
A. MAP OF AFGHANISTAN	30
B. MAP OF INSURGENT INFLUENCE AROUND KABUL	31
C. GLOSSARY	32

THE INSURGENCY IN AFGHANISTAN'S HEARTLAND

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The insurgency in Afghanistan has expanded far beyond its stronghold in the south east. Transcending its traditional Pashtun base, the Taliban is bolstering its influence in the central-eastern provinces by installing shadow governments and tapping into the vulnerabilities of a central government crippled by corruption and deeply dependent on a corrosive war economy. Collusion between insurgents and corrupt government officials in Kabul and the nearby provinces has increased, leading to a profusion of criminal networks in the Afghan heartland. Despite efforts to combat the insurgency in the south, stability in the centre has steadily eroded. Yet, with nearly one fifth of the population residing in Kabul and its surrounding provinces, the Afghan heartland is pivotal to the planned transition from international troops to Afghan forces at the end of 2014. Given the insurgency's entrenchment so close to the capital, however, it appears doubtful that President Hamid Karzai's government will be able to contain the threat and stabilise the country by then. Countering the insurgency in these crucial areas requires the implementation of long-overdue reforms, including more robust anti-corruption efforts, stricter oversight over international aid and greater support for capacity building in the judicial and financial sectors.

Although the number of major attacks on Kabul has recently declined, insurgent networks have been able to reinforce their gains in provinces and districts close to the city, launching smaller attacks on soft targets. Outmanned and outgunned by the thousands of foreign and Afghan security forces in and around Kabul, Taliban attacks inside the capital are not aimed at controlling it physically but to capture it psychologically. Once that objective is achieved, the political and financial cost of doing business for foreign forces and diplomatic missions located in Kabul will be too high to sustain for the long haul.

An aggressive campaign of assassinations of government officials and infiltration of Afghan security forces in neighbouring provinces has, meanwhile, gutted the government's ability to expand its reach to the periphery. In the rural areas of Ghazni, Wardak, Logar and other nearby provinces, where unemployment runs high and government presence is low, the insurgency has found safe havens far from the borders of Pakistan. A little more than a year

after the transfer of additional U.S. troops was completed, violence increased across the country, hitting new peaks in May 2011 as the Taliban launched their spring offensive, which resulted in the highest recorded number of civilian casualties incurred in a single month since the U.S. engagement in Afghanistan began in 2001. It is unlikely that this trend will be reversed anytime soon. Following the announcement by President Barack Obama on 22 June 2011 of U.S. plans to withdraw 33,000 troops by September 2012, it appears likely that the insurgency will push forcefully to gain more ground before the military drawdown reaches its final phase by December 2014.

Nearly a decade after the U.S.-led military intervention began, little has been done to challenge the perverse incentives of continued conflict in Afghanistan. Insecurity and the inflow of billions of dollars in international assistance has failed to significantly strengthen the state's capacity to provide security or basic services and has instead, by progressively fusing the interests of political gatekeepers and insurgent commanders, provided new opportunities for criminals and insurgents to expand their influence inside the government. The economy as a result is increasingly dominated by a criminal oligarchy of politically connected businessmen. On the surface, security conditions in the capital city appear relatively stable. The nexus between criminal enterprises, insurgent networks and corrupt political elites, however, is undermining Kabul's security and that of the central-eastern corridor. Afghan citizens, meanwhile, are squeezed on all sides – by the government, the insurgency and international forces.

The insurgency's penetration of the greater Kabul area has also intensified competition between Taliban fighters associated with Mullah Omar's Quetta Shura (leadership council), the North Waziristan-based Haqqani network and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-e Islami. Violent rivalries between commanders of these insurgent groups in places such as Kapisa, Logar and Wardak have resulted in the loss of hundreds of lives. Caught in the middle are ordinary Afghans who remain fearful of a Taliban return to power. Tasked with quelling the violence, NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is perceived as unable or unwilling to distinguish between civilians and

insurgents and to reduce dependence on corrupt government officials in its counter-insurgency strategy.

Stabilisation and improving security beyond Kabul will depend on confronting corruption in the capital and outlying areas. This will require a comprehensive reassessment of current anti-corruption efforts, which so far have proven ineffective. Building capacity in the judicial sector while weeding out corruption is crucial for lasting reform. Afghan agencies with the combined mandate of countering corruption, organised crime and terrorism financing such as the Special Investigations Unit, the Major Crimes Task Force and the Financial Transactions Reports Analysis Centre of Afghanistan need more support. A broad review of the policies and operational practices of the country's national intelligence agency, the National Directorate of Security (NDS), will also be important to ensure against abuses of power that may further fuel the insurgency.

Fighting the insurgency is synonymous with providing citizens security and basic services and tackling corruption. The Afghan government and the international community must accept and prepare for the risks that come with targeting powerful political and business elites in and around Kabul for prosecution and sanctions. The potential short-term pain of political tensions that may arise over such prosecutions is worth the long-term gains associated with striking at the primary causes of the insurgency – poor governance, corruption and misuse of force by Afghan or foreign forces. With just three years left before the bulk of international forces withdraw, the window of opportunity to expand security outside Kabul is fast closing. It is unlikely that this can be achieved unless a better balance can be struck between taking the fight to the field and countering the causes of the insurgency. Failure in Afghanistan is not inevitable, but without a recalibration of the current counter-insurgency strategy, success is far from guaranteed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Government of Afghanistan:

1. Invest more resources in building the state's capacity to confront organised crime and corruption:
 - a) fully reinstate the Major Crimes Task Force and Sensitive Investigations Unit as independent law enforcement bodies; outline and implement a public policy of non-interference in corruption investigations;
 - b) expand the capacity of the Financial Transactions Reports Analysis Centre of Afghanistan and consider creating an agency liaison to parliament that regularly produces public reports about the agency's findings; and

- c) clarify criteria for corruption investigations and harmonise policy on pursuing sensitive cases involving high-level officials; reinvest resources allocated for anti-corruption across judicial institutions with special focus on building capacity in the attorney general's office.
2. Launch a full-scale review of National Directorate of Security operational and administrative practices:
 - a) implement more aggressive procedures for the monitoring and oversight of operational funds at the provincial level; and
 - b) enhance the powers of parliamentary Internal Security and Defence Committees to call security agencies such as NDS to account and adopt policies and legislation that provide for more detailed budgetary information about NDS to be submitted to parliament on a regular basis.
 3. Conduct anti-corruption efforts in a more robust and public manner by prosecuting high-profile officials implicated in supporting the insurgency and by working with international partners to impose sanctions against individuals and firms who have financed it.
 4. Provide stronger support to the attorney general's anti-corruption unit by realigning the unit's priorities to focus on the prosecution of racketeering, bribery and extortion schemes by government officials at all levels.
 5. Enhance and enforce regulatory controls over currency trading through increased monitoring and investigation of informal currency traders; and adopt stricter controls over the import, export and trade of national and foreign currencies within the country's borders by creating incentives for currency traders to register while imposing harsher penalties on unregistered ones.

To the U.S. and NATO/ISAF:

6. Realign financial support to reflect concerns over corruption; insist on greater accountability for international aid spent on reconstruction and in support of Afghan national security forces, particularly for aid in support of NDS and other security organs.
7. Revise and implement counter-insurgency policy guidelines to encourage more rigorous review of information and broadening sources of information in order to minimise the risk of civilian casualties and wrongful detentions; increasing accountability mechanisms and encouraging greater transparency in the investigation of civilian casualties, alleged abuses and wrongful detentions.
8. Insist on more stringent vetting procedures for appointees in the Afghan security forces, particularly in NDS, and the swift removal and prosecution of security

officials found to be involved in facilitating insurgent activities.

9. Strike a better balance between spending on the improvement of the tactical capabilities of Afghan national security forces and increasing the investigative capacity of law enforcement and counter-terrorism agencies.
10. Consider partially withholding funding for security sector development until the Afghan government demonstrates a genuine commitment to supporting the Major Crimes Task Force, Sensitive Investigative Unit and other anti-corruption agencies.

Kabul/Brussels, 27 June 2011

THE INSURGENCY IN AFGHANISTAN'S HEARTLAND

I. INTRODUCTION

Insurgent activity in Kabul, Kapisa, Parwan, Logar, Wardak, Laghman and Ghazni provinces has greatly intensified as the nexus between insurgent groups, political elites and criminal networks solidifies in and around the capital. The spike in the insurgency is straining security resources and further undermining the legitimacy of President Hamid Karzai's weak and fragile government. The failure to take effective action against insurgent groups in Kabul and nearby provinces and to dismantle predatory criminal networks linked to political elites is deepening the divide between Afghan citizens and government.¹

These developments have troubling implications for the plan announced by President Karzai in March 2011 for Afghan security forces to take over from the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in providing security to most of Kabul province and some neighbouring areas. Countrywide, Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are expected to take over from NATO by the end of 2014.²

¹ For previous Crisis Group analysis of post-Taliban security dynamics and the challenges of political and security sector reform see Asia Briefing N°115, *Afghanistan: Exit vs. Engagement*, 28 November 2010; Asia Report N°190, *A Force in Fragments: Reconstituting the Afghan National Army*, 12 May 2010; Asia Report N°171, *Afghanistan's Election Challenges*, 24 June 2009; Asia Report N°158, *Taliban Propaganda: Winning the War of Words?*, 24 July 2008; and Asia Report N°123, *Countering Afghanistan's Insurgency: No Quick Fixes*, 2 November 2006.

² According to the declaration issued at the November 2010 NATO summit in Lisbon: "The process of transition to full Afghan security responsibility and leadership in some provinces and districts is on track to begin in early 2011, following a joint Afghan and NATO/ISAF assessment and decision. Transition will be conditions-based, not calendar-driven and will not equate to withdrawal of ISAF troops. Looking at the end of 2014, Afghan forces will be resuming full responsibility across the whole of Afghanistan". Lisbon Summit Declaration at www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68828. In March 2011, President Karzai announced that the first phase of the transition, to be completed by July 2011, would include Kabul province (except Surobi district), Panjshir and Bamiyan provinces, the western city of Herat, Mehtarlam in Laghman province, Mazar-e-Sharif in Balkh province and Helmand's capital

President Obama's 22 June 2011 announcement of a phased withdrawal of 33,000 U.S. troops to be completed by September 2012 is likely to act as a catalyst for the insurgency.³ A robust insurgency, the corruption and ineptitude of government and the creeping criminalisation of the conflict make it increasingly doubtful that the Karzai government will be able to broker the political settlement that many in the international community now support.⁴

Insurgent leaders have achieved momentum in the central-eastern provinces by employing a strategy that combines the installation of shadow governments, intimidation, and the co-opting of government officials. At the same time, the competition between the Quetta Shura Taliban,⁵ the Haqqani network and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami, the three main insurgent groups operating for control of areas in and around the capital, is amplifying violence. Tensions within these groups have been exacerbated by ISAF's aggressive operations following the surge of U.S. troops in 2009. Local insurgent units are also vigorously competing for control over the lucrative transport and trafficking markets that serve the country's political and criminal elites. These internal fissures could create

Lashkar Gah. "Afghan security transition to start in seven areas", Reuters, 22 March 2011.

³ The U.S. plans to withdraw 10,000 troops by the end of 2011 with an additional 23,000 scheduled to withdraw by September 2012. See: "Remarks by the President on the way forward in Afghanistan", www.whitehouse.gov, 22 June 2011.

⁴ On 18 February 2011, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, outlining the Obama administration's position on political reconciliation in Afghanistan, called the possibility of reconciliation "increasingly viable" in light of plans to transition security to Afghan lead by the end of 2014. She supported the creation of a durable and "responsible political settlement". See "Remarks at the launch of the Asia Society's series of Richard C. Holbrooke Memorial Addresses", official transcript of remarks, New York, 18 February 2011 at www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/02/156815.

⁵ All references to the Taliban indicate the militant Islamist group led by Mullah Mohammad Omar and the group's leadership council based in Quetta, Pakistan, generally known as the Quetta Shura. The Taliban's command and control is further divided into four regional military councils or shuras. The central-eastern provinces near Kabul generally fall under the control of the sub-council in Peshawar, also known as the Peshawar Shura.

opportunities for al-Qaeda to reassert its influence on the insurgency and have already driven up civilian casualties, with May 2011 marking the deadliest single month on record since the U.S. engagement in Afghanistan began in 2001.⁶

Strategically, the provinces surrounding Kabul are as significant as the Taliban's main operational bases in the southern provinces of Kandahar and Helmand and the Haqqani network's presence in the eastern provinces. Proximity to international media and diplomatic missions in Kabul augments the impact of even small-scale attacks in the capital. Surrounding provinces are equally pivotal, functioning as staging areas for ambitious insurgent commanders focused on striking inside Kabul and as vital supply and logistics nodes. As in other parts of the country, insurgents have been able to tap into deep-rooted mistrust of the government and foreign forces.

While the number of NATO forces in the central-eastern region remains inadequate to deal with the rising insurgent threat, civilian casualties resulting from U.S. Special Operations night raids and errant ISAF airstrikes are stoking support for the Taliban and other groups. The insurgents also capitalise on the absence of government officials and/or the presence of corrupt officials to expand their authority and to augment their war chests. There is a direct correlation between the weakness of the government and the strength of the insurgents, amid a growing sense that foreign forces are as responsible for the pervasive atmosphere of impunity as are the warlords they often support.

Funding and support for insurgent activity is drawn in part from outside sources such as charitable donations from individuals and patrons in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates and other countries. Insurgent groups with strong historical connections to al-Qaeda, such as the Haqqani network, increasingly finance themselves by co-opting licit businesses – primarily in construction and logistics. Local commanders tax the opium trade and raise funds through *ushr*⁷ on licit products produced in the heartland.

While insurgent groups increasingly operate like militarised cartels in the capital and nearby provincial centres, they nonetheless remain firmly rooted in militant Islamist ideology and heavily influenced by the anti-government

rhetoric of religious and jihadi leaders based within and outside Afghanistan. Commanders under the command of the Taliban's Quetta Shura leadership council and its military sub-command, the Peshawar Shura in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province, and the Haqqani network, based in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA),⁸ exploit religious conservatism as well as the political and economic vacuum resulting from high unemployment and paltry government services to gain recruits and support in the Afghan heartland.

Field research was conducted between November 2010 and May 2011 in Kabul, Kapisa, Parwan, Logar, Wardak, Laghman and Ghazni provinces, but security concerns restricted most trips to provincial capitals. Interviews were conducted with current and former Afghan government officials, local residents, civil society activists and current and former insurgent fighters. Interviews with national and international security officials and advisers also helped to identify and understand the causes and consequences of instability in the central region. Due to the sensitivity of the information shared, the majority of those interviewed for this report requested anonymity. Names of Taliban and other insurgent commanders are only included where they could be verified by several sources, including online insurgent publications, former and current insurgent commanders, local Afghan officials as well as international military officials. Similarly, allegations of government officials involved in corruption or colluding with insurgents were only included when they could be corroborated by multiple sources.

⁶UNAMA reported in an 11 June 2011 press release that 368 civilians were killed and 593 were injured in security incidents across the country from 1 May to 31 May 2011, marking the month as the most deadly since civilian casualties began being recorded by the UN in 2007. See Alissa J. Rubin, "Afghan civilian deaths set a monthly record, UN says", *The New York Times*, 11 June 2011.

⁷Distinct from *zakat*, the religious obligation to give charity, *ushr* is an Islamic tithe or tax levied primarily on agricultural products.

⁸The Haqqani command and control is currently primarily based in FATA's North Waziristan Agency.

II. RISE, FALL, RESURGENCE

A. ORIGINS

The Taliban emerged in the mid to late 1980s, during the last years of the anti-Soviet jihad, and aimed to oust the Soviet-backed government of Dr. Mohammad Najibullah, the one time director of the Afghan State Information Services or KhAD (*Khidamat-e Ittila 'at-i-Dawlati*).⁹ The anti-Soviet jihad was primarily led by seven Sunni Islamist parties, backed by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the U.S.¹⁰ Billions of dollars in military and financial support was provided to these mujahidin groups, who operated out of Pakistan's safe havens and received the funds through that country's military government, headed by General Zia-ul-Haq. The U.S. viewed the Afghan mujahidin as crucial weapons in its Cold War arsenal. Pakistan's support was partly motivated by fears of Afghan irredentist claims to its Pashtun-majority borderlands, partly by the Zia's regime's Islamist inclinations and partly by the Pakistani belief that Afghanistan fell under its sphere of influence.¹¹ Saudi Arabia's backing was fuelled by the desire to spread the kingdom's Wahhabi/Salafi ideology to counter the late Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasir's pro-Soviet pan-Arab nationalism.¹²

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar¹³ and Jalaluddin Haqqani,¹⁴ currently leaders of two of the three most powerful Afghan

insurgent groups, were among the main beneficiaries of U.S. and Pakistani support. Pakistan's influence on mujahidin fighters was further strengthened by Sunni radical madrasas in the Pashtun belt of Balochistan and North-west Frontier Province (NWFP),¹⁵ the two provinces that absorbed the bulk of the millions of Afghan refugees during the 1980s.¹⁶ A number of the predominately Pashtun Taliban's leaders were students of these madrasas, which taught a curriculum based on Sunni Deobandism¹⁷ superimposed on *Pashtunwali*, the honour code of the Pashtuns.¹⁸

As Afghanistan descended into civil war following the downfall of Najibullah's regime in 1992, violent turf wars broke out between rival warlords, particularly in Kandahar, the Taliban's heartland, where competition over trading and trafficking networks had always been fierce. The Taliban's eventual penetration of the provinces surrounding Kabul stemmed from deepening political fissures within mujahidin groups, as rivals confronted the government of Burhanuddin Rabbani, head of the Tajik-dominated Jamiat-e Islami, who was appointed president in 1992 after Najibullah's fall as part of a Pakistani-sponsored reconciliation deal. With Kabul devastated by rocket attacks launched by Hekmatyar in a failed bid to seize power in April 1992, the Taliban began their push for the capital and surrounding provinces. When the Pakistan military's favoured ally, Hekmatyar's Hizb-e Islami, failed to capture Kabul from the Northern Alliance's predominately Tajik forces, it switched its support to the Taliban.

The absence of central government authority and the control of strategic trade routes by rival warlords had also imposed huge costs on Afghan and Pakistani traders involved in the multi-million dollar transit and drug trade.

⁹ Though many analysts have traced the Taliban's beginnings from their first offensive in Spin Boldak in Kandahar, bordering on Pakistan's Balochistan province, in 1994, other scholars and Taliban fighters such as Mullah Abdul Salaam Zaeef, the former Taliban ambassador to Pakistan, suggest that scattered groups of Taliban fighters first surfaced in Uruzgan, Zabul and elsewhere in southern Afghanistan as early as 1984. See William Maley, *Afghanistan and the Taliban: The Rebirth of Fundamentalism?* (New York, 1998), p. 14; and Abdul Salaam Zaeef, *My Life with the Taliban* (New York, 2010), pp. 1-50.

¹⁰ The seven Sunni mujahidin parties were: Burhanuddin Rabbani's Jamiat-e Islami; Hizb-e Islami (led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar); Hizb-e Islami (led by Mawlawi Yunus Khalis); Abdul-Rabb Al-Rasul Sayyaf's Ittehad-e Islami; Pir Sayed Ahmad Gillani's Mahaz-e Milli-yi Islami-yi Afghanistan; Sebghatullah Mujaddedi's Jabha-yi Najat-i Milli-yi Afghanistan; and Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi's Harakat-e Inqelab-e Islami Afghanistan. For details, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°39, *Political Parties in Afghanistan*, 2 June 2005.

¹¹ See Crisis Group Asia Report N°125, *Pakistan's Tribal Areas: Appeasing the Militants*, 11 December 2006, p. 2; and Asia Report N°49, *Pakistan: The Mullahs and the Military*, 30 March 2003, p. 3.

¹² Steve Coll, *The Bin Ladens: Oil, Money, Terrorism and the Secret Saudi World* (New York, 2008), p. 103.

¹³ Hekmatyar, an engineering student at Kabul University, was one of the founders of Hizb-e Islami, which was heavily influenced by the Ikhwan al-Muslimin (Muslim Brotherhood). In

1978, Hekmatyar split with Mawlawi Yunus Khalis to form his own faction, which eventually emerged as one of the most disciplined of the U.S and Pakistani-backed mujahidin parties.

¹⁴ Initially allied with Hizb-e Islami-Khalis, whose stronghold was largely in the south east, Haqqani joined the Taliban and became minister of tribal and border affairs under the Taliban regime. Details on his background and the evolution of the Haqqani network follow below.

¹⁵ NWFP was renamed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) in 2009.

¹⁶ For detailed analysis of Pakistan's madrasas, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°130, *Pakistan: Karachi's Madrasas and Violent Extremism*, 29 March 2007; Crisis Group Asia Report N°84, *Pakistan: Reforming the Education Sector*, 7 October 2004; and Crisis Group Asia Report N°36, *Pakistan: Madrasas, Extremism and the Military*, 29 July 2002.

¹⁷ Deobandi Islam originated in the town of Deoband in northern India in 1867 at the Dar-ul-Uloom seminary. The core beliefs of the Deobandi school include a Muslim's loyalty to Islam first and then to the nation; adherence to the primacy of the *Ummah*, or global Muslim community over all other communities; and a belief in the sacred obligation to wage jihad to protect Muslims.

¹⁸ Zaeef, op. cit.

The Taliban championed the Afghan traders, who repaid the Taliban with large-scale donations and support.

During this stage of the civil war, the provinces bordering Kabul such as Wardak and Logar were under the nominal control of the predominately Pashtun Hizb-e Islami and Mawlawi Mohammad Nabi's Harakat-e Inqelab-e Islami.¹⁹ Internecine rivalries between local commanders, nonetheless, made it difficult for a single group to dominate an entire province. In Ghazni province, a key byway to central Afghanistan from Pakistan via Khost province, Harakat-e Inqelab-e Islami competed with the rival Hazara-dominated, predominately Shia, Hizb-e Wahdat party, then under the leadership of Abdul Ali Mazari. After the Taliban moved northward through Uruzgan and Zabul, they co-opted many of the factional leaders in the provinces surrounding Kabul. In time, a substantial number of Hizb-e Islami-Khalis²⁰, Hizb-e Islami-Gulbuddin and Harakat-e Inqelab-e Islami fighters joined the Taliban movement.

Hekmatyar's rival, Rabbani, who was eager to wrest control of central and south-eastern provinces from Hizb-e Islami, secretly supported the Taliban push into Ghazni, Wardak and Logar provinces. Hekmatyar's attack in Ghazni in 1995 forced a tenuous alliance between the province's governor Taj Mohammad Qari Baba²¹, a top Harakat-e Inqelab-e Islami commander, and the Taliban, which led to the Taliban's takeover of Wardak and Logar. In May 1996, the Taliban drove the Northern Alliance's Ahmad Shah Massoud out of Kabul. Key to this pivotal offensive was the Taliban capture of Charasyab and Baraki Barak districts in Logar and Chak, Sayadabad and Sheikhabad districts in Wardak, areas that remain largely under insurgent control today.

¹⁹ A cleric and former member of parliament from Barki Barak district, Logar province, Nabi was selected in a joint decision by Rabbani and Hekmatyar and their supporters to head the Harakat-e Inqelab-e Islami in 1983. It was originally envisioned as an umbrella organisation, meant to end growing frictions between Rabbani and Hekmatyar, and evolved into the main conduit for madrasa educated fighters, with the party's field commanders including Mullah Omar. See David B. Edwards, "Fault lines in the Afghan jihad", *Before Taliban: Genealogies of the Afghan Taliban* (Berkeley, 2002), pp. 225-278.

²⁰ Hizb-e Islami-Khalis was founded in 1979 by Mawlawi Mohammad Younus Khalis after the latter broke with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar over political differences. Before splitting with Khalis' faction and forming his own cadre of fighters, Jalaluddin Haqqani was among the most famous of Hizb-e Islami-Khalis' commanders.

²¹ Sayed Massoud, *Someone Is Behind The Curtain (Pushti Purdah Kasi Hast)*, Second Edition (Kabul, 2009), pp. 66-67.

B. KABUL WON AND LOST

Controlling the country from Kabul was not easy for the Taliban government. Compared with its traditional stronghold in the south, the region around Kabul has historically been more ethnically and politically diverse, with ethnic Hazaras second only to Pashtuns in Wardak and Ghazni provinces, and Tajiks, Pashayee and other ethnic groups represented throughout the central zone around the capital. With a broader economic base than that of Kandahar, the area is also much more populous than the south, and contains stretches of inaccessible terrain in the mountainous areas ringing Kabul Valley and the Shomali Plain. The predominately Pashtun Taliban relied on a strategy that combined co-optation of non-Pashtun commanders with the assassination of potential rivals – an approach similar to that used by present day insurgents. In Ghazni, for instance, the Taliban persuaded a number of Harakat-e Inqelab-e Islami, Harakat-e Islami and Hizb-e Islami commanders to join the Taliban government, including Taj Mohammad Qari Baba²² and his military commander Khial Mohammad Hussaini among others.

In Wardak, the Taliban swiftly consolidated control over Sayadabad and Sheikhabad districts before seizing the provincial capital of Maidan Shar in January 1995. Once firmly ensconced, the Taliban appointed Haji Ghulam Mohammad as military commander of the province, Harakat-e Inqelab's military commander until 1995. In Wardak's Hazara majority district of Behsud, the Taliban appointed Hazara commander Mohammad Amir Bazil to manage district affairs. The Taliban also appointed Ahmad Hussein Sangardost, a Hazara once aligned with Harakat-e Islami, to head military affairs.²³ A number of Harakat-e Inqelab commanders from Wardak and Logar were also given top positions in the Taliban government in Kabul, including Haji Musa Khan Hotak, who served as deputy minister of planning and currently heads the remnants of the Harakat-e Inqelab-e Islami party.²⁴

The Taliban's early ability to diversify its outreach to factional leaders and to co-opt or kill non-Pashtun commanders did not, however, end all opposition. Taliban rule was strongly resisted in areas in and near Kabul as well as in other parts of the country. Two years after Mullah Mohammad Omar declared himself *Amir ul-Momineen* (Commander of the Faithful), his government struggled to repair the country's war-torn economy and contain

²² Taj Mohammad Qari Baba later joined forces with Ahmad Shah Massoud.

²³ Crisis Group interview, former Wardak government official, Kabul, 15 January 2011.

²⁴ Crisis Group interview, Harakat-e Inqelab official, Kabul, 23 December 2010.

international isolation for his repressive regime.²⁵ By 1998, it was clear that the movement was unprepared to govern a country that had historically depended on international assistance. Despite high unemployment across the country and near paralysis in the industrial and agricultural sectors, the Taliban focused on the military campaign against the armed opposition in the north and the imposition of an obscurantist version of Sunni Sharia law. The Taliban were more a military force than a government, and growing resentment and resistance, particularly in the north and west, contributed greatly to the regime's downfall.

Compounding the Taliban regime's problems was Osama bin Laden, who had moved to Afghanistan following his expulsion from Sudan in May 1996. Bin Laden's close ties to Mullah Omar and mujahidin commander Jalaluddin Haqqani, whose main base was in Khost province, provided al-Qaeda the safe haven it needed to consolidate and grow.²⁶ Bin Laden, in turn, helped to finance the Taliban movement, for instance giving it \$1 million to capture Kabul.²⁷ But his increasingly strident calls for strikes against U.S. targets, and the high-profile bombing of the USS Cole in October 2000, prompted some within the Taliban leadership to question Mullah Omar's ties to bin Laden and tacit support of al-Qaeda.²⁸ Members of the Khudam ul-Furqan, mainly from Logar and Paktia provinces, formed the core of this group and included Mawlawi Qalamuddin, deputy head of the Taliban's Department for the Promotion of Virtue and Suppression of Vice (*al-Ambr bi al-Ma'ruf wa al-Nahi'an al Munkir*).²⁹ Still, Mullah Omar's relations with bin Laden remained intact, a circumstance that eventually led the United Nations to place sanctions on the Taliban in 1999.³⁰ The split within the upper ranks of the Taliban leadership, however,

became more pronounced shortly after the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001.

C. COLLAPSE

1. Operation Enduring Freedom

By the start of Operation Enduring Freedom, the U.S.-led military intervention in October 2001, the Taliban's grip on the capital was already slipping. The Taliban's rigid puritanical village mores of the south and east clashed sharply with the urban cosmopolitanism of the capital. While the regime had forcibly imposed its version of Islam through state institutions, particularly within the legal system, its culture of harsh justice never gained popular acceptance. Domestic resistance was also motivated by the regime's failure to address urgent economic needs. UN sanctions further exacerbated the country's dire economic straits, and deepened the Taliban's dependence on both the transport and trafficking mafias in the south, as well as on al-Qaeda.³¹

With the U.S. Special Forces and the CIA providing substantial support to warlord proxies allied with Ahmad Shah Massoud's Northern Alliance, Kabul fell on 6 December 2001, only two months after the first air strikes were launched. As the Taliban leadership fled across the border to Pakistan, the U.S. push into Kandahar was marked by the return of political and military skirmishes for the control of the south between the same warlords the Taliban had ousted.

While resistance to the U.S.-backed Northern Alliance takeover of Taliban-controlled areas in the central-eastern provinces near Kabul had been minimal, a similar though less pronounced competition for power also emerged. More than half of the 32 governors initially appointed by Karzai were militia commanders who consolidated their power by placing members of their faction in key provincial positions.³² As a result, the provinces near the capital witnessed the return of powerbrokers affiliated with the Jamiat-e Islami and Hizb-e Islami, which facilitated the Taliban's resurgence.

2. Resurgence

The UN-brokered Bonn Agreement of December 2001, which excluded the Taliban altogether, placed Hamid Karzai, a Popalzai Pashtun from Kandahar in charge of an interim administration that was otherwise dominated by Jamiat-e Islami and Northern Alliance loyalists, particu-

²⁵ The Taliban regime was recognised by only three countries, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

²⁶ Coll, op. cit., pp. 290-291.

²⁷ Neamatollah Nojumi, "The Rise and Fall of the Taliban", in William Maley (ed.), *Afghanistan and the Taliban: The Rebirth of Fundamentalism?* (New York, 1998), p. 105.

²⁸ Alex Strick von Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, "Separating the Taliban from al-Qaeda: The Core of Success in Afghanistan", Center on International Cooperation, New York University, February 2011.

²⁹ Qalamuddin was appointed to the government's High Peace Council in 2010. See: Thomas Ruttig, "The Ex-Taliban on the High Peace Council: A Renewed Role for Khuddam al-Furqan", Afghanistan Analysts Network, April 2010.

³⁰ In 1999, the UN Security Council established a committee to administer sanctions pursuant resolution 1267 which outlined the imposition of asset freezes, travel bans and arms embargoes against a list of al-Qaeda, Taliban members and associated individuals and entities designated for sanctions by what is commonly referred to as the "1267 Committee". On 17 June 2011, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1989 which separates the sanctions regime into two distinct groups: al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

³¹ Nojumi, op. cit., pp. 113-114.

³² Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (London, 2007), p. 16.

larly Tajiks from the northern province of Panjshir, in the security organs.³³ Pashtun grievances stemming from the Bonn process were further fuelled by the proliferation of non-Pashtun armed factions,³⁴ while the return to power of civil war-era warlords, particularly in the south, was to drive popular support for the Taliban leadership, now in Quetta, Pakistan.³⁵

Pressure from the U.S. to deliver al-Qaeda collaborators among the deposed Taliban presented ambitious warlords an opportunity to further cement their hold on lucrative positions in the security sector and consolidate their political power – and control of local trafficking networks. U.S.-backed anti-Taliban warlords in the south for instance, included Gul Agha Sherzai, the current governor of Nangarhar province.³⁶ The U.S. counter-terrorism campaign also gave these warlords the political cover to settle old scores with civil war rivals, including many Taliban who had reconciled under a general amnesty granted by Karzai in December 2002.

The U.S and the Karzai government failed to exploit divisions within the Taliban movement. A small group of Mullah Omar's associates, including military commander Mullah Baradar and Mullah Obaidullah, the Taliban minister of defence, for instance, delivered a letter of surrender to the Karzai government in Uruzgan in December 2001.³⁷ These and other Taliban overtures were rebuffed in the absence of a coherent reconciliation program and U.S. pressure to move against the top Taliban commanders.³⁸ Reorganising and re-energising their forces in Pakistan, Mullah Omar and his closest aides held the first meeting of the newly formed Leadership Council or Rahbari Shura in Quetta, Balochistan's provincial capital, in March 2003.³⁹

Within Afghanistan, including in the provinces near Kabul, government positions were swiftly distributed among mujahidin-era commanders along factional lines. In Ghazni, for instance, Taj Mohammad Qari Baba was re-appointed as governor and Ali Akbar Qasemi, an ethnic Hazara and senior Hizb-e Wahdat commander, was appointed the head of the army's 14th Division in the province. Malim Nasrullah, an ethnic Pashtun linked to Sayyaf's Ittehad-e Islami party was given an important security position as was Raz Mohammad Lonai, an ethnic Pashtun and former PDPA member who was appointed provincial chief of the National Directorate of Security (NDS), the state intelligence agency.⁴⁰ Similarly, in Kapisa province, powerbrokers associated with Rabbani's Jamiat-e Islami party replaced Hizb-e Islami commanders, co-opted earlier by the Taliban regime.

In neighbouring Laghman, local Jamiat-e Islami leaders also moved against Hizb-e Islami commanders who had been weakened by intra-party fissures over Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's continued leadership of the party.⁴¹ Dr. Abdullah Laghmani, an ethnic Pashtun from Laghman and a senior Northern Alliance intelligence officer, managed to place several of his associates in security positions in the province.⁴² West of Kabul, in Wardak province, Haji Saifullah, an ethnic Pashtun and one-time Hizb-e Islami commander in Paktia was appointed governor and Abdul Ahmad Durrani,⁴³ an ethnic Pashtun and one-time ally of Sayyaf's Ittehad-e Islami faction, was appointed chief of police.

As in the south, Afghan intelligence officials with NDS and local police chiefs – many affiliated with Jamiat-e Islami– targeted former Taliban, and in many cases former Hizb-e Islami commanders. During the early years of the U.S.-led military incursion, cash rewards were provided

³³ See Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°17, *The Loya Jirga: One Step Forward?*, 16 May 2002.

³⁴ The main ethnic groups in Afghanistan include Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks.

³⁵ For analysis of the ethnic rifts arising out of the Bonn process, particularly Pashtun political identity, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°62, *Afghanistan: The Problem of Pashtun Alienation*, 5 August 2003.

³⁶ A Barakzai Pashtun, Sherzai had ruled Kandahar before the Taliban takeover. After his militia captured Kandahar city during Operation Enduring Freedom, he was named governor of Kandahar in December 2001. Sherzai was appointed governor of Nangarhar province in August 2003.

³⁷ Anand Gopal, "The Battle for Afghanistan: Militancy and Conflict in Kandahar", New America Foundation, November 2010, p. 8.

³⁸ See Michael Semple, *Reconciliation in Afghanistan*, United States Institute of Peace (Washington, 2009).

³⁹ Giustozzi, op. cit., p. 90.

⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, former Ghazni commander, Kabul, 5 January 2011.

⁴¹ Frictions within Hizb-e Islami emerged soon after Hekmatyar declared an alliance with the Taliban and al-Qaeda in 2002 in response to the U.S. incursion and his own expulsion from Iran the same year. Internal fissures came to a head in May 2004 when ten members of Hizb-e Islami's senior leadership travelled from Peshawar to Kabul to pledge support to the Karzai government. Led by Khalid Farooqi, a relative of Hekmatyar, an ethnic Pashtun from Paktia province, the splinter group denounced terrorism, attempted to disassociate itself with Hekmatyar and declared its intention to participate in the political process. Officially registered with the government as a political party, leaders of the faction, known as Hizb-e Islami Afghanistan, claim to have cut ties with Hekmatyar's fighting wing but are widely believed to maintain contacts with him.

⁴² Crisis Group interviews, Laghman provincial officials, January and February 2011.

⁴³ Durrani was elected to the Wolesi Jirga in September 2009. He represents the province of Wardak.

to anti-Taliban collaborators while a number of senior provincial government officials were placed on the U.S. payroll in exchange for intelligence.⁴⁴ In addition to operating secret prisons, NDS and police officials in Kapisa, Laghman, Logar and Ghazni capitalised on their close ties to the U.S. military by providing the information that resulted in the killings of several prominent former Taliban and Hizb-e Islami members. These officials also provided intelligence on their rivals to U.S. ground commanders who detained them in the Bagram prison and elsewhere. International forces frequently acted on misinformation and targeted reconciled commanders and/or economic rivals of local security officials.⁴⁵

In one notable case, Esmatullah Mohabat, a rival of Hazrat Ali, the Pashayee eastern warlord, working with U.S. Special Forces to hunt for bin Laden in 2002, was arrested in Nangarhar in early 2004 on suspicion of involvement with the Taliban. Released in early 2005, Mohabat participated in the UN-supported Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) program and successfully ran for a seat in the lower house of the National Assembly in the September 2005 parliamentary elections. In December 2005, he was assassinated.⁴⁶ Suspicions that Hazrat Ali, then chief of police in neighbouring Nangarhar province, and other government officials were involved in the assassination sparked violent protests in the provincial capital and prompted a number of Mohabat's associates to join the Taliban.⁴⁷

Similar cases occurred across the central-eastern region in 2005 and 2006, just as the Taliban leadership, based in Quetta and the Pakistani tribal belt, stepped up operations within Afghanistan, including in the provinces near the capital. Although the Taliban forces under the command of Anwar Dangar, a one-time ally of Rabbani who later defected to the Taliban,⁴⁸ were smaller in comparison to Hizb-e Islami forces in Wardak, Logar and Kapisa, by 2005, the Taliban presence had increased substantially, particularly in Jaghatu district in Wardak province, Kharwar district in Logar province and Surobi district in Kabul province.

Having consolidated their hold on the south-eastern provinces of Zabul and Uruzgan by 2006, the Taliban and other insurgent groups began to expand their presence along the western edge of Kabul province. The Taliban also officially announced the start of an offensive against the capital the same year. In 2006 and 2007, armed groups proliferated in Baraki Barak, Charkh and Puli Alam districts in Logar and in Chak, Nirkh, Sayadabad and Jalrez in Wardak.⁴⁹ Penetration of these areas provided access to the Kabul-Kandahar highway, which allowed the insurgency greater mobility, augmenting its ability to attack ISAF supply convoys and to collect taxes on goods on the route. An inadequate ISAF military presence in these areas, combined with weak governance, permitted the shadow Taliban government to emerge, which has become the trademark of the insurgency's strategic success. By early 2008, the insurgents had transformed Wardak and Logar into rearguard havens, vital to the ability to strike the capital and important for income generation.

Although insurgents were not as quick to penetrate areas north-east and south-east of Kabul such as Kapisa and Ghazni, there were signs as early as 2004 that these provinces would be crucial to the Taliban's advance northward. As in Laghman province, reported abuses at the hands of Afghan intelligence and police drove many Pashtuns in Andar district in Ghazni to support Mullah Mohammad Anwar Farouq and other Taliban commanders.⁵⁰ The insurgency began to gain further momentum as several governors were appointed in Ghazni and then either were quickly removed for political reasons or killed by the insurgents following governor Taj Mohammad Qari Baba's assassination in September 2006.⁵¹ Around the same time, Kapisa witnessed a surge of security incidents as fissures surfaced over the political marginalisation of leading Hizb-e Islami figures from the Pashtun-dominated areas of Nijrab, Alasai and Tagab. Major insurgent offensives in Ghazni, Kapisa and Kabul provinces in 2008, including the killing of ten French paratroopers in Surobi, signalled the rapidly growing insurgent presence in the Afghan heartland.

⁴⁴ Bob Woodward, "CIA led way with cash handouts", *The Washington Post*, 18 November 2002.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interviews, community elders, former commanders, local government officials and former detainees, Kabul, Wardak and Parwan, December 2010 to February 2011.

⁴⁶ Amin Tarzi, "Afghanistan: Lawmakers' slayings pose hard questions", Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 15 December 2005.

⁴⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Mehtarlam, 2 March 2011.

⁴⁸ Dangar has been identified as the main commander of the Afshar assault in 1993 that ended in the massacre of hundreds of civilians in Kabul. He was assassinated in Pakistan in 2004. Giustozzi, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁴⁹ Mohammad Osman Tariq Elias, "The Resurgence of the Taliban in Kabul, Logar and Wardak", in Antonio Giustozzi (ed.), *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field* (New York, 2009), p. 46.

⁵⁰ Christoph Reuter and Borhan Younus, "The Return of the Taliban in Andar District, Ghazni", in *ibid.*, pp. 101-103.

⁵¹ From 2002 to 2011, there were several governors in Ghazni, all of them Pashtuns. Taliban fighters affiliated with Mullah Farouq assassinated Qari Baba in September 2006 four months after the Taliban assassinated Paktika governor Mohammad Ali Jalali in Andar district in May 2006. Borhan Younus, "Taliban call the shots in Ghazni", Institute for War & Peace Reporting, 5 May 2006.

III. STATE OF PLAY

Unlike southern Afghanistan where the Taliban, composed largely of Kandahari Pashtuns, tend to predominate, three main groups – the Taliban, the Haqqani network and Hekmatyar's Hizb-e Islami – operate in the central-eastern provinces surrounding Kabul.

The Taliban control large swathes of territory stretching from Logar to Laghman; as of May 2011, shadow governors appointed by the Taliban's Quetta Shura operate in 35 out of 62 districts in the seven provinces examined for this report. These mini-shadow states operate as parallel governments, administering taxes, settling disputes and distributing power through the appointment of local military commanders. The Taliban appear to have the greatest influence in districts historically dominated by Harakat-e Inqelab-e Islami commanders or leaders associated during the civil war with Harakat splinter groups such as the Mansour network.⁵² When the Taliban came to power, these two groups, which drew their membership largely from Loya Paktia, Logar and Wardak, dominated mid-level positions in the Taliban administration and are today leading members of the its shadow governments north of Zabul province.

However, commanders associated with Hekmatyar's Hizb-e Islami, traditionally the leading faction in the region, dominate a substantial number of areas. Moreover, the mix of insurgent groups appears to reflect the demographic diversity of districts and provinces. In the south-eastern province of Ghazni, for instance, where Pashtuns slightly outnumber Hazaras, the Taliban, under the leadership of shadow governor Mullah Najibullah, predominate. But Hizb-e Islami maintains a hold on districts such as Qarabagh, controlling most of the roadway from there to Moquer, in an informal alliance with Hizb-e Islami-linked Hazara commander Gen. Bashi Habibullah, who also served for a time as a police chief in several districts in Ghazni.⁵³ Yet compared with other groups, the Taliban's more robust command and control structure and alliance with well-trained fighters associated with Jalaluddin and Sirajuddin Haqqani's network have given them wider mobility and greater penetration across the central-eastern region.

While there was a marked decline in attacks in Kabul since a series of complex assaults in late 2009 and early 2010, there continue to be troubling signs that the capital is not safe. Following the September 2010 elections, there is evidence that the Taliban, Hizb-e Islami and the Haqqani network have redoubled their efforts to target the capital, evident in deadly assaults on high-profile targets from November 2010 to June 2011.⁵⁴ However, ISAF and Afghan government officials point to the relative calm in the capital since July 2010 to argue that the increase in foreign forces and targeted operations against insurgents and the newly initiated security strategy for the city have proved effective. Yet the surge and so-called "Ring of Steel" checkpoints⁵⁵ around Kabul have played a less significant role than ISAF and the Afghan government claim. Extending the "Kabul security bubble", as ISAF commander Gen. David H. Petraeus had suggested,⁵⁶ could prove far more difficult than coalition partners are willing to admit.

Meanwhile, violent insurgent activity in provinces bordering the capital has steadily risen since the first signs of the Taliban's resurgence in 2006.⁵⁷ In Ghazni, there were

⁵⁴ Insurgents mounted several attacks on Kabul during the second half of 2010 and 2011, including a suicide bomb attack on a NATO convoy in south Kabul on 12 November; a bomb attack on a bus carrying Afghan army and police personnel on 19 December; a suicide bomb attack on a bus carrying NDS officials in western Kabul on 12 January 2011; a bomb attack on a supermarket frequented by foreigners and Afghan elites in downtown Kabul on 28 January; and a suicide bomb attack on the Safi Landmark Hotel on 14 February 2011. Nearly 100 were killed and at least 150 injured in attacks in the capital during this period. Several other smaller attacks occurred in the city throughout the spring, including a suicide bomb attack on the defence ministry on 18 April and a suicide bomb attack on an Afghan army hospital on 21 May; at least nine people were killed after three insurgents conducted a suicide bomb attack on a police station on 18 June 2011.

⁵⁵ The "Ring of Steel" is a series of 25 checkpoints around Kabul manned by ANP officers. This more systematic approach to city security was adopted and supported by Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) in early 2010 after a succession of attacks on high-profile targets in Kabul, including the assault on UNAMA's Bakhtar guesthouse in November 2009, multi-pronged attacks on several government office buildings in January 2010 and a bombing and rolling gunfight near the Safi Landmark and Shar-e Naw Park in downtown Kabul on 26 February 2010.

⁵⁶ David H. Petraeus, "Letter to Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen Marines, Coast Guardsmen and Civilians of the NATO International Security Assistance Force", 25 January 2011.

⁵⁷ According to the Afghanistan NGO Safety Organisation (ANSO), countrywide there were 12,244 insurgent attacks in 2010, an increase of 64 per cent over attacks in 2009. While attacks in Kabul province decreased by 18 per cent in 2010, the increase in attacks in neighbouring provinces abutting the capital such as Wardak and Ghazni rose by 23 and 234 per cent, respectively. See

⁵² A radical offshoot of the Harakat-e Inqelab party led by Mawlawi Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi during the anti-Soviet jihad, the Mansour network was founded by Mawlawi Nasrullah Mansour who served as governor of Paktia province under Burhanuddin Rabbani's government. Mansour was killed in a car bombing in 1993 in an attack widely believed to have been carried out by Hizb-e Islami.

⁵³ Crisis Group interview, senior Afghan security official, Ghazni, 11 February 2011.

more attacks than in Helmand and Kandahar in 2010.⁵⁸ In the first quarter of 2010, attacks by anti-government forces increased by 35 per cent over the previous year with 225 attacks in the seven provinces discussed in this report.⁵⁹ Despite U.S. claims of “pockets of progress”,⁶⁰ the trend has continued with insurgent attacks increasing 51 per cent in the second quarter of 2010 across the country in the run up to the parliamentary elections and up 59 per cent in the third quarter of the year.⁶¹ The Taliban’s “Victory” campaign, which included a series of complex attacks in and around the capital in early 2010, was staged from provinces near Kabul – Kapisa, Wardak and Logar in particular.⁶² The greater Kabul region has been the theatre for the opening of the Taliban’s spring 2011 “Badr” offensive with several large-scale operations undertaken in provinces such as Laghman.⁶³ Security analysts predict that 2011 will be the most violent year since

2001 with insurgent attacks countrywide having already increased by as much as 51 per cent in the first quarter.⁶⁴

Government corruption has helped the insurgents push toward the capital. Infiltration of security organs and collusion with government officials have proved pivotal in several high-profile attacks between 2008 and 2010, including the 28 April 2008 assassination attempt on Karzai and several other officials during a Victory Day ceremony.⁶⁵ Moreover, the insurgents have been able to capitalise on the absence of government officials and/or government corruption or complicity such as in Kapisa where former governor Khwaja Ghulam Gahws Abubakr, a Hizb-e Islami partisan, was removed from office for allegedly colluding with the Taliban in August 2010.⁶⁶

The conflict in and around the capital is no longer a clear cut armed conflict between an insurgency dominated by south-eastern Pashtuns and a Tajik-dominated Afghan security apparatus, backed by the U.S. Instead, ethnic, religious, political and economic drivers of conflict are now blurred, with an increasingly pronounced interdependency between corrupt Afghan government officials, criminal networks and insurgent commanders.

ANSO Quarterly Data Report, Q4 2010, 1 January to 31 December 2010.

⁵⁸ The reported number of insurgent attacks in Ghazni was 1,540 in 2010 compared with 461 attacks in 2009. The reported number of insurgent attacks in Helmand was 1,387 in 2010 compared with 620 attacks in 2009; the number of reported attacks in Kandahar was 1,162 in 2010 compared to 970 in 2009. See ANSO Quarterly Data Report, Q4 2010, 1 January to 31 December 2010, p. 12.

⁵⁹ ANSO Quarterly Data Report, Q1 2010, 1 January to 31 March 2010, pp. 11-12.

⁶⁰ Anne Flaherty, “Petraeus: Progress in Afghanistan will take time”, Associated Press, 15 August 2010.

⁶¹ In his 25 January 2011 letter, Gen. Petraeus pointed to a decrease in attacks in 2010 in Kabul province which he said “enjoyed impressive security throughout the latter half of 2010”. The letter was released three days before eight people were killed in the Kabul supermarket attack and a little more than two weeks after four people were killed and 29 injured in the attack on a bus carrying NDS staff (See fn 50). Insurgent attacks have increased 300 per cent since 2007 and up an additional 70 per cent since 2009. “Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan”, U.S. Secretary of Defense, November 2010, p. 44.

⁶² In a 8 May 2010 press release, the Taliban announced its *Al-Faath* or “Victory” campaign and, referencing passages from the Quran describing military victories at Mecca, promised that operations would “target the invading American, NATO military personnel, foreign advisers, spies who pose as foreign advisers, members of the Karzai stooge administration and members of the cabinet”. See *ibid*, p. 42.

⁶³ Dubbed “Badr” after the historic battle for Mecca described in the Quran, the campaign was marked by several days of fierce fighting in the southern city of Kandahar in May 2011 and accompanied by other smaller operations such as the bombing of a mosque in Laghman province on 23 May that killed at least fourteen civilians.

A. RECRUITMENT

1. Motivation

Current and former members of the armed opposition explain their actions by repeatedly citing the need to defend themselves against an unjust government controlled by outside powers and to restore justice in a culture of impunity. There is also an overlap in Taliban and Hizb-e Islami propaganda, both of which combine Deobandi and Salafist calls for jihad against the government with the tenants of *Pashtunwali*, which mandates revenge for affronts to hon-

⁶⁴ See ANSO Quarterly Data Report, Q1 2011, 1 January to 31 March 2011, p. 1.

⁶⁵ An initial investigation into the complex armed attack, which killed three and wounded at least ten, revealed that several members of the Ministry of Interior (MOI) and a high-ranking Ministry of Defence (MOD) official were detained after being implicated in the plot. See Crisis Group Report, *A Force in Fragments: Reconstituting the Afghan National Army*, op. cit., p. 11; Elias, op. cit., pp. 43-55; and Carlotta Gall and Abdul Waheed Wafa, “Afghans see link to Qaeda in plot to shoot Karzai”, *The New York Times*, 1 May 2008.

⁶⁶ Under considerable international pressure, Karzai removed Abubakr from office following reports of his involvement in alleged kickback schemes, collusion with insurgents and the killing of five members of a provincial reconstruction team in 2009. Abubakr has been charged with a number of serious crimes, including bribery, but to date has not been prosecuted. See, Dexter Filkins and Alissa J. Rubin, “Graft-fighting prosecutor fired in Afghanistan”, *The New York Times*, 28 August 2010.

our (*nang*). Where the government is weak and unable to provide security, the reasoning goes, Muslims must defend their beliefs and their way of life as organised under the principles of Sharia.

Kabul's failure to support the rule of law and the absence of government in many parts of the country has given Afghans little choice but to rely on the Taliban's rough justice. The Taliban's aggressive campaign of intimidation has not necessarily earned it genuine support so much as passivity in the face of overwhelming force. Afghan perceptions of the Taliban may be more positive than those of the government or foreign forces but only because fear and distrust of foreign forces is often higher. This distrust remains one of the primary drivers of support for the insurgency, along with the state's failure to provide governance and security.⁶⁷ Widespread dissatisfaction with the Karzai administration, fuelled by political and economic exclusion, has given wide berth to the insurgency to install shadow governments, including courts, country-wide, as in the provinces close to Kabul.⁶⁸

Insurgent literature and radio broadcasts highlight the resurrection of the Taliban's Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan as the panacea to the country's ills, a message that resonates with many unemployed and undereducated Afghans.⁶⁹ Appeals to religious sentiment and Islamist ideology, while important, are only partially responsible for the renewed insurgency.⁷⁰ Recruitment tactics, which vary from province to province and district to district as well as from one insurgent group to another, reflect how the armed opposition is motivated by myriad factors. But the narrative of self-defence, which depicts ISAF forces as a hostile occupying force, is gaining more salience of late, fuelled in large part by the misuse of force.

⁶⁷ For in-depth analysis of Afghan perceptions of the conflict and parties to the conflict see: "The Trust Deficit: The Impact of Local Perceptions on Policy in Afghanistan, Regional Policy Initiative on Afghanistan and Pakistan", Open Society Foundation, Policy Brief No.2, 7 October 2010.

⁶⁸ See Crisis Group Reports, *Taliban Propaganda: Winning the War of Words?*; and *Countering Afghanistan's Insurgency: No Quick Fixes*, both op. cit. See also Stephen Carter and Kate Clark, "No Shortcut to Stability: Justice Politics and Insurgency in Afghanistan", Royal Institute of International Affairs, September 2010.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group Report, *Taliban Propaganda: Winning the War of Words?*, op. cit.

⁷⁰ Sarah Ladbury, "Testing Hypotheses on Radicalisation in Afghanistan: Why Do Men Join the Taliban and Hizb-e Islami? How Much Do Local Communities Support Them?", Independent Report for the [UK] Department for International Development (DFID), in collaboration with Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU), Kabul, 14 August 2009.

Notwithstanding increased strategic messages about "winning hearts and minds" as a pillar of the counter-insurgency campaign, ISAF and the U.S. in particular has invested heavily in an aggressive counter-terrorism strategy that has targeted scores of mid-level insurgent commanders but has also on a number of occasions inadvertently killed civilians. Although ISAF has successfully worked to reduce the number of civilian casualties resulting from its military operations and the insurgents have generally been responsible for the majority of civilian deaths, the growing intensity of the conflict has raised doubts in many Afghan minds about the coalition's intentions.⁷¹ In the wake of the troop surge, a number of errant airstrikes have heightened negative perceptions of ISAF operations, including one in the southern province of Helmand on 30 May 2011 that reportedly killed several women and children, and prompted Karzai to call on ISAF to halt all airstrikes or risk being seen as "an occupying force".⁷²

Similar concerns have been raised around the rapidly increasing tempo of night raids by U.S. Special Operations Forces, the number of which had tripled near the end of 2010.⁷³ Strong evidence suggests that misinformation often serves as the basis for many of the civilian casualties resulting from coalition airstrikes and night raids.⁷⁴ This trend must be reversed by encouraging a more rigorous review of information before launching an operation in order to minimise the risk of wrongful detentions and unintended civilian casualties. Inaction risks strengthening insurgent appeals to gain support for their attacks on the government and coalition forces.

In the central eastern provinces, motivating factors behind the insurgency, beyond religious appeals, include:

- ❑ The government campaign of harassment and intimidation in rural Pashtun communities which has left some with little choice but to take up arms.
- ❑ Widespread unemployment and the absence of cohesive social structures following the destruction of the

⁷¹ Hamish Nixon, "Achieving a durable Peace Afghan Perspectives on a Peace Process", Peace Research Institute Oslo, United States Institute of Peace, Chr. Michelsen Institute, 27 May 2011, p. 9.

⁷² Heidi Vogt, "Afghan president wants NATO to stop bombing houses", Associated Press, 31 May 2011.

⁷³ Thom Shanker, Elizabeth Bumiller and Rod Norland, "Despite gains night raids split U.S. and Karzai", *The New York Times*, 15 November 2010.

⁷⁴ See Erica Gaston and Jonathan Horowitz, "Strangers at the Door: Night Raids by International Forces Lose Hearts and Minds of Afghans", Open Society Institute/The Liaison Office, 23 February 2010; and Kate Clark, "The Takhar attack: Targeted killings and the parallel worlds of U.S. intelligence and Afghanistan", Afghanistan Analysts Network, May 2011.

tribal hierarchy during the anti-Soviet jihad and the civil war, driving young men to obtain power and authority through association with the insurgency.

- ❑ Civilian casualties stemming from night raids and ISAF airstrikes, which are perceived as evidence of the government's callousness toward its own people and Western intent to retain a permanent military presence.
- ❑ Repeatedly broken government promises of amnesty and to return land or property lost in the conflict, combined with historical land and water disputes, which motivate families and even entire villages to support the insurgents.

The failure to ensure the security of reconciled insurgent commanders is another trend that is increasing mistrust of the government.⁷⁵ Local Afghan officials and former commanders interviewed for this report cited a number of cases in which the government, in local and/or nationally negotiated agreements, guaranteed security and protection against harassment to Taliban-era commanders only for these men to be arrested, harassed or killed. For instance, in Kapisa province, Zabit Anwar, a Hizb-e Islami fighter from Tagab district, along with fifteen men under his command, agreed to lay down arms in exchange for a position in the government in 2006. According to his supporters in the government and local officials in the provincial capital of Mahmoud Raqi, Anwar rejoined the insurgency after he and some of his men were arrested in Kabul in 2007, with NDS officials attempting to extort bribes for their release.⁷⁶ In Parwan, Logar and Kapisa, corrupt NDS and police officials have also systematically ignored security guarantees given to former fighters and falsely imprisoned reconciled Taliban.⁷⁷

Similarly, Taliban and Hizb-e Islami commanders who were promised land as part of piecemeal amnesty deals never received it because the local elders or provincial officials brokering the deals were not in a position to deliver on their promises. In Laghman, for instance, one former Taliban commander from the insurgent stronghold of Badpakh said he had waited three years for the government to provide him with land while subsisting on a government subsidy that was a fraction of what he earned while in the insurgency.⁷⁸ This failure to follow through on pledges of security and livelihoods is seen as further evidence of government perfidy.

⁷⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Afghan politicians from Kapisa, Logar and Parwan province, Kabul, December 2010.

⁷⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Mahmoud Raqi and Kabul, December 2010-January 2011.

⁷⁷ Crisis Group interview, former senior NDS official, Kabul, 16 January 2011.

⁷⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Kabul, 1 March 2011; and Mehtarlam, 2 March 2011.

2. Mobilisation

Notwithstanding the mix of motivations, religious leaders and institutions remain the focal point for recruitment. The central region around Kabul has one of the highest numbers of madrasas in Afghanistan, making it fertile ground for the spread of militant Islam. Deobandi scholars and mullahs have extended their influence in the traditionally conservative provinces bordering the capital such as Logar, Parwan and Wardak, making these areas pivotal in terms of recruitment and operational support for the Taliban and other insurgent groups. This well-tended network of mosques, mullahs and madrasas in and around Kabul also provides the insurgency with a vital source of intelligence.⁷⁹

Countrywide, there is evidence of the increasing influence of conservative religious leaders and institutions on the insurgency and Afghan society. The number of madrasas registered with the government has nearly doubled in recent years, with 275 madrasas registered with the Ministry of Education in 2005-2006⁸⁰ compared with 532 in 2010-2011.⁸¹ The central region around Kabul now has the third highest number of registered madrasas. It is near impossible to gauge the exact number of unregistered madrasas in the region. In 2009, one researcher estimated that in Logar province alone, the number of unregistered madrasas was seven times higher than the number that had registered with the government.⁸²

Because Wardak, Logar and Ghazni share a rich tradition of conservative religious education, it is no coincidence that a number of the central region's most active and influential insurgent commanders reside and operate in the three provinces. Although much remains opaque about the personal backgrounds of these insurgent leaders, biographies posted on Taliban-related websites, press accounts and interviews with local officials and former insurgent commanders reveal educational differences between older commanders, many of whom were educated in madrasas in north and south-western Pakistan and younger commanders who have attended the growing number of madrasas in the three provinces.⁸³

⁷⁹ Elias, op. cit., pp. 44-45.

⁸⁰ Misbah Abdulbaqi, "Madrasah in Afghanistan: Evolution and Its Future", *Policy Perspectives*, 2008.

⁸¹ Figures provided to Crisis Group via email by the Ministry of Education on 29 March 2011. The breakdown of numbers of registered madrasas for each of the provinces covered in this report are as follows: Parwan, 28; Kabul (including the capital), 31; Ghazni, twelve; Laghman, nine; Logar, ten; Wardak, nineteen; Kapisa, eleven.

⁸² Elias, op. cit., p. 45.

⁸³ A Crisis Group review of insurgent biographies posted on three top insurgent websites "Al-Samood", "Tora Bora" and "Al-Emarah"

Darul Uloom Haqqania, Darul Uloom Hashemia and Imdadul Uloom-e Sharia, three of north-west Pakistan's best-known Deobandi madrasas, figure prominently in the biographies of fighters from Wardak and Logar provinces. Pakistani madrasa graduates among mid- to high-level commanders include Shaikh Nurul Haq Mujahid, an Imdadul Uloom-e Sharia graduate who has served in a number of positions within the Taliban's shadow government and as the overall military commander for Wardak.⁸⁴ Another is Mawlawi Mir Ahmad Gul Hashemi, a graduate of Darul Uloom Haqqania madrasa in Akora Khattak, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, who has served in a number of key Taliban positions, including as a frontline fighter in Logar and military commander in Kapisa.⁸⁵ In Logar, one graduate of a Peshawar madrasa, Mawlawi Abdul Nadeem, commander of a village in the Mohammad Agha area, returned from Pakistan in 2001 to establish his own school, which provides recruits for Logar's insurgency.⁸⁶

A wide network of official and unofficial mosques in the central heartland, many headed by militant mullahs and imams, is as vital to the insurgency as the madrasas. While the number of mosques registered with the government stood at 2,634 in March 2011, Afghan officials estimate that unregistered mosques number in the tens of thousands. About one fifth or 554 of the country's registered mosques are located in the central-eastern provinces of Kabul, Parwan, Kapisa, Logar, Wardak, Ghazni and Laghman.⁸⁷ The government's Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs has in recent years tried to exert tighter control over mosques and mullahs, including through weekly distribution of recommended sermon topics to registered mosques and an examination process that tests mullahs on their level of competence in religious practices. More recently, the NDS has made an attempt to monitor mosque activities and mullahs' sermons. Afghan officials, while concerned that the militant message is resonating more and more with the population, acknowledge that the government lacks the capacity to provide any meaningful oversight.

As one Afghan official in the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs put it, mullahs, militant or otherwise, are a potent force in Afghan culture:

from November 2010 to March 2011 revealed that a substantial number of commanders killed within the last two years attended madrasas in north-west Pakistan.

⁸⁴ "Interview with the military commander of Maidan Wardak", *al-Samoud*, 2010, at www.shahamat.info.

⁸⁵ "Interview with Mawlawi Mir Ahmad Gul Hashemi, member of the Taliban military commission", in *al-Samoud*, at www.toorabora.info.

⁸⁶ "Our Hero Martyrs" (Listing of Taliban Casualties), Series 36, 18 January 2010, at www.shahamat.info.

⁸⁷ Crisis Group interview, Afghan official from the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs, Kabul, 30 March 2011.

Television stations have employed hundreds and spent a lot of money to produce programs but people aren't interested in that. A mullah can gather together 1,000 people without spending any money. Mullahs have no money but they have the power of religion and they are important on either side of the fighting, whether Taliban or the government. Mullahs are like gold because like gold they never lose their value.⁸⁸

A number of mullahs in the Kabul area have certainly proved influential in shaping public opinion in the insurgency's favour. Among them is Enayatullah Baleegh, a lecturer in the Sharia faculty at Kabul University and imam of the Pul-e Khishti Jamei mosque, the largest in the capital. His sermons to the thousands that attend Friday prayers and his interviews with Afghan journalists and researchers, including with Crisis Group, are laced with anti-government vitriol and calls to oust foreign forces.⁸⁹

Kabul is not alone in attracting influential pro-Taliban mullahs like Baleegh. A number of former Hizb-e Islami and Taliban commanders and local Afghan politicians say the Taliban has revived the tactic of sending religious emissaries to vulnerable, insecure communities to negotiate alliances and to gauge the prospects of operating freely.⁹⁰ Commanders, who have spent years fighting on the frontlines in the provinces surrounding Kabul, believe that the Taliban's Peshawar regional military shura is sending Pakistani-trained mullahs to contested districts.⁹¹ As in the 1990s, the Taliban use these mullahs to identify the most politically vulnerable local leaders in a given community for either co-optation or elimination and to disseminate messages to the insurgency's rank-and-file.⁹² Mullahs associated with the insurgents have also provided some tactical support by storing weapons and sheltering fighters. This significantly complicates counter-insurgency efforts in contested areas in the central region where sensitivity to perceived infringements on religious life is especially high and coalition forces frequently blur the line between combatants and civilians.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Crisis Group interview, Enayatullah Baleegh, 2 March 2011.

⁹⁰ Abdulkader Sinno, "The Taliban's Ability to Mobilize the Pashtuns", in Robert D. Crews and Amin Tarzi (eds.), *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 59-89.

⁹¹ Crisis Group interviews, Kabul, Laghman, Logar, January-March 2011.

⁹² Sinno, *op. cit.*

B. COMMAND AND CONTROL

1. Taliban command and control

The resurgence of the Taliban and other armed opposition groups has sparked considerable debate about the seeming shift in the Taliban's organisational and strategic outlook following the September 11 attacks.⁹³ Some analysts argue that the insurgency's agile exploitation of the media and embrace of technology indicate that the Taliban are less opposed to the material manifestations of modernisation than in the past.⁹⁴ Closer scrutiny of command and control demonstrates, however, a capacity to adapt that has always been core to the Taliban's resilience. Moreover, although the Taliban have undoubtedly sustained heavy losses, and there is considerable fragmentation among their forces, the cohesiveness of command and control in Quetta explains the insurgency's momentum.

Unlike its more radical counterpart, the Haqqani network, which grants its commanders greater autonomy, the Taliban adhere to a much more hierarchical structure that reaches from Mullah Omar and others on the leadership council down to the district and village level. There is as much evidence of a unified command at the higher levels of the Taliban in the central region around Kabul as there is in their traditional stronghold in Kandahar.⁹⁵ The Quetta Shura and the subcouncils make decisions on everything from financing to field promotions. Directives are then issued to individual military, religious and provincial councils, which are further subdivided into regions and districts.⁹⁶

The Taliban's local, provincial and regional command structures are outlined in detail in the movement's code of conduct or *layeha*. The structure is in principle meant to reduce friction between commanders but as the Taliban's organisational structure grows more complex and its territorial control expands, the movement has become more vulnerable to fragmentation at the lower levels. For example, in geographically key and contested areas such

as Surobi district in Kabul province, a number of Taliban commanders have been vying for power since 2009.⁹⁷

At the local level, individual Taliban insurgents operate under the authority of military group commanders. Group commanders ostensibly operate under the direction of shadow district governors, who in turn report to the shadow provincial governor. In practice the relationship between the shadow provincial governor and regional military command is often blurred, but the *layeha* technically places the governor under the direct control of the regional military councils.⁹⁸ Operationally, the regional military council is the most important, tasked with reviewing military strength, conflict dynamics and planning attacks carried out by fighters. Taliban provincial and district authorities provide information on security developments to the regional military council, whose members occasionally send delegates to each province to observe the security situation on the ground.⁹⁹

Taliban operations in the provinces surrounding Kabul are generally under the command of the Peshawar regional military council, one of four regional Taliban subcommand centres.¹⁰⁰ The Peshawar Shura or council oversees day-to-day operations in the east and until relatively recently was under the command of Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, former governor of Nangarhar under the Taliban.¹⁰¹ Until his reported capture by the Pakistani military's intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence directorate (ISI), in February 2010, Kabir was, in effect, the division commander for Laghman, Kapisa, Logar, Wardak and Kabul, overseeing the setting and distribution of salaries and bonuses, disciplining commanders and consulting on intelligence and tactical targeting in operations.¹⁰²

ISI support has reportedly helped the Peshawar council penetrate several provinces ringing Kabul. Several former Taliban commanders indicated that the ISI's backing also gave the Peshawar Shura considerable financial latitude, allowing it to distribute bonuses, particularly for operations involving attacks on ISAF convoys.¹⁰³ While on average Taliban fighters in Laghman, for instance, are reportedly paid \$240 a month by the Peshawar Shura, fighters re-

⁹³ See, for example, Thomas Ruttig, "How 'Neo' were the 'Neo-Taliban'?", *Eurasia Review*, 3 August 2010.

⁹⁴ See, for example, Giustozzi, *op. cit.*

⁹⁵ Crisis Group interview, Ahmadzai, Head, National Solidarity Programme, Logar, 19 January 2011.

⁹⁶ A number of scholars have attempted to analyse the Taliban's chain of command over the years. Almost all acknowledge the central role of the Quetta Shura, the existence of two separate sub-councils in Quetta and Peshawar and the importance of the regional military councils. See, for example, Anand Gopal, *op. cit.*; Thomas Ruttig, "How Tribal are the Taliban?: Afghanistan's largest insurgent movement between its tribal roots and Islamist ideology", *Afghanistan Analysts Network*, April 2010; Antonio Giustozzi, "Negotiating with the Taliban", *The Century Foundation*, 20 June 2010.

⁹⁷ Crisis Group interview, former Kabul provincial official, 4 April 2011.

⁹⁸ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Code of Conduct, Chapter 6, Articles 34-39, at www.alemarah-ia.net.

⁹⁹ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Code of Conduct, Chapter 7, Articles 40-48, at www.alemarah-ia.net.

¹⁰⁰ The other regional military councils are geographically assigned to Quetta, Miramshah and Gerdi Jangal. Gopal, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

¹⁰¹ Kathy Gannon, "Three Taliban leaders hold secret talks with Afghan president Hamid Karzai", *Associated Press*, 31 October 2010.

¹⁰² Crisis Group interview, former Taliban commander, Kabul, 1 March 2011.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

ceive an additional \$175-\$240 for attacks on clinics, dams or schools; higher bonuses are awarded for attacks on ISAF forces.¹⁰⁴

After Kabir's arrest in early 2010, some reports suggest that he has since been replaced on the Peshawar Shura by Abdul Latif Mansour, the current head of the Taliban Political Commission¹⁰⁵ and minister of agriculture under the Taliban regime.¹⁰⁶ A Zadran Pashtun, Mansour, who also served for some time as the Taliban's shadow governor for Nangarhar, belongs to Zurmat district in the south-eastern province of Paktia; he was, at least until 2007, believed to be a member of the Miramshah council in North Waziristan.¹⁰⁷

A long-time ally of the Haqqani network, Abdul Latif Mansour emerged as a leader of the Mansour network after his brother Nasrullah Mansour, a well-known mujahidin commander, was killed in a car bomb attack in 1993. The Mansour network is perhaps most famous for thwarting U.S. forces in their hunt for Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaeda leaders during Operation Anaconda in March 2002.¹⁰⁸ It was during this battle that Abdul Latif's nephew Saifur Rahman Mansour emerged as a leading figure of the Taliban-led armed opposition in the south east where he set up a joint Zabul-Ghazni military command. Although Saifur Rahman was killed in 2007, the command structure he built in Ghazni proved resilient and was reportedly led by his appointee Mawlawi Mohammad Ismail until 2010.¹⁰⁹ The Taliban command structure is similarly resilient in other areas of the central-eastern region.

2. The Haqqani network and Hizb-e Islami

The Haqqani network's command and control remains substantially intact, despite U.S. operations in Afghanistan and in Pakistan's FATA, particularly North Waziristan Agency, where it is based. Jalaluddin Haqqani, a Zadran Pashtun, and a former leader of Hizb-e Islami-Khalis during the anti-Soviet jihad, first headed the network. Because of his illness and old age, his son Sirajuddin has taken charge

since 2005.¹¹⁰ While Jalaluddin reportedly continues to serve in an advisory role on the network's Miramshah Shura, Sirajuddin's half-brother Badruddin is now chief of military operations.¹¹¹ As recently as 2010, Abdul Lais al-Jazairi, a Saudi national allied with the network, reportedly was in charge of Arab fighters aligned to the group.¹¹²

Since 2008, the Haqqani network has expanded its reach beyond eastern Afghanistan as far as Logar, Wardak and Ghazni provinces. Proximity to Kabul now allows the network to mount sophisticated and complex attacks on high profile targets in the national capital such as the January 2008 assault – in collaboration with the Taliban – on the Serena Hotel that killed seven people and wounded several foreigners, including a member of the visiting Norwegian foreign minister's team and, more recently, the complex attack on several government buildings in the centre of the city in January 2010.¹¹³

Very little has been published about the current structure of the Haqqani network beyond the names of some commanders of the Miramshah Shura. It is not publicly known, for instance, whether the group operates under a code of conduct similar to the Taliban or how funding is distributed to the network's fighters. Nonetheless, much can be gleaned about the network's orientation and operational capabilities from its alliances with al-Qaeda as well as regional extremist groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).¹¹⁴ Operating out of Pakistan's tribal belt, these transnational and regional jihadi groups draw on a steady supply of foreign – Arab, Chechen and Uzbek – fighters to promote their vision of a violent global jihad.

Close ties with Pakistani tribal militants, particularly the Hakimullah Mehsud-led Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), provides the network with both safe havens and an endless supply of predominantly Pashtun recruits. Alliances with al-Qaeda linked Pakistani jihadi groups, particularly the Lashkar-e Tayyaba and the Jaish-e Mohammad, enable the transfer of sophisticated weaponry, technology, know-how and recruits for suicide missions which enhance

¹⁰⁴ Crisis Group interview, former Taliban commander, Kabul, 1 March 2011.

¹⁰⁵ Press statement of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, January 2010.

¹⁰⁶ Gannon, op. cit., 31 October 2010.

¹⁰⁷ "The consolidated list established and maintained by the 1267 Committee with respect to Al-Qaida, Usama bin Laden, and the Taliban and other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with them" (Consolidated List), United Nations, 19 January 2010.

¹⁰⁸ Rahimullah Yusufzai, "Battle creates new Taliban legend", *Time*, 7 March 2002.

¹⁰⁹ Crisis Group interview, senior Ghazni politicians, Kabul, January 2011.

¹¹⁰ Jeffrey A. Dressler, "The Haqqani Network: From Pakistan to Afghanistan", *Afghanistan Report* 6, October 2010, p. 8.

¹¹¹ In May 2011, the U.S. included Badruddin on the list of Specially Designated Global Terrorists, under Executive Order 13224, joining his father and brothers Sirajuddin and Nasiruddin on the list. "Designation of Haqqani network commander Badruddin Haqqani", office of the spokesman, U.S. Department of State, 11 May 2011.

¹¹² Dressler, op. cit., p. 9.

¹¹³ Carlotta Gall, "Old line commander is face of rising Afghan threat", *The New York Times*, 17 June 2008.

¹¹⁴ For further analysis of IMU in Central Asia see, Crisis Group Asia Report N°205, *Tajikistan: The Changing Insurgent Threats*, 24 May 2011.

the Haqqani network's ability to expand its influence within Afghanistan.

Unlike its Taliban and Haqqani rivals, the Hizb-e Islami-Gulbuddin faction is far less resilient on the battlefield but far more adept at negotiating political deals with both local government officials and commanders from rival factions. While Hizb-e Islami was once the dominant power in the central-eastern region provinces of Kapisa, Laghman, Logar, Ghazni and Wardak, even close associates of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who now operate under the faction's political arm, Hizb-e Islami Afghanistan, admit that the military chain of command has weakened because of many commanders joining the Afghan government and worsening security.¹¹⁵

Little has been published about Hizb-e Islami-Gulbuddin's command structure but former fighters with the faction indicate that command and control is organised along much the same lines as it was before 2001. During the civil war, when the faction was most active militarily, the operational wing was directed by eleven to fifteen members, with Hekmatyar at the head. There was a general director of military operations countrywide, with command subdivided into regional military zones and provincial military zones. A military commander was assigned to each district with anywhere from five to twenty fighters under his command.¹¹⁶

Hekmatyar's Hizb-e Islami has progressively lost ground to its Taliban rival after he split with Mullah Omar and his Quetta Shura in 2007.¹¹⁷ Since then, Hizb-e Islami has been weakened in districts such as Tagab in Kapisa and Chak in Wardak province.¹¹⁸ Skirmishes in Wardak, in particular, have intensified since the start of 2011 with the clashes between the Taliban and Hizb-e Islami resulting in the death of Mullah Zakhil of Nirkh district, one of the Taliban's leading commanders in May 2011.¹¹⁹

Nonetheless, what Hekmatyar's faction has lost militarily it has regained politically with Hizb-e Islami Afghanistan, its political wing, which is strongly represented within the Afghan government. At least 49 members of the party have leadership positions as members of parliament, provincial governors or members of the cabinet. Party representatives, such as Minister of Economy Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal,

publicly maintain that they have no contact with Hizb-e Islami's armed wing. These claims seem dubious, however, in light of attempts by party representatives to broker a reconciliation deal between Hizb-e Islami and the presidential palace.¹²⁰ Hekmatyar's closest lieutenants, including his chief deputy, Engineer Qutbuddin Hilal, former deputy prime minister during the Rabbani regime, and Ghairat Bahir, Hekmatyar's son-in-law and one time spokesman, met Karzai in March 2010.¹²¹ They laid out Hizb-e Islami's fifteen-point peace plan, which in addition to demanding NATO troop withdrawals to begin in 2011, called for parliament to undertake a constitutional review process.¹²²

Though a number of defections to the government have occurred as deals have been cut with Hizb-e Islami commanders, these agreements have been piecemeal and it remains unclear who speaks for the majority of Hizb-e Islami faction or indeed for Hekmatyar himself. This lack of clarity appears to have shaken some elements of the leadership in the party's fighting wing, making them more vulnerable to attacks from rival insurgent groups. As yet, there is no wholesale reconciliation deal nor is there any sign of broad intra-party agreement on the fate of its long-time leader should a deal be brokered at the national level. Many Hizb-e Islami commanders, in the meantime, remain firmly in the fight.

C. TAKING TERRITORY

1. Kabul

Although Kabul is nominally under the control of Afghan security forces, the high concentration of government and international institutions in the capital creates a target-rich environment. The constant flow of people displaced by insecurity, combined with the proliferation of organised crime, likewise, is a magnet for the insurgency. Afghan security officials and ISAF advisers have noted the growing interdependence of the insurgency and organised crime in Kabul; combined with fluid alliances between the Haqqani network, the Taliban, Hizb-e Islami and other groups. As a result, insurgents can easily penetrate the city and strike high-profile targets.¹²³ Because of the heavy presence of foreign and national security forces, the Taliban's shadow government structure in Kabul city is generally managed remotely by the leadership in Pakistan.¹²⁴

¹¹⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Hizb-e Islami Afghanistan party officials, Kabul, 31 May 2011.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, former Taliban official, Kabul, 7 November 2010.

¹¹⁸ Crisis Group interviews, provincial council officials in Kapisa and Wardak, Mahmoud Raqi and Maidan Shar, January and February 2011.

¹¹⁹ Crisis Group telephone interview, Wardak provincial council member, 31 May 2011.

¹²⁰ Thomas Ruttig, "Gulbuddin ante portas-again", Afghanistan Analysts Network, 22 March 2010.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Crisis Group interviews, senior Afghan security officials and ISAF officials, Kabul, April 2011.

¹²⁴ Crisis Group interview, Afghan counter-terrorism official, Kabul, 11 April 2011.

Despite this and the fact that shadow governors frequently rotate, provincial officials believe that Kabul's Taliban shadow leadership still plays an important role in facilitating infiltration into the capital.¹²⁵

A Taliban spokesman claims that the rising dissatisfaction with the Afghan government and ISAF forces and local support – passive or otherwise – are crucial for the Taliban presence in Kabul:

The people's support has been a boon in this ten-year long struggle. If we didn't have support, we wouldn't be able to transport weapons into the heart of Kabul. Our mujahidin wouldn't be able to spend days and nights in the heart of Kabul; without the people's support this would have been very difficult.¹²⁶

Despite these claims of popular support, a number of prominent Taliban commanders have been captured or killed in recent years. As a result, the insurgency has adjusted its objectives and tactics. Outmanned and outgunned by the thousands of foreign and Afghan security forces in and around Kabul, the Taliban's primary objective is not to capture the city physically but to capture it psychologically. Once that objective is achieved, Taliban representatives explain, the presence of foreign forces, and the dozens of foreign civilian agencies located in Kabul that depend directly or indirectly on them for protection, would become unsustainable.¹²⁷

The Haqqani network appears to have far more ability to operate inside Kabul and has been responsible for many high profile and sophisticated attacks, such as the two strikes on the Indian embassy in July 2008 and October 2009, respectively. The network has also frequently provided facilities to the Taliban and other groups targeting the city.¹²⁸ When Afghan and coalition forces increased pressure on Haqqani-linked individuals in mid-2010, closing several safe houses, the network changed its tactics, using militant imams in Kabul to store weapons caches at local mosques.¹²⁹ Although the arrests of a number of mullahs affiliated with the Haqqani network lessened the number of attacks for several months, the Haqqani network's penetration of Kabul has remained substantial, as

evidenced by subsequent sporadic attacks in Kabul in March and April 2011.

Outside the city itself, Kabul province contains a number of insecure areas where insurgents are present. Most notable among these is Surobi district, particularly the Uzbini and Musayir valley areas. Local Afghan officials estimate that seven to ten separate insurgent groups, although only five to ten men each, operate in Surobi.¹³⁰ During the Taliban era, the district was seized with factional clashes between Haji Nasrat Khan, a former Hizb-e Islami commander, who allied himself with the Taliban in the late 1990s, and Commander Mubin, a civil war commander, alternately allied with the Jamiat-e Islami and the Mahaz-e Milli-e Islami parties. After the fall of the Taliban, Nasrat and his son Izat were detained by coalition forces and sent to the U.S.-run prison in Guantanamo Bay.¹³¹ Mubin, meanwhile, went underground sometime in 2002, according to local officials.¹³² Locals maintain that both Nasrat and Mubin commanders have continued to exert considerable influence over Surobi through their relatives and proxies, several of whom are fighting on behalf of the Taliban in the district.¹³³

2. South of Kabul: Logar, Wardak, Ghazni

Insurgents have a stronger hold over Logar, Wardak and Ghazni than other provinces neighbouring the national capital. The Taliban is tightening its grip through its shadow governments and a campaign of intimidation and assassination. The Taliban maintain the largest presence in all three provinces, with the Haqqani network following closely behind in Logar, while in Ghazni and Wardak Hizb-e Islami's presence and influence is much greater than that of the Haqqani network.¹³⁴ There is substantial evidence of cooperation between different insurgent groups in the three provinces, but, as detailed below, internecine rival-

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Crisis Group telephone interview, Zabihullah Mujahid, Taliban spokesman, 7 April 2011.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Dressler, *op. cit.*

¹²⁹ In one such mosque at the centre of an upscale Kabul neighbourhood, a mullah and his son affiliated with the Haqqani network were caught with a dozen magnetic mines and several explosives-laden suicide vests in February 2011. "Arrests of the organisers of bombing and terrorists attacks in Kabul province", NDS press release, 3 February 2011.

¹³⁰ Crisis Group interview, former Surobi district government official, Kabul, 4 April 2011.

¹³¹ Captured in March 2003, Khan was sent back to Afghanistan in 2006. For details on Khan's background and detention see: "Summary of Evidence for Combatant Status Review Tribunal, KHAN, Hajji Nasrat", U.S. Department of Defense, 5 October 2004.

¹³² Crisis Group interview, former Kabul province official, Kabul, 4 April 2011.

¹³³ Insurgent commanders allied to Nasrat and the Taliban include Gul Ajan who, along with his brother, Ghazi, participated in the August 2008 attack in the Sper Kundai area of the valley that killed ten French soldiers. A former highway patrol officer and former Hizb-e Islami fighter who defected to the Taliban, Ghazi remained an active leader of the insurgency with an estimated 50 men under his command in the Uzbini valley area for several years until he was killed in the 2008 assault on the French.

¹³⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Kabul, Maidan Shar, Wardak, Ghazni City, Ghazni, February and March 2011.

ries, such as between the Taliban and Hizb-e Islami in Wardak, are on the rise, particularly since the injection of several thousand U.S. troops in the province in 2009. Competition between certain elements of the Haqqani network and the Taliban in Ghazni is also increasing.

An independent analysis of security incidents indicates that Logar province accounted for one fifth of attacks by insurgents in the central region in 2010.¹³⁵ The Taliban and the Haqqani network maintain a strong presence in the districts of Kharwar, Baraki Barak, Charkh and most recently Azrah. Because a number of Taliban shadow government officials have been killed or captured since the surge began in 2009, it is difficult to identify current provincial leaders and ascertain the current state of the leadership.¹³⁶ Nonetheless, several Taliban fighters from Logar are well known for having distinguished themselves on the battlefield. In a departure from the norm, some Taliban commanders in Logar also oversee groups that operate in both Logar and Ghazni.¹³⁷

The Haqqani network has over the years expanded its presence in Logar. As recently as March 2011, there were indications that pressure from drone attacks in North Waziristan had forced a large number of Haqqani fighters across the Pakistan border through Khost province to Logar.¹³⁸ Najibullah, also known as Abu Tayyeb or Mullah Atiqullah, is one of the network's more active commanders in Logar, and the suspected architect of a number of high-profile attacks on foreigners, including the August 2008 killings of three International Rescue Committee employees and the November 2008 kidnapping of *New York Times* reporter David Rohde.¹³⁹ Such incidents have helped to elevate the Haqqani group's profile in the province and the region as a whole.

The insurgents have maintained their hold over Logar through a campaign of targeted assassinations of government officials and bomb attacks on coalition and Afghan forces. Just as U.S. Special Forces have escalated their counter-insurgency campaign since 2009, the insurgents have increased the number of assassinations, particularly targeting Afghan security officials who provide intelligence to foreign troops. Taliban operatives, for instance,

killed four NDS officials in Logar between July 2010 and October 2010.¹⁴⁰

Similar tactics have been employed in neighbouring Wardak province under the leadership of a strong Taliban shadow government, which draws much of its strength from the volatile districts of Sayadabad, Nirkh, Sheikhabad, Jagathu and Chak. Although Wardak has historically been and remains an important stronghold for Hizb-e Islami, the Taliban have gained influence in the provincial capital of Maidan Shar, forcing many government officials, facing a brutal campaign of intimidation, to seek safety in Kabul. Under the leadership of Mawlawi Allah Noor, who was reported in February 2011 to be Wardak's military commander, and Mawlawi Shahid Khail, the Taliban's one-time shadow governor, several shadow district governors are in areas close to the ring road, the country's main highway.

Taliban courts in Wardak have been described as some of the most active in the central region, rendering official government courts all but inoperable.¹⁴¹ Taliban court decisions are swift and brutal; as the tempo of ISAF operations has increased so have the number of public executions of alleged spies. In 2010, there were several, including the public beheading of an alleged spy in Sayadabad district in mid-October.¹⁴²

The Taliban's hold over the province has become so pervasive that few government officials dare leave the provincial capital. As one Wardak government official explained:

They threaten people everywhere. They kill people. Anyone who works for the government can't live in these districts. They either live in Maidan Shar in the centre or they live in Kabul. In Jagathu, Chak, Sayadabad the Taliban has full control. The district centre is like a checkpoint, nothing more. Most people don't go to the district centre to solve their problems; instead they go to the Taliban.¹⁴³

Further to the south and east, the Taliban have made substantial headway in Ghazni between 2008 and early 2011 under the leadership of Taliban shadow governor Mullah Najibullah, an ethnic Tajik.¹⁴⁴ The province has slipped from being one of the most stable to the third most volatile after Kandahar and Helmand, with its security rating

¹³⁵ ANSO, "The ANSO Report", Weekly Incident Report, Issue 65, 1-15 January 2011, p. 4.

¹³⁶ These include Mir Ahmad Gul Hashemi who, after fighting on the frontlines with the Taliban in the 1990s in Charasyab district and elsewhere, served as provincial military commander in Logar until he was replaced by Mir Abdul Karim in 2009. "Our Hero Martyrs", Series 36, 18 January 2010, at www.shahamat.info.

¹³⁷ Crisis Group interview, Puli Alam, Logar, 19 January 2011.

¹³⁸ Crisis Group interview, Western security official, Kabul, 1 March 2011.

¹³⁹ David Rohde, "Held by the Taliban: 7 months, 10 days in captivity", *The New York Times*, 17 October 2009.

¹⁴⁰ Weekly Incident Report, IDC Weekly Security Narrative, NATO Information Dominance Center, 18-24 October 2010.

¹⁴¹ Crisis Group interviews, judicial officials, Maidan Shar, Wardak province, 18 August 2010.

¹⁴² Security Situation Report, Week 42, UN Department of Safety and Security, Afghanistan (UNDSS), 15-21 October 2010.

¹⁴³ Crisis Group interview, Maidan Shar, 9 February 2011.

¹⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, Afghan security official, Ghazni City, Ghazni, 11 February 2011.

downgraded by ISAF.¹⁴⁵ The Taliban are the strongest insurgent group in the province with a near total control of Andar, Moquer, Qarabagh, Giro, Gelan and Nawah districts. Taliban command structures in Ghazni are less defined than in other regions. While the Quetta Shura is generally believed to oversee the shadow government in Ghazni, the Peshawar Shura's regional military council exerts a measure of influence over some commanders in the province.

As in other provinces, the Taliban combines assassination and intimidation to consolidate its hold on Ghazni, particularly targeting local Afghan security forces. Intelligence operations play a major role in such attacks, such as against an Afghan National Police unit in the volatile Khogiyani district, south west of the provincial capital in the fall of 2010.¹⁴⁶ Cross-regional cooperation between insurgent commands and infiltration was evident in the manner in which several of the bodies of the officers killed in the incident were later dumped on the roadside in contested areas of Logar and Wardak to warn the local population. Incidents such as these have frightened the local population into submission.

Those who do not actively support the Taliban, as one Afghan security official in Ghazni explained, offer passive support, giving the Taliban wide berth to operate. "90 per cent of the people in Ghazni hate the Taliban but they don't feel they have a choice. When we've travelled to different districts we've asked the people what do you want from the government. They say: 'We don't want schools. We don't want clinics. We want security'".¹⁴⁷

3. North of Kabul: Parwan, Kapisa, Laghman

The insurgency in the provinces north and east of Kabul is heavily influenced by the area's strong historic ties with Hizb-e Islami, which maintains a substantial number of fighters in Parwan, Kapisa and Laghman. Nonetheless, the Taliban project considerable power over the region,

resulting in tensions with Hizb-e Islami. In Kapisa, for instance, areas where the Taliban and the Haqqani network have begun to make substantial inroads have witnessed clashes with local Hizb-e Islami fighters, particularly in Nijrab, Tagab and Alasai districts where Taliban commanders and a well-organised shadow government operate quite openly.¹⁴⁸

While the Taliban resurgence in Kapisa gained significant traction in 2006, according to several local provincial officials, it had even greater momentum after reconciliation deals brokered by politicians and tribal elders fell apart in 2007.¹⁴⁹ It was around this time that several prominent commanders, including Qari Bariyal, the Taliban's top military commander and shadow governor in Kapisa,¹⁵⁰ began an aggressive campaign against ISAF and Afghan forces in the province. An architect of the deadly ambush on French forces in August 2008, Bariyal, like other commanders, consolidated Taliban hold over the Pashtun areas in the province's southern districts, particularly in border areas near Surobi, through intimidation and assassination of local government officials. The Taliban also exploited deep-seated distrust between Tajik-dominated northern and Pashtun-dominated southern districts. In particular, Pashtun mistrust of the predominately Jamiat-e Islami and Tajik-dominated provincial security institutions translated, at the very least, into the Pashtun population's tacit support for the insurgents.

Once Tagab, Nijrab and Alasai were cleared of resistance from local powerbrokers associated either with Hizb-e Islami or other less influential local fighting factions, the Taliban were able to use these areas as a base of operations for attacks on Kabul, including the January 2008 attack on the Serena Hotel.¹⁵¹ Indeed, Kapisa has time and again proven pivotal for insurgent operations targeting the capital. Many of these attacks have been joint efforts by insurgent groups, particularly the Taliban and elements of the Haqqani network although relations between the two have recently

¹⁴⁵ Crisis Group interview, Western adviser, Ghazni City, 11 February 2011.

¹⁴⁶ Initially reported in early November 2010 as a case of police defection, the attack highlighted the sophistication and effectiveness of the Taliban's intelligence operations in the area. Exploiting simmering ethnic factionalism within the unit, the Taliban first targeted the unit's Hazara cook for assassination about a month before the November incident and replaced him with a Pashtun affiliated with the Taliban. Not long afterward, the Taliban infiltrator reportedly poisoned the police unit's food and twelve officers were subsequently abducted while they lay in their barracks incapacitated. All but the cook and two others implicated in the plot were killed. Crisis Group interviews, Kabul, December 2010; and Ghazni City, February 2011.

¹⁴⁷ Crisis Group interview, senior Afghan security official, Ghazni City, Ghazni, 11 February 2011.

¹⁴⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Kapisa provincial officials, Mahmoud Raqi, Kapisa, 18 January 2011.

¹⁴⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Afghan government officials, Kabul and Mahmoud Raqi, December 2010-January 2011.

¹⁵⁰ There have been conflicting reports about Bariyal's status. According to an ISAF press release, Bariyal was reportedly killed in an ISAF airstrike in Kunar province in early 2011. See "NATO officials confirm Taliban leaders' deaths", American Forces Press Service, U.S. Department of Defense, 11 January 2011. However, local officials in Kapisa told Crisis Group on 21 June 2011 that they believe Bariyal remained the shadow governor but had moved to Peshawar. He has since appointed Abdul Ghaffar Shafaq as his deputy military commander and has charged him with managing the shadow government's day-to-day affairs.

¹⁵¹ Joshua Foust, "Kapisa Province: A COIN Case Study in Afghanistan", *World Politics Review*, 31 March 2009.

frayed.¹⁵² For instance, a number of high-profile attacks from 2008 to 2010 were staged by Bariyal's command group and elements of the Tagab-based Haqqani network, led by Mullah Daoud and his brother Aman.¹⁵³

Such collaboration is common and in fact vital to the insurgency's survival in Laghman as well as other parts of the central region. In Laghman, for instance, although Hekmatyar's Hizb-e Islami predominates, there are an estimated 23 small Taliban groups operating across the province. Each group commands anywhere from ten to 30 fighters, with their overall strength estimated by former commanders to be around 400 men.¹⁵⁴

In Laghman's Pashtun-dominated districts of Badpakh, Alishang, Dawlat Shah and in the Garouch area, the Taliban exploit tensions, focusing their recruiting efforts on tribal and political factionalism, alienation as a result of international operations, and local government rivalries.¹⁵⁵ Fissures dividing prominent government officials and politicians, such as that between Hazrat Ali, re-elected to the Wolesi Jirga in 2010, and Dr. Abdullah Laghmani, NDS deputy director who was assassinated in 2009, have empowered the insurgency in Laghman.¹⁵⁶ There is now widespread insecurity in mountainous areas such as Badpakh and Garouch where the Taliban are most active. Mullah Omar's leadership council has created a well-organised command structure and shadow government in Laghman, which, as of March 2011, was headed by Mullah Hazrat, head of the Taliban's provincial military commission.¹⁵⁷

With Pashtuns making up the majority in Laghman and Tajiks the majority in neighbouring Parwan province, the insurgents are exploiting ethnic frictions there. Tensions between Parwan provincial governor Bashir Salangi, once an ally of the Northern Alliance, who served as chief of police in Kabul in 2003, and factional leaders associated with Hekmatyar's Hizb-e Islami also underlie many of the security problems in the province.¹⁵⁸ On the whole, Parwan is far more stable than other provinces near Kabul,

but Pashtun-dominated areas such as Ghorband Valley and Koh-e Safi have increasingly come under insurgent control.

D. COOPERATION AND COMPETITION

As mentioned, several mujahidin parties, including Hekmatyar's Hizb-e Islami, Mohammad Nabi's Harakat-e Inqelab-e Islami, Rabbani's Jamiat-e Islami and the Shia majority Hizb-e Wahdat had vied for control of the provinces surrounding Kabul after the collapse of Najibullah's Soviet-backed government, during the civil war and throughout the Taliban era. These rivalries are reflected today in the competition between insurgent groups. For instance, despite a détente from 2001 to 2007, the Taliban are competing with Hizb-e Islami, one of the most influential and well-represented factions inside and outside the central-eastern region's governance structure.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, violent confrontation in some regions between the Taliban and elements of the al-Qaeda-linked Haqqani network has far-reaching implications for the Afghan and foreign forces' ability to ensure and expand security in the heartland, including Kabul.

Such infighting also has implications for the Taliban's ability to maintain and consolidate control. For instance, in strategically critical districts such as Tagab in Kapisa, abutting the Kabul-Jalalabad highway, a key route for fighters flowing westward from Pakistan, internecine competition between insurgent groups appears to be weakening the Taliban shadow government's control in some areas. Clashes between the Taliban and the Haqqani network and between the Taliban and Hizb-e Islami in Logar and Wardak provinces have also become more frequent as the Haqqani network pushes deeper into those provinces.

1. The Taliban, al-Qaeda and the Haqqani network

Evolving relations between the Taliban, the Haqqani network and al-Qaeda have been widely examined but connections between the groups remain opaque.¹⁶⁰ In the past, Osama bin Laden reaffirmed his support for Mullah Omar as *Amir ul-Momineen* (Leader of the Faithful) and the al-Qaeda deputy leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, singled out

¹⁵²“TF Gladius conducts the Kapisa provincial council security meeting”, ISAF incident report, Reference ID No. AFG20070718n827, 18 July 2007, as made public by Wikileaks.

¹⁵³ Daoud served for a time as head of the Kabul Chamber of Commerce under the Taliban regime, and is known to locals as “al-Qaeda Daoud”. Crisis Group interview, Afghan official, Kabul, 13 December 2010.

¹⁵⁴ Crisis Group interview, former Taliban commander, Kabul, March 2011.

¹⁵⁵ Crisis Group interview, former Taliban commander, Kabul, March 2011.

¹⁵⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Mehtarlam and Kabul, January to March 2011.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Salangi briefly defected to the Taliban in 1995.

¹⁵⁹“Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan”, U.S. Secretary of Defense, November 2010, p. 41.

¹⁶⁰ See for instance: Anne Stenersen, “Al-Qaeda's Allies: Explaining the Relationship Between Al-Qaeda and Various Factions of the Taliban after 2001”, New America Foundation, 19 April 2010; Dressler, “The Haqqani Network in Kurram”, op. cit.; and Jeffrey Dressler, “The Irreconcilables: The Haqqani Network”, Background, Institute for the Study and Understanding of War, 10 June 2010.

several top Taliban leaders for praise.¹⁶¹ For their part, Taliban leaders have repeatedly characterised their relations with al-Qaeda as an alliance that is fundamental to their overall mission of installing an Islamic emirate in Afghanistan.¹⁶²

In his new role as al-Qaeda's leader after Bin Laden was killed by the U.S military in May 2011, Zawahiri has renewed allegiance to Mullah Omar.¹⁶³ The Taliban leadership too have reaffirmed their alliance with al-Qaeda and emphasised that bin Laden's death would reinvigorate the jihadist movement.¹⁶⁴ Taliban leaders have also acknowledged al-Qaeda's role as a force multiplier, providing as it does the Afghan insurgency with technical advice, training, weapons, propaganda and communications capabilities and funding. However, the relationship between the Haqqani network and al-Qaeda, as well as Pakistani al-Qaeda affiliates, is far closer than the links between the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

Although Sirajuddin Haqqani, the network's leader, publicly claims allegiance to Mullah Omar and his Quetta Shura, and the two insurgent groups attempt to downplay their differences, their tactics reflect their different relationships with al-Qaeda. The Haqqani network, for instance, carries out sophisticated attacks and bombings that use multiple suicide attackers and remotely triggered car bombs. Given close ties to al-Qaeda-linked Pakistani jihadist groups, such as the Lashkar-e Tayyaba and the Jaish-e Mohammad, it is unsurprising that the network is far more capable than the Taliban at staging complex attacks.

While some Taliban commanders have tried to draw a distinction between themselves and the Haqqani network by implying that the latter is far more willing to attack civilians, there is little difference in the way the two groups wage war.¹⁶⁵ Despite Taliban propaganda denouncing civilian casualties caused by foreign forces, and statements averring respect for the need to protect civilians, the vast majority of civilian deaths in 2010 resulted from insur-

gent attacks. Indeed, in the press release announcing the launch of the Taliban's spring 2011 offensive, Afghan civilians were warned to stay away from government and military installations lest they be targeted.¹⁶⁶ Insurgents have notably stepped up attacks on soft targets, which inevitably kill civilians, seemingly in response to the surge in foreign troops.¹⁶⁷ Taliban propaganda, however, appears to have convinced a segment of Afghan public opinion that foreign troops and the Afghan government are the main threat to their physical security and one of the main hurdles to the delivery of effective international assistance.¹⁶⁸

In recent years, current and former Taliban leaders have sought to distance the Afghan insurgency from al-Qaeda's global jihadist outlook while at the same time expressing their fealty to al-Qaeda's Wahhabist worldview. Mullah Abdul Salaam Zaeef, the Taliban's former ambassador to Pakistan and one of the movement's key interlocutors with the Afghan government, characterises the Taliban's relationship with al-Qaeda as an alliance of both convenience and necessity. "It is important to have a relationship with al-Qaeda. If your place in the world is against the Americans, against NATO, then you need support. It's natural", Zaeef explained. "But our agenda is only Afghanistan. Al-Qaeda they have a global system; they have a global agenda. The Taliban are not part of al-Qaeda; they are allied with al-Qaeda".¹⁶⁹

On the ground, in the central zone around Kabul as in the rest of the country, these ideological distinctions and differences in strategic outlook between al-Qaeda, the Haqqani network and the Taliban are mere abstractions. As noted, insurgent commanders linked with the Peshawar Shura appear to have collaborated with the Haqqani network in complex attacks on targets in Kabul. In many cases, the Haqqani network plays the role of facilitator, supplying safe houses and weapons, assisting with target surveillance and providing advice on attack plans while other groups, including the Taliban, "provide the bodies" by

¹⁶¹ Crisis Group Asia Report, *Taliban Propaganda: Winning the War of Words*, op. cit.

¹⁶² Crisis Group interview, Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef, former Taliban ambassador to Pakistan, Kabul, 30 November 2010.

¹⁶³ Zawahiri said: "We renew our allegiance to the leader of the believers, Mullah Mohammad Omar. We promise him obedience ... in jihad for Allah and to set up sharia law". "Al-Qaeda's new leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in his own words", *The Telegraph*, 16 June 2011. Zawahiri was named the new chief of al-Qaeda following bin Laden's death in May 2011.

¹⁶⁴ "Statement of the leadership council of the Islamic Emirate regarding the martyrdom of the great martyr Sheikh Osama bin Laden", 6 May 2011, at www.kavkazcenter.com/eng/content/2011/05/06/14250.shtml.

¹⁶⁵ Scott Shane, "Insurgents share a name, but pursue different goals", *The New York Times*, 22 October 2009.

¹⁶⁶ "Statement of the leadership council of the Islamic Emirate regarding the inception of spring", 30 April 2011, at: www.shahamat-english.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6780:statement-of-the-leadership-council-of-the-islamic-emirate-regarding-the-inception-of-the-spring-ope&catid=4:statements&Itemid=4.

¹⁶⁷ Out of 2,777 civilians killed in 2010, 2,080 were attributed to insurgents, marking an increase of 28 per cent from 2009. Suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices accounted for 55 per cent of civilian killings in 2010. According to the UN, 462 civilians were assassinated in 2010, representing a 105 per cent increase over 2009. See "Afghanistan: Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2010", UNAMA/AIHR, Kabul, March 2011.

¹⁶⁸ Crisis Group Asia Report, *Taliban Propaganda: Winning the War of Words*, op. cit.

¹⁶⁹ Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 30 November 2010.

delivering volunteers for suicide missions.¹⁷⁰ While the extent of this collaboration is unclear, a number of joint operations have been attributed to the Kabul attack network, which began to operate in 2004 under the leadership of Commander Taj Mir Jawad, who served as chief of intelligence during the Taliban regime in the eastern city of Jalalabad.¹⁷¹ It is unclear whether Jawad continues to play a role in the network, or indeed whether he may have been captured or killed, but the loose consortium of insurgent groups carrying out the attacks in Kabul was still considered to be active in 2011.¹⁷²

Cooperation between insurgent groups can also take the shape of competition, more often than not over territorial authority, access to funding streams such as kidnappings for ransom or control over high traffic roadways. These factors, at times combined with personal enmity, are more important than the seeming philosophical divergences between the Taliban and the Haqqani network. The rivalry, for example, between the Taliban and the Haqqani network in Kapisa has become increasingly violent since 2009, in large part because of personal rivalries. In 2009, the Haqqani commander Mullah Daoud, who divides his time between Kapisa and Peshawar, reportedly ordered the assassination of the Taliban shadow governor in Kapisa's Nijrab district, an apparent reprisal for the killing of the Haqqani network's shadow governor in the same area, carried out by Taliban commander Mawlawi Mahmud.¹⁷³

Rivalries between Taliban and Haqqani fighters have turned violent in Logar since 2009. The first hint of serious fissures surfaced several months after the American journalist David Rohde and his translator, Tahir Ludin, eluded their Haqqani network captors under mysterious circumstances.¹⁷⁴ Held for seven months under a cooperative arrangement with Najibullah, then top Haqqani commander in Logar, and Taliban representatives near Miramshah in North Waziristan, Rohde and Ludin reportedly escaped to safety in June 2009. The Taliban reportedly accused Najibullah of allowing Rohde to escape while keeping the ransom

money for himself.¹⁷⁵ For this and other reasons, there has been sporadic fighting between Haqqani and Taliban fighters in Logar. Some elements of the Taliban and the Haqqani network may still cooperate, as suggested by the dispatch of a number of suicide bombers from Miramshah to Logar in 2010,¹⁷⁶ but frictions between the Haqqani network and the Taliban will likely intensify as the former extends its influence over Logar and Wardak provinces.

2. The Taliban and Hizb-e Islami

Relations between the Taliban and Hizb-e Islami have been tenuous. As mentioned, the Taliban had gained the upper hand against Hizb-e Islami during the civil war, resulting in the latter's Pakistani backers switching their support to the Taliban. In 2002, Hekmatyar announced an alliance between his faction and the Taliban. Yet, despite substantial cooperation between Hizb-e Islami and Taliban fighters at the local level – particularly in the greater Kabul area, the longstanding mistrust between the two sides continues to shape the relationship.

The first signs of a serious split emerged in 2006.¹⁷⁷ According to a former Taliban official, fissures became even more pronounced around 2007, after Mullah Omar rejected Hekmatyar's proposal that Hizb-e Islami commanders be allowed to conduct operations independent of the Quetta Shura's oversight.¹⁷⁸ Hekmatyar publicly distanced his faction from the Taliban, and soon after there were reports of sporadic skirmishes in the north and centre of Afghanistan.¹⁷⁹

Hizb-e Islami has generally sought to cooperate with the Taliban in areas where its commanders feel they have limited or diminishing control such as Ghazni and the Pashtun-dominated areas of southern Kapisa. However, in areas where Hizb-e Islami believes it has the advantage, such as Wardak province, there have been fierce and frequent clashes with the Taliban in recent years. Competition for control over access points, particularly to the stretch of the Kabul-Kandahar highway that runs through Wardak, is a major factor. In Wardak's Nirkh district, for example, the Taliban and Hizb-e Islami have battled for the monopoly on the lucrative tax on the bulk transport of local produce from the district.¹⁸⁰ Similarly in Logar, there

¹⁷⁰ Crisis Group interview, Afghan counter-terrorism official, Kabul, 11 April 2011.

¹⁷¹ Jawad first surfaced on the international stage for his involvement in the kidnapping of a French journalist in Jalalabad in November 2001. Online transcript of interview with former NDS director Amrullah Saleh, "The Spy Who Quit", Frontline, published on 17 January 2011, at www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/2011/01/video-amrullah-saleh-spy-who-quit.html. BBC News, "Captured French reporter 'well'", 17 October 2001.

¹⁷² Crisis Group interview, senior Afghan counter-terrorism official, Kabul, 11 April 2011.

¹⁷³ Crisis Group interview, Kapisa provincial official, Kabul, 13 December 2010.

¹⁷⁴ Matthew Cole, "The puzzle of New York Times reporter David Rohde's dramatic kidnapping and escape", *New York Magazine*, 22 June 2009.

¹⁷⁵ Roston, op. cit.

¹⁷⁶ Crisis Group interview, Pul-e Alam, Logar, 19 January 2011.

¹⁷⁷ Giustozzi, *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field*, op. cit., p. 129.

¹⁷⁸ Crisis Group interview, Wahid Muzhdeh, Kabul, 7 November 2010.

¹⁷⁹ Zarar Khan, "Afghan warlord says he split with the Taliban", Associated Press, 9 March 2007.

¹⁸⁰ Crisis Group interview, former senior Taliban official, Kabul, 24 December 2010.

is violent competition to control territory near the Aynak Copper mine, with its hundreds of foreign workers and other resources.¹⁸¹ This suggests that financial gain, as opposed to ideological differences, is increasingly a primary driver of the violence between the two insurgent groups.

IV. THE CURRENCY OF CONFLICT

The conflict in Afghanistan has always had deep ideological underpinnings that highlight tensions between the secular and religious and the urban and rural, but the tussle for control over both licit and illicit sectors of the economy has increasingly shaped its intensity and scope. Since 2009, the flood of Western aid and the surge of U.S. troops have consolidated the nexus between Afghan political elites and businessmen with criminal networks and insurgent commanders. Even in the unlikely event that Afghanistan is reasonably stable before NATO's planned withdrawal at the end of 2014, there remains a significant risk that a criminalised war economy could transform into a criminalised peace economy, thus seriously increasing the potential for renewed conflict.

International and local efforts to address the weak rule of law have only recently increased but for the most part remain piecemeal, giving corrupt elements of the government wide berth to profit from the conflict. The end result is an organised crime pandemic that thrives in a parallel shadow economy where cash is king and black market racketeering forms the backbone of multi-layered shadow governance structures. This complex system is run by criminal insurgent cartels and managed by conflict entrepreneurs in political and business circles in the legitimate "overworld".¹⁸² Kabul's failure to enforce laws and to adopt rigorous regulatory frameworks for critical economic sectors such as banking, transportation, customs and trade impedes economic development, slows the pace of reconstruction, discourages foreign investment and expands the political capital of international and Afghan actors operating at the margins of the licit economy. The negative impact on key sectors – banking, fuel, minerals, construction, private security, telecommunications and financial services – can be seen in every region. The illicit "drug economy" has similarly distorted and reshaped the dynamics of the conflict.¹⁸³

Weak enforcement of regulatory controls over the import and export of foreign currencies as well as Afghanistan's vast informal currency trading industry have resulted in millions of dollars being shipped out of the country each day. An investigation by the Central Bank's financial intelligence unit found that as much as \$190 million transited

¹⁸¹ The Afghan government has signed a \$3.4 billion deal with the Chinese Metallurgical Group to develop what is believed to be one of the world's largest copper fields.

¹⁸² Karen Ballentine and Heiko Nitzschke, "The Political Economy of Civil War and Conflict Transformation", Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, April 2005, p. 7.

¹⁸³ Citha D. Maass, "Afghanistan's Drug Career: Evolution from a War Economy to a Drug Economy", Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, January 2010, published in English by the Afghanistan Analysts Network, March 2011, pp. 3-4.

through Kabul International Airport to Dubai on a single day in July 2010.¹⁸⁴ There are virtually no restrictions on the transfer or outflow of cash from the country with the exception of a requirement to declare cash transfers over \$20,000 across the border or through Kabul International Airport. Similar restrictions apply to bank transfers over \$10,000, which must be declared to the Central Bank.¹⁸⁵ Such declarations are largely voluntary and violators are rarely investigated or prosecuted. This makes the informal currency trading system all the more vulnerable to exploitation by insurgent networks. It has also created an attractive environment for regional business elites seeking to maximise their profits by laundering their money and transferring proceeds from licit and illicit business ventures in Afghanistan to Dubai, Russia and/or Europe.

Only about 5 per cent of Afghans¹⁸⁶ have opted to deposit their money in the country's fragile commercial banks, making the entire country dependent on cash transactions administered by informal currency brokers, or *hawaladars*.¹⁸⁷ The Afghan government has attempted to regulate the *hawala* system through the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Afghanistan (FinTRACA), the financial intelligence unit of the Central Bank, with 1,000 such currency exchange agencies registered as of 2011, up from six in 2006.¹⁸⁸ Tens of thousands of unregistered *hawaladars* continue to operate, acting as the primary nexus between the illicit drug trafficking and smuggling industries and the political elites who provide cover for such activities.

In border areas, control over customs and transit has taken on a cartel-like quality where Taliban commanders compete with U.S.-backed commanders and their patrons among the Afghan political elite for the spoils. The intensifying violent competition for reconstruction contracts likewise springs directly from these cartels' needs to control roads and other infrastructure to move goods, services and currency from one part of the country to another. The Afghan government's failure to deliver basic services and security, combined with the concentration of ISAF troops and donor resources in the south has left the rest of the country vulnerable to insurgent encroachment, with the Taliban opening new fronts in the north and penetrating

even deeper into the central-eastern provinces.¹⁸⁹ Meanwhile, donor funds are feeding corruption.

Kabul, the political and financial capital, stands at the centre of this war economy. Government corruption fosters interdependencies between the "criminal underworld and political upper world".¹⁹⁰ Mid- to high-level officials pay tens, sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars to obtain a senior position in the security services and then extract bribes or collaborate with criminal and insurgent networks in smuggling and other illegal activities, including kidnapping for ransom. Corrupt officials also buy their jobs in national and local level government institutions and form alliances with armed groups operating in their area who pay them a cut of their profits which are in turn streamed up to political patrons in Kabul. The destabilising nature of this corrupt patronage system has received little international attention and cursory efforts to reign in corruption have stalled.

The international community appears unable or unwilling to confront corruption in Kabul. But, as one former senior Afghan official observed, nothing is more urgent: "Operation Kabul is as important as Operation Kandahar. 'Operation Kabul' means that you need to construct tests of those in the government; you go for the political elite in a way that is just as tough as 'Operation Kandahar'. A test should not be how good we are in delivering our speeches, it should be how good we are in delivering services to our villages".¹⁹¹

The nexus between the insurgency, political elites and organised criminal networks may provide opportunities to cast doubt on the insurgency's claim to the religious, political and moral high ground.¹⁹² Ordinary Afghans are alienated by the pervasive lawlessness and corruption that is part of their daily lives. A broad and even-handed application of the law, entailing the prosecution of both criminals and their willing accomplices among political and business elites would go a long way toward restoring public confidence in the government. Greater investment in rebuilding the judicial system is crucial to restoring the rule of law. This will inevitably entail house-cleaning in the attorney general's office, which has emerged as a hotbed of corruption and the central force in reinforcing the growth of the criminal oligarchy that has gained power under the Karzai administration. Pay and rank reform in the chief prosecutors must be of the highest priority along

¹⁸⁴ "Afghanistan: Capital flight and its impact on future stability", U.S. State Department cable, Reference ID 09KABUL3364, 19 October 2009, as made public by Wikileaks.

¹⁸⁵ 2004 Anti-Money Laundering and Proceeds of Crime Law, Article 5.

¹⁸⁶ 2011 Investment Climate Statement-Afghanistan, U.S. State Department, Bureau of Economic, Energy, and Business Affairs, March 2011.

¹⁸⁷ Edwina A. Thompson, "The Nexus of Drug Trafficking and Hawala in Afghanistan", World Bank, 2007.

¹⁸⁸ Crisis Group interview, senior Afghan official, Kabul, 28 February 2011.

¹⁸⁹ Gilles Dorronsoro, "The Taliban's Winning Strategy", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009, pp. 21-29.

¹⁹⁰ Carter and Clark, op. cit., p. 10

¹⁹¹ Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 2 December 2010.

¹⁹² Gretchen Peters, "Crime and Insurgency in the Tribal Areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan", Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, United States Military Academy, 15 October 2010.

with the implementation of more stringent vetting mechanisms for prosecutors. There is also a strong need to clarify criteria for corruption investigations and harmonise policy on pursuing sensitive cases involving high-level officials.

Given the dismal state of the judiciary and the time needed to restore formal courts, this may seem like wishful thinking. But there are steps that can be taken in the short term. The international community can, for instance, work more closely with the government to develop a strategic communications campaign to expose the increasingly predatory nature of the insurgency and its links with organised crime. Efforts undertaken by the U.S. military in 2010 to alter its contracting practices, to reduce reliance on corrupt local contractors and to re-examine the distribution of reconstruction aid are also positive first steps. The establishment in June 2010 of Task Force 2010, a U.S.-led body charged with oversight of military contracting and the adoption of new, stricter guidelines for contracting practices will undoubtedly have an impact.¹⁹³ But substantial investment in the capacity of Afghan agencies to combat money laundering, racketeering, trafficking and smuggling will do far more in the long term to reverse the growth of organised crime.

However, the Karzai government has actively undermined the Major Crimes Task Force (MCTF), the Sensitive Investigative Unit (SIU) and the Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU), the three Afghan agencies best equipped to confront the threat from organised crime and terrorism financing.

Established in May 2009, the MCTF was formed to investigate corruption and organised crime by the ministry of interior under the joint administrative direction of that ministry's deputy minister of security and the NDS director general. Following a request from ISAF commander Gen. Petraeus to augment existing efforts to fight organised crime, a memorandum of agreement was signed in August 2009 between the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the U.S. Department of Defense that outlined funding administration for the MCTF.¹⁹⁴ In November

2009, Karzai formally announced the establishment of the task force, which also receives guidance and assistance from the UK through its Serious Organised Crime Agency.¹⁹⁵ Similar to its police and intelligence counterparts, the attorney general's ACU is charged with investigating and prosecuting corruption and organised crime, focusing on criminal activities within the government.

Staffed by about 100 ministry of interior officers and around 60 NDS officers, the MCTF has faced serious obstacles almost from the outset.¹⁹⁶ Although the task force swiftly delivered results with the arrests of several high-ranking members of the Afghan security organs on corruption charges, it ran into trouble when it began to focus on Karzai's inner circle. Conflict between the president and U.S. officials peaked following the arrest of Mohammad Zia Salehi, a senior presidential adviser and chief of administration for the National Security Council in August 2010, who was implicated in a corruption investigation led by the task force and the SIU.¹⁹⁷ Within days of Salehi's arrest, Karzai called for an investigation into the MCTF, all but shutting it down.¹⁹⁸ Both it and the SIU have since become defunct and several Afghan investigators with the units have been forced out, including the task force chief Brig. Gen. Nazar Mohammad Nikzad, who has reportedly left the country for fear of retribution from government officials.¹⁹⁹

In July 2010, Attorney General Ishaq Aliko barred advisers with the U.S. Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement and the U.S. Department of Justice from working with prosecutors in the ACU.²⁰⁰ Fazl Ahmad Faqiryar, deputy attorney general for investigation, was subsequently dismissed in connection with the Salehi investigation, with the attorney general charging Faqiryar

¹⁹³ On 8 September 2010, Gen. David H. Petraeus issued a letter to commanders, contracting personnel, military personnel and ISAF civilian personnel outlining the tenants of his "Counterinsurgency (COIN) Contracting Guidance", cautioning that without sufficient oversight "it is likely that some of those funds will unintentionally fuel corruption, finance insurgent organisations, strengthen criminal patronage networks and undermine our efforts in Afghanistan".

¹⁹⁴ Under the agreement, financing for MCTF was to be drawn from the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund and distributed by the CSTC-A. See Vadim D. Thomas, Special Supervisory Agent, Federal Bureau of Investigation, "The G-Men in Kabul: The FBI Combating Public Corruption in Afghanistan", Naval War College, 27 October 2010.

¹⁹⁵ Damien McElroy, "Afghanistan: Hamid Karzai unveils new anti-corruption unit", *The Telegraph*, 16 November 2009.

¹⁹⁶ Figures represent staffing levels as of December 2010. See Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), 30 January 2011, pp. 107-109.

¹⁹⁷ Dexter Filkins and Mark Mazetti, "Karzai aide in corruption inquiry is tied to CIA", *The New York Times*, 25 August 2010.

¹⁹⁸ Joshua Partlow and Greg Miller, "Karzai calls for probe of U.S. backed anti-corruption task force", *The Washington Post*, 5 August 2010.

¹⁹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Kabul, February 2011.

²⁰⁰ Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, SIGAR, 30 January 2011, p. 109.

with libelling government ministers.²⁰¹ In November 2010, all charges against Salehi were dropped.²⁰²

Despite these problems, the MCTF and ACU could still prove effective against organised crime rings within the government that are linked to the insurgency. Given the Karzai administration's resistance, however, it may be necessary to make future security and law enforcement assistance contingent on benchmarks set to reflect government support for special law enforcement entities targeting organised crime and corruption.

The international community should also allocate greater resources to build the capacity of the government's financial intelligence unit, FinTRACA. With just 40 staff and lacking a clear mandate, the Central Bank's investigative division needs more international support and broader powers of inquiry. Steps have been taken to address links between criminal actors and their financiers by enhancing the unit's ability to detect money-laundering enterprises and to analyse businesses' financial links to terrorism. FinTRACA, however, still lacks the authority to ensure that other Afghan ministries implement its recommendations for corrective action or, indeed, prosecution.²⁰³ Greater accountability in the finance sector is fundamental to reform and combating corruption and terrorism financing. The creation of an agency liaison to parliament that regularly produces public reports about FinTRACA's findings could help facilitate greater transparency. Countering the insurgency requires cutting off the flow of funding for the armed opposition and their facilitators; targeted investment in law enforcement and financial intelligence gathering capacity, therefore, is vital for long-term stability.

A. SHADOW GOVERNANCE/SHADOW ECONOMY

Afghan and international law enforcement officials estimate that the insurgents need anywhere between \$600 million to \$800 million annually to conduct their operations.²⁰⁴ In a cash economy as large and unregulated as Afghanistan's, it is impossible to define the full scope of the insurgency's financial infrastructure. The confluence of financial interests between insurgent commanders, foreign and domestic businessmen and government officials often transcends ethnic, factional or political boundaries.

Collaboration between government officials and insurgent groups varies from province to province and district to district, but several primary modes of cooperation are evident. Joint ventures in drug trafficking between political elites and insurgent commanders provide the strongest and most lucrative link in the opium producing regions, particularly in the south. In the greater Kabul area where poppy production is comparatively lower,²⁰⁵ political elites often facilitate the movement or refinement of opium while the insurgents tax the transportation of opium and obtain kickbacks not just from narcotics smugglers but also from government officials who turn a blind eye. Provincial and district governors, local security officials and business elites similarly further consolidate their power or protect their financial investments, licit and illicit, by paying the insurgent groups.

The impact of this protection racket on security has been extensively documented.²⁰⁶ For instance, millions of dollars are paid to the Taliban and other insurgent groups to secure truck convoys contracted to supply the U.S. military. Similarly lucrative interdependencies exist between elements of the insurgency and Afghan intelligence officials, with NDS often benefiting directly and indirectly from insecurity. The more volatile the area, the more provincial operating funds the agency receives.²⁰⁷ There is now a nascent Afghan oligarchy comprised of business and political elites who rely on their strong ties to insurgent and criminal networks, with extensive transnational links to the United Arab Emirates, Central Asia and Russia.

By capturing portions of the growing national construction and logistics sector and using these licit enterprises to launder profits generated from drug and weapons trafficking, the Haqqani network has penetrated the formal economy. It uses front companies that operate in Kabul, which provide the network with a vital link to the country's main financial hub.²⁰⁸ The criminal capture of legitimate enterprises extends far beyond the capital. The expansion of the insurgency's shadow economy into the trade and protection of licit goods is perhaps most striking in the central-eastern provinces near Kabul where, unlike the southern provinces of Kandahar and Helmand, poppy production is less vital than trafficking enterprises.

²⁰¹ Dexter Filkins, "Letter from Kabul: The Great Kabul Bank Heist", *The New Yorker*, 31 January 2011.

²⁰² Matthew Rosenberg and Maria Abi-Habib, "Afghanistan blunts anticorruption efforts", *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 December 2010.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Afghan and U.S. law enforcement officials, Kabul, February 2011.

²⁰⁵ "Afghanistan Opium Survey 2011: Winter Rapid Assessment for the Central, Eastern Southern and Western Regions", UNODC, January 2011, pp. 5-7.

²⁰⁶ See: "Warlord, Inc.", Report of the Majority Staff, Rep. John F. Tierney, Chair, Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, United States House of Representatives, June 2010.

²⁰⁷ Crisis Group interviews, former NDS officials, Kabul, December 2010 to April 2011.

²⁰⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Afghan and Western financial policy advisers, Kabul, February 2011.

In Wardak, Logar and Ghazni, for instance, there has been marked growth in smuggling rings involved in trafficking minerals from central Afghanistan to Pakistan. All three provinces are rich in chromite, an iron oxide used for smelting stainless steel. In several of the most volatile areas near Kabul's southern border, the remains of Soviet-era mines are still easily exploitable.²⁰⁹ The Taliban and other insurgent groups have come to rely heavily on funds generated by the criminal trade in chromite, whose value has increased as demand rises in China.²¹⁰ Afghan government officials are increasingly playing an important role as middlemen in elaborate smuggling networks that stretch from Kabul to Karachi. Thousands of tons of chromite have been trafficked out of the country for processing at two Pakistani plants under cooperative arrangements between provincial government officials and insurgent groups.²¹¹ In Ghazni province, where chromite resources are believed to be abundant and there are old Soviet mines in southern Ghazni city, Moquer, Gelan and Andar, there are widespread reports of collusion between a former provincial governor and chromite smuggling rings.²¹²

Taxes on other licit goods provide the insurgency with other, less lucrative sources of funding. In Wardak province, insurgents, often with the support of police and low-level government officials, levy substantial taxes on locally grown apples, one of the province's primary exports.²¹³ Although the profits from such taxes are difficult to estimate, a former local Wardak official said that the Taliban levy \$33 per truckload of apples from the volatile district of Nirkh near the Kabul-Kandahar highway, driving up the market price of apples from Wardak in recent years.²¹⁴ Although far from comparable with profits from the illicit drug and weapons market, with an estimated 100,000-124,000 tonnes of apples produced in Wardak in 2010

alone, the insurgency's tax on the province's main export is not insignificant.²¹⁵

The insurgency's dependence on taxes, to some extent, dictates the tempo and scope of its territorial advances, as does its need for access to strategic areas and lines of communication. Although insurgents have been careful to avoid setting up major bases, the Taliban and other groups have consolidated their hold in the areas surrounding Kabul by attempting to control mountain districts close to the ring road, the country's main highway. In areas such as Badpakh, Garouch and Alishang in Laghman, Qarabagh, Khogiyani and Andar in Ghazni and Charkh, Baraki Barak and Kharwar in Logar where there is little to no government presence, access to the roads and the income gained from controlling them is important to the insurgency's survival and growth. As discussed below, however, the Taliban, the Haqqani network and Hizb-e Islami also benefit from corrupt Afghan government officials who frequently collaborate with local insurgent commanders in schemes aimed at profiting from the conflict.

B. PROFIT MOTIVES

In every province profiled for this report, current and former insurgent commanders and government officials point to the paradoxical relationship between the insurgency's growth and the ill-advised policies and actions of Afghan and international forces attempting to counter it. A counter-insurgency strategy that has long rewarded volatile provinces with more money and greater attention from Kabul and coalition forces has created perverse incentives and distorted the economy. For insurgents, criminal networks and corrupt government officials alike, the financial rewards of insecurity are preferable to a stable security environment in which political power is derived directly from performance and service delivery.

The role of elements within the NDS in fomenting discord in provinces around Kabul cannot be ignored. Misinformation, faulty investigations and abuses of power by the national intelligence agency figure heavily in the narrative of the Taliban's resurgence and its expanding influence in provinces such as Kapisa, Logar, Parwan and Laghman. Several current and former NDS officials also believe that some local NDS officials work hand in hand with insurgents and benefit financially from insecurity, as indeed do their divisions.²¹⁶ The agency has been subject to little in the way of review and has routinely resisted attempts by

²⁰⁹ Crisis Group interview, Ghazni provincial official, Kabul, 7 December 2010.

²¹⁰ "China seeks copper, tungsten and chromium in Central Asia, Ernst and Young says", Bloomberg News, 8 July 2010.

²¹¹ Crisis Group interview, Western counter-terrorism officials, Kabul, 22 February 2011.

²¹² Gov. Usman Usmani was removed from his post in the wake of repeated complaints about his alleged involvement in corruption, which reportedly included illicit trade in chromite. According to Crisis Group interviews with local Afghan and coalition officials in Ghazni province in February 2011, at least one of his reputed partners in the alleged chromite smuggling scheme remains in place as a district governor in Ghazni. These allegations can be found in "Pervasive Corruption Undermining Ghazni Province's Public Administration", U.S. State Department cable, Reference ID 09KABUL4182, 28 December 2009, as made public by Wikileaks.

²¹³ Crisis Group interviews, Wardak provincial council members, 11 February 2011.

²¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, former Wardak official, Kabul, 24 December 2010.

²¹⁵ Hakim Basharat, "Wardak exports 100,000 tonnes of apples", *Pajhwok Afghan News*, 29 December 2010.

²¹⁶ Crisis Group interviews, current and former NDS officials, Kabul, December 2010 to April 2011.

parliament to investigate alleged abuses.²¹⁷ There is a strong need to enhance parliament's engagement with NDS and for the agency to regularly provide the National Assembly with information about its budget, policies and practices.

Funded primarily through assistance from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency from 2001 to 2008, the NDS has more or less operated as a subsidiary of U.S. intelligence.²¹⁸ Millions of dollars of assistance have been funnelled to the NDS with little evidence that this money has been properly accounted for. Poor oversight of U.S. funding has indirectly empowered malign elements within the agency and created incentives for collaboration with insurgent and criminal networks. Under a scheme devised in cooperation with international advisers, NDS divisions located in Grade 1 provinces with large populations such as Kabul on average are allocated about \$60,000 a month for a discretionary operational fund.²¹⁹ NDS division heads are permitted to spend the discretionary funds as they see fit with little or no oversight and no requirement for inter-agency reporting of expenditures. Additional funds are also regularly allocated to the most unstable areas.²²⁰ Some Afghan officials argued that this scheme encouraged some NDS officials to "manufacture" security incidents to bring in more funding for areas under their control.²²¹ In Ghazni province, for instance, the unprecedented spike in violent attacks has been paralleled by a near doubling of the monthly NDS operational budget from 2009 to 2010, which could provide a windfall for some agency officials.²²²

²¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 16 January 2011.

²¹⁸ "Office call between the Director General of National Directorate of Security and Commander of Regional Command-East", ISAF incident report, Report Tracking No.2008-069-123305-0281, 8 March 2008, as made public by Wikileaks.

²¹⁹ Division funds are divided into separate budget categories: one for administrative costs which covers salaries, equipment and other day-to-day operational costs and a discretionary fund for unspecified operations.

²²⁰ In Crisis Group interviews with current and former NDS officials from December 2010 to April 2011, officials described a sliding scale in which more populous provinces such as Kabul, Nangarhar, Balkh and Herat are considered Grade 1 areas, eligible for the largest amount of funding, while Grade 2 provinces such as Ghazni and Grade 3 provinces such as Parwan receive less. According to an NDS official interviewed in April 2011, Grade 1 areas received an average of about \$60,000 a month; Grade 2 received \$20,000 a month; Grade 3 \$10,000 a month. Others described a system in which local NDS officials in particularly volatile areas are rewarded with extra operational funding if they are able to demonstrate that insecurity in their region is acute.

²²¹ Crisis Group interview, former NDS officials, Kabul, December 2010 to April 2011.

²²² Crisis Group interview, former NDS official, Kabul, 2 March 2011.

Kapisa provides perhaps one of the best examples of the nexus between the insurgency and corrupt Afghan security forces. During the early years of the Taliban and Hizb-e Islami's resurgence in the province, security officials worked closely with Mawlana Sadiq,²²³ a former Hizb-e Islami commander who first joined the Taliban insurgency before mobilising his own force in the province in 2006. His son-in-law, Sardar Wali, was later appointed deputy shadow governor of Kapisa and shortly after his appointment formed a close relationship with both the provincial NDS chief and provincial deputy police chief who reportedly helped to facilitate safe houses for insurgent fighters in the region.²²⁴

The NDS abuse of power and authority has fuelled local alienation, which is compounded by a lack of consultation between coalition forces, Afghan government officials and local elders and other influential community actors. For nearly a decade, the U.S. military, which has taken the lead in the provinces surrounding Kabul, has been running blind, largely ignorant of the political dynamics in a given area. Coalition efforts to understand this crucial region and adjust its counter-insurgency campaign to local dynamics have been one-dimensional, with information gathered for targeting purposes.²²⁵ These developments have been exacerbated by a lack of continuity between incoming and outgoing ISAF military units. This knowledge deficit has hobbled coalition efforts to counter the insurgency in the Afghan heartland. As one U.S. general put it:

Ignorant of local economics and landowners, hazy about who the powerbrokers are and how they might be influenced, incurious about the correlations between various development projects and the levels of cooperation among villagers, and disengaged from the people in the best position to find answers – whether aid workers or Afghan soldiers – U.S. intelligence officers and analysts can do little but shrug in response to high level decision-makers seeking the knowledge, analysis and information they need to wage a successful counter-insurgency.²²⁶

²²³ Sadiq was only briefly allied with the Taliban. He returned to Hizb-e Islami in 2006 and moved to Peshawar the same year. He appointed Sardar Wali deputy shadow governor of Kapisa after his move to Peshawar.

²²⁴ Crisis Group interview, Kapisa provincial official, Kabul, 30 March 2011.

²²⁵ For a detailed assessment of U.S. military analysis of factors driving the conflict in Afghanistan see Maj. Gen. Michael T. Flynn, Capt. Matthew Pottinger and Paul D. Batchelor, "Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan", Center for New American Security, January 2010.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

All of this has greatly undercut the legitimacy of ISAF and its partners in the Afghan security forces, reducing public confidence in the government at every level, but especially at the local level where the principal players are well known to most residents. Locals in provinces surrounding Kabul repeatedly pointed to the nexus between government security officials and local commanders of both criminal gangs and insurgent groups as one of the main factors behind instability in the region. As one former Logar government official observed, the net result is a population that feels squeezed, targeted by insurgents while their security is as much at risk because of official complicity or neglect:

It is very clear who is opposing the government and who is in the Taliban. The government knows where the Taliban are operating and the Taliban know where the government and the Americans are patrolling but they never fight each other. Instead they are attacking our villages. We are not with the Taliban but we have always paid the price. We have been victims caught between the two sides.²²⁷

Corrupt government officials allow insurgent groups to exploit ISAF-backed reconstruction efforts in contested areas in the provinces surrounding Kabul. Numerous instances have been reported of the Taliban striking deals with locals to allow projects to go forward. Several international military advisers complained that money intended for local projects frequently finds its way into insurgent hands. "Not only is the money going to the Taliban but it is transferring capacity to their shadow governments. They're learning how to coach the councils. They're learning how to get people onto the councils. They're learning what and how much they can demand from the contractors. They're getting an education in how to work the system".²²⁸

But local Afghan officials complain that the push to launch reconstruction projects in insecure areas makes it impossible for provincial councils and other local government bodies to assess the quality and impact of the work. There is an urgent need to conduct more thorough assessments of the potential impact of proposed reconstruction projects on security and stability in inaccessible, high-risk areas.

In response to these problems and Congressional investigations into contracting practices, the U.S. has increased efforts to examine and curb the distortion in local economies caused by billions in international aid. These efforts, however, have yielded only nominal changes and have little

impact on Afghan perceptions of U.S. collusion in government corruption.²²⁹

As mentioned, Task Force 2010 has been charged with oversight of military contracting. A month after it was launched, a Contract Action Plan was developed to better facilitate cooperation between U.S. field commanders and task force leadership in suspending or cancelling contracts with firms suspected of directly or indirectly aiding the insurgency. Included in the plan was a provision for the task force to recommend that contracting firms or individuals involved in financing the insurgency be placed on the UN sanctions list. While at least one major Afghan security contractor has since been barred,²³⁰ no efforts are underway to place Afghan elites with known connections to the insurgents on the sanctions list. Although management and administration of the UN sanctions regime against Afghan insurgents and their facilitators has been uneven over the years, it has proved to be effective in isolating active financiers of the insurgency.²³¹ More action should be taken to target financiers and facilitators of the insurgency and to add their names to the list.

²²⁷ Crisis Group interview, former Logar government official, Kabul, 10 January 2011.

²²⁸ Crisis Group interview, senior Western military adviser, Kabul, 12 December 2010.

²²⁹ "Inquiry Into the Role and Oversight of Private Security Contractors in Afghanistan", U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, 28 September 2010.

²³⁰ Heidi Vogt, "Security firm put on U.S. blacklist", Associated Press, 10 December 2010.

²³¹ See "Designation of Haqqani Network Commander Badrud-din Haqqani", Media Note, U.S. State Department, 11 May 2011.

V. CONCLUSION

Insurgent attacks in central provinces near Kabul are intended to demonstrate that the armed opposition's reach extends beyond its traditional power base in the south and east. While the Taliban and other insurgent groups have made notable strides toward their goal of creating fears of encirclement in the capital and surrounding provinces, countering the insurgency's reach in these critical areas will require a multi-dimensional strategy. Such a strategy should build on current efforts to strengthen the rule of law, and prioritise an anti-corruption campaign in Kabul. These efforts will only succeed if government agencies have greater capacity to reduce the influence of organised crime and to limit opportunities for collusion between corrupt officials in Kabul and surrounding provinces.

The international community has for years tried to use military force to stabilise the country. Classic counter-insurgency doctrine, however, holds that military operations are only one means of keeping insurgents at bay until state institutions can be built up and reforms implemented. The creation of several U.S.-led task forces to weed out corruption and to avoid giving contracts to Afghan and international firms known for their direct or indirect support for the insurgency are a step in the right direction, but is not enough. Consequently, the impact of these efforts have been blunted and overshadowed by Afghan mistrust of foreign forces in the wake of an increasingly aggressive counter-terrorism campaign following the surge of U.S. troops in 2009.

Similar efforts must be made to rein in and account for international funds directed to Afghan security forces, including the NDS. Reversing the pernicious effects of the growing nexus between the insurgency, organised crime and elites within the Afghan government will largely depend on the international community's ability to marshal the political will for stricter oversight of international aid. To this end, greater support for capacity building in the judicial sector and the financial sector is essential.

Ending impunity in Kabul and removing corrupt and abusive officials through vigorous public prosecutions must be given the highest priority. Reducing the influence of corrupt political and economic elites will go a long way toward restoring the government's legitimacy. Using military force alone to fight the insurgency has proven ineffective and is creating an environment that fuses together the interests of Afghan oligarchs and insurgent commanders. The insurgency's reach is extensive but it cannot survive without the parallel shadow economy that has enriched and emboldened so many Afghan elites. The fight against the insurgency can no longer be limited to the battlefield. It is time to recognise the real front in Kabul.

Kabul/Brussels, 27 June 2011

APPENDIX A

MAP OF AFGHANISTAN

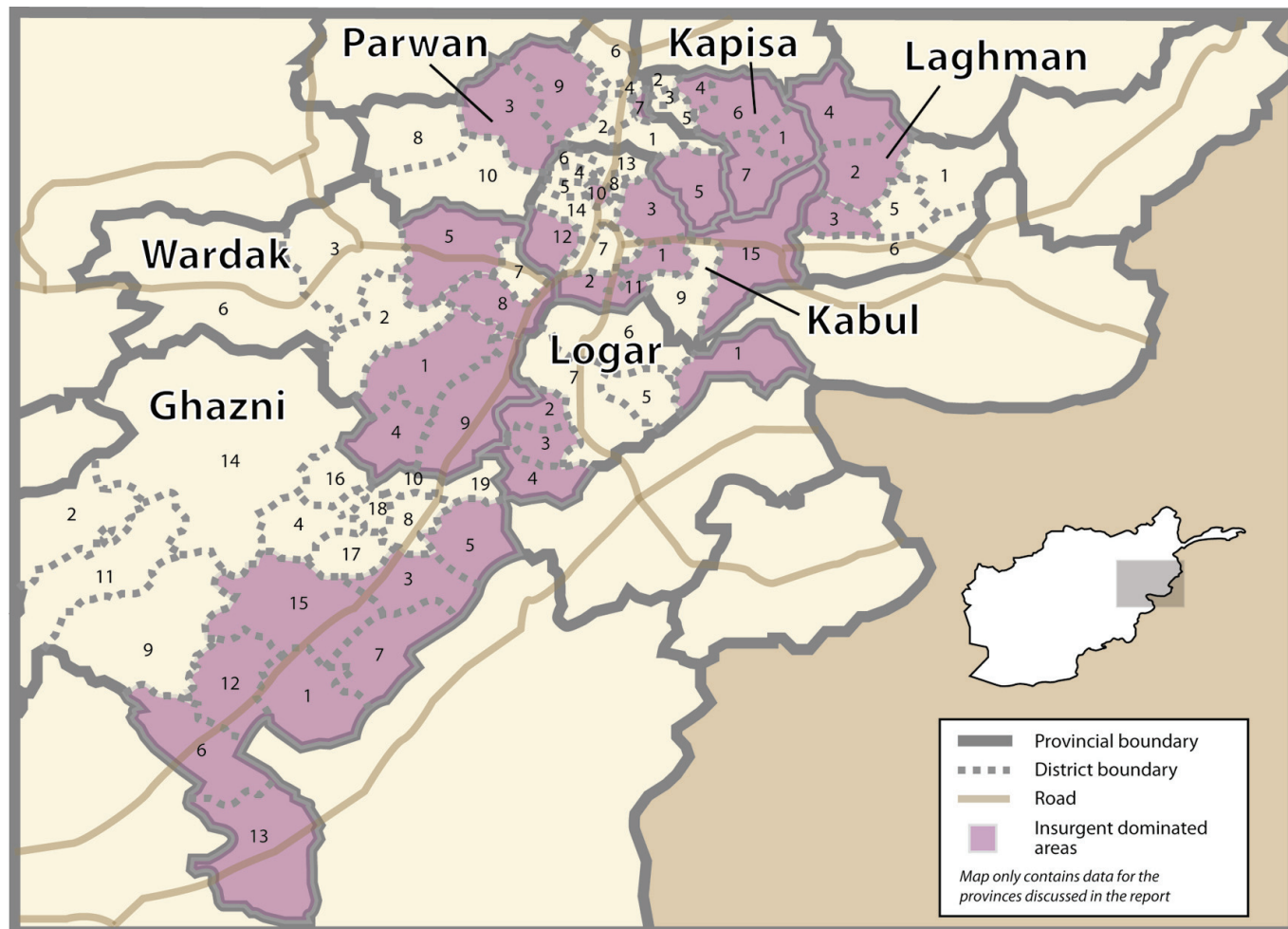


Map No. 3958 Rev. 7 UNITED NATIONS
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Department of Field Support
 Cartographic Section

APPENDIX B

MAP OF INSURGENT INFLUENCE AROUND KABUL



Ghazni province:

1. Ab Band*
2. Ajristan
3. Andar*
4. Jaghatu
5. Deh Yak*
6. Gelan*
7. Giro*
8. Ghazni City
9. Jaghuri
10. Khwaja Umari
11. Malistan
12. Moquer*
13. Nawah*
14. Nawur
15. Qarabagh*
16. Rashidan
17. Waghaz
18. Khogiyani
19. Zana Khan

Kabul province:

1. Bagrami*
2. Charasiyab*
3. Deh Sabz*
4. Farza
5. Guldara
6. Istalif
7. Kabul City
8. Kalakan
9. Khaki Jabbar
10. Mir Bacha Kot*
11. Musayi*
12. Paghman*
13. Qarabagh
14. Shakardara
15. Surobi*

Kapisa province:

1. Alasai*
2. Hisay-e Awali Kohistan
3. Hisay-e Duwumi Kohistan
4. Kohband*
5. Mahmoud Raqi
6. Nijrab*
7. Tagab*

Laghman province:

1. Alingar
2. Alishang*
3. Badpakh*
4. Dawlat Shah*
5. Mehtarlam
6. Qarghayi

Logar province:

1. Azra*
2. Baraki Barak*
3. Charkh*
4. Kharwar*
5. Khoshi
6. Mohammad Agha
7. Puli Alam

Parwan province:

1. Bagram
2. Charikar
3. Siyagerd*
4. Jabalussaraj
5. Koh-e Safi*
6. Salang
7. Sayedkhel*
8. Sheikh Ali
9. Shinwari*
10. Surkh Parsa

Wardak province:

1. Chak*
2. Dai Mirdad
3. Hisay-e Awali Behsud
4. Jagathu*
5. Jalrez*
6. Markazi Behsud
7. Maidan Shar
8. Nirkh*
9. Sayadabad*

* Insurgent dominated area

APPENDIX C

GLOSSARY

- ANA** – Afghan National Army
- ANP** – Afghan National Police
- ANSF** – Afghan National Security Forces
- ANSO** – Afghanistan NGO Safety Office
- CSTC-A** – Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan
- GAO** – Government Accountability Office (U.S.)
- Haqqani network** – Militant Islamist military group founded by Jalaluddin Haqqani after his split with Hizb-e Islami-Khalis leader Mohammad Younus Khalis in the late 1980s
- Harakat-e Inqelab-e Islami** (Islamic Revolutionary Movement) – A top Islamist party formed under the leadership of Mawlawi Mohammad Nabi, a Pashtun cleric, in the late 1980s in a bid to unite the fractured mujahidin parties
- Harakat-e Islami** (Islamic Movement) – One of the main Shiite parties allied with the Northern Alliance to fight in the anti-Soviet jihad
- Hizb-e Islami-Gulbuddin, HIG** (Islamic Party) – One of the leading radical Islamist parties of the anti-Soviet jihad era; led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, an ethnic Pashtun from Kunduz province
- Hizb-e Islami-Khalis, HIK** (Islamic Party) An offshoot of Hizb-e Islami founded in 1979 after Mawlawi Mohammad Younus Khalis broke with his one-time compatriot Gulbuddin Hekmatyar over political differences
- Hizb-e Wahdat Islami** (Islamic Unity Party) – A predominantly ethnic Hazara party founded by Abdul Ali Mazari, currently led by vice-president Karim Khalili
- Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)** – Militant Islamist group formerly led by the late Tahir Yaldashev
- ISAF** – International Security Assistance Force
- Ittehad-e Islami bara-ye Azadi-ye Afghanistan** (Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan) – Anti-Soviet jihadist party founded under the leadership of Abdul Rasul Sayyaf
- Jaish-e Mohammad** (Army of Mohammad) – Pakistan-based jihadist party founded by Maulana Masood Azhar with the aim of separating Kashmir from India
- Jamiat-e Islami** (Islamic Society) – A majority Tajik party and the oldest among the seven anti-Soviet jihadist factions; led by former President Burhanuddin Rabbani
- Lashkar-e Tayyaba** – Pakistan-based jihadist group founded by Hafeez Mohammad Saeed
- Miramshah Shura** – Leadership council of the Haqqani network based in the town of Miramshah in the Pakistani tribal agency of North Waziristan
- Peshawar Shura** – Based in the north west Pakistani city of Peshawar and known as the Peshawar Military Council or Shura; one of four Taliban regional military councils operating under the leadership of Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar's Quetta Shura
- Quetta Shura** – The top leadership council of the Afghan Taliban headed by Mullah Mohammad Omar and based in the southern Pakistani city of Quetta in Balochistan province
- SIGAR** – Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
- UNAMA** – United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan