

The Future of the Afghan Local Police

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Executive Summary

The Afghan Local Police (ALP) began as a small U.S. experiment but grew into a significant part of Afghanistan's security apparatus. In hundreds of rural communities, members serve on the front lines of a war that is reaching heights of violence not witnessed since 2001, as insurgents start to credibly threaten major cities. The ALP also stand in the middle of a policy debate about whether the Kabul government can best defend itself with loosely regulated units outside the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) structure. The mixed record suggests that the ALP contribute to security where local factors allow recruitment of members from the villages they patrol and where they respect their own communities. But such conditions do not exist in many districts. The ALP and pro-government militias are cheap but dangerous, and Kabul should resist calls for their expansion. Reforms are needed to strengthen oversight, dismiss ALP in the many locations where they worsen security and incorporate the remaining units into the ANSF.

Since 2001, when intelligence officers arrived in northern Afghanistan to raise local militias against the Taliban, the U.S. presence has been associated with a proliferation of irregular or semi-regular forces backed by American sponsors. None has approached the scale of the ALP, which has perhaps 29,000 men deployed in 29 of 34 provinces. Its predecessors were invented to meet short-term tactical requirements, such as assisting counter-terrorism teams in border regions; the ALP is a broader effort to correct strategic problems in the war against the Taliban. U.S. planners realised they were sending Afghan forces into rural communities that treated them as outsiders because of their tribe, ethnicity or urban background.

Senior Afghan officials were reluctant to endorse community-based units, in part because they circumvented central government authority, but also because they resembled militias that had contributed to the civil wars of the 1990s. President Hamid Karzai eventually accepted the ALP concept after insisting the armed villagers would at least nominally be categorised as "police" and answer to the interior ministry. He approved a 10,000-man roster as a two- to five-year temporary measure to address growing instability, although the program rapidly expanded. Five years later, officials in President Ashraf Ghani's government are considering plans to increase the roster to 45,000 and seeking money to continue the program after the scheduled September 2018 expiration of U.S. funding.

U.S. and Afghan security officials also continue experimenting with other irregular units. Abdul Rashid Dostum, the first vice president and an ex-militia leader, has publicly called for a new force of 20,000. Already, security officials are attempting to raise about 5,000 militiamen in at least seven provinces as a stopgap against rising insecurity. Afghan officials who feel qualms about hastily-raised forces with little training may lose the internal argument if insurgent attacks continue growing in 2015-2016 as forecast, leading to more pressure for quick fixes.

However, the ALP program has not improved security in many places and even exacerbated the conflict in a number of districts. A minority of villagers describe it as an indispensable source of protection, without which their districts would become battlegrounds or insurgent havens, but it is more common to hear complaints that ALP prey upon the people they are supposed to guard. Such behaviour often provokes

violence: in 2014, an ALP officer was three to six times more likely to be killed on duty than his ANSF counterpart. At times, this reflected the way ALP units have become a central part of the war, singled out by Taliban as important targets. In other places, the high rate resulted from abuses – extortion, kidnapping, extrajudicial killings – that instigated armed responses. Teachers who feel outraged by ALP behaviour and pick up guns to attack an ALP outpost may have no connection to insurgents and may quickly return peacefully to civilian life. Such cases illustrate how ALP can inspire conflict, instead of quelling it.

The chequered history suggests further expansion of such forces would be a mistake, but an abrupt halt to the program would give insurgents a military edge, and ex-fighters might also be drawn to banditry and other forms of lawlessness if not carefully reintegrated into society or the ANSF. New policies are needed to extend ALP units with proven good behaviour, while reducing the overall force and ultimately ending the program. The mix of interventions required – strengthened oversight and integration into ANSF of units that would remain after poor ones are disbanded – includes additional training, vetting and discipline. Many domestic and international actors should be empowered to identify where the ALP contributes to instability, including the councils of elders originally convened to approve the program. Oversight mechanisms should have power only to reduce or eliminate ALP where the program is not working, not authorise bigger rosters or shift resources to new locations.

Only a minority of the existing ALP would likely pass muster in such a stringent system, but those remaining should receive pay increases equivalent to those received by the national police (ANP), and adequate support from the government and international community. Washington's allies have been reluctant to get involved with the program, but they should set aside their concerns as ALP members become *bona fide* policemen and leave behind the ALP's history as a U.S. military project.

Recommendations

To strengthen ALP oversight and identify units that worsen security

To the government of Afghanistan:

1. Establish new mechanisms within the interior ministry (MoI) to discipline individual ALP members; cancel ALP rosters in districts or communities where the program contributes to instability; and review the allocation of ALP by district, removing those resulting from political patronage, not security needs.
2. Support the ALP Directorate's Monitoring Unit to develop a permanent presence at provincial and district levels, with resources and authority needed to investigate individual members and entire units.
3. Empower a variety of domestic actors to investigate ALP abuses and recommend to the ALP Directorate the dissolution of the program in particular locations.
4. Consider deploying Afghan National Police (ANP) or National Directorate for Security (NDS) officers as leaders, mentors or inspectors of ALP units.
5. Require that provincial governors' monthly updates to Kabul include reporting on ALP performance, including human rights violations and assessments of contributions to stability or instability.
6. Give oversight mechanisms power only to reduce or eliminate ALP where the program is not working, not to authorise bigger rosters in any district or shift resources to new locations.

To the U.S. Department of Defense:

7. Inform the ALP Directorate formally that the U.S. will only continue funding if clear, measurable criteria are satisfied, including stronger oversight and accountability mechanisms; publish the criteria so funding conditions are transparent; and restrict funding if the criteria are not satisfied.
8. Ensure that U.S. commanders continue requesting reports from their analysts on ALP performance, including how district, provincial and national leaders employ and oversee ALP; and demand changes or criminal charges where the program is misused or poorly overseen.
9. Continue shifting U.S. counter-terrorism resources away from remote locations and redeploying them in support of ANSF and ALP defending Kabul, major provincial capitals and key highways.
10. Require U.S. Special Operations Forces to replace on-the-job training for ALP with direct training in Kabul or major provincial centres, if not for entire ALP units, then at least for ALP commanders.

To the UN Security Council:

11. Give the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) more resources for consultation and advocacy with the ALP Directorate, to encourage oversight and accountability, especially on human rights; and extend UNAMA's cooperation with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) to include technical support for investigating and correcting ALP performance.

12. Authorise the hiring of additional staff at UNAMA offices outside Kabul to investigate ALP and convey findings to the U.S. and Afghan governments.

To integrate remaining ALP into the regular police forces

To the government of Afghanistan:

13. Promise and deliver to ALP not eliminated by more rigorous oversight compensation equivalent to the ANP's.
14. Respect the original guidelines of the ALP program, including restriction to home villages; only defensive operations; equipping only with assault rifles and a small number of machine guns; and, especially, service only where accepted by local community leaders.
15. Clarify the ALP Directorate's role to eliminate chain-of-command ambiguity; and encourage ALP-ANP cooperation by joint exercises and other relationship-building at the district and provincial levels.
16. Direct all ANSF to give quick-reaction support to ALP, including medical evacuation, formalising if necessary the relationship with the Afghan National Army Special Operations Command (ANASOC).

To all donor governments:

17. Consider not-disbanded ALP units as full police and guarantee that their salaries will continue to be paid after 2018 through the same funding and accountability mechanisms that support the ANP.

To disband abusive ALP, along with militias

To the government of Afghanistan:

18. Reintegrate into society ALP members eliminated by the new oversight mechanisms and members of other irregular or semi-regular forces. Do not recruit additional pro-government militias.

To the U.S. government:

19. Fund the process of demilitarising non-ANSF units generously; refrain from supporting new pro-government militias; and concentrate on supporting professional civilian law enforcement.

Kabul/Brussels, 4 June 2015

The Future of the Afghan Local Police

I. Introduction

Security challenges in Afghanistan are increasing as international forces withdraw.¹ Insurgent attacks in the first quarter of 2015 surpassed all records for the same period since 2001,² and Taliban started to credibly threaten major cities for the first time since 2006.³ The government faces serious budget shortfalls, estimated at \$400 million in the 2015-2016 fiscal year, after missing the previous year's domestic revenue targets by 35 per cent.⁴ A political solution to the conflict is not likely in the short term, leading to calls for additional pro-government forces that can be raised quickly and maintained cheaply.⁵

However, NATO plans no further expansion of regular Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF),⁶ in part because external funding will be “trending downward” toward the goals set at its 2012 Chicago summit, which envisioned cuts to the security budget from \$5.4 billion per year in 2015 to \$4.1 billion.⁷ NATO has recommended that Afghan forces close bases, because the existing infrastructure is not sustainable, and the army and police had 161 and 205 “excess” facilities in spring 2015 respectively.⁸

In that context, Afghan officials increasingly view the some 29,000 men working outside the formal ANSF pay structure as part of the Afghan Local Police (ALP) as a model for bolstering firepower. The ALP costs only \$120 million per year, about a quarter the price per individual of ANSF personnel.⁹ The ALP Directorate in Kabul wants to increase the maximum size from 30,000 to 45,000 and is pushing for the program's extension from its scheduled September 2018 end date until at least 2024.¹⁰ ALP officials have been asking for heavy weapons from U.S. Special Operations Forces, which raised the ALP and continue to be its main sponsor. A senior Western official

¹ See Asia Reports N°256, *Afghanistan's Insurgency After the Transition*, 12 May 2014; and N°236, *Afghanistan: The Long, Hard Road to the 2014 Transition*, 8 October 2012.

² Crisis Group interviews, Western security analysts, Kabul, April 2015.

³ For example, large numbers of insurgents massed on the outskirts of Kunduz city in April 2015. “Kunduz won't fall to insurgents, says Massoud”, *Pajhwok Afghan News*, 27 April 2015.

⁴ Letter from John Sopko, U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), to Daniel Feldman, U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Michael McKinley, U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, 15 April 2015.

⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Afghan officials, 2013-2015.

⁶ This paper uses the acronym ANSF in reference to regular Afghan police, military and air forces. The broader term Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) comprises all Afghan security forces, including the National Directorate for Security (NDS) intelligence agency.

⁷ Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan (CSTC-A), briefing slides, 2 March 2015. The ANSF budget already dropped from \$12.3 billion in 2012 to \$6.3 billion in 2014; the timeline for further reductions is unclear. *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 16 March 2015.

⁹ Crisis Group interview, U.S. military official, Kabul, 27 January 2015. Some estimate the ALP's cost at \$180 million per year; even so, it is considerably cheaper than the ANSF. Jonathan Goodhand and Aziz Hakimi, “Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding in Afghanistan”, U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP), 2014, p. 48.

¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, senior ALP official, Kabul, 21 January 2015.

said “huge pressure” exists within the government for ALP expansion.¹¹ Kabul has started reaching out to donors other than the U.S., in case Washington funding ends in 2018. Other donors have so far refused to get involved because the ALP resembles a militia program, disqualifying it from receiving money from the Japanese and some Europeans.¹²

Superficially, the ALP offers the appealing logic of confronting a rural insurgency with armed villagers who understand their enemies and in some cases know the Taliban fighters personally. NATO military analysts suggest that 85 to 90 per cent of the insurgents are “not ideologically driven” and fight near their own homes in response to local grievances.¹³ ALP may be well-placed to identify and affect those dynamics in their villages, but the history of the program since 2010 also suggests it frequently exacerbates conflicts among ethnicities, tribes and families. In many places this creates higher violence and results in greater recruitment for, and acceptance of, anti-government forces.¹⁴

The double-edged nature of the ALP as both security tool and potential cause of insecurity has created profound scepticism about it in some quarters: “We don’t need a guard dog that bites its owner”, said a veteran aid worker.¹⁵ A panel of well-



¹¹ Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 26 January 2015.

¹² Crisis Group interviews, European diplomats, Kabul, 2013 to 2015.

¹³ NATO briefing slide, Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP), 8 June 2011. Non-ideological motivations to fight may include political, economic, ethnic, tribal and family grievances; Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, *An Enemy We Created* (London, 2010); Anand Gopal, *No Good Men Among The Living* (New York, 2014); and Mike Martin, *An Intimate War: An Oral History of the Helmand Conflict* (London, 2014).

¹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Kabul, Maimana, Kunduz, Asadabad and Kandahar, 2013-2015.

¹⁵ Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 14 November 2014.

known U.S. experts concluded that the program worked in some places, but “in other districts, the ALP are causing more harm than good”.¹⁶ All sources agree that the argument about its future should be resolved quickly. If any parts of the program can be salvaged and incorporated into the ANSF, that must start immediately. “The uncertainty is damaging”, a senior NATO official said. Many ALP members know their paycheques are not guaranteed in the coming years and are considering options for survival as bandits or insurgents.¹⁷

This report reviews the performance of the ALP since the program started in 2010 and suggests options. Interviews were conducted in eight provinces from 2013 to 2015, with particular focus on the southern province of Kandahar, hailed by ALP supporters as an example of success, and the northern province of Kunduz, where the program has attracted the most criticism.

¹⁶ Mark Moyar, Ronald Neumann, Vanda Felbab-Brown, William Knarr, Jack Guy, and Carter Malkasian, “The Afghan Local Police: Community Self-Defense in Transition”, Joint Special Operations University, August 2013.

¹⁷ Crisis Group interviews, NATO, Kabul, 5 December 2014; ALP members, Kunduz, Kandahar, January 2014-May 2015.

II. Pro-government Militias Pre-2001

Kabul governments have a long history of working with militias. Abdur Rahman Khan, who ruled in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, arguably the first leader to attempt centralised state building, also relied on tribal militias for regime survival.¹⁸ Starting in 1929, the dynasties of Nadir Shah, Zahir Shah, and Daoud Khan built a relatively small modern army, while respecting the parallel authority of rural leaders and their tribal forces, particularly in the south east, where tribes were exempted from conscription. The irregular *arbakai* in the south east, a traditional form of tribal police, became synonymous with the Policy of National Reconciliation under the communist regime of Dr Mohammad Najibullah, which, starting in 1986, offered weapons, money and uniforms to rebel groups willing to switch sides and fight for the government. They also inspired U.S. military planners who developed local policing concepts after 2001.¹⁹

The term *arbakai* and the militia concept have negative connotations for many Afghans because of human rights abuses committed by those forces, most notoriously during the civil wars of the 1990s.²⁰ But perceptions within the current Afghan government are more mixed. Abdul Rashid Dostum rose to prominence in the 1980s as leader of a pro-government militia; now first vice president, he seeks to repeat his old role by raising 20,000 men to battle insurgents.²¹ According to Deputy Interior Minister Masood Azizi, Dostum's former militia is a cautionary tale, because he defected to the insurgency in the 1990s and helped to bring down Najibullah. A former police general said, "Dostum turned against Najib, so the ALP can turn against us".²²

Some senior ALP officials are mindful of the historical baggage attached to the program and argue the ALP is a break from the pre-2001 cycle of militia violence: "We are not like the militia forces under Najib, because at that time the *arbakai* were irresponsible", a senior ALP official said. "Now it's the opposite: the ALP connects the people with the government. We help children go to school and patients reach clinics".²³ Yet, as the case studies in Kunduz and Kandahar demonstrate, the performance of the ALP has been uneven at best: some units promote security, others conflict.

¹⁸ For detailed analysis of pre-2001 militias from 1880 to 2008, see Seth Jones and Arturo Munoz, "Afghanistan's Local War", RAND, 2010, pp. 34-39.

¹⁹ Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton, 2010), p. 184. Antonio Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud: Wars and Warlords in Afghanistan* (New York, 2009). Mohammed Osman Tariq, "Tribal Security System (*Arbakai*) in Southeast Afghanistan", Crisis States Research Centre, December 2008.

²⁰ "Just Don't Call It a Militia: Impunity, Militias, and the 'Afghan Local Police'", Human Rights Watch (HRW), 2011, p. 14.

²¹ Goodhand, Hakimi, op. cit., p. 54. Margherita Stancati and Ehsanullah Amiri, "Afghan official seeks to muster own force", *The Wall Street Journal*, 20 January 2015.

²² Masood Azizi, "Tribalism Mechanism in Afghanistan", unpublished thesis, p. 36. Despite those misgivings, the paper argues the ALP program can be useful. Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 17 January 2015.

²³ Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 21 January 2015.

III. Pro-government Militias Post-2001

A. Precursors to the ALP

The ALP is the latest U.S. experiment in using Afghan militias to counter the insurgency, but many precedents exist among ad hoc forces the U.S. raised after the 2001 intervention. Anti-Taliban militias were initially labelled Afghan Military Forces (AMF) and partly integrated into the defence ministry. Thousands of armed men were also organised, primarily in the south and east, under programs such as the Afghan Guard Forces (AGF), Afghan Security Guards (ASG), and Afghan Security Forces (ASF), also known as “campaign” forces.²⁴ The largest was the Afghan National Auxiliary Police (ANAP), which started hastily deploying in late 2006 in response to deteriorating security. Plagued with disloyalty, desertions, criminality, supply shortages and other issues, it was aborted in May 2008 after weapons and brief training courses were given to about 9,000 men.²⁵

The U.S. military continued experimenting with locally raised forces as temporary solutions to the problem of insufficient ANSF. Several of these were later absorbed entirely or partially into the ALP, including the Afghan Public Protection Program (AP3) in central Afghanistan; the Critical Infrastructure Police (CIP) in the north; the Community Based Security Solutions (CBSS) in the east and the Interim Security for Critical Infrastructure (ISCI) in the south west.²⁶

The U.S.-led coalition promised to transfer “all security related programs” to government control at President Karzai’s request in 2011, though some transformed into private militias.²⁷ Many remnants of U.S.-funded militias continue as armed groups: in 2013, police in Faryab province complained they were still fighting former CIP strongmen who refused to be disarmed.²⁸ Another ex-CIP commander, Nabi Gechi, controls most of a district in Kunduz province and maintains good relations with provincial authorities.²⁹ “He is like the supreme leader of his district”, a provincial official said. “He gives permission for everything: who can get married, which government officials can visit. He taxes everything: harvests, engagements, weddings”.³⁰ Such pro-government armed groups (outside the ALP) are becoming more dangerous: in 2014, the UN recorded 53 civilians killed by pro-government militias, almost triple the 2013 number.³¹

²⁴ “Just Don’t Call It a Militia”, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

²⁵ Mathieu Lefèvre, “Local Defence in Afghanistan”, Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), May 2010, pp. 5, 7.

²⁶ “ISAF remains committed to MOI lead in security programs”, press release, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), 27 December 2011.

²⁷ *Ibid.* Moyer et. al., *op. cit.*, p. 17. Crisis Group interviews, Maimana, Kunduz, 2013-2014.

²⁸ Crisis Group interviews, senior police officials, Maimana, September 2013.

²⁹ Crisis Group interview, security officer for aid organisation, Kunduz, 20 November 2014.

³⁰ Crisis Group interview, provincial peace council official, Kunduz, 17 November 2014. “Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Annual Report 2014”, UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), February 2015, p. 84. Part of Nabi Gechi’s militia may join the ALP in the aftermath of Taliban offensives in spring 2015. Crisis Group interview, MoI official, Kabul, 28 May 2015.

³¹ “Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict”, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

B. *Origins of the ALP*

1. Persuading Karzai

The ALP's origins are sometimes traced to Major-General Scott Miller, who took charge of U.S. Special Forces operations in early 2010 and was inspired by village-based tactics in Vietnam. General David Petraeus endorsed the idea when he took over NATO forces in mid-2010 and persuaded a reluctant Karzai, despite palace misgivings about semi-regular security forces.³² "I participated in those meetings when Petraeus was pushing hard for this program", said a retired senior Afghan official. "I told him, okay, you want to fight guerrillas with guerrillas, fine, but it's a lot more complicated here than in Iraq. Here's it's not Sunni against Shia; you have a whole mix of tribes and ethnicities".³³ A notable exception to Karzai administration resistance was Hanif Atmar, then interior minister, today President Ashraf Ghani's chief security adviser. "We need to sub-contract security in some areas to local villagers", he told RAND visitors.³⁴ Karzai accepted a 10,000-man force on condition it would be labelled "police" under interior ministry command and control, with the program ending in two to five years.³⁵

2. Strategic correction

U.S. strategists became interested in village-based security partly due to growing frustration about the war's overall direction. By 2009, U.S. military leaders were questioning the prevailing wisdom of establishing Kabul's authority in places where the state's writ has traditionally been weak. A paper by a U.S. Special Operations Forces officer started from the premise that "Afghanistan has never had a strong central government, and never will" and recommended a strategic shift toward tribal security forces.³⁶ Until then, the U.S. had not funded Afghan irregular or semi-regular forces on a national scale. "The problem with the ALP was that Petraeus wanted to deal directly with the villages, circumventing the central government", said a former police general. "Now the Americans are going away and leaving these groups with no bosses".³⁷ Senior Kabul powerbrokers resisted ALP program aspects that would have diluted central government authority and used the district rosters to empower their own non-Pashtun armed groups.³⁸

Part of the impetus for a bigger program came from realisation that NATO was devoting huge resources to install regular ANSF units in districts where locals viewed them as unwelcome outsiders. In 2010, a British research firm did in-depth interviews in rural southern districts and found widespread dissatisfaction at the idea of villages being patrolled by Afghan National Police (ANP) who did not belong to their

³² Linda Robinson, *One Hundred Victories: Special Ops and the Future of American Warfare* (New York, 2013), pp. 28-33. Dan Madden, "The Evolution of Precision Counterinsurgency: A History of Village Stability Operations & the Afghan Local Police", RAND, 30 June 2011.

³³ Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 17 January 2015.

³⁴ Crisis Group interview, Afghan scholar, Kabul, 7 March 2014. Quoted in Jones, Munoz, op. cit., p. 84. This was as early as 2009.

³⁵ Interior ministry Decree P-3196, 16 August 2010. Cited in "Assessment of U.S. Government and Coalition Efforts to Develop the Afghan Local Police", Inspector General, U.S. Defense Department, 9 July 2012.

³⁶ Jim Gant, *One Tribe at a Time: A Strategy for Success in Afghanistan* (Los Angeles, 2009) p. 13.

³⁷ Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 17 January 2015.

³⁸ Robinson, op. cit., p. 34.

ethnic group and frequently could not speak the local dialect. The same year, the Afghan army launched an effort to raise the numbers of southern Pashtuns to 4 per cent of the overall force, while concentrating its largest combat operations in the Pashtun south. The U.S.-devised ALP concept would emerge as another way of addressing this problem; within a few years, almost three quarters of the ALP were Pashtun.³⁹

C. *Implementation of the ALP*

1. Rapid expansion

U.S. Special Operations Forces had already created small teams in rural areas, Village Stability Platforms (VSPs) or Village Stability Operations (VSO), as the primary means of selecting, training, and supervising new ALP units. Between April 2010 and March 2011, the sites expanded from five to 46 and U.S. troops assigned to the program from 2,900 to 5,400.⁴⁰ The U.S. military organised meetings of elders to nominate local men between eighteen and 45 as volunteers, obtained vetting approval for the candidates through the interior ministry and gave three weeks of training.⁴¹ Salaries were 60 per cent of a regular ANP officer's.⁴² The ALP had assault rifles and one machine gun per six men but were refused rocket-propelled grenade launchers.⁴³ They were scattered across districts in small groups, usually of ten or twenty, and authorised to patrol only in their home villages, though this was widely ignored.⁴⁴ The program spread rapidly, to 157 districts in 29 of 34 provinces.⁴⁵ Though the ALP now has an authorised roster of 30,000, actual force strength may be closer to 28,000-29,000.⁴⁶

³⁹ Austin Long, Andrew Radin, "Enlisting Islam for an Effective Afghan Police", *Survival*, vol. 54 (2), April-May 2012, pp. 113-128. "Afghan National Security Forces", NATO media backgrounder, 26 October 2010. By early 2012, southern Pashtuns were 3.7 per cent of ANA recruits, 13 per cent of ANP. "Securing the Future of Afghanistan: Tenth Report of Session 2012-13", UK House of Commons Defence Committee, April 2013, p. 96. As of March 2013, the ALP were 73 per cent Pashtun, 11 per cent Tajik, 9 per cent Uzbek, 3 per cent Hazara and about 3 per cent other. Jefferson Marquis, Sean Duggan, Lisa Miyashiro, Amber Jaycocks and Nelson Lim, "Building MOI Capacity to Manage the ALP: An Assessment of the Afghan Ministry of Interior's Ability to Support the Afghan Local Police After 2014", RAND, May 2013.

⁴⁰ Donald Bolduc, "Forecasting the Future of Afghanistan", *Special Warfare*, vol. 24 (4) 2011.

⁴¹ Training varied: U.S. Special Operations Forces required graduates in one district to leap through a ring of fire as part of their induction. Crisis Group interview, Western aid worker, Kabul, 18 April 2015.

⁴² "Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan", U.S. Defense Department, October 2011, pp. 68-69. Additional payments somewhat closed the gap in later years.

⁴³ "Assessment of U.S. Government and Coalition Efforts to Develop the Afghan Local Police", Inspector General, U.S. Defense Department, 9 July 2012, p. 32.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Maimana, Asadabad, Herat, Kandahar, Kunduz, Jalalabad, 2013-2015. Mark Moyar, "Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police", Joint Special Operations University, October 2014, p. 74.

⁴⁵ "Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict", op. cit., p. 79.

⁴⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Afghan and U.S. officials, Kabul, January 2015.

2. Relationship with violence

In general, ALP deployment did not correlate with greater peace and stability: violent incidents rose 14 per cent in the entire country from 2010 to 2014, while the five provinces without ALP saw a 27 per cent decrease.⁴⁷ UNAMA recorded 121 civilian casualties (52 killed) from incidents involving ALP in 2014, while attributing 1,225 civilian casualties (468 killed) to all Afghan security forces that year.⁴⁸ Adjusting for the ALP's comparatively small size, this suggests that it did not, on average, generate significantly more complaints of civilian casualties than regular Afghan forces.⁴⁹ In other words, an ALP member was statistically about as likely as an average ANSF member to kill or injure a civilian. Considering the statistics per battle, rather than per individual, would improve the picture of the ALP, however, because the ALP are exposed to greater violence than their uniformed counterparts. ALP officials say their casualty rate is six times greater than ANSF's; their U.S. mentors put the figure closer to three.⁵⁰

3. ALP abuses

UNAMA has raised concerns about ALP intimidation forcing mass displacements, sometimes of entire villages.⁵¹ This is hard to quantify. A survey of U.S. Special Operations Forces teams mentoring ALP units in 2011 found that 20 per cent reported ALP colleagues were guilty of undefined "physical abuse/violence"; a further 12 per cent reported bribe-taking. Between one-fifth and one-sixth reported that ALP indulged in salary fraud and theft. A smaller number witnessed rape, drug trafficking, drug abuse and the selling or renting of ALP weapons and vehicles.⁵² Complaints of extortion and illegal taxation are commonplace.⁵³ Some reports have even described ALP commanders selling the lives of their men: one allegedly accepted bribes equal to \$500 per head to murder subordinates and killed six before capture.⁵⁴ ALP in Faryab province were accused of raping, looting and keeping a torture chamber with snakes at the bottom of a dry well.⁵⁵

⁴⁷ Crisis Group interview, Western security analyst, Kabul, 20 April 2015. However, such broad analysis may lack relevance, as the latter provinces – Bamyan, Khost, Nimroz, Panjshir and Samangan – were already more peaceful as a group. Many factors unrelated to ALP cause violence in Afghanistan. The ALP are sometimes assigned dangerous zones regular ANSF are unwilling to patrol, creating a false association between ALP and violence. Still, the program is intended to bring security, and RAND evaluations have claimed ALP success in places where violence reduced, even for a few months. For example: Lisa Saum-Manning, "VSO/ALP: Comparing Past and Current Challenges to Afghan Local Defense", December 2012; and Radha Iyengar, Daniel Egel, Walt Perry, Todd Helms, "Assessment of Opinion Poll and Team Reporting for Village Stability Operations in Afghanistan: Wave 5", briefing slides, February 2012.

⁴⁸ "Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict", *op. cit.*, pp. 78-79.

⁴⁹ Reporting of ALP abuses may be arguably less consistent than coverage of ANSF abuses, because ALP often serve in rural locations without access to journalists and human rights officials.

⁵⁰ Crisis Group interviews, senior ALP official, Kabul, 21 January 2015; U.S. military official, Kabul, 27 January 2015. Some variance also exists between the ALP and U.S. counts; U.S. statistics show 985 ALP killed and 1,737 injured in 2014, *ibid.*

⁵¹ "Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict", *op. cit.*, p. 80.

⁵² Radha Iyengar, *et. al.*, *op. cit.*

⁵³ Crisis Group interviews, Kunduz, Kabul, Kandahar, January 2014-May 2015.

⁵⁴ Crisis Group interview, international aid group doctor, Kabul, 14 November 2014.

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interview, aid worker, Maimana, 11 September 2013.

The way such actions are perceived by local communities usually depends on whether villagers expect better or worse behaviour by other armed groups that might replace the ALP. UN reporting on civilian protection has consistently noted that local interlocutors often appreciate the ALP for keeping away the Taliban, which inflict more civilian casualties than any other faction. The latest such UNAMA report says that “many communities continued to welcome the stability, enhanced security and local employment they attributed to the ALP – particularly in those areas where ALP was locally recruited and deployed”.⁵⁶

4. Abuses instigate conflict

About 700 ALP were killed and 800 injured in the Afghan calendar year from April 2013 to April 2014; in only the first three quarters of the 2014-2015 calendar year, the force suffered 1,015 killed and 1,320 injured, meaning that ALP casualties more than doubled.⁵⁷ It can be hard to discern why the ALP experience high casualties: perhaps they are an effective bulwark against the Taliban, or their abuses inspire local vendettas, or a combination of factors. A senior Afghan official argued that rising casualties show that insurgents consider ALP valuable targets. He cited a mixed group of ALP and other Afghan security forces captured in Nangarhar province; the others were released, but the Taliban executed the lone ALP member: “They roasted him on a stick, like a kabob”.⁵⁸

In other locations, ALP abuses directly contribute to a worsening of the conflict. In a predominately Pashtun village of Logar province, a local doctor claimed that an ethnic Tajik ALP commander executed 45 prisoners, including a suspected Taliban militant who was blindfolded and used as target practice for rocket-propelled grenades. ALP in that part of the province also reportedly closed the roads to Pashtun travellers but allowed other ethnicities to pass. The Tajik ALP commander was killed in late 2014; like other such attacks, the incident was blamed on Taliban but may be more accurately described as a revenge killing. Similarly, Kunduz province interlocutors described several instances of ALP polarising disputes, turning personal enemies into insurgents, including an ex-schoolteacher who became a Taliban leader after ALP harassment.⁵⁹

5. Ineffective discipline systems

ALP command responsibility rests primarily with the regular Afghan Uniformed Police (AUP), with district chiefs supervising the day-to-day operations. However, the separate ALP Directorate within the interior ministry has parallel responsibility for managing the force (see *Figure 1*). The National Directorate for Security (NDS, the main intelligence service), also claims jurisdiction as part of its domestic security responsibility.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ “Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict”, op. cit., p. 80.

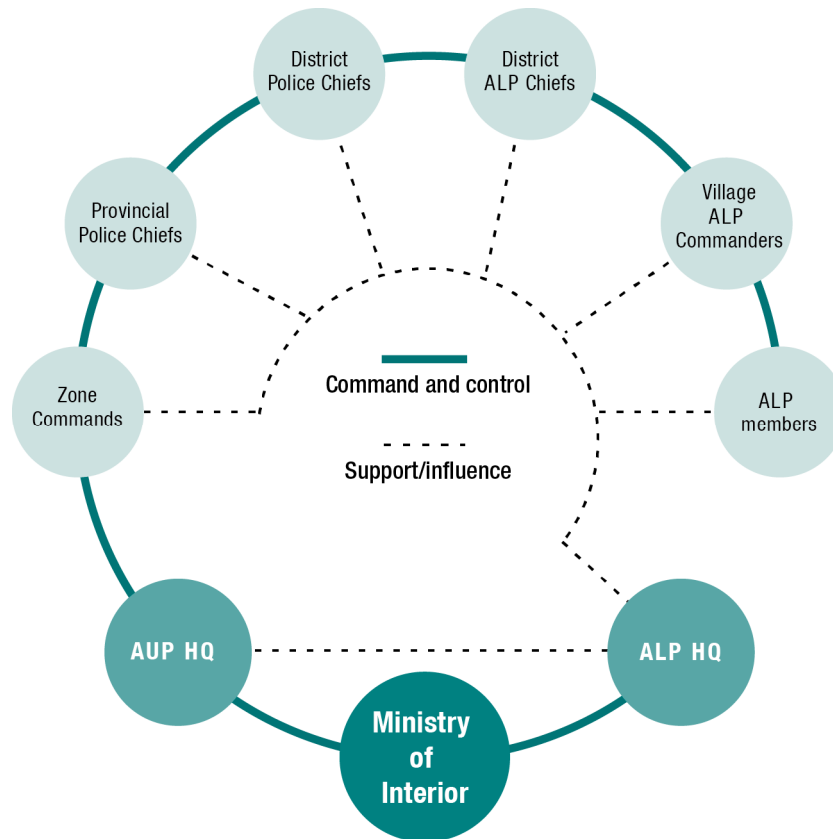
⁵⁷ Crisis Group interview, senior ALP official, Kabul, 21 January 2015.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interviews, doctor from Logar province, Kabul, 14 November 2014; elders from Archi district, Kunduz, 17 November 2014. Other examples are in the case studies below.

⁶⁰ Crisis Group interviews, ALP, MoI, and NDS officials, 2014-2015.

Figure 1. ALP chain of command



Many interlocutors described an absence of effective mechanisms for registering and responding to complaints about the ALP. When an elder from Wardak province complained in 2014 about a local ALP commander whose men were allegedly stealing from travellers, robbing houses and kidnapping teenage boys for sexual entertainment, he was instructed to meet with a prominent political party leader in Kabul who had no official role in the ALP program. He went to the politician twice, but the only result was that, upon return to his home village, ALP members tied his long beard to a rope and fastened it to their ALP pickup. “They killed him by dragging”, a witness said.⁶¹

Such lack of accountability is usually associated with ALP units that have ties to factional militia leaders, often in places where Afghan powerbrokers want control of drug routes or other strategic territory. “Drug mafias are controlling ALP in many places”, said an Afghan senator. “They can make a phone call from their village to a minister and avoid the chain of command”.⁶² Circumvention of formal structures is a source of frustration for mid-level MoI and NDS officers assigned to monitor the ALP, because they are overruled or ignored by superiors in Kabul when they raise concerns.⁶³

A senior Afghan official said that the ALP Directorate in Kabul investigates all complaints, acts when necessary and has imprisoned 65 ALP officers suspected or

⁶¹ Crisis Group interview, elder from Chak district of Wardak province, Kabul, 17 November 2014.

⁶² Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 7 December 2014.

⁶³ Crisis Group interview, Afghan intelligence officer, Kunduz, November 2014.

convicted of abuses.⁶⁴ The ALP headquarters' ability to investigate has diminished as U.S. troops withdraw, however, and sometimes is limited to the chief of the ALP Directorate, Major-General Ali Shah Ahmadzai, telephoning to district officials about incidents in media reports. However, many ALP abuses described in this report were not reported by local journalists, who often feel intimidated by, or loyal to, Afghan security forces.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) includes ALP monitoring as part of its civilian protection program but lacks capacity to collect information about the program in remote places. The U.S. military sometimes directly investigates allegations against the ALP – for example, looking into allegations of the rape of a fourteen-year-old girl in Kapisa province in 2014 and concluding that the story was unfounded – but U.S. capabilities for this are small and dwindling.⁶⁵ As troops withdraw, the U.S. is left “without the situational awareness and local capacity required to exert much influence in these areas”.⁶⁶

6. Impediments to confronting abusive units

Afghan officials sometimes lack the strength, military or political, to confront ALP units. In Kunduz, provincial officials lamented that ALP often refuse to visit the district or provincial authorities to whom they theoretically answer in the MoI chain of command.⁶⁷ In Parwan province, a provincial police chief tried to disarm 50 ALP who were allegedly preying on local villagers but was thwarted when the ALP commander slipped away and reinvented his men as bandits.⁶⁸ In Kunar, a retired former governor, Haji Jandad Khan, was openly defiant of the provincial authorities after his seventeen-year-old son was kidnapped in 2013; he responded by capturing dozens of villagers from Chappa Dara district and putting them into his private jails. Khan spoke dismissively about the provincial officials who urged him to stop his vigilante actions, saying he “only kept twenty or 25 [villagers]”.⁶⁹ He held no official position but commanded perhaps 100 men associated with a 1980s militia whose right to carry weapons was protected by ALP officer status.

A tribal elder said the increasing boldness of Khan and other commanders was a result of dwindling U.S. influence: “The ALP are like snakes in winter. Spring is coming, and they are waking up”.⁷⁰ Even in provinces such as Laghman, where the ALP were described as relatively well-behaved, authorities resorted to trickery to disarm units: summoning them to the provincial capital on the pretext of a lunch meeting, only to have armed ANP strip them of their weapons.⁷¹ Where people expressed satisfaction about the ALP, usually the most important factor was having seen rogue units disbanded: “We like the ALP – and if we don't like them, we complain to the district chief of police, and he will disarm them”, said a religious scholar from Parwan.⁷²

⁶⁴ Crisis Group interview, senior ALP official, Kabul, 21 January 2015.

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Afghan and U.S. officials, Kabul, January 2015.

⁶⁶ Moyer et. al., op. cit., p. 7.

⁶⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Kunduz, November 2014.

⁶⁸ Crisis Group interview, religious leader from Parwan province, Kabul, 16 November 2014.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interview, Asadabad, 26 August 2013. He spoke in the governor's guesthouse, underlining his lack of concern for provincial officials' authority.

⁷⁰ Crisis Group interview, Asadabad, 23 August 2013.

⁷¹ Crisis Group interview, businessman from Laghman province, Kabul, 11 November 2014.

⁷² Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 16 November 2014.

7. ALP vs. ALP

Reports of ALP-vs-ALP violence remain comparatively rare and usually involve low casualties.⁷³ “Sometimes they shoot at each other, but not seriously”, said a businessman. “They know this can start a tribal war, so they avoid it”.⁷⁴ The most serious instances have been concentrated in the north west, where political parties such as Jamiat-i Islami and Junbish-i-Meli-Islami have significant control of the program. “Many ALP units, especially in the north, represent warlords and members of parliament, not the local communities”, a senior Western official said.⁷⁵ The Junbish-Jamiat rivalry became especially tense and sometimes resulted in violence during the transition toward a new government in Kabul, 2013 to 2015. For example, rival ALP commanders in Faryab province fired machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades at each other in September 2014; and clashes between ALP resulted in seven killed in November.⁷⁶

Tensions have usually amounted to threats and posturing, not outright warfare, as the ALP are now intrinsic to the balance between powerholders. During a meeting with U.S. military officials, an ALP official was overheard on the phone saying, “don’t worry; tell Atta he will be satisfied”, which was understood to mean that Governor Atta Mohammed Noor was negotiating with Kabul to obtain ALP rosters under his influence. “In some places it’s more about the balance of power between Junbish and Jamiat and less about fighting the Taliban”, a U.S. official said.⁷⁷ An aid worker in the northern city of Maimana expressed concern that ALP could start fighting each other more frequently in coming years, with less supervision from international forces: “There’s a big question about the future”.⁷⁸

8. Pressure for expansion

While in previous years rosters were closely monitored by U.S. Special Operations Forces, the ALP now self-reports personnel numbers, and U.S. officials cannot independently confirm them. About 30 per cent of ALP are paid electronically, but this does not preclude fraud: in Logar province, a bank manager was allegedly caught in collusion with police officials collecting salaries for 37 fake ALP officers. U.S. officials say they know that “ghosts” exist on the payrolls, but they need more auditors to find them.⁷⁹ In some places, Afghan officials estimate, the real number is about half the official count.⁸⁰ In many locations, militia commanders appear to use the ALP as a pretext for legitimising bigger forces than exist on paper, claiming that their illegally armed men are registered ALP.⁸¹

⁷³ Crisis Group interviews, Kabul, Maimana, Mazar-e-Sharif, Asadabad, Jalalabad, Kunduz, Kandahar, Herat, Gardez, January 2013-May 2015. See also, Moyar et. al., *op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁷⁴ Crisis Group interview, businessman from Gardez, Kabul, 9 December 2014.

⁷⁵ Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 26 January 2015.

⁷⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Afghan aid worker, 4 September 2014; telephone interview, journalist, Maimana, 14 November 2014.

⁷⁷ Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 17 May 2014.

⁷⁸ Crisis Group interview, Maimana, 11 September 2013.

⁷⁹ Crisis Group interview, U.S. military official, Kabul, 27 January 2015. By comparison, the \$5.3 billion budget of regular Afghan forces is heavily monitored: as of February 2015, there were 33 ongoing internal and external audits.

⁸⁰ Crisis Group interview, retired provincial official, Kandahar, 11 February 2015.

⁸¹ Crisis Group interviews, Maimana, September 2013; Kandahar, February 2015.

Despite suffering heavy casualties, the ALP are described as having low desertion rates, and most local sources did not expect that the escalating body count would lead to recruitment problems, especially as rising unemployment pushes Afghan men to accept any job.⁸² The drive to recruit ALP and other pro-government militias also comes, in part, from villagers preparing for greater insecurity after NATO troops depart. Where the conflict has assumed tribal or ethnic dimensions, the insurgency's growing strength means that people who belong to groups aligned against the Taliban find themselves with the choice of fighting or evacuating. "My relatives sold their animals and farm equipment to buy bullets and rocket-propelled grenades to defend themselves", said the owner of a media outlet in Kunduz city. "They created a militia to save their homes".⁸³

The ALP Directorate in Kabul frequently hosts delegations from remote provinces which request ALP for their villages.⁸⁴ A district official from Shorabak, a border district in Kandahar, said he has lobbied for years for this because one third of the regular police assigned to his district were killed or fled. "The Taliban have bigger groups now, moving around with 400 men at a time", he said.⁸⁵ In other cases, enthusiasm for a militia has little connection to resisting threats, more closely resembling entrepreneurship by militia leaders such as Commander Madad, who tried to join the program to get arms for his group in Faryab province in 2013. When refused, he turned to the Taliban and was killed fighting security forces two months later.⁸⁶ It is also common to hear about villagers raising ALP to defend against other ALP. In Uruzgan province, an ALP unit allegedly committed murders and mass rapes until victims' relatives recruited 72 men and threatened to join the Taliban. Faced with that threat, the MoI granted an ALP roster to ward off the hostile ALP from neighbouring villages.⁸⁷

Pressure for additional ALP also comes from the highest government levels. Kabul submitted a proposal to the U.S. military in late 2012 for expanding the ALP from 30,000 to 45,000 men. U.S. commanders were supportive, until the summer of 2013, when "we got a clear directive from Washington that it's not happening".⁸⁸ In the meantime, the Afghan government had already mapped out the new ALP locations in the districts, leading to confusion when the additional rosters were not approved. A parliamentarian said he would continue lobbying for the expansion: "They call it 'warlordism', but we call it self-defence".⁸⁹ When arguing for more U.S. resources, many ALP commanders said they were in a broader fight against Arab, Chechen and other foreign militants, despite a lack of confirmed sightings of Chechens and intelligence estimates that very few Arab fighters were involved in the war.⁹⁰ By describing

⁸² The U.S. Special Operations Forces estimate ALP retention at 93 per cent and monthly attrition at 1-2 per cent. SIGAR, Quarterly Report, 30 April 2015, p. 95; Crisis Group interviews, January 2013-May 2015.

⁸³ Crisis Group interview, 22 November 2014.

⁸⁴ Crisis Group observations and interviews, Kabul, January 2014-May 2015.

⁸⁵ Crisis Group interview, district official from Shorabak, Kandahar, 17 February 2015.

⁸⁶ Crisis Group interview, senior politician, Maimana, September 2013. Also, Qutbuddin Kohi, "Illegal armed group leader joins Taliban", *Pajhwok Afghan News* (online), 23 August 2013; Qutbuddin Kohi, "Almar fighting claims over a dozen lives", *ibid*, 1 November 2013.

⁸⁷ Crisis Group interview, elder from Uruzgan province, Kandahar, 16 February 2015.

⁸⁸ Crisis Group interview, U.S. military official, Kabul, 17 May 2014.

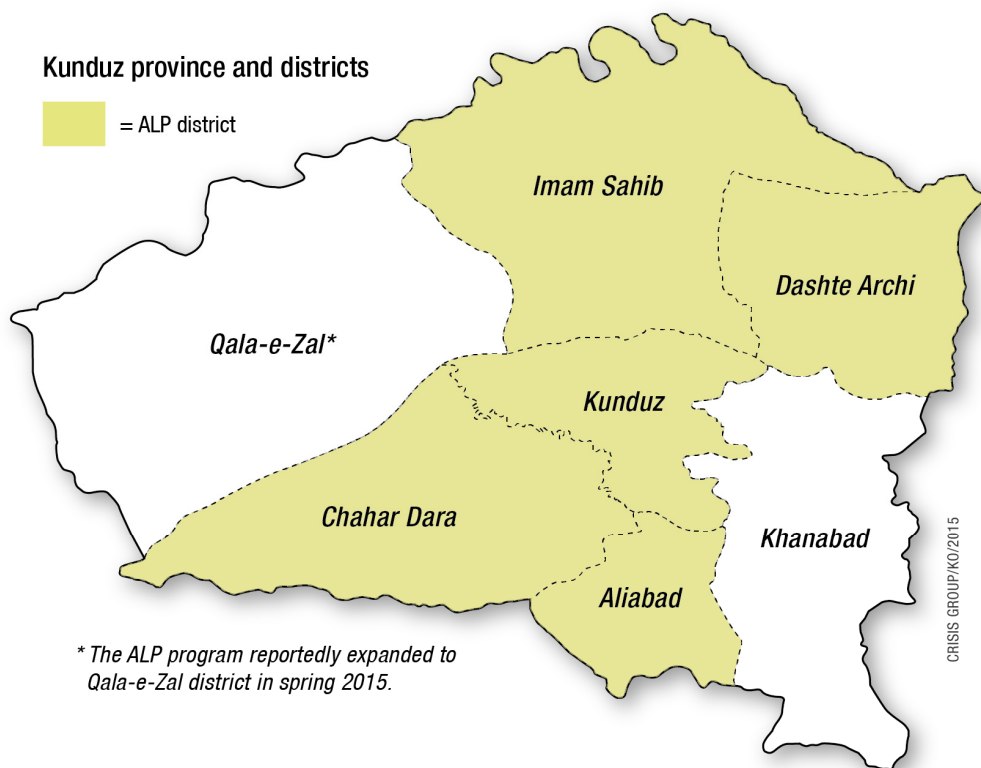
⁸⁹ Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 13 December 2014.

⁹⁰ Crisis Group interviews, ALP commanders, Kunduz and Kandahar, 2013-2015.

their battles as a war on terrorism, they appeared to downplay the predominately local drivers of the conflict.⁹¹

D. Case Study: ALP in Kunduz

The northern province of Kunduz serves as a stark example of how the ALP chain of command can break down; how the program is sometimes hijacked by political figures outside of formal structures; and how such issues can worsen longstanding tensions between ethnic groups, creating opportunities for the insurgency. These ALP weaknesses contributed to insecurity that threatened to overwhelm Kunduz city early in the 2015 fighting season.



1. Provincial overview

In the early stages of the program, by 2011, Kunduz province had ALP units assigned to Kunduz district (225 men), Chardara (300), Imam Sahib (300) and Dashte Archi (300).⁹² By summer 2014, the program had expanded to Aliabad district, with 195 men reporting for duty from a roster of 200, while numbers held steady in Imam Sahib (299 on duty, of 300 rostered); Kunduz (219 of 250); and Chardara (298 of 300). Heavy fighting eroded the ALP in Dashte Archi, where it had a reported strength of 278 in May, but six months later, according to an aid organisation estimate, only 130 remained.⁹³ Hundreds of ALP were killed, captured or dispersed in a major Taliban

⁹¹ Crisis Group interview, senior ALP official, Kabul, 21 January 2015.

⁹² ALP Tashkil, interior ministry, Afghanistan, 2011.

⁹³ "ALP map", unclassified briefing slide, NATO Special Operations Component Command – Afghanistan, 16 May 2014. Crisis Group interview, security officer for aid group, Kunduz, 20 November 2014.

offensive in April-May 2015, but the fighting season's full impact will not be known for months.⁹⁴

Many factors influence violence, and the ALP presence in a given district may not be decisive. So far, however, the program's implementation has not correlated with peace: in the four districts where it was first introduced, violence increased 25 to 30 per cent from 2010 to 2014. By comparison, the two districts of the province entirely without ALP had no increase during the same period. Aliabad district saw no significant reduction as the program expanded, though the district has been less volatile than the rest of the province in recent years.⁹⁵

Before the 2015 spring offensive, local ALP commanders described themselves as a bulwark against the rising insurgency, even in relatively stable locations such as Aliabad. "The Taliban attack us every night", said an ALP officer.⁹⁶ The highway through Aliabad is a vital connection from the provincial capital to Kabul, especially as increasing attacks have made other routes impassable; the ALP there say the provincial government would collapse without their help. "Let's test it", an ALP commander said in November 2014. "Try to remove the ALP from a district. Just try it, and see what happens".⁹⁷ ALP officers from more dangerous parts of the province also emphasised their front-line role; yet, the ALP offered little meaningful resistance to a major Taliban offensive in spring 2015 and in effect collapsed in Imam Sahib, Aliabad, and Kunduz districts. "The Taliban cut through the ALP like a hot knife through butter", an analyst said.⁹⁸

2. Ethnic rivalry

Misbehaviour by ALP units in recent years provoked uprisings along many of the infiltration routes that were later employed by insurgents for their 2015 advance on Kunduz city. A year earlier, in Chardara district, villagers forced the ALP from an outpost where the members were accused of killing, maiming and disrespecting the locals. Government forces conducted reprisal attacks that killed six people, but the outpost was not reconstructed. "I am not Taliban, but they were making problems for our women and children, so I took a weapon and removed them", a villager said.⁹⁹ This pattern was repeated in other parts of Chardara, and by summer 2014 most of the district was believed to be controlled by the insurgency, serving as a staging ground for attacks in the rest of the province.¹⁰⁰

Such local resistance often occurred in Pashtun areas patrolled by non-Pashtun ALP. Ethnic demography is disputed in Afghanistan, but there is broad consensus that Pashtuns are under-represented in the Kunduz ALP program.¹⁰¹ Safeguards

⁹⁴ Crisis Group email correspondence, Western security analyst, Kabul, 4 May 2015.

⁹⁵ Crisis Group interview, Western security analyst, Kabul, 9 December 2014. Violence statistics represent averages for ALP and non-ALP districts taken as a group. A new ALP roster was reportedly approved in Qala-e-Zal district in spring 2015, which falls outside of this violence analysis. Crisis Group interview, MoI official, Kabul, 28 May 2015.

⁹⁶ Crisis Group interview, ALP officer from Aliabad district, Kunduz, 21 November 2014.

⁹⁷ Crisis Group interview, ALP commander from Aliabad district, Kunduz, 21 November 2014.

⁹⁸ Crisis Group telephone interview, ALP official, Kunduz, 28 April 2015. Email correspondence, Western security analyst, Kabul, 4 May 2015.

⁹⁹ Crisis Group interview, Kunduz, 20 November 2014.

¹⁰⁰ Crisis Group interview, Western security analyst, Kabul, February 2015.

¹⁰¹ A MoI official estimated that Kunduz is 75 per cent Pashtun, but only 30 per cent of the ALP are Pashtun; another provincial official said the province is 45 per cent Pashtun but agreed that a dis-

against ethnic and tribal imbalances are built into the protocols for creating ALP but were circumvented in parts of Kunduz where U.S. Special Operations Forces could not find Pashtun volunteers. In Archi district, Pashtun elders refused to send their sons to fight for a local administration they considered Uzbek-dominated.¹⁰² The district ALP thus consisted mostly of Uzbeks, who provoked complaints of looting, illegal taxation and summary execution. These units were forced out in heavy 2014 fighting, and much of the district remains outside government control.¹⁰³ “The Americans broke their own rules”, a provincial official said. “They were supposed to hire local police with the local tribes’ consent”.¹⁰⁴ A businessman said the root of ethnic frictions was strongmen who cultivated personally loyal ALP units in preparation for a growing civil war.¹⁰⁵

Non-Pashtun ALP commanders deny mistreating Pashtun villagers, attributing minor thefts by their men to a lack of food, bullets, fuel and other supplies. However, many ALP commanders acknowledged that ethnicity plays a role in the conflict, alleging that Pashtuns were less loyal to the central government than other ethnic groups.¹⁰⁶ A Pashtun ALP officer said that his own community sees him as a traitor: “Most of my tribe wants to kill me”, he said.¹⁰⁷

3. Weak oversight

U.S. Special Operations Forces withdrew their village teams from Kunduz in August 2013, leaving oversight of the ALP program to the MoI and NDS.¹⁰⁸ However, provincial officials from both branches said they felt powerless to modify the behaviour of units.¹⁰⁹ A senior police commander estimated that his roster of 1,000 regular ANP would need to expand by 700 for any serious effort to control the ALP and the additional 2,000 “irresponsible armed men” in the province who lack any formal designation as security forces.¹¹⁰ The inability of provincial officials to enforce their authority over ALP was usually described as a three-fold problem: a lack of firepower for confronting insubordinate commanders; related security concerns about leaving a military vacuum that would give opportunities to insurgents; and political impediments in Kabul, where leaders often protected ALP members from their own factions. Even minor changes to the payroll roster in a district can provoke phone calls from Kabul, overruling the modifications.

In another case, the MoI tried to capture an ALP commander accused of beatings and summary killings but was thwarted for months by his refusal to surrender. “I don’t have control of my own men”, a MoI official said.¹¹¹ The NDS also plays a role in supervising the ALP and assisting with the capture of rogue units, but provincial intelligence officials said, “we can’t really manage them. We just deliver their salaries”.

proportionately small number of Pashtuns were recruited. (Other estimates say Kunduz is 34 per cent Pashtun.) Crisis Group interviews, Kunduz, November 2014.

¹⁰² Crisis Group interviews, elders from Archi district, Kunduz, 17 November 2014.

¹⁰³ Crisis Group interview, Western security analyst, Kabul, 16 January 2015.

¹⁰⁴ Crisis Group interview, provincial peace council official, Kunduz, 17 November 2014.

¹⁰⁵ Crisis Group interview, Kunduz, 21 November 2014.

¹⁰⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Kunduz, November 2014.

¹⁰⁷ Crisis Group interview, Kunduz, 21 November 2014.

¹⁰⁸ Crisis Group interview, security officer, aid organisation, Kunduz, 20 November 2014.

¹⁰⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Kunduz, November 2014.

¹¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, Kunduz, 18 November 2014.

¹¹¹ Crisis Group interview, Kunduz, 21 November 2014.

What little control the government exerts has provoked discontent from ALP commanders, who express dissatisfaction that the regular police try to stop summary executions.¹¹²

Many ALP units are associated with political parties and militias with armed strength rivalling the ANP. Pro-government militia members in Kunduz, not counting the ALP, have been estimated at 4,500 to about 10,000.¹¹³ Villagers often describe seeing ALP units with official rosters of ten patrolling in groups of 30 or more, frequently from the same pro-government armed groups that were formally dissolved as part of the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) program in recent years. “The DDR collected 580 weapons in our district, but the guns ... went to the ALP”, a schoolteacher said.¹¹⁴

4. Risk of militia growth

Two battalions of Afghan soldiers rushed to Kunduz city in April 2015 to prevent it falling into Taliban hands. But they will soon return to Kabul duty stations, leaving provincial officials searching for ways to replace the ALP units destroyed in the Taliban offensive. In early May, discussions focused on “deputising” illegal militias controlled by pro-government strongmen, including perhaps 600 to 1,500 men. This may involve wholesale adoption into the ALP program of militias associated with the anti-Soviet rebel groups of the 1980s that have reinvented themselves as political parties, further weakening oversight of the ALP.¹¹⁵ Another plan discussed by security officials in late May envisioned recruiting perhaps 5,000 militamen in at least seven provinces, including Kunduz, under the supervision of the (NDS, apparently with funding from the U.S.¹¹⁶

Such plans would carry a number of serious risks, because illegal militias have an even worse reputation than ALP units: “The real problem is the warlords; if we get rid of the ALP, what about the other militias? They’re much bigger”, an elder said.¹¹⁷ While asking for help from pro-government militias may seem like the only available option for officials besieged in Kunduz city, it risks escalating the war.¹¹⁸ Significant numbers of weapons remain in private hands, not controlled by active factions in the conflict, meaning that much depends on the opinion of powerbrokers who have so far remained neutral.

E. Case Study: ALP in Kandahar

The southern province of Kandahar is frequently cited as a location where the ALP program has enjoyed success. It is claimed that units there patrol without remaining confined to checkpoints; other Afghan forces provide greater cooperation than in any other province; and the police headquarters is among the few that effectively enforces discipline and provides allotted resources. A U.S. analysis estimated that only

¹¹² Crisis Group interviews, Afghan intelligence officer; ALP commander from Kunduz city, Kunduz, November 2014.

¹¹³ Gran Hewad, “Legal, illegal: Militia recruitment and (failed) disarmament in Kunduz”, Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), 10 November 2012.

¹¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, schoolteacher from Chara Dara district, Kunduz, 20 November 2014.

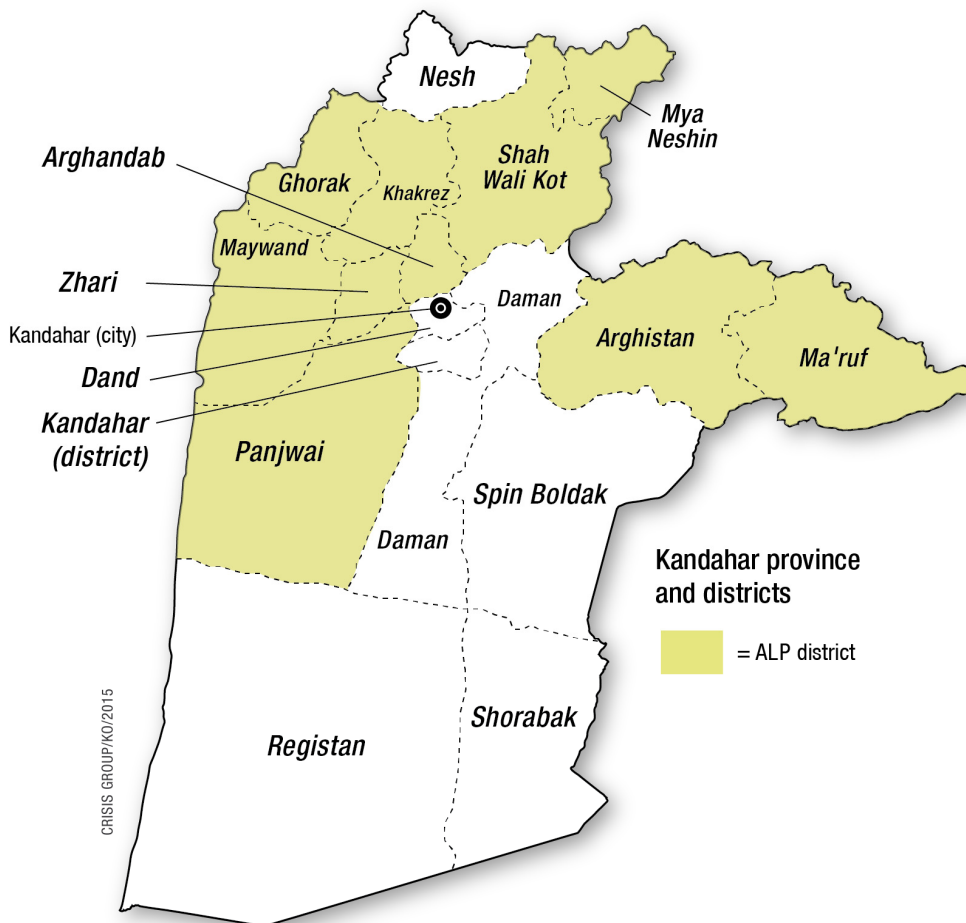
¹¹⁵ Crisis Group email correspondence, Western security analyst, Kabul, 4 May 2015.

¹¹⁶ Crisis Group interview, MoI official, Kabul, 28 May 2015.

¹¹⁷ Crisis Group interviews, elders from Archi district, Kunduz, 17 November 2014.

¹¹⁸ Crisis Group email correspondence, Western security analyst, Kabul, 5 May 2015.

a third of ALP units across the country are “enhancing local security, undermining insurgent influence, and facilitating better governance”, and ranked the Kandahar ALP among that top tier.¹¹⁹ Still, concerns persist about human rights abuses that contribute to fragility in the security situation and perhaps to further escalation of violence.



1. Provincial overview

Among the first provinces to adopt the ALP program, Kandahar by 2011 had ALP units assigned to Arghandab (300 men), Maruf (200), Khakrez (250), Maywand (300) and Shah Wali Kot (300).¹²⁰ The districts enrolled doubled in the province by summer 2014, as the rosters were extended to Ghorak (63 on duty of 70 assigned); Panjwai (496 of 500); Argghanistan (287 of 300); Mya Neshin (100 of 100); and Zhari (586 of 600). Zhari became notable for having the biggest ALP force assigned to any district in the country, reflecting U.S. military planners’ concerns about Taliban incursions from the west on Kandahar city. The force was also increased by 2014 in Arghandab (350 on duty of 350 assigned); Maruf (300 of 300); and Shah Wali Kot (400 of 400). At the same time, resources were shifted away from Khakrez (140 of 150 as-

¹¹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Kandahar, 2013-2014; Moyar et. al., op. cit.

¹²⁰ ALP Tashkil, MoI, 2011.

signed); and the force declined somewhat in Maywand as a result of heavy fighting (250 of 300 assigned) by summer 2014.¹²¹

As noted, many factors cause violence in Afghanistan, and incident numbers cannot serve as a primary measure of ALP performance. Still, ALP presence has not usually correlated with enhanced security in Kandahar. The five districts where they were first introduced have seen violence double; the remaining five to which the program expanded have not, on average, seen any significant change in violence levels. During the same period, from 2010 to 2014, violence halved in the seven districts that had no ALP presence.¹²²

Claims of ALP success have been notable for using violence as a metric, including narratives from Kandahar. A RAND study focused on U.S. Special Operations Forces teams in Khakrez district and concluded that by January 2011, “security had improved in the district, though it was unclear whether this was due to the traditional decline in attacks during the winter”.¹²³ In fact, the decline was limited to a few months: violence doubled the following year, making 2012 twice as violent as 2011, and the higher incident volumes continued in 2013-2014.¹²⁴

Still, supporters claim that ALP units have provided an effective buffer between Taliban-influenced areas and the main populated zones.¹²⁵ While violence rose in Khakrez, for example, incident volumes were halved in Arghandab district and the central district of Kandahar city, reinforcing the view of several local interlocutors that the Khakrez ALP had helped impede the passage of insurgents along infiltration routes from the periphery to urban areas.¹²⁶ Similarly, district officials in Zhari described the ALP as a shield between Taliban strongholds in Maywand and the western outskirts of the city: “Afghan soldiers hide inside their bases and collect their salaries. Only the ALP are patrolling”.¹²⁷

The ALP were not originally conceived as cannon fodder; U.S. strategists saw them “building local defence in areas where the insurgency has been militarily weakened”, without being drawn into conventional operations.¹²⁸ Afghan officials view the program differently, however, often pushing the ALP into locations considered too dangerous for regular forces. “We don’t need them in safe places”, a senator said.¹²⁹

2. Brutal discipline

Unlike some counterparts, Kandahar Police Chief Lieutenant-General Abdul Razik says he fully controls the ALP in his province. Interlocutors did not dispute this.¹³⁰ Because his methods are harsh, human rights investigators say, Kandahar does not have problems with rogue units.¹³¹ Such discipline is a powerful tool for winning trust

¹²¹ “ALP map”, op. cit.

¹²² Crisis Group interview, Western security analyst, Kabul, 9 December 2014.

¹²³ Austin Long, “Historical Lessons Learned on Local Defense: Interim Report”, RAND, April 2011, pp. 44-46.

¹²⁴ Crisis Group interview, Western security analyst, Kabul, 9 December 2014.

¹²⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Afghan elders and officials, Kandahar, February 2015.

¹²⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Western security analyst, Kabul, 9 December 2014; Afghan elders and officials, Kandahar, February 2015.

¹²⁷ Crisis Group interview, Kandahar, 15 February 2015.

¹²⁸ Austin Long, Stephanie Pezard, Bryce Loidolt, Todd Helmus, “Locals Rule: Historical Lessons for Creating Local Defense Forces for Afghanistan and Beyond”, RAND, 2012, pp. 177, 183.

¹²⁹ Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 7 December 2014.

¹³⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Razik, Kandahar, 25 June 2013; Kandahar, 2013, 2015.

¹³¹ Crisis Group interview, Kandahar, 11 February 2015.

in communities that might otherwise resist ALP. A landowner expressed admiration for the police after the June 2013 arrest of four ALP officers from President Karzai's Popalzai tribe, two days after the ALP allegedly ransacked local houses and looted valuables. In previous years, police from that tribe might have stolen from locals with impunity, but Razik reacted strongly against the unsanctioned operations. He also gives cash bonuses to ALP commanders from his personal funds and has arranged loans with moneychangers and emergency supplies of bullets for ALP units. This has given rise to concerns that the chain of command would be vulnerable if he were killed or removed.¹³²

The relative strength of the central authorities in Kandahar provides latitude to settle disputes among ALP and replace individuals when necessary. In December 2014, two cousins who were ALP commanders in Zhari district became embroiled in a personal dispute that resulted in two ALP members killed. After elders and mullahs discussed the issue under leadership of Razik and the head of the provincial council, the squabbling cousins were persuaded to end their feud and were dismissed from their jobs.¹³³

3. Not rogue, but abusive

Despite police headquarters' control of ALP units, stories about kidnapping, torture and summary execution by personnel remain widespread.¹³⁴ The most serious allegations of human rights violations are usually attributed generically to the police, because villagers fail to distinguish between ALP and ANP, particularly when they conduct joint operations. In the aftermath of large battles with insurgents in Zhari district in August 2014, local officials expressed concern that many of the dead appeared to have been killed outside of combat. "After one incident, 51 bodies were recovered, and some looked like they were executed", a Western official said.¹³⁵ Razik reacted by praising his forces' reluctance to take prisoners and "for killing all of them [insurgents] and not giving [a] chance to the judges or prosecutors to take money from them and release them", referring to the widespread problem of corruption in the judicial system.¹³⁶

The harsh tactics of Kandahar's ALP and ANP are described by local interlocutors as part of the reason why insurgents have been prevented from encroaching on the city. By spring 2015, government forces had pushed Taliban west of the city into southern Maywand district, although they were struggling to maintain supply lines to remote locations such as Ghorak district. Ghorak had 70 ALP assigned, but only an estimated fifteen remained by February 2015 because of Taliban pressure on routes connecting it with the rest of the province.¹³⁷

In locations closer to the city, many villagers expressed discontent with ALP misrule. A Zhari district official described how a 22-year-old man was arrested by ALP on suspicion of planting a bomb; the official was later asked to collect the young man's

¹³² Crisis Group interviews, ALP commander, Kandahar, 24 June 2013; retired provincial official, Kandahar, 11 February 2015.

¹³³ Crisis Group interview, Zhari district official, Kandahar, 15 February 2015.

¹³⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Kandahar, 2013, 2015. Less serious abuses were also routine: "They steal mobile phones, money, opium taxes, grape taxes, pomegranate taxes and sheep from the nomads", said a Zhari district official. Crisis Group interview, Kandahar, 15 February 2015.

¹³⁵ Crisis Group interview, Kandahar, 17 February 2015.

¹³⁶ Media statement (in Pashto, audio recording on file), 7 August 2014.

¹³⁷ Crisis Group interview, former provincial official, Kandahar, 11 February 2015.

body, which showed signs of torture. “When they behave like this, the ordinary people are creating their own militias to guard against ALP”, he said. An Arghandab district official expressed concern that “the tribal conflicts are increasing, and it’s not good for the future”.¹³⁸

4. Taliban joining the ALP, perhaps temporarily

Kandahar’s authorities have recruited Taliban into ALP units, using methods reminiscent of the way communist forces co-opted rebels in the late 1980s. In Zhari district, some interlocutors viewed the defections triumphantly; others saw local tribesmen making pragmatic choices for their own security. Insurgents appear to have seized the opportunity to get financial support from the ALP program and form their own militias as a hedge against uncertainty. This made little difference to most villagers, who saw no change in the people patrolling their areas: “These Taliban just shaved their beards”, a landowner said. “Before they were stopping cars and ordering people to pray, but now they ask for money”.¹³⁹

Drawing insurgents into state security forces can be a useful strategy, in places, but the danger is that Taliban may revert back to their anti-government posture when the opportunity arises. Many people in Kandahar fear that insurgent defections are temporary. “The ALP will join the Taliban, as soon as the Americans leave”, an elder said.¹⁴⁰ Still, many interlocutors noted that Zhari is significantly less violent since the ALP were reorganised to include a broader array of tribal and political factions.¹⁴¹ Incidents fell in 2013-2014 to roughly half the levels of 2011-2012, when the district was the most violent part of the province outside the city.¹⁴² Many interlocutors predicted these gains would be reversed with the departure of U.S. airpower, however: “Some people say the ALP keep the Taliban away; that’s wrong, it’s the drones that keep Taliban away”, a tribal leader said.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ Crisis Group interviews, 13, 15 February 2015.

¹³⁹ Crisis Group interviews, former provincial official, 28 June 2013; Zhari district landowner, Kandahar, 25 June 2013.

¹⁴⁰ Crisis Group interview, Sulaimankhel (Ghilzai) tribal leader, Kandahar, 28 June 2013.

¹⁴¹ Crisis Group interview, Zhari district official, Kandahar, 15 February 2015.

¹⁴² Crisis Group interview, Western security analyst, Kabul, 9 December 2014.

¹⁴³ Crisis Group interview, prominent landowner, Kandahar, 14 February 2015.

IV. Future Options

A. *Integration with Regular Police*

With the approaching end date for U.S. funding, the Obama administration appears undecided about the future direction for the ALP program.¹⁴⁴ Kabul's plans are also ambiguous; expansion, followed by downsizing and dissolution are specified in its National Police Strategy:

The Afghan Local Police is a provisional security structure performing tasks based on the current national situation to assist in the provision of greater security in the villages and towns. The Ministry of Interior plans to increase the number of local police to 45,000 for the years of 2014 and 2015, thereafter decreasing to 30,000 in 2016 and 15,000 in 2017, and ultimately dissolving it completely by the year 2018.¹⁴⁵

At the same time, the interior ministry's ten-year plan suggests that "as security conditions improve", ALP members can be further trained and "integrated" into the ANP, but a U.S. military official said, "it's not clear what that means".¹⁴⁶

The U.S. Special Operations Forces are hopeful some portion of international funding for Afghan security can be set aside for ALP after 2018, but non-U.S. donors, including from Western Europe and Japan, refuse to support what they consider irregular militias.¹⁴⁷ Their objections have also contributed to the problem of the ALP's bifurcated command structure, through which the U.S.-funded headquarters is separate from the regular police, but command-and-control responsibility follows the police chain of command. U.S. officials also believe they can make the case for integration into the ANSF and extension of the program after its scheduled end date: "Before 2018, we need to go to the Germans and the Japanese and the other big donors and say 'Hey, this is a good program'".¹⁴⁸

ALP officials in Kabul have qualms about losing their quasi-independence from the interior ministry, and commanders on the ground are sometimes resistant to being identified as part of the regular ANSF.¹⁴⁹ This appears to be partly a result of weak institutional support from the MoI, compared with U.S. backing, particularly from U.S. Special Operations Forces which could supply air support, logistics and other requirements.¹⁵⁰ A wide variety of Afghan interlocutors said they had heard about MoI plans to integrate the ALP into the ANP. Most expressed support for the idea, but generally on the assumption – which may prove incorrect – that regularis-

¹⁴⁴ Q1 Report, SIGAR, 30 April 2015, p. 95.

¹⁴⁵ "National Police Strategy: 2014 through 2018", interior ministry, February 2014, p. 14.

¹⁴⁶ "Ten-Year Vision for the Afghan National Police: 1392-1402", interior ministry (<http://moi.gov.af/en/page/5718/5729>) undated. Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 17 May 2014.

¹⁴⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Western European diplomats, Kabul, January 2013-May 2015.

¹⁴⁸ Crisis Group interview, U.S. military official, Kabul, 27 January 2015.

¹⁴⁹ Crisis Group interview, U.S. military official, Kabul, 17 May 2014.

¹⁵⁰ A RAND analysis concluded: "MoI has some serious weaknesses with respect to the quantity and quality of personnel dedicated to ALP support; the mechanisms designed to track and account for ALP personnel, pay and equipment; the transportation and storage of supplies and equipment; vehicle maintenance; checkpoint construction and upkeep; medical care; and national to district headquarters communications", along with insufficient capacity for ALP training. Marquis et. al, op. cit., p. viii.

ing the ALP would allow for improved discipline, training, salaries, equipment, supplies and training.¹⁵¹

B. *Disbanding the Entire Force*

The Kunduz case study shows how ALP misbehaviour can worsen the conflict, but in some other locations the ALP has become part of the fragile security structure keeping the insurgency at bay. “I know that people in Kabul are talking about cancelling the ALP, but you don’t understand”, said a provincial governor, gesturing at the barbed wire along his compound’s perimeter. “Without those guys, the Taliban will climb over that wall and cut my head off”.¹⁵²

Most interlocutors agreed that cancelling the program, which could happen if foreign funding ends in 2018, would have a destabilising influence on the conflict. ALP officials say the absence of formal planning for post-2018 funding has obliged them to reluctantly draw up scenarios for dismantling the force, but warned that halting pay for thousands of armed men could result in mass defections to the insurgency or independent militias. “If this program gets cut, those ALP officers will become irresponsible armed men, and violence will increase a lot”, a senior ALP official warned.¹⁵³ A RAND study suggested that disarming all ALP might be impossible: “Once the word spread that weapons were being confiscated, other units would hide their weapons and ammunition”.¹⁵⁴

C. *Disarm the Rogues, Regulate the Rest*

Given the problems of halting the program completely, the Afghan government faces the challenge of identifying which ALP units contribute to security and which inflict harm. Several institutions could help: the ALP Directorate’s Monitoring Unit; the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC); the Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG); the NDS; the Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (MEC); and, potentially, a new directorate within the MoI tasked with monitoring and oversight. However, these Kabul-based institutions may lack the understanding of village politics to evaluate ALP behaviour. The MoI or NDS could assign professional officers to remote districts as evaluators, but outsiders have a poor track record for reading the rural nuances, and such assignments would pose serious logistical and security challenges.

A better solution may rest with district and sub-district governance structures, such as district and village councils. President Ghani’s election promises included strengthening district governance, devolving some responsibilities to that level and holding the first ever district council elections.¹⁵⁵ Giving those low-level officials a formal opportunity to inform decision-making about the future of the ALP program in their home villages could be a way for local people to express their opinion non-violently. Several interlocutors suggested that better regulation of the ALP could involve giving district or sub-district authorities greater influence over units. “This is how it tradi-

¹⁵¹ Crisis Group interviews, Kabul, Kandahar and Kunduz, 2013-2015.

¹⁵² Crisis Group interview, provincial governor, 2013.

¹⁵³ Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 21 January 2015.

¹⁵⁴ Moyer et. al., op. cit., p. 21. Goodhand and Hakimi, op. cit., p. 44, reached a similar conclusion: “It is not realistic to disarm these groups”.

¹⁵⁵ “Manifesto of the Change and Continuity Team”, campaign literature, March 2014, pp. 52, 83.

tionally worked in the south east”, a businessman said. “The problem is bad management: the water is dirty from upstream”.¹⁵⁶

District council members say they would welcome a greater role in the program. “The ordinary people complain to us when something goes wrong with the ALP, but we have no control over them”, noted a Zhari district council member. Like other local officials, however, he cautioned that ALP units are frequently sponsored by powerbrokers at the provincial or national level, making it hard for district politicians to stand against them.¹⁵⁷ An Afghan scholar who has researched the ALP in depth likewise warned: “This responsibility is too heavy for the local councils, because they would be killed for complaining”.¹⁵⁸ Still, some district officials said they would gain leverage over the central authorities, which might offer a measure of protection.¹⁵⁹ A U.S. military official said the concept would fit with the village-based way U.S. Special Operations Forces originally raised the units and might be a useful balance to provincial police chiefs’ power: “The elders helped us set up the ALP, so they should have the power to end it”.¹⁶⁰

In addition to such local oversight and input, the government should support the ALP Directorate’s Monitoring Unit to develop a permanent presence at provincial and district level, with the resources and authority to investigate individual ALP members and entire units or summon national authorities to conduct investigations when necessary. It should also consider deploying ANP or NDS officers as leaders, mentors, or inspectors of ALP units, as well as require that provincial governors’ monthly updates to Kabul report on ALP performance, including human rights violations and assessments of contributions to stability or instability. Kabul should likewise create a new MoI directorate to take disciplinary action against individual ALP members and cancel rosters in districts or communities where the program contributes to instability.

Programs of disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) have a poor track record in Afghanistan, often worsening the problems of political exclusion and failing to reintegrate fighters into society. An effort to demilitarise part of the existing ALP roster must avoid the failures of previous such programs, with emphasis on outreach to mid-level commanders.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ Crisis Group interview, businessman from Gardez, Kabul, 9 December 2014.

¹⁵⁷ Crisis Group interview, Kandahar, 15 February 2015.

¹⁵⁸ Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 7 March 2015.

¹⁵⁹ Crisis Group interview, Shorabak district official, Kandahar, 17 February 2015.

¹⁶⁰ Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 27 January 2015.

¹⁶¹ Deedee Derksen, “The Politics of Disarmament and Rearmament in Afghanistan”, USIP, May 2015.

V. Conclusion

The ALP was invented as a military solution to political issues, so may never have been destined for success. U.S. Special Operations Forces were given the daunting task of raising local units not only to fill gaps in ANSF performance and capacity, but also as bridges between urban and rural, ethnicities and tribes. Those challenges remain. Rather than being village defence forces, the ALP in some areas turned into armed gangs acting on behalf of warlords and criminals, some of whom are also significant politicians. These units instigated conflicts, as in Kunduz, or became cannon fodder for regular forces, as in Kandahar. They failed to bring peace and stability to their home areas, though they sometimes were bulwarks against the insurgency. The assessment that one-third of the ALP function correctly is a crude estimate but consistent with the general patterns observed in the fieldwork for this report.

The government and donors face hard choices about the program's future. A school-teacher who said ALP killed his brother and twelve-year-old son made an impassioned argument for regularising all security forces. Like many villagers exposed to global information via mobile networks, he noted that few other countries are patrolled by loosely regulated, poorly trained men. "Do you have militias in your country? No, of course not", he said. "We want your system".¹⁶² At the same time, the war has developed a self-perpetuating logic. Tens of thousands of ALP cannot be arbitrarily removed from battlefields without leaving a security vacuum; abruptly halting their pay would probably not improve their behaviour. The disputes fuelling the insurgency have become personal vendettas in many places, forcing locals to continue fighting the Taliban with or without government backing. "The Taliban knows the name of every single ALP officer, every one. If the government disarms them, they will die", said a program supporter.¹⁶³

As Taliban attacks increase, pressure grows on the government to raise additional forces. It would be a tragic mistake to increase the size of the ALP program or replace lost units with illegal armed groups, however. Strong pressures are building within the government for short-term security fixes, but raising more irregular or semi-regular forces would aggravate factionalism and worsen security in the medium and long term. "In an overall context of heightened violence or incipient or outright civil war ... the pressures for Afghan national leaders to retreat to their respective political and ethnic faction and shore up that faction under such circumstances would likely be intense", a study predicted.¹⁶⁴

The program must be slowly managed down in size, with careful selection of troublesome units that should be disbanded. The remaining forces will need stronger support and oversight, with additional checks and balances at district level. It is easier to raise than to dismantle militias or transform them into responsible security forces. The most difficult work on the ALP program lies ahead.

Kabul/Brussels, 4 June 2015

¹⁶² Crisis Group interview, schoolteacher from Chara Dara district, Kunduz, 20 November 2014.

¹⁶³ Crisis Group interview, religious leader from Parwan province, Kabul, 16 November 2014.

¹⁶⁴ Olga Oliker, Derek Eaton, Bryan Frederick, Linda Robinson, James Quinlivan and Ryan Brown, "The Future of ALP: Change, Risk and Mitigation", RAND (undated).

Appendix A: Map of Afghanistan



Appendix B: Glossary

AGF	Afghan Guard Forces
AIHRC	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
ALP	Afghan Local Police
AMF	Afghan Military Forces
ANAP	Afghan National Auxiliary Police
ANASOC	Afghan National Army Special Operations Command
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
AP3 or APPP	Afghan Public Protection Program
ASG	Afghan Security Guards
ASF	Afghan Security Forces
AUP	Afghan Uniformed Police
CBSS	Community Based Security Solutions
CIP	Critical Infrastructure Police
IDLG	Independent Directorate for Local Governance
ISCI	Interim Security for Critical Infrastructure
MEC	Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee
Mol	Ministry of Interior (Afghanistan)
NDS	National Directorate for Security
UNAMA	UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
VSO	Village Stability Operations
VSP	Village Stability Platform