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A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP

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When the Ministry of Interior officials and human rights activists are asked where the worst Afghan Local Police (ALP) are, Takhar province is usually on the list. The reasons given are the enduring power of local strongmen over the force and the involvement of ALP units in crime, especially drug smuggling, and abuses of the population. AAN's Kate Clark (with input from Obaid Ali) looks into why Takhar's ALP has been so consistently bad and finds the force to be just one element in a province with deep structural problems to do with power, armed groups and a drug economy.

The research for this dispatch was conducted as part of a project looking at the ALP and other local forces which asks why some units protect local people, while others are abusive and criminal. AAN has already written about two ALP units which lived up to the label of 'community defence forces' – in Yahyakhel, Paktika (2018), and Shajoy, Zabul (2016); residents in both districts reported that the ALP had defended territory and people, and responded to community controls. In the case of Yahyakhel, this was backed up by statistics showing a sharp drop in security incidents since the ALP was established (read more here (<https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/how-to-set-up-a-good-alp-the-experience-of-yahyakhel-district-paktika-and-how-it-became-more-peaceful/>) and here (<https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/how-to-replace-a-bad-alp-commander-in-shajoy-success-and-now-calamity/>)).

We also wanted to look in detail at a province where the ALP is consistently cited as among the worst. Takhar is certainly that, forming part of a wider regional pattern. As a senior Ministry of Interior official told AAN in 2017, "most of the problems and complaints that we find, of bad ALP, of strongmen and MPs misusing the ALP" come from "Kunduz, Baghlan, Faryab and Takhar provinces." The UNAMA human rights unit has also reported on abuses of power and predatory behaviour by the ALP in Takhar, Baghlan, Kunduz and other parts of the northeast (see here (https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/2012_annual_report_eng_0.pdf) at page 43 and here (<https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/2014-annual-report-on-protection-of-civilians-final.pdf>) at page 80).

We chose Takhar to focus on partly because we had conducted interviews there in January 2011 when the ALP was being set up. We carried out more interviews with Afghan and international experts on security and human rights in Takhar in 2017, 2018 and 2019, and also spoke this year to local journalists, a provincial council member and 2018 parliamentary candidate, the provincial Afghan National Police (ANP) spokesperson and local residents.

It seems especially important to scrutinise the ALP at this time because the government and Resolute Support are now setting up the latest iteration of a force aimed at harnessing local people to defend themselves against the Taleban – the Afghan National Army Territorial Force. Takhar's provincial capital, Taloqan, is one of the locations where this new force has been established (in phase one of the programme), while another is planned for Khwaja Bahauddin district (in phase two, which is currently being rolled out).

This dispatch looks at what the control of the ALP in Takhar by strongmen has meant for civilians and the security, economy and politics of the province. It looks in turn at:

- How the ALP was established in Takhar, with militias being (re-) mobilised to fight the Taleban and re-hatted as ALP, with 'reconciled' Taleban also being allowed to join
- The Context (1): The influence of factions and the 'commander class' in Takhar
- The Context (2): The political economy of narcotics and armed men in Takhar
- The Context (3): The nature of the Taleban insurgency in Takhar and the military response to it
- The ALP as one of various types of 'militia' controlled by strongmen in Takhar, with a look at infighting; abuses; involvement in crime; possible attempts at reform and how militias, including the ALP, may both fight the Taleban and destabilise their areas.

Given how important both factional background and ethnicity is to politics and the conflict in Takhar, these are given in brackets for the various 'characters' introduced, along with any positions in government they have held.



Takhar province showing the Mawara-ye Kokcha area, famous for its smuggling, and the four districts where there are ALP in the province. (Map: Roger Helms © for AAN)

The establishment of the ALP in Takhar

The Afghan Local Police was established, nationally, from August 2010 onwards as an attempt to mobilise local communities to defend themselves against the Taliban, particularly in areas where the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) were weak. Units were supposed to be set up only in areas where locals wanted to resist the Taliban, and local people were supposed to be involved in nominating and approving recruits, so that the new force could draw on local expertise, intelligence and support. The ALP built upon various earlier experiments by United States special forces in setting up local forces and, in its formative years, had a heavy US involvement. Even so, it has always been under the command of the Afghan National Police (ANP) within the Ministry of Interior.

ALP were established in five districts Takhar, one in the southwest in the district of Eshkamesh, and four in the northwest of the province in an area famous for drug smuggling (known as Mawara-ye Kokcha, or 'beyond the Kokcha', as it lies between that river and the Tajikistan border): Khwaja Ghar, Darqad, Dasht-e Qala and Yangi Qala (the latter has since been dismantled). When exactly these units were set up is a matter of debate, as units were called 'ALP' before they they were officially sanctioned. Who was recruited was controversial, not only because the ALP in Takhar was formed from existing militias without any apparent community consultation or approval, but also because 'reconciled' Taleban were allowed to join.

AAN was prompted to ask questions about the ALP after coverage of a press conference on 4 January 2011 by German general Hans-Werner Fritz and his deputy, US army colonel Sean Mulholland (reported by the US Department of Defence here (<https://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=62319>)). They were claiming a successful counter-insurgency operation in northern Afghanistan and said the ALP and efforts to reintegrate Taleban, including by allowing them to join the new force, were integral to that success (more on this below). We interviewed the district police chiefs of Yangi Qala and Khwaja Bahauddin, the district police commander and governor of Khwaja Ghar and the provincial ALP commander (possibly self-proclaimed), who reported that ALP had been set up in Darqad, Yangi Qala, Khwaja Bahauddin and Khwaja Ghar districts (as well as in Dasht-e Archi across the border in Kunduz province). This seemed highly unlikely, not least because ISAF had just said that only two out of five locations in the whole of the north were up and running. Rather, the descriptions of what was happening on the ground pointed to commanders mobilising or remobilising their men to fight the Taleban, with the name 'ALP' applied to these militias to give them some legitimacy and try and attract government and international resources.

As an indication of how messy it all was, in February 2011, Heidi Vogt of The Associated Press listed Darqad district as one of "the first 25 districts in the Afghan Local Police program" in a report which interviewed people in 12 of those locations, "Afghans complain U.S. special forces are training criminals to be police". In Vogt's piece (http://www.nbcnews.com/id/41713134/ns/world_news-south_and_central_asia/t/afghans-complain-us-special-forces-are-training-criminals-be-police/#.XbGSByVCdao), she quotes Darqad 'ALP commander' Nurullah, who said his "boss" was Qazi Kabir Marzban, an Uzbek commander, originally Hezb-e Islami who became Shura-ye Nizar/Jamiat, had been the governor of Takhar in 1995 and again 2003-05, and had then been appointed a senator. Yet, a year later, the Darqad ALP was listed by the US military on 22 March 2012 as having a *tashkil* that was 'not validated', meaning, it said, government officials had not yet met local officials to "formally agree that there is a want and demonstrated need for an ALP site." (see the chart (https://www.rand.org/pubs/working_papers/WR936.html) on page 10 of this RAND publication). The US, listed one other ALP kandak in Takhar at the time, also 'not validated', in Khwaja Ghar. In July of that year, the US Department of Defence reported that 120 ALP from both districts had 'graduated' (<https://www.dvidshub.net/image/618813/afghan-local-police-graduate-khwaja-ghar>).

Those mobilising the anti-Taleban militias in January 2011 referred to as 'ALP' were all men who had fought in the 1980s and 1990s. They came from a variety of factions (*tanzims*), both former mujahedin (Shura-ye Nizar/Jamiat-e Islami, Ittihad-e Islami and Hezb-e Islami) and former PDPA (Jombesh-e Melli, and 'tribal militias'(kandak-e qawmi) and ethnicities (Uzbek, Tajik and Tatar and among sub-commanders also Arab, Baloch and Pashtun). This ethnic diversity reflects, to a large extent, the ethnic breakdown of the province: apart from Pashtuns (ten per cent of the population, mainly migrants who came to Takhar in the 1950s and their descendants), the rest of the population is split fairly equally between Tajiks and Uzbeks.

As well as the big players, our interviewees mentioned some small-scale mobilisations, for example: Chang Boi (Hezb-e Islami, Baloch) was appointed 'local police commander' with 15-20 men in Darqad district by the provincial NDS department of Takhar and the already-mentioned former group commander of Qazi Kabir, Nurullah (ethnic Arab), whom interviewees said had been appointed by the district police chief. In Khwaja Ghar, AAN was told of ten units mobilised by District Governor Muhammad Omar (Uzbek, Ittihad-e Islami, commander) led by group commanders allied to his faction Ittihad (five), Jamiat (two) and Hezb (two), plus one who was "close to" then Kunduz governor Engineer Muhammad Omar (Pashtun, Ittihad, commander).

The mobilisation of militias that interviewees referred to as 'ALP' appeared to be driven by local initiative with some state financial support, and some degree of partnership with the national or international forces. For example, then Khwaja Ghar District Police Chief Mir Kamal said his district had 120 'ALP', all local men, who took part in military operations and had been mobilised by district governor Mullah Omar, who Mir Kamal said had been spurred into action after the Taliban starting "bothering the people." Omar himself described in July 2010 to Giustozzi and Reuter for their AAN report (<http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/10/AAN-2011-Northern-Insurgents.pdf>), "The Insurgents of the Afghan North" how fighting had intensified that summer in Khwaja Ghar (and also in Khwaja Bahauddin, Yangi Qala and Darqad districts) and that on 16 July, 100 to 200 Taliban had attacked the area of Mintshekur and Jaukada in Khwaja Ghar district, and he had called the provincial ANP headquarters for urgent help.

"But their only answer," he recalls, "was: 'We have to get orders from the MOI in Kabul. And today is Friday, no one will pick up the phone there.' Hence no one came, and we had to fight the Taliban with the local police and the two dozen men of our Arbaki. Which I opposed to set up for a long time, but now we have no other choice. The government is doing nothing to rescue us."

Omar told AAN in January 2011 how he and a 'district commission' had gone to see the provincial governor, head of NDS and chief of police and gained permission to set up the ALP unit (no date for the meeting given). The force had its own weapons, he said, but got ammunition from the Ministry of Interior. Additionally, when the commander of police for the Northern Zone (Pamir) and of the elite police commandos unit, the 303 Pamir Corps, General Daud Daud (Shura-ye Nizar/Jamiat-e Islami commander, a Tajik from Takhar), had visited two months previously, he had authorised food rations and given them 200,000 afghanis (about 4,650 USD).

The man who was purportedly the head of the ALP in Takhar was Malek Tatar aka Commander Mala. He had been the commander of a PDPA-era *kandak-e qawm*, is ethnic Tatar and is currently commander of Uprising forces in Khwaja Bahauddin and Dasht-e Qala districts (this is another local force supported by the NDS, which has proliferated under the National Unity Government (1). He told AAN in January 2011 that the ALP had been established to maintain security after 'clearing operations' in the province in late 2010:

Pamir 303 Zone [either referring to the ANP of the northern zone or, more probably, the elite police commando unit] led by General Daud has been conducting operations for the last few months. The security of districts and villages after the mopping-up operation necessitated that, along with police forces and the national army, local police were also appointed.

Malek Tatar also gave a more personal narrative, that even before this, he had mobilised armed men in early 2010 to protect the community after a local woman had been "taken and tortured" (no other detail were given). Speaking in January 2011, Tatar said he had about 80 men who were

taking part in operations with the police and Afghan National Army; weapons, military equipment and salaries were provided by himself and the "residents" of the district. He was also getting money "frequently" from Provincial Chief of Police Shah Jehan Nuri.

It is not clear how far these militias were under full state control, and in the words of Koehler and Gosztonyi whether (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2014.910402>) the mobilisation was official or just "a 'local' initiative." They describe how the anti-Taleban militia mobilisation had the support of governors, police and NDS chiefs, most of whom were also former commanders and had factional ties to those mobilising. In some cases, it would be more accurate to say it was the government officials themselves who were mobilising men. All the strongmen also had factional allies with officials in the security forces and ministries in Kabul. (2)

Taleban in the ALP

AAN's January 2011 interviews indicate that the commanders brought with them their own men, had some state support and took part in military operations alongside state forces. Also, in some instances, they recruited 'reconciled' Taleban (mentioned by interviewees in Yangi Qala and Khwaja Bahauddin). This was the aspect of the ISAF press conference on 4 January which had first caught the author's eye. In Takhar, the option for 'reconciled' insurgents to join the ALP, as Colonel Mulholland described it, and of ALP as "actually a job, a program they can stay enrolled in for two to five years" was already in operation.

'Taleban', in this context, maybe a rather fluid label. For example, according to the Yangi Qala district police chief, one of the Taleban who had reconciled and joined the ALP, Muhammad Zaher, used to be a group commander with Qazi Kabir, but had left him to join the insurgency. He said Zaher had surrendered to the government one or two weeks previously and brought his small group of fighters with him into the ALP. He said that, even though the former Taleban were not yet receiving government salaries, they would "join in with any operation when we ask them."

In Khwaja Bahauddin, the district police chief described a somewhat more formal process whereby tribal elders and other locals had taken the 'reconciled' Taleban's weapons and provided a guarantee to the Ministry of Interior as the first stage in a one to three month-long process. If the ministry's Department of Investigations cleared them, he said, the individuals' details would be sent to the provincial NDS, and only then would they be officially announced as local policemen. "They are already recruited," he told AAN, "but the procedure isn't yet officially finished." There was some precedent already for using local forces as an inducement for the surrender of insurgents, for example in Baghlan (see AAN reporting here (<http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/another-militia-creation-gone-wrong/>)), but ISAF's official sanctioning appeared new, as AAN (<https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/for-a-handful-of-dollars-taleban-allowed-to-join-alp/>) and others reported. For example, Stars and Stripes (<https://www.stripes.com/news/reintegrated-taliban-fighters-allowed-to-join-local-police-units-1.130609>) wrote on 4 January 2011 that, while previously, the ALP had been "billed as a way to organize informal tribal militias and warlords into better trained, equipped and disciplined police units loyal to the Afghan government" in a programme similar to the Iraqi 'Sons of Iraq', now:

Surrendering Afghan Taliban fighters are being welcomed into newly created local police units in their home areas, coalition commanders in the north revealed Tuesday.

Turning enemy fighters into trusted, trained and armed policemen is a new development for the Afghan Local Police program, a key component of Gen. David Petraeus' counterinsurgency strategy.

Not everyone wanted to use ALP as an incentive for reconciliation; a Ministry of Interior spokesman told AAN at the time that reconciled Taleban would not be allowed to join the new force. Such discrepancies were typical of the ALP in its early years when policy and data about the ALP often varied between centre and province, and who was speaking – Afghan or international officials. As the ALP programme bedded down across the northeast, as Koehler and Gosztanyi describe it, the militias mobilised to fight the Taleban were “increasingly integrated into the newly established ALP.” Not all the commanders who mobilised militias against the Taleban in Takhar gained official ALP status for their men, but for those who did, it was a useful vehicle to legitimise some of their existing, or just-remobilised armed men: they were able to re-label them and get funding and arms from the Afghan state and US military. One international human rights expert told AAN that commanders were able to co-opt the ALP so easily in the northeast thanks to their “ties into patronage networks and security networks.” The consequence, he said, is a “semi-legitimate force, under an official *tashkil*” [the Ministry of Interior’s designated number of ALP], but with “no [Ministry of Interior] command and control.” A similar pattern can be seen, later on, in Takhar’s Uprising Forces. These are also local forces, supposedly emerging from communities’ desire to resist the Taleban, but funded by the NDS; these have proliferated under the National Unity Government. In Takhar, Uprising Forces like the ALP, are controlled and mobilised by local strongmen.

Before looking at how the ALP developed in Takhar, it is worth considering the context that allowed factional commanders to so easily co-opt what was supposed to be a force authorised and answering in some way to ‘the community’, while also being under ANP command. This dispatch first looks at the historic rise of the ‘commander class’ and then the illicit drug economy, and finally, the nature of the Taleban insurgency and the military response to it.

The context (1): The influence of factions and the ‘commander class’ in Takhar

Setting up a ‘community defence force’, an armed force that would defend and not abuse local people, be accountable to them in some way, and be under the discipline of the Ministry of Interior, was always going to be the tallest of orders in Takhar. Here, the commander class that emerged during Afghanistan’s long years of war is particularly strong. These are the men who, regardless of their or their families’ pre-war status, achieved military, economic and political power because of the war. In 2001, such commanders either stayed on or ‘reclaimed’ government posts, depending on whether their area had been captured by Taleban forces or not. Attractive posts were in the police, NDS, the ‘Afghan Military Forces’ (the precursor to the Afghan National Army), provincial and district governorships and so on. Ittihad commander Mullah Omar, for example, was Khwaja Ghar district governor during the Rabbani mujahedin government of the mid-1990s and returned after the fall of the Taleban and has stayed in that same post ever since. Shura-ye Nizar commander Qazi Kabir was governor of Takhar in the mid-1990s and again in 2003-2005. Another Uzbek Shura-ye Nizar commander who mobilised forces in 2010, Mutaleb Beg (from Hazar Somach district) was provincial police commander in Takhar and then Kunduz.

Commanders in Takhar are often involved in strong local rivalries, including between men of the same faction and ethnicity. The conflict in this province has also always been characterised by flux, with commanders joining and leaving the various *tanzims*. An interplay of national factional leaders courting and being courted by Takhari commanders is evident. This means that, when it came to establishing the ALP, strongmen in the province had factional allies and supporters in Kabul to back up their claims for units. Yet, supporting these strongmen’s mobilisation of militias and then allowing them to take control of the ALP was extremely problematic because of their human rights records, as detailed by Giustozzi and Reuter:

Since the fall of the Taliban regime, Takhar has remained under the often-brutal control of former mujahedin commanders who rule like feudal lords... [with] cases of arbitrary behaviour include murder, rape, the theft of land, kidnapping and forced marriages. Between 2005 and 2008, this led to numerous demonstrations against those commanders – but not one was removed. (3)

The context (2): The political economy of narcotics and armed men in Takhar

The fact that Takhar is also one of the northern provinces "key to wider trafficking activity," as described by the United Nations Office on Drugs Crime (UNODC) in 2018 (https://www.unodc.org/documents/publications/NR_Report_21.06.18_low.pdf), has made gaining control of state positions and armed men there attractive for anyone involved in the drugs trade. (4) In its 2012 assessment (https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Northern_Afg_Central_Asia_Opiate_flows_2012_draft_jan26_2012.pdf), of what it calls 'the Northern route', the trade of narcotics across Afghanistan's northern border into Central Asia, the UNODC describes how un-named "local warlords and power brokers," usually former field commanders, have maintained control of the drugs trade since its inception. They were able to do this, said the UNODC 2012 report, even as the state became more stable after 2001, either by "reaching accommodation with [it] or penetrating its structures." This was usually done by being appointed to a "public post as a border or law enforcement official at the border or district level" where they could oversee the drugs trade directly. The report describes a situation where, "[a]gainst a backdrop of inter-ethnic rivalry, elements within these factions compete with one another for influence, development aid and political and economic power which inevitably includes the drug trade." The report also points out that, while factional networks are a highly significant feature of the drugs trade, there may be both competition and rivalry between factions and commanders at the local level. Moreover:

... [the] loyalties of field commanders to the different parties were and are both multiple and temporary and the parties are frequently nothing more than frontends for an individual's ambition. Here again the opiate economy plays a role, as access to drug profits is a factor in warlords' decisions on alliances and allegiances... (p37)

To secure their businesses, both licit and illicit, says the UNODC:

...the traffickers have the ability to muster armed men. The profile of the typical large trafficker in Afghanistan is more often than not, a government official with a military background that owns several businesses. (p38)

The northeast of Afghanistan, for UNODC, Kunduz, Badakhshan and Takhar, is the focus of a series of reports by the agency on the Northern route (published in 2007, 2012 and 2018) because this is where cross-border drug smuggling in the north is concentrated. The sort of dynamics described by the UNODC are exemplified in two of the most famous seizures of drugs related to the north. In Kabul in 2007, a routine check of a Takhar Afghan Border Police truck found 120 kilogrammes of heroin on board: in charge was Bilal Wali Muhammad, personal secretary and cousin to the commander of Takhar's border police, Haji Zaher Qadir (Pashtun, from Nangrahar, from the influential Arsala clan, Hezb-e Islami Kholes, MP 2010-2018, who boasted to parliament in 2013 he was worth \$365 million). Bilal and four others were convicted and sentenced to between 16 and 18 years in prison, but were pardoned by President Karzai in 2009 as part of a deal to get the support of Bilal's uncle, Haji Din Muhammad, for his re-election campaign. Another seizure of heroin was made in one of the cars belonging to then provincial chief of police, Mutaleb Beg as described by Philip Münch for AAN (https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/20131110_PMunch_Kunduz-final.pdf):

Before his appointment as provincial chief of police of Kunduz [in 2005], [Mutaleb Beg] held this position in Takhar. While there, a large amount of heroin was found in one of his cars and he therefore lost his post. He threatened to destabilise the situation in Takhar. A compromise was reached, however, and he swore allegiance to Karzai and received the position in Kunduz. (p21) (5)

Media reporting has also provided some detail on the drugs trade in Takhar. For example, a 2006 Christian Scientist Monitor investigation into the involvement of police in the drugs trade in the province, which used secret recording of police officers (<https://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0613/p01s04-wosc.html>), has accounts of police carrying drugs, police commanders "competing with each other to dominate the drug trade in Takhar Province," and senior officials in the Ministry of Interior taking "bribes to appoint corrupt drug dealers into top police positions."

Several experts in security interviewed about the ALP in 2017 and 2018 described both pro-government and Taleban commanders as intent on making money from the cross-border drugs trade. "The only difference," one said, "is that the Taleban get weapons [in exchange] for drugs, rather than [ketamine] tablets or alcohol." They also described both collaboration and conflict between ALP units and the insurgents, partly motivated by shared or conflicting interests over the drugs trade.

The context (3): The nature of the Taleban insurgency and the military response

The nature of the Taleban insurgency in Takhar and the military response to it are both significant to how the ALP was to unfold there. Unlike many other places, the insurgency in Takhar was not a rebellion sparked by government officials' exclusionary and predatory behaviour. (6) Instead, wrote (<http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/10/AAN-2011-Northern-Insurgents.pdf>) Giustozzi and Reuter, it came to Takhar from outside, as Taleban infiltrated from neighbouring Kunduz province in early 2010, with a mix of fighters, both native Takharis and outsiders. (7) Religious preachers fuelled further recruitment with an anti-occupation message that "easily crosses ethnic frontlines." Giustozzi and Reuter stress that people in Takhar had been "patient" with the provincial strongmen in the hope that the government would eventually intervene, but once the Taleban were present, people tended "to see [the insurgents] as a minor evil compared with the current rulers," and the "oppressive status quo." (Compare also Koehler and Gosztanyi's findings in Takhar and Kunduz that, in 2011, people's fear of local militias superseded their fear of the Taleban).

The insurgency in Takhar was also unusual in that the Taleban did not try to leverage ethnic disputes to get support, nor did they rely on Pashtuns, who are typically more likely to support this Pashtun-led movement than other ethnicities, but in Takhar are a small minority. Instead, they sought to mobilise support using a religious message and to recruit non-Pashtuns, including by appointing them to leadership positions in the province. Any other course of action would have been futile, given the small minority of Pashtuns in Takhar.

The geographic thrust of the insurgency was from the beginning concentrated on the north of the province for several reasons. It was easier for the Taleban logistically, write Reuter and Giustozzi, because here they could easily move across the border from Kunduz province where they were already strong. There were also financial incentives. The authors write of a possible desire to get "[c]ontrol over smuggling routes... near the border with Central Asia." The insurgents, they wrote, "have reportedly been negotiating agreements with smugglers: protection in exchange for

financial support and help in getting militants across the border.” They also contend that, while levels of violence did rise when the Taliban came to Takhar, the movement’s main interest was to “establish their presence, control the population, raise taxes and recruit new members.”

The military response to the Taliban’s incursion into Takhar in 2010 was swift. US Special Operations Forces began a campaign of targeted killings of Taliban commanders (at least one of which, on 2 September 2010, killed ten civilians because of gross intelligence failings, for detail, see [here](http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/10/20110511KClark_Takhar-attack_final.pdf) (http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/10/20110511KClark_Takhar-attack_final.pdf)). As previously mentioned, the ANSF also launched an offensive in October of that year. Together with the militia mobilisation, this successfully pushed the Taliban back, report Koehler and Gosztanyi. However, the militias then caused fresh problems:

While partly successful in checking the progress of the Taliban, the setting up of local militias created new problems. Militia fighters were often undisciplined, tended to engage in inter-militia feuds, and frequently abused and extorted [sic] the population. Their behaviour threatened the ‘hearts and minds’ logic of COIN itself. (p247) (8)

The authors go on to argue that the integration of militias into the ALP was “[t]he last stone in the current security sector mosaic [which]... emerged as an attempt to limit the damage done by unruly militias.” (p247) They considered it to be a partial success, with less infighting between militia groups and fewer reports of predation on the population by ‘ALP-integrated militias’ than non-integrated ones.

The ALP in Takhar: one of many ‘militias’

AAN returned to look at the ALP in 2017 and 2018, as part of a project looking at the role and impact of militias, local or regional defence forces and other quasi-state forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. We found the units still under the control of the same provincial strongmen. We spoke to four experts, all with a deep knowledge of the ALP and security and/or human rights in Takhar, three Afghan and one international, to try to understand more about the force. Their responses at first seemed strange because when asked questions specifically about the ALP, all answered by providing a much broader picture. They did not view the ALP as a stand-alone topic, but described the force as one element in much deeper structural patterns of power, armed force and political economy in the province.

All of the experts spoke about the strongmen who controlled the various ALP units – who were not necessarily the ALP commanders themselves. They gave substantial detail about the variety of armed men under each strongman’s command – including not only ALP, but also Uprising Forces and unauthorised militiamen. They also listed other strongmen in the same districts who did not control ALP, but did command Uprisers and/or unauthorised militias, and how ALP in one district might comprise men loyal to different strongmen. Not all of those who mobilised militias in 2010 ended up controlling ALP, but some were mentioned in reference to other forces. For example, PIRAM QUL (Uzbek, Hezb-e Islami turned Jamiat/Shura-ye Nizar, MP in the 2005 parliament) in Rustaq District was given command of Uprising Forces (they have since been de-authorised after they revolted against him). The details of all this were confusing, something that was explained by one expert by the fact that in Takhar, as in Kunduz, armed men are “hard to define: what are random guys with guns, what are criminals, what’s ALP, *tanzim*, Uprisers? It shifts and changes.” Another, describing the ALP in Takhar and Badakhshan said:

According to the rules and procedures, ALP should be appointed by the government. They should be loyal to the District Chief of Police. Members should be screened and vetted and suggested by the community – the village council, the NSP [National Solidarity Programme, which has elected village shuras] in the district or the ulema council should check his background, to make sure he is not criminal. This is done only on paper. Mostly, ALP belong to MPs, former commanders, drug dealers and some police or NDS commanders who say [to the Ministry of Interior]: "Please appoint my brother, my uncle, my father," to protect their influence. Some ALP are also involved in illegal mining, drugs and illegal taxation.

The interviewees provided historical background on the Takhari commanders, the factions they had joined and left over the years, their changing links to the centre, including attempts to woo or be wooed for their backing for the various tickets running in the 2019 president elections, and the often deep historical grievances and sometimes outright conflict between various of them. Bitter rivals include Qazi Kabir and Malek Tatar in Khwaja Bahauddin and Darqad; and Wakil Khan Aqa (Uzbek, commander of a PDPA-era militia who then joined Jombesh) and fellow Uzbek Mamur Hassan (Hezb-e Islami before also joining Jombesh), in Dasht-e Qala. "If there is a big external threat," said one expert, "they do come together, for example [when] re-taking Khwaja Ghar in October 2015 there were 700 militiamen and 50 ANSF. Afterwards, they resume fighting each other."

All the experts also volunteered information about which of the various ALP units tend to fight and which collaborate with the Taleban. They distinguished between those engaged in criminal activities (such as smuggling drugs to Tajikistan and weapons, alcohol and 'tablets', a reference, AAN was told, to the drug ketamine, from Tajikistan), and those who oppressed local people as well, by for example assaulting women, grabbing land or extorting money, including *ushr*, a ten per cent Islamic 'tax' on the harvest. Two of the interviewees in 2017/18, for example, said the ALP in Eshkamesh were somewhat better than the other units in Takhar. As one described: "They're a bit better. They don't oppress the people. It's relative. You always have to be relative in Afghanistan."

Attempts at ALP reform?

In April 2017, deputy minister of interior General Ali Sher Ahmadzai described the Takhar ALP as "warlord-infiltrated" and warned, "If they don't reform, we will cut them." Nothing changed until earlier this year when all the ALP commanders in Takhar were replaced. Three ANP officers and one school principal, all with no apparent factional affiliations, were given command. AAN could not find out what had prompted this change of personnel, but on the surface, it looked like an attempt at reform, at peeling away ALP units from the provincial strongmen. Looking into the matter further, however, little had actually changed. One Afghan security expert said the new commander in Dasht-e Qala, for example, former high school principle Salim had been "appointed at the suggestion of and with agreement of" local strongman, Wakil Khan Agha: "[Salim] is the commander in name only." (9) Similarly, in Darqad district, experts pointed to a progression of commanders and no actual change: the initial ALP commander, Mir Hamza, a brother-in-law of Qazi Kabir had earlier been replaced by Kabir's paternal uncle's son, Dr Aman; he has now been replaced by former ANP officer Abdul Mu'min, who, although not one of Kabir's close relatives was, one expert said, "proposed by Qazi Kabir" and is also from Khwaja Bahauddin. He and a western security expert drew similar conclusions about all of Takhar's ALP units: the commanders had changed, but the rank and file and group commanders had not been; there would be little if any change on the ground.

As to ALP behaviour, local journalists and security experts also described to AAN the ALP in Takhar as still having large numbers of ghost policemen (men who only exist on the payroll and whose salaries are pocketed by someone else) and of ALP being used for non-ALP work, especially as bodyguards for provincial officials, strongmen and their relatives, both in Takhar and in Kabul. Asking residents of the various districts about their recent experiences with the ALP, we heard specific allegations of land-grabbing by one former ALP commander; of government officials distributing state land to armed groups, ALP fighters and others in one district; and of forced 'taxation' of the harvest (*ushr*). One resident reported that a farmer in his district who had refused to pay *ushr* had been shot in early July 2019. "If a person tried to advocate for state properties to be protected or for justice [from these commanders]," he said, "then he'd face serious threats or could even get killed." While AAN has not been able to confirm these allegations, the fact they are made suggests, at the very least, a lack of popular confidence in the ALP.

The impact of the ALP in the conflict

Nine years on from when the insurgency arrived in Takhar and anti-Taleban militias were first mobilised and the ALP stood up, the government side remains weak and still deploys unregulated, pro-government militias to fight alongside the ANSF. "Militias take part in most of the clearance operations in the province," provincial ANP spokesperson Khalil Aser told AAN. "If the ANSF needs militia support, they contact local jihadi leaders to help the ANSF with their militia forces." He said ALP, Uprising Forces and pro-government militia forces have fought alongside the ANA and ANP against the Taleban in Eshkamesh, Baharak and the Mawara-ye Kokcha districts. He thought the ALP played a useful role.

Recent reporting from the north by The Washington Post (https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/pro-government-forces-make-fragile-gains-against-taliban-in-northeast-afghanistan/2019/10/17/4e4720d4-ee82-11e9-bb7e-d2026ee0c199_story.html) described a "motley crew" on the government side, "local fighters in T-shirts, Afghan army commandos in American tactical gear, and intelligence officers in shalwar kameez," with US providing intelligence and air support mainly in Kunduz and Badakhshan, but also Takhar. The reporter had accompanied Deputy Minister of Defence Yasin Zia who, she said, had arrived in Takhar "with additional forces," although "his primary task was to streamline the command structure in a part of the country thick with irregular fighters." Moreover, once the large-scale anti-Taleban operations are complete in Takhar, she reported, the reinforcements from Kabul would move on to the next front, leaving the existing local security forces 'reorganised', in the hope that they can now hold territory.

The militias, including the ALP, although they fight with government forces are also part of the fundamental reason of why Takhar is so vulnerable to the Taleban. One resident of Dasht-e Qala explaining how "over the course of a few years, the Taleban have infiltrated the district and today control most parts of it," detailed the infighting between the two strongmen in his district, Wakil Khan Agha and fellow Uzbek Mamur Hassan, both of whom, expert interviewees told AAN, have men in the ALP and Uprising Forces. "The [Afghan National] security forces and the local government officials either support one [commander's] group or the other," said the resident, "or merely watch the fighting between the powerbrokers." The Taleban, while capturing some territory, have also been unable to really capitalise on government weakness because of their own internal struggles, which, as AAN detailed (<https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/the-non-pashtun-taleban-of-the-north-the-takhar-case-study/>) in 2017 are centred on "tensions and power struggles among its Uzbek and Pashtun Taleban cadres."

What the attacks and counter-attacks have meant for civilians is intensifying insecurity. (10) In the first six months of the year, UNAMA noted (https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_poc_midyear_update_2019_-_30_july_2019_english.pdf) an "overall increase in civilian casualties in the northern and northeastern regions, particularly in Balkh, Baghlan and Takhar provinces." In June, the last month of that six-month period, the Taliban had launched attacks on Khwaja Ghar, Yangi Qala and Baharak district centres, which were all repelled, and the government had begun 'clearing operations', including the use of airstrikes, as part of its Operation Pamir 207 in Takhar and Badakhshan. Since the end of August, the Taliban have attacked the district centres of Chah Ab, Khwaja Ghar and Baharak (all overrun, but not held), Taloqan (our researcher reported attacks on polling centres in the northeast of the city on election day (<https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/afghanistans-2019-election-13-14-observations-from-kandahar-takhar-wardak-and-balkh/>)), although five days later, the governor denied reports that the Taliban had entered (<https://tolonews.com/index.php/afghanistan/residents-take-protest-kabul-takhar-security-deteriorates>) the city, Yangi Qala (held for a few days) and Darqad (taken), with fighting also reported in Eshkamesh (detail, as of 11 September 2019 can be read here (<https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/taliban-attacks-on-kunduz-and-pul-e-khumri-symbolic-operations/>)). Then, in October, Baharak district was reported "completely cleared" of insurgents (<https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/takhar%E2%80%99s-baharak-district-cleared-insurgents-mod>) on 6th, with government forces also reported (https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/pro-government-forces-make-fragile-gains-against-taliban-in-northeast-afghanistan/2019/10/17/4e4720d4-ee82-11e9-bb7e-d2026ee0c199_story.html) to have forced the Taliban back from Taloqan on 18 October, and to have re-captured Darqad (<https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/takhar%E2%80%99s-durqad-cleared-insurgents-mod>) on 25th. The Long War Journal's most recent assessment reported that Darqad and Taloqan were still "contested" and Baharak was still "under Taliban control." (11)

Civilians have faced not only deaths and injuries, but also forced displacement because of the fighting. In its weekly (<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/document/afghanistan-weekly-humanitarian-update-7-13-october-2019>) Humanitarian Update ending 13 October, OCHA reported that around 10,500 people from Yangi Qala and Darqad had fled to Taloqan city, while others had moved to "inaccessible remote villages" in Darqad and Khwaja Bahauddin districts. The following week, it reported (<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/document/afghanistan-weekly-humanitarian-update-14-20-october-2019>) that 6,230 people had been displaced (<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/document/afghanistan-weekly-humanitarian-update-21-27-october-2019>) in both Badakhshan and Takhar, with more reported (<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/document/afghanistan-weekly-humanitarian-update-28-october-3-november-2019>) the following week.

Currently, AAN's assessment is that eleven of Takhar's 17 districts are not under government control, are heavily contested or largely under Taliban control, or the government is only visible in the district centre and immediate vicinity. Yet, even in the remaining seven districts of Takhar that are securely held by the government (Rustaq, Farkhar, Warsaj, Kalafgan, Hazar Somuch and Chal), people are still under threat – from militias. In May this year, for example, there were clashes in Rustaq between Mawlawi Muhammad Khan (Tajik, Shura-ye Nizar/Jamiat, reported to have some Uprisers) and what Etilaat-e Roz described (<https://www.etilaatroz.com/77475/clashes-between-people-and-irresponsible-gunmen-in-takhar-left-nine-dead/>) as "residents." In Chah Ab, considered secure until August 2019, Commander Bashir Qanet (Hezb-e Islami, Uzbek, former governor of

Sar-e Pul) has also been repeatedly accused of abuses, including killing 30 civilians in a "three-month long rampage," as reported (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/18/world/asia/in-afghanistan-a-destructive-game-of-thrones.html>) The New York Times in August 2017 (AVA Press, in September, reported (<https://www.avapress.com/fa/report/149643/125-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D8%AA%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B1%DA%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D9%88-%D9%BE%D8%B3%D8%B1-%DA%A9%D8%A7%DA%A9%D8%A7-%D9%88%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%DB%8C-%DA%86%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A2%D8%A8-%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%AC%D9%87%DB%8C-%D8%AD%DA%A9%D9%88%D9%85%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%84%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B1%DA%A9%D8%B2%DB%8C>) 125 people dead. According (<https://swn.af/english/Article.aspx?a=43861>) to Salaam Watandar in December 2018, there were four outstanding arrest warrants against Qanet for "murder, injuring, insult to sacred places, and aggression against public servants." A more general report from Radio Azadi in July 2018 reported unauthorised militias in Takhar perpetrating crimes, including (<https://da.azadiradio.com/a/29334650.html>) murder, "bullying, usurpation and harassment."

In recent months, the Afghan government replaced all the senior officials in Takhar. There is now a new governor, NDS chief and police commander. (12) Provincial council member Mir Ahmad Qasim (no factional allegiance) was sceptical: "The recent appointments... disrupted security even further because the new faces are not very familiar with the social and political dynamics in the province." One of the security experts interviewed reported that people were hopeful about the changes. He also pointed to how voters in the 2018 parliamentary elections had managed to secure some fresh faces among the province's MPs as well as what he called the "positive results" of two strongmen becoming weaker: Qazi Kabir lost his parliamentary seat and the son of Piram Qul, Bashir Ahmad Ziayi, failed to get one.

Conclusion

In Takhar, the ALP are not so much a problem in their own right as a symptom of the dysfunctional political and security environment. The ALP in this province has never risen to become anything other than militias in uniform, unruly, unaccountable and of limited use, or indeed counter-productive, in defending populations and territory from the Taleban. Civilians are still threatened by both the Taleban and local pro-government powerbrokers. In the last ten years of insurgency, government forces have not been able to keep the Taleban at bay in Takhar, despite – and perhaps partly because of – their continuing tactic of turning to local militias for support.

Takhar's strongmen, with armed men in the ALP, Uprising Forces and unauthorised militias, have been able to lobby patrons in Kabul for support. The wealth of the opium trade continues to make these men attractive to powerbrokers at the centre, allowing the ALP and other militias to thrive with some level of protection at the national level in Kabul. The difference between the various armed groups, from the officially-sanctioned ALP, through the Uprising Forces to the unrecognised pro-government militias, is not always readily visible. However, their behaviour and value to powerbrokers is similar. As for resisting the Taleban, the ALP may fight, or collaborate, as personal interests at the time determine.

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(1) Uprising Forces have never been formalised into a national program as the ALP was, and as UNAMA has pointed out earlier this year in their annual (https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_annual_protection_of_civilians_report_2018_-_23_feb_2019_-_english.pdf) Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, they "have no legal basis under the laws of Afghanistan." It is possible there has been an unpublished presidential decree authorising the force. There is also no public source indicating their force strength, locations, training, or rules of engagement.

(2) There are narratives also of what happened in neighbouring Kunduz from 2009 onwards which also point to a mix of local initiatives by commanders and their provincial government allies, with the NDS playing an active role. There was some official backing from elements in Kabul, and some international support, often given only reluctantly. In just one case, Nabi Gechi (Hezb-e Islami turned Jombesh-e Melli after 2001, ethnic Turkman), there appears also to have been popular support for a commander to return to his district to mobilise men and lead the defences against the Taliban. See Philipp Münch "Local Afghan Power Structures and the International Military Intervention: A review of developments in Badakhshan and Kunduz provinces (https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/20131110_PMunch_Kunduz-final.pdf)", March 2013, AAN; and Toon Dirkx, "The Unintended Consequences of US Support on Militia Governance in Kunduz Province, Afghanistan (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13698249.2017.1416851>)", in Civil Wars, 2017 vol 19, issue 3, 377-401.

(3) Other cases include accusations against a nephew of Qazi Kabir. See 'Afghan family seeks justice after their daughter killed by local powerful people,' Tolo TV, Kabul, 9 February 2010, accessed via BBC Monitoring. For accusations of Kabir's involvement in drug smuggling and having a large private militia, see also Heidi Vogt, "Afghans See Warlord Footprints in New Police Force (http://www.nbcnews.com/id/41713134/ns/world_news-south_and_central_asia/t/afghans-complain-us-special-forces-are-training-criminals-be-police/#.XVXY2ZKjq0)." Associated Press, 21 February 2011.

(4) The quote is from "Afghan Opiate Trafficking Along the Northern Route (https://www.unodc.org/documents/publications/NR_Report_21.06.18_low.pdf)", United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Vienna June 2018, p68. For some detail on 'drug-related' postings, see Münch (https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/20131110_PMunch_Kunduz-final.pdf) (p25). Takhar is not a significant opium-cultivating region, but it does lie on crucial trafficking routes. UNODC's studies of what it calls the Northern route describe heroin coming mostly from southern and eastern Afghanistan to the north, concentrating on Takhar and Kunduz. A reverse course brings opium from the north (probably originating in Badakhshan as it is prized in Helmand and other processing centres for its high morphine content). In 2012, UNODC (https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Northern_Afg_Central_Asia_Opiate_flows_2012_draft_jan26_2012.pdf) estimated that an average of approximately 200kg of heroin and 50kg of opium was being trafficked daily from Takhar, Kunduz and Badakhshan into Tajikistan (the country receiving the most narcotics from northern Afghanistan).

(5) Both Mutaleb Beg and his rival, Mir Alam, provincial police commander in neighbouring Kunduz were eased out of their jobs by the Pay and Rank Reform, a 2005-2007 project which aimed at getting professional, literate police generals who were not implicated in crime or abuses

appointed – for more detail, see this AAN report (<https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/reforming-the-afghan-ministry-of-interior-a-way-to-tilt-the-war/>). US cables published (https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06KABUL2862_a.html) by Wikileaks said:

Both were major mujahideen commanders who had little higher education and no formal police training or experience before being appointed as police chiefs. Mir Alam had been commander of the 54th AMF Division in Kunduz, while Motalib Beg was a Takhar-based commander closely associated with his Uzbek compatriot General Dostum. But even after their appointments as police chiefs, both continued to act as mujahideen commanders rather than professional police officers, abusing their positions of authority to engage in a broad range of criminal activity, including extortion, bribery and drug trafficking. Their removal from power constitutes a major step forward in establishing rule of law in the northeast.

(6) For accounts of the more usual trajectory of the start of insurgency locally, where predatory, abusive or exclusionary behaviour by government officials and US forces drove rebellion, see, for example, accounts of Helmand – Anand Gopal, *The Battle for Afghanistan: Militancy and Conflict in Kandahar*, New American Foundation, November 2010 (https://static.newamerica.org/attachments/4336-the-battle-for-afghanistan/kandahar_0.685663454461452584d08faeae6d538b.pdf); Uruzgan – Martine Van Bijlert; 'Unruly Commanders and Violent Power Struggles: Taliban Networks in Uruzgan', Chapter 7 in Antonio Giustozzi (ed) *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field* (New York/Chichester: Columbia University Press/Hurst, 2009), 158; Loya Paktia – '2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Paktia and why the US preferred warlords', Afghanistan Analysts Network, 24 November 2011 (<https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/2001-ten-years-on-3-the-fall-of-loya-paktia-and-why-the-us-preferred-warlords/>); the north – Antonio Giustozzi and Christoph Reuter in "The Insurgents of the Afghan North (<http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/10/AAN-2011-Northern-Insurgents.pdf>)" AAN, April 2011, 46-7, and; multi-provincial analysis and more general descriptions – Anand Gopal, *No Good Men Among the Living: American, the Taliban and the War through Afghan Eyes*, New York, Metropolitan Books Henry Holt and Company, 2014; and Stephen Carter and Kate Clark *No Shortcut to Stability Justice, Politics and Insurgency in Afghanistan*, Chatham House December, 2010 (https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Asia/1210pr_afghanjustice.pdf).

(7) Giustozzi and Reuter describe how, from early 2010, the Taleban moved some "core units" from Kunduz into the north of the province: 60–100 fighters settled in the woods in the triangle between Darqad, Yangi Qala and Khwaja Bahaiddin districts (Takhari Pashtuns and Tajiks, Pashtuns from Helmand and a few foreign fighters), with a new front opening in Khwaja Ghar in April of that year, pp 45-46.

(8) In interviews conducted in early January 2011, AAN also heard allegations of ALP/militias taking food by force and of a commander taking land. When asked about these allegations, 'Provincial ALP chief' Malek Tatar denied them, saying, "We never take anything by force. I'm a very nice person. People bring their loved ones to work with me voluntarily. I never did anything wrong."

(9) The new ALP commander in Eshkamesh has himself been replaced, after he was arrested for allegedly killing District Police Chief Sebghatullah, son of Sayed Ekram Masumi (Tajik, Jamiat-e Islami, former governor of Takhar, Badakhshan and Badghis, MP until 2018 and the strongman behind the Eshkamesh ALP).

(10) Since 2015, the Taliban have made repeated attempts to overrun districts in the Mawara-ye Kokcha and Namak Ab and Eshkamesh, for example, storming Darqad district centre and holding it for two months in 2015; overrunning Khwaja Bahauddin district centre for a day in October 2017 (<http://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan-39380090>); trying and failing to overrun Yangi Qala district centre and capturing Dasht-e Qala, district centre for a week in May 2018, (media report here (<https://ariananews.af/%D9%88%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B4%D8%AA-%D9%82%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%87-%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8/?lang=fa>)) and, since 2016, attacks on Khwaja Ghar's district centre which has meant it changed hands three times (read <https://middleeastpress.com/slideshow/%D9%88%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%87-%D8%BA%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B3%D9%82%D9%88%D8%B7-%DA%A9%D8%B1/>) here (<https://www.darivoo.com/a/Taliban-attack-on-khuja-ghar-distract-takhar/4955674.html>) and here (<http://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan-48620614>)). In mid-June of this year, the Taliban attacked Khwaja Ghar, Yangi Qala and Baharak districts, attacks which were repelled. Over the last two years, the Taliban have also pushed towards Taloqan through Baharak district.

(11) The Long War Journal in its mapping of Taliban control (<https://www.longwarjournal.org/mapping-taliban-control-in-afghanistan>) characterises these districts in Takhar as follows; government control, Taliban control (which it says might mean the Taliban openly administering a district, providing services and security, and running the local court) and "contested", which might mean the government controls the district centre, but little else. (US military designation from July 2019, as reported by the Journal is given in brackets).

Chah Ab: Taliban control (contested)

Yangi Qala: Taliban control (insurgent activity)

Khwaja Ghar: Taliban control (insurgent activity)

Darqad: contested (insurgent activity)

Khwaja Bahauddin: contested (same)

Dasht-e Qala: contested (same)

Baharak: Taliban control (contested)

Taloqan: contested (under government control)

Bangi: contested (same)

Eshkamesh: contested (insurgent activity)

NB The Long War Journal does not include Namak Ab district which was split from Taloqan in 2005, so counts only 16 districts in the province.

(12) They are Abdul Haq (governor) General Hashmatullah Muslim (ANP commander) and Hafezullah Samangani (NDS Director).

ecoi.net summary:

Article on Afghan Local Police in Takhar province (impact of the ALP being controlled by strongmen; establishment of the ALP; Taliban in the ALP; influence of factions; drugs trade; other topics)



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