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International Crisis Group
WORKING TO PREVENT CONFLICT WORLDWIDE

Afghanistan's Insurgency after the Transition

Asia Report N°256 | 12 May 2014

International Crisis Group
Headquarters
Avenue Louise 149
1050 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32 2 502 90 38
Fax: +32 2 502 50 38
brussels@crisisgroup.org

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Executive Summary

The war in Afghanistan entered a new phase in 2013. It now is increasingly a contest between the insurgents and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). Many within and outside the government are more optimistic about stability in the wake of a relatively successful first round of presidential elections on 5 April 2014. However, any euphoria should be tempered by a realistic assessment of the security challenges that President Karzai's successor will face in the transitional period of 2014-2015. Kabul may find these challenges difficult to overcome without significant and sustained international security, political and economic support.

The overall trend is one of escalating violence and insurgent attacks. Ongoing withdrawals of international soldiers have generally coincided with a deterioration of Kabul's reach in outlying districts. The insurgents have failed to capture major towns and cities, and some areas have experienced more peace and stability in the absence of international troops. Yet, the increasing confidence of the insurgents, as evidenced by their ability to assemble bigger formations for assaults, reduces the chances for meaningful national-level peace talks in 2014-2015.

A close examination of four provinces – Faryab, Kunar, Paktia and Kandahar – reveals underlying factors that may aggravate the conflict in the short term. Historical feuds and unresolved grievances are worsening after having been, in some cases, temporarily contained by the presence of international troops. In Faryab, these are largely ethnic tensions; in Kandahar they are mostly tribal; but in all transitional areas there is a variety of unfinished business that may result in further violence post-2014. Similarly, clashes among pro-government actors may become more frequent, as predicted by local interlocutors after recent skirmishing between government forces in Paktia. The situation in Kandahar also illustrates the way mistreatment of Afghans at the hands of their own security forces, operating with less supervision from foreign troops, breeds resentment that feeds the insurgency. Finally, despite its rhetoric, Pakistan has not reduced safe havens and other support for the insurgency, while Afghanistan's hostile responses – especially in Kandahar and Kunar – risk worsening cross-border relations.

None of these trends mean that Afghanistan is doomed to repeat the post-Soviet state collapse of the early 1990s, particularly if there is continued and robust international support. In fact, Afghan forces suffered record casualties in 2013 and retreated from some locations in the face of rising insurgency but maintained the tempo of their operations in most parts of the country. Afghanistan still has no shortage of young men joining the ANSF, offsetting the rising number of those who opt to leave them or abandon their posts. The government remains capable of moving supplies along highways to urban centres. ANSF cohesiveness, or lack of it, may prove decisive in the coming years, and Paktia notwithstanding, only minor reports emerged in 2013 of Afghan units fighting each other. As long as donors remain willing to pay their salaries, the sheer numbers of Afghan security personnel – possibly in the 370,000 range today – are a formidable obstacle to large-scale strategic gains by the insurgents.

That will not stop the Taliban and other insurgent groups from pushing for such gains, however. Despite a short-lived gesture toward peace negotiations in Doha, the insurgents' behaviour in places where the foreign troops have withdrawn shows no

inclination to slow the pace of fighting. They are blocking roads, capturing rural territory and trying to overwhelm district administration centres. With less risk of attack from international forces, they are massing bigger groups of fighters and getting into an increasing number of face-to-face ground engagements with Afghan security personnel, some of which drag on for weeks. The rising attacks show that the insurgents are able to motivate their fighters in the absence of foreign troops, shifting their rhetoric from calls to resist infidel occupation to a new emphasis on confronting the "puppets" or "betrayers of Islam" in the government. The emerging prominence of splinter groups such as Mahaz-e-Fedayeen is a further indication the insurgency will not lack ferocity in the coming years.

For the first time, the insurgents inflicted almost as many casualties on Afghan security forces in 2013 as they suffered themselves, and several accounts of battles in remote districts suggested the sides were nearly matched in strength. There are concerns that the balance could tip in favour of the insurgency, particularly in some rural locations, as foreign troops continue leaving. President Karzai has refused to conclude agreements with the U.S. and NATO that would keep a relatively modest presence of international troops after December 2014. The two presidential run-off candidates have vowed to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the U.S., which would in turn allow for a NATO Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). While retaining a contingent of foreign soldiers would not be sufficient on its own to keep the insurgency at bay, its absence could prove extremely problematic. The ANSF still needs support from international forces, and signing a BSA and a SOFA would likely have knock-on effects, sending an important signal of commitment at a fragile time, thus encouraging ongoing financial, developmental and diplomatic support.

With or without backup from international forces, the Afghan government will need more helicopters, armoured vehicles, and logistical support to accomplish that limited objective. Such additional military tools would also permit the government to rely increasingly on the relatively well-disciplined Afghan army rather than forcing it to turn to irregular forces that have a dismal record of harming civilians.

Certainly, the future of the Afghan government depends primarily on its own behaviour: its commitment to the rule of law, anti-corruption measures and other aspects of governance must demonstrate its concern for the well-being of all Afghans. However, responsibility also rests with the international community; its patchy efforts over a dozen years to bring peace and stability must now be followed not with apathy, but with renewed commitment.

Recommendations

To help Afghan security forces withstand a rising insurgency

To the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan:

1. Sign a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the U.S. and a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with NATO.
2. Take urgent steps to reduce casualties among Afghan forces, including a large-scale effort to train police and soldiers in the basics of emergency medical care.
3. Strengthen anti-corruption measures to ensure that security personnel receive their salaries and other benefits, and confirm that ammunition, diesel and other logistical supplies reach Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) units.

To the government of the United States:

4. Significantly increase the size of the Mobile Strike Force (MSF) program, so that sufficient ANSF quick-reaction units are available to handle many of the worsening security trends of 2014-2015 and beyond.
5. Find a way, possibly by working with other donors, to expand Afghan capacity for tactical air support, including more helicopters in support of government efforts to retain control over remote district centres.

To all donor countries:

6. Convene a meeting of donor countries as a follow-up to the 2012 NATO summit in Chicago, with a view to expanding annual pledges of support, realising them on schedule and allowing the ANSF to maintain for the time being personnel rosters approximately equal to their current levels. Those ANSF levels are not indefinitely sustainable or desirable, but reductions should progress in tandem with stabilisation.
7. Support anti-corruption measures by the Afghan government to ensure, inter alia, that salaries are distributed to all ANSF members and logistical supply chains function as required.

To reduce tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan

To the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan:

8. Increase diplomatic outreach to regional governments, including Pakistan, to find ways of reviving peace talks with the insurgents; maintain, at a minimum, lines of communication between Afghan and Pakistani civilian and military leaders; and explore ways to increase bilateral economic cooperation as a way to ease tensions with Pakistan.
9. Refrain from taking direct military action inside Pakistan or supporting anti-Pakistan militants.

To strengthen the rule of law

To the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan:

10. Reduce reliance on and ultimately phase out the controversial Afghan Local Police (ALP) program, given the ALP's abuse of power and destabilising effect in most parts of the country.
11. Respond with transparent investigation and disciplinary measures as appropriate to any report of ANSF failure to protect or deliberate targeting of civilians, in violation of obligations under Afghan and international law.

To all donor countries:

12. Assist with programs aimed at encouraging the ANSF to respect the constitution and the country's obligations with regard to human rights and the laws of armed conflict.

To improve political legitimacy and state viability:

To the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan:

13. Encourage open public and media discussion and debate of security problems so as to find solutions and keep policymakers informed; and acknowledge that, aside from the conflict's external factors, internal Afghan dynamics such as corruption, disenfranchisement and impunity also deserve attention.
14. Strengthen efforts to make the Afghan government more politically inclusive, particularly at the provincial and district level.
15. Refrain from interfering in the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and the Independent Complaints Commission (IECC) processes of disqualifying voters and adjudicating complaints in connection with the 2014 and subsequent elections.
16. Direct propaganda messages toward front-line insurgents that publicise the absence of international forces in their areas of operation in order to undermine the logic of jihad after the departure of foreign troops.

To all donor countries:

17. Sustain economic assistance for the Afghan government and work with the finance ministry to encourage growth in customs and other forms of government revenue.
18. Encourage the IEC and the IECC to comply strictly with electoral laws, including requirements to conduct their work in a transparent manner, in the processes of disqualifying voters and adjudicating complaints.
19. Provide diplomatic support for the Afghan government's efforts to improve relations with Pakistan and revive peace talks, when feasible, with insurgent factions.

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Afghanistan's Insurgency after the Transition

I. Introduction

The future has always been hard to predict in Afghanistan, but uncertainty has never been greater than now, as the international military effort winds down and a resilient insurgency demonstrates its clout countrywide, particularly in rural areas.[1] Most international forces are scheduled to depart by 31 December 2014, with the expiry of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mandate. The numbers have already been sharply reduced from ISAF's peak strength of about 132,000 personnel in 2011 to roughly 55,000 in early 2014.[2] ISAF's bases in Afghanistan have shrunk from about 800 in 2011 to around one tenth that number.[3]

The U.S. and NATO are discussing plans with the Afghan government for a post-2014 mission, Operation Resolute Support, which the U.S. military has described as a combined force of perhaps 8,000 to 12,000 international troops.[4] It remains in doubt because of President Hamid Karzai's reluctance to sign a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the U.S. and an associated Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with NATO.[5] These agreements would provide a framework for the continued presence of foreign troops, which most Afghans and many experts consider important for the sustainment of Afghan forces.[6] It is likely that his successor will sign a BSA – both candidates in the presidential run-off scheduled tentatively for mid-June say they favour this – but in any event, Washington is already reducing significantly its troop presence, and smaller donor countries are expected to follow its lead. In his 2014 State of the Union address, President Obama said, "America's longest war will finally be over".[7]

With rising insurgent violence in 2013 and the first months of 2014, and no sign of a negotiated peace in the short term, an assessment of the security environment in places where international troops have already transferred the security lead to the

[1] For earlier Crisis Group analysis of the Afghan insurgency, see Asia Reports N°236, *Afghanistan: The Long, Hard Road to the 2014 Transition*, 8 October 2012; N°221, *Talking About Talks: Toward a Political Settlement in Afghanistan*, 26 March 2012; N°207, *The Insurgency in Afghanistan's Heartland*, 27 June 2011; and N°158, *Taliban Propaganda: Winning the War of Words?* 24 July 2008.
[2] "Security Council: Reporting and mandate cycles", UN Department of Political Affairs; Security Council Secretariat Branch, 9 January 2014. At end January 2014, there were 36,500 American and some 19,000 other foreign troops. Thom Shanker, "Military plans reflect Afghanistan uncertainty", *The New York Times*, 29 January 2014.
[3] Crisis Group interview, senior NATO official, Bishkek, 14 November 2013.
[4] Jim Garamone, "Resolute Support Planning Continues, Options Still Open", American Forces Press Service, 23 January 2014.
[5] Shanker, op. cit.
[6] For example: "... the inability to conclude a BSA between the U.S. and Afghanistan [is] likely to result in a downward spiral of capability for the ANSF". "Independent Assessment of the Afghan National Security Forces", Center for Naval Analyses (research centre for U.S. Navy and Marine Corps), January 2014.
[7] "President Barack Obama's State of the Union Address", White House Office of the Press Secretary, 28 January 2014. www.elections.pajhwok.com/en/2014/05/08/iec-plans-conduct-runoff-polls-june-14.

Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) is important to understand what might lie ahead and devise policy accordingly. There are some positive signs. Rejecting the electoral process, the Taliban had threatened to attack electoral workers, voters and security personnel during the 5 April presidential and provincial council polls.[8] Defying threats, millions turned out to vote, particularly in the major cities.[9] Despite a flurry of violence, the ANSF proved capable of moving ballot papers, including to remote districts, and protecting polling sites.[10] Yet, security challenges will likely grow should there be a presidential run-off in June, at the height of the fighting season. With fewer international troops available for *in extremis* support, the 2015 parliamentary polls will face an even more serious test.

Afghanistan's future after the departure of most international troops has been a matter of widespread speculation, but in many parts of the country the effects of the withdrawals are already visible. To assess whether fears for the country in 2014-2015 have any foundation, Crisis Group conducted case studies of 4 of the 34 provinces: Faryab in the north west, Kunar in the north east, Paktia in the east and Kandahar in the south. Field work was mainly carried out in their respective provincial capitals, Maimana, Asadabad, Gardez and Kandahar, as well as in Kabul. Historical research gave context to the views of local interlocutors, whose opinions of the war were often shaped by decades of conflict. While this report largely represents a view from within government enclaves, and no interviews were held with the Taliban or other insurgent groups, some insights were gained from former rebels and tribal leaders with knowledge of the insurgency. As the international forces already play a diminishing part in the war, this paper focuses primarily on the challenges faced by Afghan security forces.

[8] The Taliban's 11 March statement said, "all fighters are given orders to disrupt th[ese] sham elections by full force and bring under attacks election workers, activists, volunteers and those providing security everywhere. If someone takes part in this [election], they will be responsible for the bad consequences themselves". Hamid Shalizi, "Afghan Taliban threaten to attack 'sham' poll 'manipulated by U.S.'", Reuters, 10 March 2014; also, "Afghanistan: Taliban violence threatens election", Human Rights Watch, 15 March 2014.

[9] The Independent Election Commission (IEC) estimated the turnout at 7 million voters out of an estimated 13.5 million, but this figure will change once invalid ballot papers are excluded. Mushtaq Mojaddidi, "Abdullah widens lead in Afghan presidential poll", Agence France-Presse, 20 April 2014; Jeremy Laurence, "Abdullah widens lead in Afghan presidential poll", Reuters, 20 April 2014.

[10] According to U.S. military data, there were few civilian casualties; the 286 insurgent attacks mainly targeted the ANSF, killing seventeen soldiers and police, while 141 insurgents died, indicating that the security forces were capable of holding their own. Joshua Parlow, "Violence data show spike during Afghan presidential election", *The Washington Post*, 21 April 2014; John Chalmers and Maria Golovnina, "Smooth Afghan election raises questions about Taliban's strength", Reuters, 7 April 2014; Ron Nordland, Azam Ahmed, Matthew Rosenberg, "Afghan turnout high as voters defy the Taliban", *The New York Times*, 5 April 2014; Josh Smith, Heath Druzin, "Officials: Despite Afghan election success, insurgents remain active", *Stars and Stripes*, 9 April 2014.

II. Transitioning to December 2014

As international forces pull back, they are handing security duties to Afghan forces. This process began in July 2010, when the Afghan government and donors approved a plan for *inteqal* (transition), with the goal that Afghan units will "lead and conduct military operations in all provinces by the end of 2014".[11] The transition was divided into five tranches, with Afghan forces taking the lead in a small number of central districts in March 2011 and moving into more dangerous parts of the country in stages, culminating with the June 2013 transfer of volatile districts along the Pakistan border and the southern heartland of the insurgency.[12]

International trainers built up the ANSF in the transition period from roughly 224,000 in May 2010 to an estimated 345,000 by January 2014.[13] Those expanded ranks may prove hard to maintain, however. Donors have pledged long-term funding for only 228,500.[14] It is, moreover, unclear how or when the existing roster might be reduced. The future of the separately U.S.-funded Afghan Local Police (ALP) program, with an estimated 24,400 armed men, also remains unknown.[15] These potential reductions of Afghan forces are causing anxiety in provinces most affected by the insurgency. "If we lose 100,000 Afghan soldiers and police, we will have a very serious problem", a senior police official said.[16] While the enormous size of the ANSF is neither indefinitely desirable nor sustainable, and reductions whenever they come will carry their own specific challenges, such concerns were echoed by the senior U.S. commander in Afghanistan, Joseph Dunford, when he testified before a Senate committee in March 2014, arguing that the current size of Afghan forces – including the ALP – should be maintained until at least 2018.[17]

A. *Escalating Violence*

The impact of the transition process on security was tested as foreign troops fully withdrew from some provinces (such as Faryab, discussed below), and international operations were reduced in other parts of the country in 2013. Insurgent activity reaches its greatest strength during the summer in Afghanistan. There were divergent views about the intensity of the conflict during the peak 2013 fighting season. From early April until mid-September, the U.S. military reported a 6 per cent decrease in insurgent attacks and a 12 per cent drop in violent incidents of all kinds.[18]

[11] "Communiqué, Kabul International Conference on Afghanistan", Afghan foreign ministry, 20 July 2010.
[12] "Inteqal: Transition to Afghan Lead", NATO, undated.
[13] Ian Livingston, Michael O'Hanlon, "Afghanistan Index", Brookings, 10 January 2014. "NTM-A One Pager", NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan, January 2014.
[14] "Chicago Summit Declaration on Afghanistan", NATO, 20 May 2012.
[15] Crisis Group interview, senior NATO official, Kabul, 11 January 2014. In recent years, the controversial ALP program has raised village defence forces – in effect militias – and funded them outside the regular ANSF payroll. "From Arbaki to Local Police: Today's challenges and tomorrow's concerns", Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, spring 2012; also "World Report 2013", Human Rights Watch.
[16] Crisis Group interview, Arghandab, 27 June 2013.
[17] "Recent Developments in Afghanistan", video, Armed Services Committee, 12 March 2014, http://armedservices.house.gov/index.cfm/2014/3/recent-developments-in-afghanistan.
[18] "Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan", U.S. Department of Defense, November 2013.

The UN, however, reported an 11 per cent increase in security incidents during the summer months, and a UN report found that civilian casualties increased of 14 per cent in the year.[19]

Most analysts considered the UN figures more reliable, particularly after problems with the ISAF database were discovered in early 2013.[20] Unpublished assessments estimated a 15 to 20 per cent increase in violence for 2013, as compared with 2012.[21] Escalation appeared to continue in the early months of 2014.[22] "There are clear signs that armed opposition groups have gained ground in rural areas where security responsibilities have been transferred to the ANSF", Oxfam said in January 2014. "Security has deteriorated in some provinces and areas that were previously considered safe".[23]

B. *Fears of Greater Instability in 2014-2015*

Property dealers started to complain in 2012 that worries about the end of the foreign intervention were already starting to depress the real estate market, even before the consequences of troop withdrawals were evident. Real estate prices continued to fall in 2013, and the currency's slow decline turned into a sell-off, driving up prices for staples such as food and firewood by at least 25 per cent after President Karzai announced in November he would delay signing the BSA.[24] The number of Afghans applying for asylum in Western countries increased in 2013, and an estimated 106,000 fled their homes for safer parts of the country in the first half of that year, mostly because of conflict and insecurity.[25] Afghans inside government enclaves often say they fear the internationals will abandon them, igniting the sort of chaotic wars the country suffered from 1992 to 1996. "Don't abandon us like the Russians", a retired official said; "there could be big anarchy".[26]

C. *Stalled Peace Talks*

Negotiations with the Taliban showed no progress in 2013, leading some observers to dismiss the possibility of a breakthrough that might ease the conflict in the short term. A former participant in U.S. diplomatic efforts said, "it's not going anywhere

[19] The UN figures include violent incidents from 16 May to 15 August 2013. "The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General", General Assembly, 6 September 2013, p. 6. "Afghanistan Annual Report 2013: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict", UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Kabul, February 2014.
[20] Robert Burns, "Taliban attack trends: Never mind", Associated Press, 5 March 2013.
[21] Crisis Group interviews, Western security analysts, November, December 2013.
[22] One estimate was of a 30 per cent rise in insurgent attacks in the first three 2014 months, compared with the same period in 2013. Some Western diplomats disputed this, citing unpublished military assessments of a modest decrease in incidents – although other unpublished military estimates show rising violence in the initial months of 2014. Crisis Group interviews, Kabul, April 2014.
[23] "Written evidence of Oxfam", UK Commons Select Committee on Defence, 22 January 2014.
[24] Crisis Group interviews, Kabul, April 2013. Also, Zarghona Salehi, "NATO's 2014 exit dents Kabul property market", Pajhwok Afghan News, 28 October 2012; Zabihullah Jhanmal, "Afghan economy could see downturn with 2014 withdraw", Tolo News, 5 July 2013; Hamid Shalizi, Mirwais Harooni, "Uncertainty over security pact drives final nail into Afghan bubble", Reuters, 18 December 2013.
[25] Crisis Group interviews, Western diplomats, Kabul, December 2013, January 2014; "World Report 2014", Human Rights Watch, citing UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) data.
[26] Crisis Group interview, former Ghorak district official, Kandahar, 28 June 2013.

right now".[27] Hopes had been raised when a Taliban delegation opened an office in Doha, Qatar on 18 June 2013. The initiative almost instantly collapsed, as the Kabul government objected when it displayed a signboard with the name of its former regime, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, and the white flag of the insurgency.[28] These symbols were seen by pro-government figures as a Taliban effort to claim legitimacy as a government-in-exile. "What do the Taliban want? It's simple: they want power", a tribal leader said. "Look at Qatar, the way they displayed their flag".[29]

There is an emerging consensus in Afghanistan that the insurgents will only talk seriously after testing the military strength of Afghan forces once the internationals exit. A post-election, post-transition government, provided it has broad acceptance and legitimacy, would be best placed to explore new avenues for reviving the peace talks, including through outreach to regional countries, particularly Pakistan.

D. *Pakistan's Role*

Pakistan claimed a role in bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table in Doha but later publically cast doubt on its ability to broker peace.[30] In December 2013, its top national security and foreign policy adviser, Sartaj Aziz said, "we have contacts with the Afghan Taliban but do not have control over them, so it will be unrealistic to expect that Pakistan delivers the Taliban for the peace process".[31] That statement was dismissed by some Afghan officials as a continuation of dissembling over the depth of Pakistan's connections with the insurgency.[32]

Local perceptions in Afghanistan generally hold that the civilian government in Islamabad has some inclination to break with Pakistan's history of backing Afghan insurgents, but its signals are undermined by the insurgents' continued access, with the military's backing, to Pakistani safe havens and other support. For example, a senior religious figure in Gardez said that one of his regular contacts in the insurgency attended a meeting in November 2013 with high-level Pakistani politicians who warned him that the state could no longer guarantee his security – but he did not take the warning seriously enough to leave Pakistan.[33]

Similar reports emerged after a spate of assassinations in 2013 of Taliban figures around Quetta, in Pakistan's Balochistan province, bordering on southern Afghanistan (see below). According to a tribal elder in Kandahar, the insurgents reacted to the killings by complaining to the Pakistan military that the government had failed to keep its promises to provide security. "The Pakistan army told the Taliban that the political situation has changed, and the new government is not pleased with the Afghan Taliban", the elder said. He added that Pakistani security officials responded

[27] Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 22 January 2014.
[28] Borhan Osman, Kate Clark, "Who played havoc with the Qatar talks?" Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), 9 July 2013.
[29] Crisis Group interview, Mohmand tribal leader, Asadabad, 23 August 2013.
[30] "Record of the Press Briefing by Spokesman", Pakistan foreign ministry, 20 June 2013.
[31] Ahmad Ramin, "Afghan Taliban not ready for peace talks: Pakistan", Tolo News, 15 December 2013.
[32] Crisis Group interview, High Peace Council member, Kabul, December 2013.
[33] Crisis Group interview, provincial peace council official, Gardez, 30 November 2013. Peace councils were established at the national and provincial levels in 2010 to manage talks with the Taliban and other insurgent groups but have failed to show significant progress.

to the Taliban complaints by giving insurgent leaders permission to travel with armed bodyguards in Quetta.[34]

E. *Insurgent Factions Gain Prominence*

Even in the unlikely event that the Taliban reach a peace deal with Kabul or lose the Pakistan military's backing, hardline factions may keep fighting. Taliban leaders do not have a monopoly on rebellion in Afghanistan. This lack of control was highlighted when the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) compound in Jalalabad was attacked on 29 May 2013, resulting in the death of a guard and injuries to three staff. The ICRC is among the most neutral of humanitarian actors in the country and was not considered a target for the insurgency. A Taliban spokesman issued an unusual denial of responsibility for the strike.[35]

Suspicion fell on a Taliban splinter group, Mahaz-e-Fedayeen, under the command of a young leader, Mullah Najibullah, who had served under the notorious Taliban commander, Mullah Dadullah.[36] The group neither claimed nor denied responsibility, and it also remained silent after being implicated in a 3 August bombing at the Indian consulate in Jalalabad that was also disavowed by the Taliban. However, it raised its profile after the 15 October assassination of Logar Governor Arsala Jamal, claiming responsibility for killing "a spy of America". The group also took responsibility for killing a Swedish radio journalist in downtown Kabul on 11 March 2014, after the Taliban denied involvement.[37] This gave new prominence to Mullah Najibullah, who had previously been best-known for kidnapping a *New York Times* reporter in 2009.[38] A key element of Mahaz-e-Fedayeen's propaganda has been rejection of all negotiations, including condemning the Taliban's Doha delegation. "These are the servants of America", the group said; "they want to sell our holy jihad and our holy martyrs for a few dollars and for a seat in government".[39]

Mahaz-e-Fedayeen and other such factions, mostly in eastern Afghanistan, are a problem for the Taliban because they make the insurgency less cohesive. "The Taliban cannot stop fighting, even if their leaders sign a deal, because now they have many different groups", a tribal leader in Kandahar said. "Even if the government gives away the south, or some government ministries, what will happen? You can make the Quetta *shura* (council) happy, but all the other *shuras* will remain unhappy".[40]

[34] Crisis Group interview, January 2014. Another source indicated that Taliban and Pakistani security forces had started joint patrols around Quetta, Kuchlak, Kharotabad, Chaman and other parts of Balochistan, in part as a defensive reaction to the assassinations. Crisis Group telephone interview, Quetta resident, 14 April 2014.

[35] Azam Ahmed, Matthew Rosenberg, "Taliban deny responsibility for attack on Red Cross", *The New York Times*, 31 May 2013.

[36] The faction is sometimes called the "Suicide Group of the Islamic Movement of Afghanistan"; its website, www.alfida.org, uses the English name "Afghanistan Islamic Movement Fidai Front". Local media have also used "Mahaz Fedai Tahrik Islami Afghanistan". Crisis Group interviews, Western security analysts and experts, Kabul, November 2013. Also Zia Ur Rehman, "Who is killing Afghan Taliban in Pakistan?" *The Friday Times*, 24 January 2014; Sami Yousafzai, Ron Moreau, "Too radical for the Taliban", *Newsweek*, 30 August 2013.

[37] Matthew Rosenberg, "Afghan militant group declares itself reporter's killer", *The New York Times*, 12 March 2014.

[38] Aram Roston, "After David Rohde's escape, a Taliban feud", *The Nation*, 17 November 2010.

[39] The group's Facebook page has been removed, but a cached version remains available. Mahaz-e-Fedayeen website, op. cit.

[40] Crisis Group interview, Sulaimankhel (Ghilzai) tribal leader, Kandahar, 28 June 2013.

Even the use of the term "Quetta *shura*", used for many years as shorthand for the Taliban leadership (*rahbari*) council, is considered outdated by some experts, because factionalism now prevents the *shura* members from acting as a single governing body.[41]

F. *Motivation to Fight*

Pragmatic elements of the insurgency could potentially play a constructive role in the coming years. Some observers have expressed hope that some Taliban factions will lose enthusiasm for the war once they lack foreign targets and find themselves fighting only fellow Afghans.[42] "Insurgent groups' main propaganda theme for the past eleven years has been that they are fighting a foreign 'occupation'", the U.S. military reported in November 2013. "As the ANSF take over almost all operations, and coalition forces transition from a combat to a primarily advisory role, this message increasingly lacks credibility".[43]

However, religious and xenophobic sentiments have not been the only motivating factors for the insurgency.[44] Anecdotal accounts of the Taliban putting down their weapons after the withdrawal of foreign troops often seem exaggerated upon closer examination. For example, a senior Afghan official said that a Taliban commander "retired" his 80 fighters in Ghaziabad district of Kunar province in 2013, after U.S. troops pulled out of the area, because of a personal conviction that the war against foreign occupation was finished.[45] However, Western analysts say the number of attacks in Ghaziabad have shown no signs of diminishing.[46] According to tribal leaders from the district, the insurgency's growing encroachment on the roads has driven food prices 50 per cent higher than in the provincial capital.[47] Taliban swarmed into an Afghan army outpost in Ghaziabad on 23 February 2014, killing at least nineteen soldiers and abducting six.[48] This suggests that, even within a single district, the number of insurgents giving up the fight was eclipsed by a greater number who continued fighting (discussed further in the Paktia case study).

G. *Assessing the Insurgency*

An exhaustive survey of the insurgent groups is not within this paper's scope. To discuss conflict trends, it suffices to identify the three biggest groups. Their leaderships are all Pakistan-based. The largest is the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (the Afghan Taliban), under Mullah Mohammed Omar, who ruled most of Afghanistan from

[41] Experts disagree about the degree of cohesiveness in the Taliban movement; some describe two major factions centred, respectively, on Peshawar and Quetta; others say Mullah Omar's Quetta *shura* retains significant control. "The Taliban are still more cohesive than any other armed group we've seen since 1978", a veteran expert said. Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 29 January 2014.
[42] For example, Borhan Osman, "The Future of Peace Talks: What would make a breakthrough possible?", AAN, 23 January 2014. The Paktia section of this report contains a more detailed look at the ideological crossroads the insurgency faces in the absence of international troops.
[43] "Report on Progress", November 2013, op. cit.
[44] Alex Strick van Linschoten, Felix Kuehn, *An Enemy We Created* (London, 2012), p. 306.
[45] Crisis Group interview, senior police commander, Asadabad, 25 August 2013.
[46] Crisis Group interview, Western security analyst, Kabul, December 2013.
[47] Crisis Group interviews, Kabul and Asadabad, August-November, 2013.
[48] Niamatullah Karyab, Rod Nordland, "Taliban raid Afghan Army base, killing soldiers in their sleep", *The New York Times*, 23 February 2014.

1996 to 2001.[49] His leadership group is sometimes called the "Quetta *shura*" because senior figures are believed to operate near that city, though some are understood to have relocated to Karachi, Sindh province's capital, and elsewhere. Another, reportedly based in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), is commanded by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who transformed his Hizb-e Islami party into an eastern-based insurgency.[50] The third is the Haqqani network, in FATA's North Waziristan Agency, named after its leader, Jalaluddin Haqqani, and run in effect by his son, Sirajuddin.[51] The leaders of all three factions fought the Soviets in the 1980s, participated in the civil wars of the 1990s and largely redirected their efforts against the Kabul government after 2001.

No credible assessment of the factions' manpower exists in the public domain. In any case, all have flexible memberships and consist mainly of part-time fighters, meaning their numbers vary considerably. Some analysts believe that roughly 10,000 insurgents have been killed over the last dozen years, including senior leadership figures.[52] Western officials often claim that such losses have diminished the insurgents' capacity. "We've broken the Taliban's momentum in Afghanistan", President Obama said in 2012.[53] Insurgent strength is hard to quantify, however. That attacks are growing in frequency does not necessarily make the insurgents a rising threat to the survival of the government. For example, counts of violent incidents usually give equal weight to a single gunshot and the overrunning of an outpost. Districts that seem peaceful may be controlled by insurgents; conversely, parts of the country may erupt into violence as government forces gain control. The resilience of the insurgency, therefore, can only be assessed through a closer examination of areas affected by withdrawal of foreign troops.

This paper considers four case studies in border provinces that are among the country's most dangerous, according to the number of security incidents in 2013: Kandahar (1st); Kunar (5th); Faryab (7th); and Paktia (14th).[54] They are battlegrounds for the diverse groupings Kabul is fighting: the main Afghan Taliban faction in Kandahar and a variety of more heterogeneous groups in the other three provinces. The case studies also highlight underlying conflict dynamics: feuds between tribes (Kandahar); ethnic groups (Faryab); and ideological rivals (Kunar). The Paktia study in contrast raises the possibility that security could improve after withdrawal of international troops. Altogether, these studies suggest varying short-term scenarios for outlying provinces as international troops withdraw.

[49] For an overview of the research, see Thomas Rutting, "The Other Side: Dimensions of the Afghan Insurgency: Causes, Actors and Approaches to Talks", AAN, July 2009.
[50] Hizb-e Islami is a hybrid organisation with insurgent and political wings. "Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG)", Institute for the Study of War, undated; Crisis Group Asia Report N°255, *Policing Urban Violence in Pakistan*, 23 January 2014, p. 5.
[51] Jeffrey Dressler, "The Haqqani Network: From Pakistan to Afghanistan", Institute for the Study of War, October 2010.
[52] Crisis Group interview, Western security analyst, Kabul, December 2013.
[53] "Weekly Address: Honoring Our Nation's Service Members and Military Families", The White House, 1 September 2012.
[54] Crisis Group interview, Western security analyst, Kabul, January 2014.

III. Case Study: Faryab Province

Faryab's experience serves as a stark warning about how the situation may deteriorate in outlying provinces after the departure of foreign troops. Although hundreds of kilometres from the insurgent heartlands of the south, the Taliban has made significant gains in its western districts, taking advantage of rivalries among government security forces, historic grievances of the Pashtun minority and the security vacuum left by the departure of international forces in mid-2012. Many local interlocutors feared further encroachment by the insurgency in 2014-2015 period that would put district centres at risk of being overrun.

A. *History of Conflict*

1. Pashtuns vs. Uzbeks, 1700s-1900s

Maimana was the seat of power for Uzbek rulers who enjoyed varying degrees of independence until Afghanistan's birth as a nation and the rise of the Pashtun Durrani empire that took control of the provincial capital in 1751.[55] Since then, tensions between local Uzbeks and Pashtuns have resulted in sporadic violence. "This colonisation is still at the root of present-day disputes and conflicts in Faryab".[56] Local interlocutors often described the conflict's roots in the context of resettlement patterns of the past three centuries, as ethnic factions gained or lost territory.[57]

2. Civil wars, 1980s and 1990s

Upheaval after the Soviet intervention allowed ethnic factions in Faryab to pursue their rivals. For much of the 1980s, these squabbles resulted in no clear winner, only an "endless tactical shifting of alliances among commanders and political leaders".[58] As the civil war progressed, ethnic groups started to coalesce behind major rebel fronts; in large part, but not exclusively, the Jamiat-i Islami group gathered Tajik fighters, while Junbish-i-Meli-Islami gained support from Uzbeks and Turkmens.[59] Junbish eventually became the dominant faction, until years of brutal fighting with the Taliban ended with the latter capturing Maimana in 1998.[60]

3. Ethnic dynamics post-2001

The U.S. intervention in 2001 empowered Uzbek militias that preyed on Pashtun communities in western Faryab and Ghormach district, with reports of local warlords

[55] Christine Noelle, *State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan* (New York, 1997), p. 75.
[56] Stale Ulriksen, "Norway's political test in Faryab, Afghanistan: how to lead?" Norwegian Peacebuilding Centre, 2010.
[57] Crisis Group interviews, Maimana, September 2013.
[58] Geert Gompelman, "Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan's Faryab Province", Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, January 2011.
[59] "Faryab Provincial Profile", The Liaison Office (TLO) (an NGO in Kabul), July 2011; also Crisis Group interviews, Maimana, September 2013.
[60] TLO, op. cit.; Liz Alden Wily, "Land relations in Faryab Province", AAN, June 2004 Gompelman, both op. cit.; also Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia* (New York, 2002), p. 72.

kidnapping, beating, robbing and raping their ethnic rivals.[61] A large number of Pashtuns fled their homes in 2001-2002, migrating south and west. A team of surveyors estimated that roughly half the Pashtuns forced to leave remained outside the province a decade later, in 2011.[62] The northern militias that drove the Taliban away also resumed old feuds among themselves, as Tajik-dominated Jamiat groups battled against the Uzbek-dominated Junbish.[63]

4. NATO troop surges, 2005-2012

Norway, with an initial force of 100 soldiers, took primary responsibility for security in the province in 2005, as part of NATO's expanding role beyond Kabul. Troop numbers grew steadily; by 2010, the province was patrolled by 450 Norwegians and Latvians, along with 700 U.S. forces.[64] Security incidents in Faryab also spiked sharply: roughly six-fold from 2008 to 2011. Much of the fighting was concentrated in the western district of Qaysar and neighbouring Ghormach district (which falls under the province's jurisdiction for security); these two accounted for almost half the violence in the province's fourteen districts.[65] "That is where the front lines were in the 1990s, when the Taliban were fighting the mujahidin", said a political leader.[66]

5. Security transition, 2012

Faryab entered the security transition in May 2012, when Karzai announced that Afghan forces would take lead responsibility in ten of the province's districts, excluding the most dangerous areas in the west. The process was broadened to include the entire province in December 2012.[67] In practice, however, most international forces had already withdrawn from Faryab by September 2012. A civil society leader in Maimana said, "after the withdrawal, the situation got worse. Stepping outside my house in the city, I was never sure if I would return home alive".[68] These concerns were reinforced in October 2012, when a suicide bomber at a central mosque killed 40, including many security officials, in Faryab's worst single attack since 2001.[69]

B. *Drivers of Conflict in 2013*

While none were as spectacular as the mosque bombing, a growing number of attacks have occurred after the departure of international troops. Western security analysts reported a 40 to 50 per cent increase in violent incidents in Faryab in 2013, as compared with 2011.[70] Some say this reflects a strategic choice of Taliban leaders. An Afghan security official said he received intelligence about a meeting in early 2013 in

[61] "Paying for the Taliban's Crimes: Abuses Against Ethnic Pashtuns in Northern Afghanistan", Human Rights Watch, April 2002.
[62] TLO, op. cit. According to some estimates, 10,000 Pashtuns were displaced in 2001-2002; local interlocutors suggest greater numbers. Wily, op. cit. Crisis Group interviews, Maimana, September 2013.
[63] Crisis Group interviews, Maimana, September 2013.
[64] Ulriksen, op. cit.
[65] Crisis Group interview, Western security analysts, Kabul, November, December 2013.
[66] Crisis Group interview, senior Junbish provincial official, 11 September 2013.
[67] "Inteqal: Transition to Afghan Lead", NATO, undated.
[68] Crisis Group interview, Maimana, 13 September 2013.
[69] Bashir Ansari, "Suicide bomber kills 40 at Afghan mosque during Eid", Reuters, 26 October 2012.
[70] Crisis Group interview, Western security analyst, Kabul, November 2013.

Quetta, involving the Taliban shadow governors for Faryab and the neighbouring Ghor and Badghis provinces, at which the insurgent leadership, exploiting the absence of international troops, decided on a "hard approach" in Faryab.[71] Many local security officials also attributed the rise in insurgent activity to the lack of NATO air support, since the Taliban could deploy bigger groups of fighters.[72] The insurgents may have also enjoyed a morale boost, as they watched their NATO enemies depart. A Taliban propaganda site boasted that "the foreign invading troops are compelled to completely abscond from this province".[73]

Other local interlocutors viewed rivalries such as feuds among pro-government commanders and competition between local powerbrokers after the exit of international forces as responsible for the rise in violence.[74] "In the time of jihad there was more unity among us", said a militia commander, referring to the war against the Soviets. "Now there are assassinations every day, and we're not clear about who orders the killings".[75] Serious rivalries also played out within political factions. A member of the Meshrano Jirga (upper house of parliament) and a member of the Wolesi Jirga (lower house), both commanding hundreds of armed men and associated with Junbish, allegedly refused to deploy their informal militias to help political rivals during Taliban attacks.[76]

Another factor creating instability was the central government's struggle to deal with remnants of the Critical Infrastructure Police (CIP), irregular militias raised by the U.S. military in 2011 and disbanded by President Karzai five months later.[77] Some former CIP commanders joined the Afghan Local Police (ALP) program, legitimising at least part of their militias under a government structure; others became freelance warlords.[78] These militias usually enjoy ties to Jamiat or Junbish, giving them a degree of impunity that frustrated some provincial government officials.[79]

C. *Insurgent Strategies*

1. Interrupting road access

The main supply route to Maimana, the paved highway to Mazar-e-Sharif, mostly remains open. As a result, the price of staple foods has not increased, despite the rising number of insurgent attacks and checkpoints on the roads.[80] However, Taliban encroachment on nearly all roads in the province has started to undermine government ability to evacuate the wounded from battlefields, to reach citizens and to implement economic development plans. Aid agencies that, as early as 2012, were concerned about ability to operate throughout the province have been forced to curtail travel,

[71] Crisis Group interview, senior police commander, Maimana, 13 September 2013.
[72] Crisis Group interviews, Maimana, September 2013.
[73] "Qari Salahuddin: The enemy's operations inside Faryab province have been completely pushed back", Voice of Jihad, 16 July 2013.
[74] Crisis Group interviews, Maimana, September 2013.
[75] Crisis Group interview, Jamiat militia commander, 14 September 2013.
[76] Crisis Group interview, senior cleric, Maimana, 16 September 2013.
[77] Matthew Rosenberg, Alissa J. Rubin, "Afghanistan to disband irregular police force set up under NATO", *The New York Times*, 26 December 2011.
[78] Crisis Group interviews, Maimana, September 2013.
[79] Crisis Group interview, provincial council member, Maimana, 14 September 2013.
[80] Crisis Group interviews, Maimana, September 2013.

particularly after insurgents killed six Afghan workers from the French NGO Acted just outside Maimana in November 2013.[81]

Growing control of roads in the western part of the province also gives the Taliban a share of the drug-smuggling business, profits from the transportation of opium to the northern borders.[82] Accounts vary about the extent of Taliban roadblocks; some described the insurgents as a daily presence on the main highway, while others said they were a fleeting hazard.[83] Either way, Taliban pressure on the roads is undermining security. "In Gurziwan (district), the district leader can't even walk in the yard of his administration centre", a politician said. "He uses heavy convoys, or disguises, to leave the office and meet his family".[84]

Decreasing road access, at a time when NATO air evacuation for injured Afghan personnel is no longer available, has put serious pressure on the ANSF's ability to treat wounded comrades. A local police commander said, "the Norwegians sent aircraft in ten minutes to pick up our wounded, but now they're gone, so we transport our injured men by car, and they die along the way". On some occasions, the risky effort to transport the injured by road results in additional casualties from insurgent bombs and ambushes.[85]

2. Capturing territory

After years of hit-and-run attacks, the Taliban are shifting toward more ambitious efforts to overrun government outposts and hold positions in Faryab. The insurgents claim to control 90 per cent of the territory in several districts. While this is almost certainly exaggerated, their use of territorial gains in propaganda messages may indicate a renewed focus on taking ground.[86] "Taliban could capture whole districts", a young politician said; "already some schools and clinics have closed because of the fighting".[87]

The Taliban's efforts to gain territory in 2013 resulted in some of Faryab's largest battles since 2001, including an attack on police checkpoints in Qaisar district by hundreds of fighters in late April that captured several outposts and resulted in two weeks of heavy fighting. Local officials claimed to have killed 70 Taliban and scored a significant victory.[88] At one point in the fighting, however, until reinforcements arrived, the Taliban had surrounded 50 police, including the provincial police chief. An army general was wounded in the battle.[89]

[81] According to a 2012 evaluation, "because of worsened security conditions in the province, development efforts have become increasingly confined to the safer areas". "Evaluation of Norwegian Development Cooperation with Afghanistan 2001-2011: Final Report", Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) Evaluation Department, 2012; Rod Nordland, "Safety of aid workers is a concern after Afghan attacks", *The New York Times*, 27 November 2013.
[82] Crisis Group interviews, Maimana, September 2013.
[83] Crisis Group interview, former Junbish commander, Maimana, 14 September 2013.
[84] Crisis Group interview, provincial council member, Maimana, 14 September 2013.
[85] Crisis Group interview, Afghan Local Police (ALP) commander, Maimana, 14 September 2013.
[86] Voice of Jihad, op. cit. The insurgents claimed 90 per cent control in "Qaisar, Almar, Pashtunkot, Khwaja Musa, Lolash, Bandar, Daulat Abad, Shirin Tagab and Andkhoy", although some of these locations are not formal districts.
[87] Crisis Group interview, Jamiat youth wing leader, Maimana, 12 September 2013.
[88] Obaid Ali, "Moving East in the North: Transitioned Faryab and the Taleban", AAN, 17 May 2013; Qutbuddin Kohi, "Taliban vanquished in Faryab: Mohammadi", Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 May 2013.
[89] Crisis Group interview, senior police commander, Maimana, 13 September 2013. Qutbuddin Kohi, "ANA commander wounded in Faryab operation", Pajhwok Afghan News, 28 April 2013.

In June and July, Afghan forces battled for three weeks to destroy a Taliban provincial administration centre in Pashtun Kot district. The insurgents had equipped their shadow office with a formal signboard and a white Taliban flag and were using the base for raids on neighbouring areas. "We didn't have helicopters, so we went there on horseback", said a police commander.[90] A participant said the Taliban had occupied 45 villages in the district, and government forces would not have prevailed without an unusual NATO air strike.[91] In November, some 500 families reportedly fled homes as the Shakh bazaar area of Qaisar district was captured, lost, and then re-captured by insurgents. The district remains heavily contested.[92]

3. Economic sabotage

Some Taliban actions are undermining Kabul's economic plans. A new electricity network was announced in 2012, a $390-million project to extend power lines from Turkmenistan to five provinces, including Faryab.[93] Implementation slowed after insurgents blew up electrical pylons on several occasions in 2013, plunging most of the province into darkness. Local security forces responded harshly, executing suspected Taliban allegedly responsible for the sabotage.[94] The heavy presence of Taliban in western Faryab has also prevented construction crews from finishing the $2.5-billion ring road intended to circle Afghanistan. Work remains stalled in the same districts where killings and kidnappings interrupted the project in 2009.[95]

A senior Afghan provincial official asserted that Islamabad was using Taliban proxies to pursue economic goals, thwarting development of highways and pipeline routes.[96] Such conspiracy theories about Pakistani intervention are rampant across the country, yet it is doubtful that any party to the conflict has systematic plans to undermine the formal economy. Several interlocutors blamed economic pressures and reduced foreign aid for the rising insurgency, driving unemployed youth to become Taliban recruits. An ALP commander said, "reconstruction has stopped, so the youth are now joining the Taliban. It's because they're jobless".[97]

4. Cultivating local support

Officials, pro-government clerics and anti-Taliban political figures tried to erode support for the insurgency after the withdrawal of foreign troops by talking about the flawed logic of jihad, in the absence of non-Muslim soldiers in Faryab. "Now, the Taliban have no excuse to say they are fighting invaders", a politician said.[98] In an inversion of the usual Taliban rhetoric about the Afghan government being a "puppet regime", local officials describe the insurgents of being instruments of Pakistan or international terrorists. Security officials frequently claim that the local insurgents are helped by "Pakistani advisers", or members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbeki-

[90] Crisis Group interviews, Maimana, 13 September 2013.
[91] Crisis Group interview, Afghan Local Police (ALP) commander, Maimana, 14 September 2013.
[92] Qutbuddin Kohi, "Bazzar in Faryab cleared of insurgents"; "7 killed as militants storm Qaisar bazaar"; "10 killed as Faryab fighting continues" Pajhwok Afghan News, 18, 19, 21 November 2013.
[93] "Power network being established in Jawzjan", Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 April 2012.
[94] Crisis Group interview, senior Jubish provincial official, Maimana, 11 September 2013.
[95] Crisis Group interviews, Maimana, September 2013. Peter Wonacott, "Afghan road project shows bumps in drive for stability", *The Wall Street Journal*, 17 August 2009.
[96] Crisis Group interview, Maimana, 12 September 2013.
[97] Crisis Group interview, Maimana, 14 September 2013.
[98] Crisis Group interview, senior Jamiat politician, Maimana, 14 September 2013.

stan (IMU).[99] To counter this and respond to the post-NATO environment, the Taliban emphasise the local nature of their movement in Faryab. The Taliban's shadow governor's statement on a propaganda site said:

> These staunch enemies of Islam and the masses are propagating that foreign militants are fighting inside Faryab and other provinces of the north, but the people of this province observe with their own eyes that mujahidin [Taliban] are their own sons and brothers.[100]

When the former Taliban shadow governor, Mawlawi Yar Mohammed, was killed in 2012, the Quetta *shura* appointed a local insurgent from Almar district of Faryab province, Qari Salahuddin, as his replacement.[101] He took steps to expand his support beyond the Taliban's traditional ethnic Pashtun base, replacing the Pashtun shadow governor in Almar district with an Uzbek commander and making a similar switch with the chief Taliban judge in the district. A religious leader said, "the Taliban are trying hard to recruit the Uzbeks, so they can show they are not only Pashtuns".[102] The Taliban have claimed to have reached out to non-Pashtun communities since at least 1994, but such efforts have historically met with limited success.[103]

D. *Prospects for 2014 and 2015*

The history of Taliban advances through Faryab in the 1990s weighs on the local imagination; many worry that the insurgents will try to repeat those gains in 2014 or 2015, using the province as a point of entry to the northern region. "Faryab is the doorway to the north", a Jamiat leader said. "If this province falls, the entire north will fall".[104] Yet, most senior provincial officials believed that the Afghan security forces, provided that they continued to receive international support, would be able to withstand the insurgency.[105] Even if the Taliban continued to gain in peripheral areas, locals in 2013 did not perceive it as a threat to the survival of the government. Many local officials were confident Kabul would sign the BSA with the U.S. and the SOFA with NATO, allowing Germany to make good on its promise to leave 600-800 troops in Mazar-e-Sharif after 2014.[106] "The situation will get a little worse, but we will still have German troops nearby", an aid worker said.[107]

Predictions were frequently more pessimistic among front-line commanders. An ALP commander admitted that he is considering giving up. "Right now I'm buying bullets for my men with my own money", he said. "We borrow money for food. During one operation I led more than 100 men on horseback into battle. I will leave the

[99] Crisis Group interviews, Maimana, September 2013.
[100] Qari Salahuddin, op. cit.
[101] Qari Salahuddin's qualifications included having been captured twice by pro-government forces and bribed his way to freedom. Qutbuddin Kohi, "Taliban's governor among 31 rebels killed", Pajhwok Afghan News, 24 October 2012.
[102] Crisis Group interview, senior cleric, Maimana, 16 September 2013.
[103] In Faryab, the Taliban started making efforts to establish non-Pashtun groups in 2007. Antonio Giustozzi, Christoph Reuter, "The Northern Front: The Afghan insurgency spreading beyond the Pashtuns", AAN briefing paper, June 2010, p. 3.
[104] Crisis Group interview, senior Jamiat provincial leader, Maimana, 11 September 2013.
[105] Crisis Group interview, provincial council member, Maimana, 14 September 2013.
[106] Matthias Gebauer, "After ISAF: Germany commits troops for post-2014 mission", *Der Spiegel*, 19 April 2013.
[107] Crisis Group interview, head of provincial aid agency office, Maimana, 11 September 2013.

country if we don't get better support. Otherwise, I will be killed". Such concerns are rarely reflected in media reports. Local journalists often defer to provincial leaders, who say it is their responsibility to calm the "irrational fears" created by foreign troop withdrawals.[108] Privately, however, mid-level officials say this tendency toward positive thinking can make it hard to discern the real situation in embattled districts.[109]

1. Pashtun alienation

Even in the absence of reliable information about the Taliban's progress in the districts, some observers in the provincial capital believe that the conflict could increase in coming years, in part, because long-standing tensions between Pashtun villagers and the provincial government have yet to be resolved. Since 2001, the Pashtun minority has seen comparatively less development in their villages under the Uzbek-dominated provincial government.[110] More than 60 per cent of Pashtun villages lack roads, running water and electricity – more than twice the provincial average.[111] This reinforces dissatisfaction. Donors have tried to distribute assistance more fairly but have been thwarted by local powerbrokers. There is a risk that these imbalances will be exacerbated by the decreasing international presence in the years ahead.[112] The Uzbeks and Tajiks who control the provincial government seem unprepared for meaningful political outreach to the Pashtuns. Scoffing at the idea, a political party official said, "it's the Pashtuns who created problems from the beginning".[113]

2. Feuds between pro-government actors

Relations between pro-government forces in Faryab will play a major role in shaping the conflict's direction. While many locals feel Pashtun alienation is intractable, relations between the Jamiat and Junbish militias hold the potential for significant change, for better or worse. Bellicose words occasionally spilled over into shooting in 2013. Commanders were reported to be distributing weapons and ammunition to followers as a hedge against instability after NATO withdrawals.[114] Militia commanders were outspoken about the dangers: "The Taliban will take advantage of the internal fights among us, and could capture some districts".[115] The onset of the 2014-2015 elections intensified competition among pro-government militias. A politician said armed control of a village usually meant ownership of its votes, which have a market value in a corrupt voting system. "Part of the reason why militia commanders fight each other to control more territory is because they want to control more votes for the elections. They can sell these votes for a good price. We blame the Taliban for the violence but in many cases we're fighting each other".[116]

That pattern continued on election day. In Gurziwan district, supporters of a presidential and provincial council ticket reportedly instigated a skirmish that kept

[108] Crisis Group interviews, Maimana, September 2013.
[109] Crisis Group interview, provincial council member, Maimana, 16 September 2013.
[110] Faryab's provincial council consists of thirteen Uzbeks, two Tajiks and no Pashtuns. Crisis Group interviews, Maimana, September 2013.
[111] Elin Marthinussen, David Nordli, "A new beginning – the Faryab survey in post-ISAF climate (Wave 7)", Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 27 June 2013.
[112] Crisis Group interviews, Maimana, September 2013. Also Ulriksen, op. cit.
[113] Crisis Group interview, senior provincial official for Jamiat, 11 September 2013.
[114] Crisis Group interviews, Maimana, September 2013.
[115] Crisis Group interview, Jamiat militia commander, Maimana, 14 September 2013.
[116] Crisis Group interview, provincial council member, Maimana, 16 September 2013.

voters and observers away from a polling centre, enabling ballot-stuffing.[117] Security concerns prompted closure of 12 per cent of Faryab's 203 polling centres on 5 April, the fourth-highest percentage nationally.[118] Still, electoral-season violence was not seen as a fundamental threat to stability.[119] Many local powerbrokers appeared to take cues from national politics, which so far shows no inclination on the part of presidential campaigns to systematically target each other.[120]

Faryab powerbrokers seemed to view the elections as less of a hurdle to stabilisation than the early years of the new presidency. Whoever is elected, they said, will need to find ways to distribute patronage without alienating factions now supporting the government. A party official said, "everything depends on the future leader, and whether he shares power among the tribes and ethnicities".[121] The post-election period will determine the extent to which jockeying for power either provides insurgents with or deprives them of opportunities to benefit from internal divisions.

[117] Crisis Group interview, Afghan election observer (by telephone), Maimana, 10 April 2014.
[118] Crisis Group interview, Western election observer, Kabul, 14 April 2014.
[119] Crisis Group interviews, Maimana, September 2013; telephone interview, April 2014.
[120] Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Kabul, 9 April 2014.
[121] Crisis Group interview, senior provincial official for Junbish, Maimana, 11 September 2013.

IV. Case Study: Kunar Province

The withdrawal of U.S. troops from Kunar's outlying districts in 2012-2013 has brought a measure of calm to some of the war's most iconic battlefields but not reduced the overall number of insurgent attacks in the province. The conflict has shifted to new locations, generally from the highlands to the settled valleys, where Afghan forces have patrols and outposts. Government forces struggle to clear insurgent blocks on the main road to Nuristan, and several district centres are besieged. The provincial capital, Asadabad, seems likely to stand, so long as pro-government forces hold the highway to Kabul, which has not been seriously challenged. Many provincial interlocutors expect the 2014-2015 balance of power to depend on the unity of pro- and anti-government forces, both of which lack cohesiveness.

A. *History of Conflict*

1. Civil wars, 1980s and 1990s

Arguably the first serious battles of what was to become an anti-Soviet jihad started in Kunar, when militias began to fight the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in 1978, opposed to its modernisation policies. The first reports of Arab fighters also emerged from Kunar. When Moscow decided to start withdrawing troops in 1988, its garrison at Asadabad was among the first to shut down, allowing rebels to capture the provincial capital.[122]

No single force controlled Kunar in the dozen following years; anti-Soviet parties fought each other, and for a short period Arab-funded groups gained the upper hand. Hizb-e Islami-Gulbuddin (HIG), led by Hekmatyar, emerged as the strongest mujahidin party in Kunar. His and many other mujahidin factions were forced to flee when the Taliban conquered most of the area in 1996.[123]

2. U.S. invasion and surges, 2001-2012

Resistance to U.S. forces started soon after their arrival in 2001. As early as 2002-2003, insurgents operated fairly freely, modelling their response to the U.S. intervention, by some accounts, on their resistance to Soviet occupation.[124] Conflict was also fuelled by local strongmen vying for government positions and profitable alliances with the U.S. or the insurgency and by the insurgents' access to nearby safe havens in Pakistan.[125] The U.S. military steadily increased its troop concentration in the province, and by 2008 it was estimated that the Korengal Valley accounted for one fifth of all battles in the country. U.S. commanders faced resistance from a variety

[122] Barnett Rubin, "Arab Islamists in Afghanistan", in John Esposito (ed.), *Political Islam: Revolution, Radicalism, or Reform?* (London, 1997); Lester Grau, "Breaking Contact Without Leaving Chaos: The Soviet Withdrawal From Afghanistan", *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2 (2007).
[123] Ludwig Adamec, *Historical Dictionary of Afghanistan*, (Oxford, 2003) p. 227. Also, "Afghan Taliban recapture northern town: FM", Agence France-Presse, 10 May 2001.
[124] Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan 2002-2007* (New York, 2008); Brian Glyn Williams, "Afghanistan's Heart of Darkness: Fighting the Taliban in Kunar Province", *CTC Sentinel*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2008.
[125] Crisis Group correspondence with Taliban expert, 11 February 2014.

of armed groups that inflicted some of the worst one-day losses on their forces.[126] Violence increased as U.S. troops surged into the province, roughly doubling from 2008 to 2010 and remaining at those high levels in 2011-2012. "When more Americans came, we had more fighting. It was like this everywhere", a senior provincial official said. "They made a lot of mistakes, killing the wrong people by accident".[127]

3. Security transition, 2012

Kunar entered the transition in May 2012, when Afghan forces started to take lead responsibility in four relatively stable districts along the main highway to Asadabad. The remaining districts started the process in June 2013.[128] U.S. Special Forces were still in the province in 2013, but several bases in outlying districts shut down or were handed over to Afghan forces between 2011 and 2013.[129] The province is now primarily defended by eight *kandaks* (battalions) of the Afghan National Army (ANA), three of the Afghan National Border Police (ANBP) and one from the main intelligence agency, the National Directorate of Security (NDS).[130] The NDS unit, known locally as the "0-4 brigade", consists of 250 men trained by U.S. Special Forces; its zone of responsibility includes the southern districts of Nuristan province.[131] The ANP have 1,200 men in Kunar; roughly 500 ALP have been raised in seven districts, mostly along the border and main highway, since 2010.[132]

Despite the increase in ANSF numbers, local forces stopped patrolling some dangerous locations after U.S. troops departed.[133] For instance, after the Americans pulled out of the Korengal Valley in 2010 and the connected Pech Valley in 2011, the Afghan army was reluctant to enter the Korengal. Some officials reportedly said Afghan forces had struck an informal deal with insurgents, allowing safe havens in Korengal in exchange for a respite in attacks in Pech.[134] Violence fell significantly from 2010 to 2013 in Pech district[135] (which includes the Korengal Valley), with attacks dropping to one third their previous levels.[136] Afghan forces said they were not equipped to fight in these remote places, particularly because they lacked air power. "The U.S. abandoned the Korengal with no plan", a tribal leader said; "they just left.

[126] Sebastian Junger, "Into the valley of death", *Vanity Fair*, January 2008; Michael Moore, James Fussell, "Kunar and Nuristan: Rethinking U.S. Counterinsurgency Operations", Institute for the Study of War, July 2009; and Williams, op. cit.
[127] Crisis Group interview, Maimana,26 August 2013.
[128] "Inteqal: Transition to Afghan Lead", NATO, undated.
[129] The number of military surveillance balloons watching the approaches to Asadabad fell from three to one in 2013. Crisis Group interview, senior politician, Asadabad, 22 August; Crisis Group interviews and observations, Asadabad, August 2013.
[130] A *kandak* usually has 500-600 soldiers. Crisis Group interview, senior security official, Asadabad, 24 August 2013.
[131] Crisis Group interview, senior police commander, Asadabad, 25 August 2013. A spokesman for President Karzai described the 0-4 as being "run by the C.I.A". Rod Nordland, "After airstrike, Afghan points to C.I.A. and secret militias", T*he New York Times*, 18 April 2013.
[132] Crisis Group interview, senior security official, Asadabad, 27 August 2013; "Report on Progress", November 2013, op. cit.; Crisis Group interview, tribal leader, Asadabad, 23 August 2013.
[133] Crisis Group interviews, Afghan security officials, Asasdabad, August 2013.
[134] Azam Ahmed, "U.S. soldiers find surprise on returning to Afghan valley: Peace", *The New York Times*, 30 August 2013; Azam Ahmed, Taimoor Shah, "Local turf-sharing accord with the Taliban raises alarm in Afghanistan", *The New York Times*, 18 December 2013.
[135] Confusion exists over administrative boundaries, as some sources indicate that Pech district has been renamed after its central town, Manogai.
[136] Crisis Group interviews, Western security analysts, Kabul, November, December 2013.

How can we secure those valleys without their technology?"[137] The withdrawals resulted in the transfer of several parts of the province to the insurgency, although accounts varied about the extent of government control.[138]

B. *Directions of Conflict in 2013*

Kunar remained the fifth-most violent province in 2013, with insurgent attacks averaging three or four per day. However, their locations changed considerably; violence decreased in Pech, Watapur, and Naray districts.[139] Nevertheless, government access to those districts dropped, as security forces cut back on patrols.[140] After the 2012 closure of the U.S base in Naray district, the insurgents scored a clear victory against the Afghan military by overrunning an outpost in April 2013, killing thirteen soldiers.[141] Afghan forces reasserted their presence in the district over the following months, but government officials said they had cancelled some development work there and required helicopters to reach the district centre.[142] The 2013 fighting season also resulted in greater pressure on Asadabad from the east, as violence almost tripled in neighbouring Marawarah district. Similar escalation happened in Dangam district, where violence more than doubled from 2011 to 2013.[143]

Perhaps the most serious challenges emerged in Chappa Dara district, next to the Pech Valley and the gateway to Nuristan province. Insurgent attacks in Chappa Dara climbed roughly 70 per cent in 2013, as compared with 2012. The pattern shifted from insurgents lobbing mortars or launching other indirect attacks at a safe distance to mostly close-range hits on the district administration centre. "They're getting really close to the district centre and engaging directly with Kalashnikovs and rocket-propelled grenades", said a Western security analyst.[144] Local officials reported that Chappa Dara spent most of the year under siege, supplied by helicopters, and with no road access to Nuristan or Asadabad.[145] An Afghan military operation in December 2013 reopened the route, but it was unclear for how long. Election authorities reported that hundreds of ballots were cast in Chappa Dara during the 5 April elections, despite attacks on polling stations.[146]

The government intended to keep 70 police in nine Chappa Dara outposts, though a local official said only twenty officers remained in the district in summer 2013, holed up in the central administration building and incapable even of returning to the provincial capital to collect salaries.[147] Others described local tribes in Chappa

[137] Crisis Group interview, Mohmand tribal leader, Asadabad, 23 August 2013.
[138] Crisis Group interview, 0-4 brigade officer, Asadabad, 27 August 2013; Crisis Group interviews, Asadabad, August 2013.
[139] Crisis Group interviews, Western security analysts, Kabul, November, December 2013.
[140] An Afghan intelligence official claimed that departure of foreign troops allowed insurgents to build weapons arsenals in caves in the Korengal and Pech Valleys; this could not be confirmed.
[141] Rod Nordland, Azam Ahmed, "Taliban attack highly regarded Afghan army unit", *The New York Times*, 12 April 2013.
[142] Crisis Group interview, tribal leader, Asadabad, 23 August 2013.
[143] Crisis Group interviews, Western security analysts, November and December 2013.
[144] Crisis Group interview, December 2013.
[145] Crisis Group interview, tribal leader, Pech district, 23 August 2013.
[146] "Results by Polling Stations", IEC (online), April 2014; Hyder Akbar, "An Afghan American votes amid missile and other insurgent attacks", *The Washington Post*, 5 April 2014.
[147] Crisis Group interviews, senior police commander, Asadabad, 25 August 2013; district leader, Asadabad, 26 August 2013.

Dara turning against the government after previously helping the police smuggle food and other supplies through Taliban checkpoints. "After they stopped delivering food, the government had problems", a provincial official said; "this was the result of the quiet in Pech; we had more war in Chappa Darra".[148] An ex-police commander blamed missteps by U.S. forces in Chappa Dara, saying the insecurity was not a result of lax Afghan patrolling in neighbouring areas but the product of long-festering grudges about the way U.S. soldiers had arrested and killed people in previous years. "Now the people who were wronged in Kunar are taking revenge".[149]

C. *Insurgent Strategies*

1. Disrupting road access

The siege of Chappa Dara district was the most dramatic example of the widespread insurgent strategy of cutting off road access. In mountainous areas, roadblocks had serious effects on the supply of staple goods, because few alternative routes exist to reach remote valleys. As a result, the wheat price in one district rose 250 per cent in mid-2013 over the usual price in neighbouring Nuristan.[150] Truck drivers who ran supplies to government-held enclaves risked being kidnapped for ransom or losing their vehicle to the insurgency.[151] While such tactics might be expected to make the insurgency unpopular with poor, hungry villagers, starvation could prove an effective tool of coercion. A former police commander commented: "Cutting the food supply is political. When you make people hungry, they can be persuaded to join you".[152]

As with other parts of Afghanistan, lack of road access was disastrous for the government's ability to evacuate wounded men. A politician in Asadabad spoke with bitter frustration about the eight-month blockade of his district administration centre in the Pech Valley that prevented him from transporting a wounded police commander to the nearest clinic, only 50 km away, in August. "It took three days for the military to send a helicopter. Our police commander died because he was without treatment. He was calling me, minute by minute. The district police chief was calling me, begging. I couldn't do anything".[153]

Several local interlocutors said they recognised the insurgents' strategy from their days fighting the Soviets in the 1980s, when they captured the provincial capital by isolating the main garrisons. "We fought using the same plans against the Soviets", a tribal leader said. "Next they can cut the highway to Asadabad and capture the town".[154] There was, however, no sign that the insurgents had the capacity to surround Asadabad, since Afghan forces controlled the hills outside the town from heavily-defended positions.

There has not been any large-scale evacuation by the Kunar population, as occurred in the 1980s. Moreover, in 2013, violence declined in two of three districts along the highway from Asadabad to the south-western edge of the province, leading

[148] Crisis Group interview, provincial peace council official, Asadabad, 22 August 2013.
[149] Crisis Group interview, 24 August 2013.
[150] Crisis Group interview, tribal leader, Pech district, Asadabad, 23 August 2013.
[151] Crisis Group interview, tribal leader, Ghaziabad district, Asadabad, 26 August 2013.
[152] Crisis Group interview, Asadabad, 24 August 2013.
[153] Crisis Group interview, Asadabad, 22 August 2013.
[154] Crisis Group interview, tribal leader Pech district, Asadabad, 23 August 2013.

to Jalalabad, Nangarhar province's capital, suggesting that the insurgents were not significantly challenging the regular presence of Afghan forces on that road.[155]

2. Unifying insurgent groups

The Taliban, the largest group of insurgents in the province, has a long-standing feud with the second-largest insurgent force, Hekmatyar's Hizb-e Islami. With their bitter history dating back to the Taliban's 1996 capture of Asadabad, they rarely cooperate in attacks against common enemies.[156] The Hizb militia also differs with the Taliban about strategy, preferring to target foreign troops rather than the Afghan army that Hekmatyar still hopes to command someday. "Killing the Afghan soldiers is not good", a senior Hizb official said. "It's like cutting off your own right hand".[157] The rivalry has occasionally resulted in violent confrontation, as in Shigal district in 2011, and they regularly inform Afghan security forces about the other's positions.[158]

The Taliban also have a history of intermittent confrontation with Salafi groups it fought in the 1990s and that have remained comparatively neutral in the first years of the current insurgency.[159] Local sources indicated that the Taliban had made peace with the Salafis. A Taliban press release in January 2010 claimed the Salafis had sworn allegiance to Mullah Omar and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.[160]

Afghan officials believe that the Taliban continue working to bring other groups more solidly under the leadership of Qasim Noor Sabri, its shadow governor for Kunar, and his deputy, Maulvi Nazir Mohammed.[161] According to security officials, some 300 insurgent networks operate in the province (including many based in Pakistan), with a rough estimated membership of at least 5,400 fighters.[162] Several local sources indicated that the Taliban has recently succeeded in asserting its leadership over this assortment of groups. Yet, the feud with Hekmatyar means the insurgency still lacks the power to overwhelm the provincial capital. "All of them follow orders from the Taliban, except Hekmatyar", a local official said; "if they were unified, our problems would be much bigger".[163]

[155] Crisis Group interviews, Afghan security officials, Asadabad, August 2013.
[156] Crisis Group interview, provincial peace council official, Asadabad, 22 August 2013.
[157] Crisis Group telephone interview, 26 August 2013.
[158] Crisis Group interview, provincial peace council official, Asadabad, 22 August 2013.
[159] Thomas Ruttig, "On Kunar's Salafi Insurgents", AAN, 14 January 2010. Local residents appear to use "Salafis" as a shorthand for all of the Salafi groups.
[160] Ibid. Crisis Group interview, provincial peace council official, Asadabad, 22 August 2013.
[161] Afghan security officials said that an airstrike in April killed seventeen Taliban insurgents, including the shadow Kunar provincial governor, Noor Qasim Sabri. The Taliban confirmed his death. "Taliban shadow governor among 17 killed: NDS", Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 April 2014; "Message of condolence of Leadership Council of Islamic Emirate regarding the martyrdom of two Jihadi officials", Voice of Jihad, 22 April 2014.
[162] Such estimates should be treated with caution, but they illustrate the complexity of the insurgency. Local authorities and journalists said that the most active groups include the Taliban, Hizb-e Islami Gulbuddin, the Salafi groups, al-Qaeda, and a number of Pakistani groups, including the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Jaish-e-Islami (the renamed Laskhar e Islam), Jaish-e-Mohammed and Al Badr. Arabs were reported among the insurgents. Authorities also claimed a local presence was maintained by Chechen militants and the Shia group Fedayin Islam, but both of these claims were unsubstantiated. Crisis Group interviews, Afghan officials, Asadabad, August 2013.
[163] Crisis Group interview, provincial peace council official, Asadabad, 22 August 2013.

3. Cultivating support

Security officials in Kunar, as noted earlier, acknowledged that they stopped patrolling several remote valleys as the U.S. forces pulled back; some also admitted entering into ceasefire agreements with local insurgents that resulted in fewer attacks.[164] In some districts, however, these deals appeared to be part of a divide-and-rule strategy by the insurgents that allowed them greater freedom to launch attacks, as they selectively granted immunity to some ANSF units. In Marawara district, for instance, the 2012 weekly average of fewer than two attacks rose to five in 2013.[165] The increasing violence was attributed by some local interlocutors to the Taliban's detente with a unit of 40 Afghan Border Police (ABP) stationed nearby in a former U.S. base. "They have a deal with the Taliban, splitting their rations of food and bullets with the insurgents", an elder said. "Sometimes they pretend to fight each other".[166] For members of the Afghan security forces isolated in remote outposts, the motivation to make such deals may come partly from receiving poor support from their colleagues in safer locations.[167]

Besides reaching out to its enemies, the Taliban has also made an effort to improve relations with villagers. In areas where the insurgents have recently gained control, government officials said, the reach of health and education services has in some cases improved.[168] These zones are no longer active battlefields, and the Taliban has declared that certain types of government workers should be permitted access.[169] Permission to travel often appeared tied to the particular task. A former health department worker said he could go to all districts of the province on official business, but after quitting his job, he had trouble visiting his home village.[170] Insurgents also gave permission for the work of the National Solidarity Program (NSP), a development initiative of the rural rehabilitation and development ministry. An elder said, "the Taliban has no program of their own for education and health, but they make themselves popular with the people by allowing government schools".[171]

D. *Prospects for 2014 and 2015*

1. Splits among pro-government forces

Divisions among pro-government forces appear almost as serious as some of the rivalries among the armed insurgents. Many local powerbrokers belong to a generation of former mujahidin leaders who made their reputation fighting the Soviets and remain bitterly opposed to the communists – and the communists' sons, whom they believe were recruited in large numbers into the ANSF.[172] They frequently accuse the NDS's 0-4 brigade of being dominated by ex-communists and working outside provincial government supervision, particularly after incidents of civilian casualties. When a

[164] Crisis Group interviews, Asadabad, August 2013.
[165] Crisis Group interviews, Western security analysts, Kabul, December 2013.
[166] Crisis Group interview, Mohmand tribal elder, Asadabad, 23 August 2013.
[167] Crisis Group interview, senior elected politician, Asadabad, 22 August 2013.
[168] The same pattern emerged in parts of Paktia province after the withdrawal of foreign troops. A local schoolteacher said he regularly is stopped at Taliban checkpoints but goes unharmed when he identifies himself as a teacher. Crisis Group interview, Gardez, 30 November 2013.
[169] Crisis Group interviews, provincial officials, Asadabad, August 2013.
[170] Crisis Group interview, Asadabad, 24 August 2013.
[171] Crisis Group interview, tribal elder, Pech district, Asadabad, 23 August 2013.
[172] Crisis Group interviews, Asadabad, August 2013.

shopkeeper was killed during an August operation, a senior provincial official (ex-mujahidin) blamed the 0-4: "This is a shame, because the mujahidin defeated their fathers and grandfathers during the jihad. After the U.S. troops leave, we will find a way to punish these men".[173]

Brigade officers insist they have no ideological affiliation and only follow orders from the NDS, which is part of the central government. Some animosity from pro-government factions, they suggested was a result of jealousy about their unit's modern equipment and logistics.[174] Very few of the men in uniform today would have served in the pre-1992 government, but the "communist" label is shorthand for secular versus religious tensions within pro-government forces.

2. Growing tensions with Pakistan

The Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP-Taliban Movement of Pakistan) appears to enjoy greater freedom in the province than other insurgent groups.[175] Pakistan accuses Afghanistan of giving it safe havens and says its leader, Mullah Fazalullah, runs a headquarters in Nuristan province.[176]Some locals said Kabul had decided to harbour these anti-Pakistan militants as a reaction to Pakistani sanctuary for anti-Kabul insurgents, but it is unclear whether this is official policy.[177] "You will see this problem spread more and more into Pakistan", a tribal elder said; "now the militants are coming to Afghanistan and so Afghanistan is sending them back".[178] Provincial authorities acknowledged the TTP presence but denied support and said it was an unavoidable result of some 1,200 Pakistani families arriving as refugees in recent years, fleeing military offensives at home. "These refugees have weapons and attack Pakistan outposts, and then Pakistan fires artillery and missiles into our territory," a police commander said.[179] Not all officials denied government toleration, and one named a TTP militia operating near the Pakistan border with immunity.[180]

Most locals framed insurgent violence in Kunar as Pakistan's proxy war, saying that it was trying to extend its borders to include all the territory to the south bank of the Kunar River – or, by other accounts, all Pashtun tribal areas.[181] This prompted local strongmen to chafe at orders from Kabul or suggestions from U.S. forces to avoid conducting armed operations inside Pakistan. "We must break the teeth of the Taliban inside Pakistan", a politician said.[182] Given the dwindling U.S. military presence in the province, it is reasonable to assume that 2014-2015 will be marked by

[173] Crisis Group interview, Asadabad, 26 August 2013.
[174] Crisis Group interview, Asadabad, 27 August 2013.
[175] The TTP is an umbrella organisation of predominantly Pashtun militant groups in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and FATA. Crisis Group interviews, Asadabad, August 2013.
[176] Tahir Khan, "Taliban begin consultations to respond to government talks offer", *The Express Tribune*, 31 January 2014.
[177] Several interlocutors in Gardez and Kandahar also reported that Afghan government forces tolerated, or even endorsed, the presence of anti-Pakistan militants. "For every action there is a reaction", said a tribal leader. "This is our temporary plan, harming Pakistan this way. We cannot do much. We know we cannot destroy Pakistan". Crisis Group interview, Mangal tribal leader, Gardez, 30 November 2013. See also: Matthew Rosenberg, "U.S. disrupts Afghans' tack on militants", *The New York Times*, 28 October 2013.
[178] Crisis Group interview, Asadabad, 23 August 2013.
[179] Crisis Group interview, Asadabad, 26 August 2013.
[180] Crisis Group interview, provincial peace council official, Asadabad, 22 August 2013.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Crisis Group interview, former governor, Asadabad, 26 August 2013.

increasing tensions among pro-government Afghan forces over Pakistan policy, and perhaps a rising number of border clashes between Afghan and Pakistani troops.

3. Defending Asadabad

Many people in Kunar have personal or family memories of the mujahidin capture of Asadabad in 1988 or the failed mujahidin offensive against the nearby city of Jalalabad in 1989.[183] They assess the short-term prospects of the insurgency through that historical lens. A participant in those battles, who fought the then-government as part of Hizb-e Islami, said the assault on Jalalabad failed because communist soldiers had greater motivation than today's Afghan forces and because of rebel disunity.[184] Others highlighted the PDPA military's air support, surface-to-surface missiles and heavy artillery, concluding that the Karzai government was more fragile because it lacked such weaponry.[185]

While there was considerable disagreement about the prospects for 2014-2015, most locals agreed that the war would continue and likely escalate. Many echoed the results of UN civilian casualty monitoring in the eastern region in 2013 that noted an association between the decreased presence of foreign troops and rising insurgent attacks.[186] Some tribal leaders believed that the Taliban was mustering its forces in preparation for bigger offensives and would avoid using its full strength while international troops remained in the country.[187] "We don't know what will happen in 2014 and 2015, but we imagine a bad future", an elder said.[188]

[183] Grau, op. cit. Western analysts have also examined the battles from that period for lessons. See, for example, Anne Stenersen, "Mujahidin vs. Communists: Revisiting the battles of Jalalabad and Khost", Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), February 2012.
[184] Crisis Group interview, Mohmand tribal elder, Asadabad, 23 August 2013.
[185] Crisis Group interview, provincial peace council official, Asadabad, 22 August 2013.
[186] With "the closure or transition of military bases in the eastern region, and the subsequent reduction in air and ground operations carried out by international military forces, Anti-Government Elements were observed to have greater mobility and capability to attack Afghan security forces". "Afghanistan: Mid-Year Report 2013 Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict", UNAMA, Kabul, July 2013.
[187] Crisis Group interview, tribal leader, Pech district, Asadabad, 23 August 2013.
[188] Crisis Group interview, tribal leader, Ghaziabad district, Asadabad, 26 August 2013.

V. Case Study: Paktia Province

Paktia provides a more positive view of the transition, an example of how the insurgency might subside in places no longer patrolled by foreign forces. Reduced U.S. military presence coincided with sharp reductions in violence in 2012 and 2013. The insurgents failed to significantly block traffic on roads that link the provincial capital, Gardez, with Kabul and neighbouring Khost province. While the insurgency continues, particularly in south-western districts, government forces seem capable of standing on their own, provided they stop fighting each other. It is, however, unclear to what extent improvements in Paktia's security can be replicated elsewhere, since they result partly from tribal dynamics that do not exist in many other provinces.

A. *History of Conflict*

1. Armed Resistance and Civil War

From the early days of modern Afghanistan until Sardar Daud Khan overthrew the monarchy in 1973, tribes in the Paktia area entered into agreements with Kabul that gave them a degree of autonomy in exchange for peace.[189] A local uprising started soon after the coup, and "by the end of the 1970s, the state influence did not exceed beyond the provincial capital of Gardez".[190] A rebel commander, Jalaluddin Haqqani, emerged as a significant leader in the 1980s, digging his bases into the mountains south east of Gardez and resisting major government offensives.[191] The Haqqani network is now one of the province's most prominent insurgent groups.[192]

After the collapse of the PDPA government in 1992, rebel factions in Paktia did not indulge in the internecine warfare that tore apart other areas of Afghanistan, preferring to guard their own tribal fiefdoms. "In a situation where state and government were absent, civilian life returned rather smoothly".[193] The Taliban swept into Paktia in mid-1995, before the fall of Kabul, without serious fighting, in part because major tribes acquiesced.[194]

2. U.S. intervention, 2001-2005

An uprising of local tribesmen overthrew the Taliban in November 2001.[195] U.S. forces recruited warlords in the early months after the fall of the Taliban and fought major battles, such as Operation Anaconda, south of Gardez in March 2002, in pursuit of "al-Qaeda and Taliban".[196] The insurgency was slow to take hold in Paktia, be-

[189] "Tribal Jurisdiction and Agreements: the Key to Sub-National Governance in South-Eastern Afghanistan", TLO, December 2009.
[190] Conrad Schetter, Rainer Glassner, Masood Karokhail, "Understanding Local Violence: Security Arrangements in Kandahar, Kunduz and Paktia (Afghanistan)", University of Bonn, May 2006.
[191] Lester W. Grau, Ali Ahmad Jalali, "The Campaign for the Caves: The Battles for Zhawar in the Soviet-Afghan War", *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3 (2001).
[192] Jeffrey Dressler, "The Haqqani Network: A Strategic Threat", Institute for the Study of War, March 2012.
[193] Bernt Glatzer, "Being Pashtun – Being Muslim: Concepts of Person and War in Afghanistan", *Essays on South Asian Society: Culture and Politics II* (Berlin, 1998) pp. 83-94.
[194] Michael Bhatia, Mark Sedra, *Armed Groups, Disarmament and Security in Post-War Society* (New York, 2008), p. 215.
[195] Kate Clark, "The fall of Loya Paktia and why the US preferred warlords", AAN, 24 November 2011.
[196] Kenneth Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy", Congressional Research Service, October 2013.

cause the local tribes remained loyal to Kabul, and Haqqani did not emerge as a strong anti-government figure in the initial years. "In the first years, the Taliban went peacefully to their homes", a local journalist said. However, "the U.S. Special Forces hunted them down, so they were forced into the insurgency".[197] Another account held Kabul responsible for capturing and torturing former Taliban members and hence encouraging them to resume fighting.[198]

3. NATO troop surges

ISAF took responsibility for the east, including Paktia, in October 2006, but the U.S. military, including significant numbers of U.S. Special Forces, remained the dominant force in the province. American troops built several new outposts to accommodate the rising number of soldiers, which culminated with the "surge" of an entire Army brigade in 2010.[199] As elsewhere, the surge resulted in greater violence in Paktia; insurgent attacks roughly tripled from 2009 to 2011. Some local interlocutors blamed the rising violence on anti-American preachers. "The mullahs published a *fatwa* in 2008, saying anybody who helps the foreigners should die", a journalist said; "the barbers cutting hair for soldiers were targeted".[200]

The presence of U.S. troops allowed construction to begin in 2008 on the road from Gardez to Khost. Two thirds of the work was completed by January 2011. Work on the final third started in December 2013. There were reports that security funds for the highway secretly went to the Haqqani group for protection.[201] Access to locations away from main highways remains a problem for the government. In 2009, for instance, a property developer in Gardez was appointed police chief in the remote district of Jani Khel, near the Pakistan border, but could not reach the district centre to assume his post. "For a whole year he pretended to be in Jani Khel and kept doing his business in Gardez", a civil society leader said.[202]

4. Security transition, 2012

Paktia entered the security transition in May 2012, when Karzai announced Afghan forces would take the lead in two of its eleven districts, Gardez and Ahmadabad. The latter then had the fewest security incidents in the province. Gardez was the most dangerous district, particularly due to improvised bomb attacks on the major roads outside the provincial capital, but it was growing safer.[203] The formal closure of the Gardez Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) headquarters in April 2013, ten years after it opened, resulted in the direct and indirect loss of 30,000 jobs. Yet, as the rest of Paktia's districts entered the transition in June 2013, troop withdrawals brought a

[197] Crisis Group interview, Gardez, 27 November 2013.
[198] Crisis Group interview, former election official, Gardez, 27 November 2013.
[199] Carmen Gentile, "In Afghanistan, special units do the dirty work", *USA Today*, 11 October 2011; James Warden, "Scouting the lay of the land", *Stars and Stripes*, 7 May 2009; "Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan", U.S. Department of Defense, November 2010.
[200] Crisis Group interview, Gardez, 27 November 2013.
[201] Mohammad Haroon, "Khost-Ghulam Khan road construction begins", Pajhwok Afghan News, 12 December 2013; Alissa J. Rubin, James Risen, "Costly Afghanistan road project is marred by unsavoury alliances", *The New York Times*, 1 May 2011.
[202] Crisis Group interview, Gardez, 27 November 2013.
[203] Crisis Group interviews, Western security analysts, November, December 2013.

degree of calm; violence had fallen by half in 2012. compared with 2011.[204] "Before, we had U.S. forces in every district", a senior Afghan intelligence officer said; "now the Americans have only one small base in the whole province, and violence has gone down".[205] As discussed below, some local interlocutors said the troop withdrawals calmed the situation because the Taliban lacked foreign enemies for jihad; others attributed declining violence to the province's inter- and intra-tribal stability.

B. *Direction of Conflict in 2013*

In 2013, U.S./NATO operations in the province fell to roughly one quarter the number recorded in 2011. While insurgent violence remained steady, it was significantly less intense than in the surge years, roughly equal to 2012 levels. The area surrounding Gardez city, known as Gardez district, was still the most violent part of the province in 2013, although attacks declined 25 per cent from peak levels in 2011. The road to Kabul was open for regular traffic from about 8am to 4pm, although government and NGO convoys required armed guards. Security improved significantly on the road to Khost; violent attacks fell to one tenth the number witnessed two years earlier in Shwak and Dzadran districts.[206] Afghan forces secured checkpoints on high ground along the road to Khost. While the rough terrain still allowed insurgents to mount ambushes, preventing most international aid workers from using the route, local NGOs said the trip became feasible.[207] Violence fell to less than one third previous levels in Dand Patan, near the Pakistan border, despite skirmishes between Afghan Local Police (see below) as part of a tribal feud.[208]

Ahmadabad district, previously one of the safest parts of the province, was one of the few areas where security worsened. With insurgent attacks doubling in 2013, it became the third-most violent district in Paktia. A local elder said that insurgents mounted new checkpoints on the main road, particularly at night, and intensified their campaign of assassinations against people with government connections. He suggested that the insurgency was targeting Ahmadabad because of its history of loyalty to Kabul, but it is unclear what other factors may have contributed.[209] Still, the government remained capable of resupplying all Paktia district centres by road, indicating that the insurgency had failed to block important routes.[210]

The most regular Taliban checkpoints were in Zurmat district, south west of Gardez. Pro-government forces maintained at least three outposts on the road from the provincial capital to the district centre, but officials still found it difficult to reach Zurmat and could not travel further south west into the district without an armed convoy.[211] Zurmat is the most tribally diverse of Paktia's districts, with perhaps sixteen to eighteen major Pashtun tribes. The lack of a single dominant group is locally

[204] Javed Hamim Kakar, "PRT closure left 30,000 jobless: Naeemi", Pajhwok Afghan News, 27 August 2013; Crisis Group interviews, Western security analysts, November, December 2013.
[205] Crisis Group interview, Gardez, 29 November 2013.
[206] Crisis Group interviews, Western security analysts, Kabul, November, December 2013.
[207] Crisis Group interviews, civil society leader, NGO project manager, Western expert, Gardez, November, December 2013.
[208] Crisis Group interviews, Western security analysts, Kabul, November, December 2013.
[209] Crisis Group interview, tribal leader, Ahmadabad district, Gardez, 27 November 2013.
[210] Crisis Group interview, senior Western official, Kabul, November 2013.
[211] Crisis Group interview, civil society leader, Gardez, 27 November 2013.

perceived as a reason for continued violence.[212] The district was home to Maulvi Nasrullah Mansoor, who led an especially religiously orthodox mujahidin faction in the 1980s; after his death, his faction gained prominence within the Taliban. "That's why this district has more support for the insurgency", a local elder said.[213]

Dissatisfaction of the populous Zadran tribe, which lacked political representation after Pacha Khan Zadran failed to retake the governorship and lost the 2010 election, has also contributed to instability in the southern districts.[214] For most of 2013, Paktia was without a Taliban shadow governor, which may have hurt the local insurgency's momentum.[215]

C. *Insurgent Strategies*

1. Shifting targets

The insurgency in Paktia is indicative of the challenges Taliban and other anti-government fighters will face as foreign troops depart and deprive the insurgency of international targets and thus a raison d'être for the fight. Some analysts believe that prospects for peace may improve with the Taliban "narrative of war losing credibility as foreign troops pack up".[216] This is echoed by some locals, who attribute the easing of violence in Paktia to the lack of enthusiasm for Taliban fighters among the villagers who provided them shelter, supplies and intelligence. "The local people have stopped helping them with food and information", a tribal leader said. "Ordinary people now understand this is not a jihad against foreigners, because they are only killing Afghan forces".[217]

The absence of international troops not only changes the argument for jihad, it also reduces the accidental killings, mistaken captures, bombings of civilian homes and other incidents that provoke villagers.[218] Local government officials said they started experiencing fewer disputes with villagers as the U.S. reduced operations. "Foreign troops put people in prison and local people complained, but we couldn't do anything, so the people saw us as American puppets", a senior politician said. "Now the people are starting to understand the Taliban are puppets of Pakistan".[219]

The Taliban and other insurgent groups appear to understand the challenges of motivating their fighters and allies in the post-NATO environment. Since at least 2008, mullahs in Paktia who support the insurgency have been telling their followers to focus on resisting the Afghan government and its security forces, branding them "*munafiqeen*" (religious hypocrites) and saying such local enemies are more dangerous to the faithful than the foreign invaders.[220] This message about shifting focus from infidels to betrayers of Islam is disseminated broadly and is now an important theme of insurgent propaganda. "When I travel in the districts I hear the Taliban talking", a pharmacist said. "They say we must target the *munafiqeen* first. This is their new

[212] Crisis Group interviews, tribal leader, Zurmat district, Gardez, 28 November 2013; senior Western official, Kabul, November 2013.
[213] Crisis Group interview, tribal leader, Zurmat district, Gardez, 28 November 2013.
[214] Crisis Group interview, senior Western official, Kabul, November 2013.
[215] Crisis Group telephone interview, Afghan journalist, Gardez, 30 January 2014.
[216] Osman, op. cit.
[217] Crisis Group interview, tribal leader, Zurmat district, Gardez, 28 November 2013.
[218] Crisis Group interview, Western expert, Kabul, December 2013.
[219] Crisis Group interview, Gardez, 29 November 2013.
[220] Crisis Group interview, Afghan journalist, Gardez, 1 December 2013.

strategy".[221] An official involved with the reconciliation process observed: "The new Taliban slogan is, 'First the puppets, then the infidels'".[222]

This propaganda strategy has not been consistently successful. A popular story in Paktia describes a Taliban commander who instructed his men to avoid targeting U.S. patrols and focus on killing Afghan forces, but his fighters responded by throwing down their weapons, complaining that the order was not in accordance with jihad principles.[223] Several pro-government figures in Gardez believe such discontent is an opportunity to persuade moderate insurgent factions to stop fighting. A former governor said, "nowadays the foreign troops have zero presence in the districts, so this is a good chance for the government to turn the people's minds in a positive direction".[224] The hopes were focused on local insurgents. Fighters arriving from Pakistan were generally viewed as more radical. "When the U.S. leaves, half the Taliban will quit. We can negotiate with them", a pro-government religious leader said. "The other half is coming here from across the border, and we can't stop them".[225]

However, even the most heavily indoctrinated militants are occasionally confused by the lack of U.S. targets. An Afghan intelligence official said he interrogated a failed suicide bomber who had received three-months training in Miranshah, the administrative centre of FATA's North Waziristan agency. Mullahs told him that U.S. troops were cavorting with "dancing girls" in a local park, but he saw no foreigners, only local women in burkhas. The intelligence officer nevertheless remained sceptical that such ideological issues would be enough to significantly reduce the insurgency. "From this story you can see that ordinary people don't want to fight against Muslims, but this fight will not stop completely", he said. "It will continue, because the mullahs can preach against the *munafiqeen* instead of the infidels".[226]

Indeed, opinions varied about the overall impact of NATO withdrawals on the insurgents' enthusiasm. According to a local politician, "slowly, people will abandon the fight because they are not fighting jihad anymore". By contrast, an NGO worker said, "the Taliban say they will stop fighting when the international forces withdraw, but that's a lie".[227] The easing of attacks in Paktia through the 2012 and 2013 fighting seasons may provide some indications of dwindling morale among insurgents, at least on a local basis, but the national trend of rising violence in 2013 undermines its relevance to the insurgency as a whole.

2. Waiting for the exit

Further eroding the perception that the Taliban will grow tired of fighting Afghan forces was the suspicion the insurgents were biding their time, waiting for NATO troops to withdraw before launching major attacks. A tribal leader from Zurmat said Taliban commanders in his district recently told locals that the insurgents' 2013 strategy involved maintaining a visible presence without committing their full resources. "They are just keeping the Afghan government busy now with a few attacks", he said. "They are waiting to make a big attack after 2014". A human rights worker

[221] Crisis Group interview, Gardez, 30 November 2013.
[222] Crisis Group interview, provincial peace council member, Gardez, 30 November 2013.
[223] Crisis Group interview, Afghan journalist, Gardez, 1 December 2013.
[224] Crisis Group interview, Gardez, 30 November 2013.
[225] Crisis Group interview, senior cleric, Gardez, 1 December 2013.
[226] Crisis Group interview, Gardez, 29 November 2013.
[227] Crisis Group interviews, Gardez, 29, 30 November 2013.

strongly agreed: "This is the silence before a revolution". Such fears are partly the result of Taliban propaganda that advocates a two-stage war: first, to expel foreigners; secondly, to change the government. "Now they are waiting for their second fight, a fight for power", a former governor said. "They have stopped their fighting, but only temporarily. It's like a man with a bad headache who uses painkillers – the relief is only temporary. The original reason for the fight has not disappeared".[228]

D. *Prospects for 2014 and 2015*

1. Tribes keeping the peace

Several factors stabilising Paktia are historical legacies that would be difficult to replicate elsewhere. The Jaji tribe in the border areas supplied soldiers to government armies under Afghanistan's monarchs and has continued that tradition by volunteering men for the ANSF. Similarly, the Ahmadzai tribe supplied well-educated bureaucrats to governments in Kabul ranging from King Zahir Shah's (1933-1973) to the PDPA's in the 1980s. It continues to take a favourable view of participation in the central government.[229] Tribal monopolies, or the dominance of a single tribe in some districts, combined with a long tradition of local militias, have resulted in the formation of ALP units with considerable local legitimacy. There are also strong mechanisms for addressing disciplinary issues via local elders, particularly in the eastern districts.[230] Yet, a senior Western official cautioned: "It's hard to export this model". Nor is there a guarantee that intra-tribal dynamics will remain static, with implications, noted below, for ALP discipline and local legitimacy [231]

Positive relationships between tribal leaders and the central government have become self-reinforcing in parts of Paktia, since security allows greater access to aid money. There are also fewer instances of violent competition for development projects, because of well-defined lines of tribal influence in several districts. An Afghan intelligence officer said, "the tribes became happy with us because we gave them development projects, so we get good intelligence from them".[232] Significant cuts to donor budgets in the coming years may, however, threaten the government's relationship with the tribes or result in greater rivalry for fewer resources. [233] But the tribes may also appreciate the greater autonomy that comes with reduced foreign presence. "In many places we don't need government", an elder said. "It was like this in my grandfather's time. We can fight outsiders, like we always did".[234]

[228] Crisis Group interviews, Gardez, November 2013.
[229] Crisis Group interview, senior Western official, Kabul, November 2013.
[230] Darin J. Blatt, Eric Long, Brian Mulhern, Michael Ploskunak, "Tribal Engagement in Afghanistan", *Special Warfare*, vol. 22, issue 1, January-February 2009.
[231] Crisis Group interview, Kabul, November 2013.
[232] Crisis Group interview, Gardez, 29 November 2013.
[233] The U.S. Congress, for instance, voted in January 2014 to cut development assistance by half, and politicians are sceptical about other budgets. Matthew Rosenberg, Azam Ahmed, "U.S. Aid to Afghans flows on despite misgivings of misuse", *The New York Times*, 30 January 2014; Ernesto Londoño, Karen DeYoung, "Congress cuts U.S. military and development aid for Afghanistan", *The Washington Post*, 25 January 2013.
[234] Crisis Group interview, tribal leader, Tsowkey district, Asadabad, 25 August 2013.

2. Afghan security forces and tribal feuds

While the well-structured tribal system in most districts has generally stabilised Paktia, the strong links between tribes and Afghan security forces also create a risk of fragmentation when tribal disputes occur. Violent clashes between Afghan units remain very rare. However, ALP members fought each other in November 2013 during heated battles between Jaji and Mangal tribes in Dand Patan district.[235] The district had 400 ALP on the payroll in 2012, but funding reductions in September 2013 forced the government to disarm 50, leaving 350 in the district.[236] Some of the remaining ALP, along with their government-issued white pickup trucks, were recruited by the Jaji tribe into a long-running struggle over the right to harvest pine nuts from a forest. The confrontation was limited (perhaps only three killed) and brief, with a ceasefire reached in November. Yet, it is a concern that a senior Mangal leader, acknowledging that his tribe raised several hundred armed men for the conflict, predicted further hostilities.[237]

Many people in Gardez warned that other such conflicts were simmering within the ranks of Afghan forces. A religious leader said, "don't think this is only one district; you will see this in many places". A senior politician who participated in ceasefire negotiations between the tribes said fissures between pro-government militias represent a more profound threat in coming years than the insurgency. "When the U.S. leaves, we will restart the civil war", he warned.[238] Such concerns about war between pro-government factions remain somewhat theoretical, considering the relative cohesiveness of ANSF and ALP units in 2013, but the fighting between ALP members in Paktia highlights the trouble that can emerge even in a province where the ALP is relatively well-disciplined.

3. Surviving the economic transition

The degree to which competition for resources pushes the tribes into conflict may depend on how Paktia's economy is affected by the international troop withdrawals and potential reductions in foreign aid. The province should be cushioned to some degree by the local emphasis on farming, along with modest industrial production of honey, dried fruit and other agricultural products. Nor will it lose the remittances of an estimated 30,000 workers abroad, mostly in Gulf countries.[239] Job losses after the closure of the PRT headquarters in Gardez have not had a significantly adverse effect on stability. However, more serious pressures may result from the potential reduction in the size of the Afghan security forces since many locals rely on jobs in them. "The real problem is lack of jobs", an aid worker said.[240]

On the whole, locals appear to have fewer concerns about 2014-2015 than those in other provinces.[241] Some feel more secure in the absence of disruptive U.S. operations, while others are apprehensive about the possibility of a full withdrawal. Yet,

[235] Crisis Group interviews, government and tribal leaders, Gardez, November 2013.
[236] Crisis Group interview, senior police official, Gardez, 1 December 2013.
[237] Crisis Group interviews, Gardez, 30 November 2013.
[238] Crisis Group interviews, senior cleric, 1 December 2013; senior Afghan politician, Gardez, 29 November 2013.
[239] Sahil Mangal, "Paktia residents want agriculture sector developed", Pajhwok Afghan News, 29 August 2013.
[240] Crisis Group interview, NGO project manager, Gardez, 27 November 2013.
[241] Crisis Group interview, Western security analyst, January 2014.

most believe the insurgency will have difficulty capturing major cities such as Gardez. "I think it would be impossible for them", said a tribal leader. "The Taliban misunderstand the situation now, with so many Afghan soldiers and police".[242]

[242] Crisis Group interview, tribal leader, Zurmat district, Gardez, 28 November 2013.

VI. Case Study: Kandahar Province

The escalating war in Kandahar shows the conflict's disproportionate effect on rural areas as compared with the better-protected major cities. The rapid increase in the number of ANSF has saturated Kandahar city, the provincial capital, reducing attacks in the city centre for the first time in a decade. Yet, the increasing presence of Afghan forces and their brutal tactics are breeding resentment in the countryside, leading to growing violence in the villages. While the ANSF lack neither firepower nor motivation to fight, the abusive nature of some of their operations may lead to backlash and risks undermining international support.

A. *History of Conflict*

1. Civil wars, 1980s and 1990s

The anti-Soviet jihad and subsequent civil wars empowered tribal strongmen in Kandahar, such as Gul Agha Shirzai (Barakzai); Mullah Naqibullah (Alokozai); and Ismat Muslim (Achakzai).[243] The Taliban's early beginnings have been traced to anti-Soviet fronts in the 1980s, particularly in the Panjwai Valley, west of Kandahar city; the movement then defeated or co-opted other factions in 1994. After it captured Kabul in 1996, Kandahar city became Afghanistan's de facto capital.[244]

2. U.S. intervention, 2001-2005

American forces seized Kandahar in 2001, returning power to many of the tribal factions routed or sidelined by the Taliban. With U.S. backing, Hamid Karzai, with Popalzai roots in the Kandahari village of Karz, became president. His younger half-brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, became chairman of the provincial council, while Shirzai became governor of Kandahar. Over time, a young border police commander from the Achakzai tribe, Abdul Razik, gained prominence as the most powerful security official in southern Afghanistan. Some parts of the Zirak Durrani tribal confederacy closely aligned with the Karzai government took the lion's share of foreign resources flowing into the province.[245]

After battles to remove the Taliban, the U.S. military left a single combat brigade at Kandahar airport in 2002. This was deemed sufficient for security, as un-armoured UN vehicles could drive safely to every district of the southern region in 2003 and 2004.[246] In keeping with the pattern in other provinces, "intense harassment" – killing, capturing, and torturing of ex-Taliban by local and foreign security forces – has been described as a central reason for the beginnings of the insurgency.[247]

[243] Antonio Giustozzi, Noor Ullah, "The inverted cycle: Kabul and the strongmen's competition for control over Kandahar, 2001-2006", Central Asian Survey (June 2007) vol. 26, issue 2, pp. 167-184; Anand Gopal, "The Battle For Afghanistan: Militancy and Conflict in Kandahar", New America Foundation, November 2010, p. 13.
[244] Alex Strick van Linschoten, Felix Kuehn, *An Enemy We Created* (London, 2012), p. 58. Also, Crisis Group Report, *Taliban Propaganda*, op. cit.
[245] Gopal, op. cit., and Crisis Group interviews, Kandahar, June 2013.
[246] "The United States Army in Afghanistan, Operation Enduring Freedom, October 2001-March 2002", U.S. Army Center of Military History, undated.
[247] Gopal, op. cit.

3. NATO surges, 2006-2012

Canada deployed about 2,500 troops in early 2006, which doubled the international soldiers in Kandahar as part of a NATO surge into the southern region, before ISAF formally took responsibility for the province on 31 July 2006. ISAF's southern headquarters in Kandahar, with responsibility for surrounding provinces, commanded 11,500 troops in January 2007, 17,900 in November 2008, 67,000 by December 2010 and reached an unknown peak in 2011.[248]

These increases coincided with deteriorating security. In June 2006, UN security maps showed a small area of "extreme risk" concentrated in northern Kandahar, but that designation expanded to cover almost the entire province by March 2008, except for small corridors along Highway 4 to the border and Highway 1 toward Kabul that carried the lesser designation "high risk".[249] The whole province, except for Highway 4, was assessed as "extreme risk" by October 2010.[250] The NATO surges failed to reduce the insurgency's capacity, as Taliban attacks increased 75 per cent from 2008 to 2011 in Kandahar, including a major assassination campaign in Kandahar city. By one count, more than 500 pro-government figures were gunned down from 2002 to 2012. The most high-profile, in 2011, was Ahmed Wali Karzai, whom Brigadier General Razik replaced as the preeminent strongman in the south.[251]

4. Security transition, 2012

Kandahar city and its surrounding districts started the transition to Afghan security in May 2012, in a handover of NATO control that included Daman, Dand, and Arghandab, which were relatively safer than the outlying areas. The rest of the province followed in June 2013.[252] The transition brought a sharp reduction in NATO forces, with 40,900 remaining in the south by August 2013 and withdrawals continuing. Foreign troops conducted roughly one third as many operations there in 2012 compared with 2011. Violence eased somewhat in 2012, falling perhaps 10 to 15 per cent from the previous year in Kandahar, but declines were concentrated in the early months, as an unusually cold winter made battlefields inhospitable for insurgents.[253] International forces also began to remove surveillance balloons in 2012 that provided intelligence, a move several Afghan officials lamented.[254] The provincial PRT closed in April 2013, raising unemployment concerns among provincial officials.[255]

[248] "International Security Assistance Force: ISAF Regional Commands and PRT Locations", NATO, 29 January 2007, 25 November 2008, 14 December 2010. By that point, the south had been divided into two zones: RC (South) and RC (Southwest). ISAF did not provide a breakdown of troops deployed to the south for 2011.

[249] "Afghanistan UN Security Accessibility Map", UN Department of Safety & Security (UNDSS), 20 June 2006; also "UN Programme Accessibility Map", UNDSS, 12 March 2008.

[250] Yaroslav Trofimov, "U.N. maps out Afghan security", *The Wall Street Journal*, 26 December 2010.

[251] Crisis Group interviews, Western security analysts, Kabul, November, December 2013; Kandahar, June 2013. Also, Dawood Azami, "Kandahar: Assassination capital of Afghanistan", BBC World Service, 29 October 2012. The Taliban claimed to have hired Ahmed Wali Karzai's bodyguard to kill him, but the circumstances of the assassination remain unclear.

[252] "Inteqal: Transition to Afghan Lead", op. cit. Crisis Group interviews, Western security analysts, Kabul, November, December 2013.

[253] "ISAF: Key Facts and Figures", NATO, 1 August 2013. Crisis Group interviews, Western security analysts, Kabul, November 2012-January 2013.

[254] Crisis Group interview, ALP commander, Kandahar, 24 June 2013.

[255] "Kandahar PRT exits province amid criticism", Tolo News, 14 April 2013.

Foreign troop withdrawals were accompanied by increases in Afghan forces that happened so rapidly government officials in Kandahar said they do not know the precise number of Afghan personnel now on duty. A senior official said, "in previous years we struggled to get a few dozen police for a district, and now we have several hundred".[256] The Afghan army has 19,100 troops in four provinces of the south, mostly in Kandahar, and deployed a Mobile Strike Force (MSF) brigade with armoured vehicles to Kandahar in 2013. The air force has gained the ability to conduct assaults with its Mi-17 helicopters based in the province.[257]

B. *Directions of Conflict in 2013*

Violence increased across the province in 2013, with security incidents rising to levels that exceeded even the peak years of troop surges. A relative calm was maintained within the capital, however, with shopkeepers in the city centre saying business improved as fears of conflict receded.[258] Urban violence steadily declined in 2013 to almost one third the number of incidents in 2010.[259] The zone of relative stability went beyond the city limits in some areas, including Dand district to the south (which includes Karz, President Karzai's birthplace); Daman district, which is protected by Kandahar Air Field; and Spin Boldak, General Razik's home district and the location of a heavily guarded border crossing.[260] Most of these areas had suffered relatively fewer insurgent attacks than the rest of the province for several years, and this continued in 2013. A tribal leader attributed significantly improved security in Dand to a new paved road and the growing strength of the ANSF, whose increased patrols the majority Barakzai tribe generally welcomed.[261]

Those positive trends spilled over into the notoriously dangerous Panjwai district, but not very far. Villages in eastern Panjwai, including Nakhonay, Khanjakak, and Salawat, have seen security improve. "Those were Taliban centres for five years, but now it's better", said a tribal leader.[262] Further from Kandahar city, however, the government struggled to extend its influence into the western part of the district. A senior official said that Afghan forces needed helicopters to reach outposts in western Panjwai because road travel was too dangerous.[263]

Some Western analysis ranked Panjwai as the most violent district in the country, with attacks setting new records in 2013. The worsening trend was part of a general strengthening of the insurgency west of Kandahar city. Maywand district also saw violence double and was ranked by some analysts as the fourth-worst district in the country.[264] According to local officials, the Taliban's core supporters in the farmland

[256] Crisis Group interview, Kandahar, 29 June 2013.
[257] "ISAF", op. cit.; "Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan", U.S. Department of Defense, July 2013.
[258] Crisis Group interviews, local businessmen, Kandahar, June 2013.
[259] Crisis Group interviews, Western security analysts, Kabul, November-January 2013.
[260] Crisis Group interview, former provincial official, Kandahar, 28 June 2013.
[261] Crisis Group interview, Kandahar, 25 June 2013.
[262] Crisis Group interviews, senior NATO official, Kabul, 11 January 2013; Barakzai tribal leader, Kandahar, 24 June 2013.
[263] Crisis Group interviews, Noorzai tribal leader, Kandahar, 23 June 201; senior provincial official, Kandahar, 29 June 2013. Local interlocutors said Panjwai became less dangerous in the final months of 2013 and early months of 2014, but such improvements are usually seasonal.
[264] Crisis Group interviews, Western security analysts, Kabul, December 2013.

that originally gave rise to the movement were feeling victorious as they watched foreign troops withdraw, encouraging them to attack more frequently.[265]

Zhari district was an exception to the worsening trend west of the city. Historically a hotbed of Taliban support, it became safer in 2013, with roughly one third the 2011 violence. Authorities claimed their indigenous ALP force of perhaps 400 to 600 brought security where thousands of international troops had failed.[266] However, such improvements are relative. The Taliban still had sufficient numbers to surround and almost capture a large group of police in the summer, and assassinations remained a serious threat. Yet, officials said, the situation had improved after the entire district council was dismissed and replaced with elders selected on the basis of their ability to raise armed men to fight the Taliban. "They fired the whole district council and told the elders to bring ALP officers if they wanted to join the new council", a police commander said. "This was very successful".[267] Reliance on the ALP may have paid short-term security dividends in Zhari and a few other districts. But given the ALP's abuse of power and destabilising effect in most parts of the country, efforts should be made to reduce it and ultimately phase out the controversial program.

C. *Insurgent Strategies*

1. Isolating and capturing districts

Roughly half of all insurgent attacks in Kandahar during 2013 were against targets on Highways 1 and 4, major routes connecting the province with the rest of Afghanistan and neighbouring Pakistan. However, strikes on these roads did not seriously affect the volume of regular traffic or the price of staple goods in Kandahar city.[268] Fewer attacks were recorded on minor routes, but in many places that simply meant government forces did not challenge Taliban roadblocks.

The most prominent example was the isolation of Ghorak, a small town in a district of the same name in north-western Kandahar. Police officials complained the Afghan army had failed to keep ground routes open, leaving it surrounded by insurgents.[269] According to a former Ghorak district official, the Taliban had controlled the town for three years until ousted in March 2012, when hundreds of Afghan and U.S. forces were helicoptered to the district, followed by a large convoy of military and police. The district centre was reduced to "ruins" before the forces arrived, he said. "The Taliban had their own courts, prison, governor. They were flying their white flags". Battles over the next seven months killed 23 of the 115 officers assigned to the district, and all but twenty deserted. U.S. helicopters took away the wounded and supplied bullets, food and medicine for the besieged. Shops in the government enclave ran out of basic food supplies. In June 2013, the official said, "now the U.S. is saying, 'Take care of yourselves', but without U.S. helicopters that district will fall the same day".[270]

This prediction did not prove completely accurate. After the American flights to Ghorak ended in mid-2013, less frequent trips by Afghan military helicopters re-

[265] Crisis Group interview, former provincial official, Kandahar, 28 June 2013.
[266] Crisis Group interviews, Western security analysts, November, December 2013.
[267] Crisis Group interview, Kandahar, 24 June 2013.
[268] Crisis Group interviews, Kandahar, June 2013.
[269] Crisis Group interview, senior police official, Arghandab, 27 June 2013.
[270] Crisis Group interview, 28 June 2013; also, Heath Druzin, "Wake-up call: Struggles in Kandahar show Afghan troops not ready to lead", *Stars and Stripes*, 28 March 2012.

placed them. At the end of 2013, the government controlled 22 villages in the district and the Taliban 63. Local authorities said food supply in the government-controlled area remained a problem and predicted the district would fall to the insurgency unless more regular air support resumed. Ghorak's district centre remains under government control today, but Taliban roadblocks restrict the food supply, and people in the besieged pro-government enclave say they have resorted to boiling and eating grass.[271]

Ghorak's plight has prompted some discussion in Kandahar about the value of investing substantial resources to retain government presence in far-flung districts and whether it is worth fighting for a small outpost with limited significance.[272] There are also divergent views about what the insurgents intend, with some in Kandahar seeing the Taliban's actions in Ghorak as the beginnings of its strategy for other parts of the country. A former Ghorak official said, "the Taliban want to capture all of Afghanistan, but they're starting with small places like Ghorak".[273] However, a provincial peace council member suggested that the Taliban's desire for safe enclaves inside Afghanistan may also be motivated by an uneasy relationship with its hosts in Pakistan and that allowing havens for the Taliban might provide an opening for peace negotiations.[274]

2. Exploiting grievances against security forces

The Taliban leadership remains more engaged in the day-to-day conduct of operations in Kandahar than in other provinces. A member of the governing *shura*, Hafis Majid, has played a leading role in the southern insurgency since at least 2004. He was considered one of the top three commanders of the Kandahar insurgency in 2010 and was described by some residents as the province's most important Taliban leader in early 2014.[275] He is a Noorzai tribesman from the Panjwai Valley, and a fellow Noorzai served until recently as his shadow governor for Kandahar province.[276] While the conflict in Kandahar is not a dispute between tribes, and senior government and Taliban figures alike hail from all major Pashtun tribes, the insurgency has successfully exploited the discontent among the Noorzai and other members of the Panjpai Durrani confederacy, as well as tensions with another major disenfranchised tribal confederacy, the Ghilzai. Such dynamics appear to have worsened as the ANSF grew stronger, and supervision by international forces diminished.

Serious allegations are emerging from Kandahar of abuses by Afghan security personnel, usually directed against tribal rivals. These remain largely unsubstantiated but are an important part of the anti-government narrative in the south. "One month ago, the police beat a boy to death in the Arghandab", a Ghilzai tribal leader said. "The problem is tribal. If they capture you, and you're from the wrong tribe, they can

[271] Crisis Group telephone interview, Ghorak resident, 12 April 2014.
[272] Crisis Group interview, senior police official, Arghandab, 27 June 2013.
[273] Crisis Group interview, Kandahar, 28 June 2013.
[274] Crisis Group interview, Kandahar, 25 June 2013.
[275] Carl Forsberg, "The Taliban's Campaign for Kandahar", Institute for the Study of War, December 2009, p. 22; Gopal, op. cit., p. 26. Crisis Group telephone interview, tribal elder, Kandahar, 29 January 2014.
[276] The Taliban's shadow Kandahar governor, Abdul Wasi Azzam, originally from Sperwan village of Panjwai district, was killed in an April ambush. Crisis Group interviews, current and ex-Afghan government officials, Kandahar, 21 April 2014. Also, "Message of condolence of Leadership Council of Islamic Emirate regarding the martyrdom of two Jihadi officials", Voice of Jihad, 22 April 2014. Crisis Group telephone interview, tribal elder, Kandahar, 29 January 2014.

do anything to you". Police were taking captives to the Registan desert, he said, killing them and dumping them into mass graves.[277] Villagers in the Arghandab Valley said police captured a man and slowly executed him with an electrical drill, though local officials denied this.[278] A provincial council member said prisoners were disappearing from jails, and families worried they were killed.[279] A former provincial official said police were forcing villagers to hand over their daughters to become wives for officers and abducting boys for sexual exploitation.[280]

ANP and ALP commanders denied such allegations but were unapologetic about some harsh tactics, saying they needed to take a tough approach because the Taliban did not follow the rules of war.[281] An ALP officer said he felt outraged after his men discovered a cache of explosives and captured a bomb-maker, but instead of being praised by provincial authorities, they were criticized for beating the suspect. "Of course we beat him", the officer said; "this is a war". In other places, commanders have tried to reduce abuses; Arghandab authorities say they fired perhaps 50 of the district's 400 ALP because they were "harassing and beating people".[282] Attempting to justify police abuse, a senior police official said some predatory behaviour was a result of economic necessity, because salaries do not arrive from Kabul. Yet, the heavy-handed nature of policing in Kandahar risks provoking a broader uprising. "Look at Kandahar, and the way the police are killing Noorzais", a veteran politician said. "Someday the tribes will get together to oppose them".[283]

D. *Prospects for 2014 and 2015*

1. Economic concerns

Notwithstanding pressing security issues in Kandahar, several local interlocutors said the most urgent requirement in 2014-2015, and indeed the most pressing challenge for Karzai's successor, will be to provide economic support. A senior police official said that unemployment was a serious threat to security, with perhaps 200,000 jobless men threatening the province's stability – many of them drivers, guards and road builders who previously worked on aid projects. "These young men will become thieves and insurgents, and my forces must fight them".[284]

Local officials fear donor money is running out for the diesel generators that supply much of Kandahar's electricity. The U.S. military plans to pay for fuel through the Afghanistan Infrastructure Fund (AIF) until the end of 2014. That subsidy may be extended, but U.S. politicians have indicated that the AIF may shrink in the com-

[277] Crisis Group interview, Sulaimankhel (Ghilzai) tribal leader, Kandahar, 28 June 2013.
[278] Crisis Group interview, senior police official, Arghandab, 27 June 2013.
[279] Crisis Group interview, Kandahar, 25 June 2013.
[280] Crisis Group interview, Kandahar, 28 June 2013. A tribal leader also complained about local police abducting boys to sexually abuse.
[281] The UN has noted a similar tendency among Afghan security personnel, warning that "an approach of 'fighting a wrong with another wrong' could result in a rapid unravelling of accountability gains made in recent years". "Afghanistan Annual Report 2013: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict", UNAMA, Kabul, February 2014.
[282] Crisis Group interviews, ALP commander, Kandahar, 24 June 2013; senior police official, Arghandab, 27 June 2013.
[283] Crisis Group interviews, senior police commander, Kandahar, 25 June 2013; former southern governor, November 2013.
[284] Crisis Group interview, Kandahar, 26 June 2013.

ing years.[285] Economic problems in Kandahar city would hurt the Taliban less than pro-government forces, officials say, because they are less reliant on legal commerce and international projects.[286] A tribal leader said, "some people are worried about a 1992 scenario, so they are sending money away from Afghanistan, mostly to Dubai".[287] The "1992 scenario", commonly mentioned by Afghans as the worst-case, refers to the civil wars that broke out then between hundreds of factions.

2. Fractured elites

Ahmed Wali Karzai's death concentrated power in the hands of the police chief, Brigadier-General Razik, reducing local competition for power and contributing to stability after years of sometimes violent struggle between strongmen.[288] The younger Karzai's empty seat at the helm of the provincial council provoked a squabble over the chairmanship, however, prompting a majority of members to boycott meetings. The council has not convened for a full session since March 2013.[289] Some politicians saw the feud as a sign of the ruling clique getting smaller in the province.[290] All the same, elites remained interested in participating in the electoral process, including by paying bigger bribes. This was interpreted positively. A politician said his colleagues were still willing to pay for seats because "they think the government will survive."[291]

3. Cross-border conflict

At least four Taliban officials were assassinated in Quetta or environs in 2013, and two others narrowly escaped.[292] The most significant assassination was in early 2014, when Maulana Abdullah Zakiri, sometimes considered the top Taliban religious scholar, was shot outside a Quetta mosque.[293] An official from Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, a pro-Taliban Pakistani Islamist party, blamed Afghan intelligence.[294] Media reports after the December 2013 killings contained accusations that senior Afghan police were involved.[295] Afghanistan's interior ministry denied involvement in such "terrorist activi-

[285] Crisis Group interview, former provincial council member, 25 June 2013."Report to the United States Congress", Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR), 30 October 2013, p. 164; John Bennett, "US House Members Vote to Cut Afghanistan Projects", *Defense News*, 24 July 2013.
[286] Crisis Group interview, senior government leader, Kandahar, 29 June 2013.
[287] Crisis Group interview, Barakzai tribal leader, Kandahar, 24 June 2013.
[288] Crisis Group interviews, Kandahar, June 2013.
[289] Crisis Group interviews, provincial council members, Kandahar, June 2013, January 2014.
[290] Crisis Group interview, former provincial council member, Kandahar, 24 June 2013.
[291] Crisis Group interview, provincial council member, Kandahar, 26 June 2013.
[292] Some attacks in Quetta have not been publicised but are believed to include the killing in January 2013 of Sheikh Maulvi Rahmatullah, from Ghazni province, who issued *fatwas* in support of the Taliban; in December 2013 of Sheikh Maulvi Abdul Salam (Noorzai), a Taliban religious leader from Kandahar who preached in Quetta; on 26 December 2013 of Noorullah Hotak, who previously served as Taliban governor of Zabul province; and on 29 December 2013 of Mullah Abdul Malik, another senior Taliban figure. Maulvi Abdul Rauf, a former Taliban shadow governor, narrowly escaped assassination at his madrasa in Chalo Bawari near Quetta in early 2013. A failed attempt targeted Maulvi Hayatullah, a Taliban religious scholar who lives in Kuchlak, near Quetta, in December 2013. Crisis Group interviews, Kandahar, January 2014.
[293] Nasim Hotak, "Taliban leader gunned down in Quetta", Pajhwok Afghan News, 29 January 2014.
[294] "Pro-Taliban Cleric Killed in Quetta", Agence France-Presse, 30 January 2014.
[295] Saeed Shah, Margherita Stancati, "Afghan Taliban suspect Kabul of targeting them in Pakistan", *The Wall Street Journal*, 6 January 2014; also, Zia Ur Rehman, "Who is killing Afghan Taliban in Pakistan?", *The Friday Times*, 24 January 2014.

ties".[296] Another prominent victim was Mullah Abdul Raqeeb, refugees and martyrs minister in the Taliban regime, in Peshawar on 17 February 2014. Reportedly part of a group supporting peace talks with Kabul,[297] he was buried by the Afghan government in his native town in Takhar province and called a victim of peace by President Karzai. His killing was variously attributed to hardline Taliban factions and Pakistani intelligence agencies.[298] Whoever is behind such assassinations, cross-border escalation of the conflict appears set to continue in 2014-2015.

[296] Mujib Mashal, "The Haqqani Silence", *The Beacon*, 27 January 2014.
[297] "Afghan Taliban leader shot dead in Peshawar," *The Express Tribune*, 17 February 2014.
[298] Karzai's deputy spokesperson said at the funeral, "we saw several green lights from those willing to start the peace negotiations process, but most of them were assassinated". This killing, he said, "is part of the coordinated murders ". Tariq Majid,"Karzai condemns killing of Taliban leader, body returned to Takhar", Tolo News, 18 February 2014.

VII. **Enablers Required**

These case studies illustrate some of the local factors driving the conflict. Turning these dynamics more clearly in favour of Kabul will require effort by the Afghan government to strengthen governance, the rule of law and anti-corruption measures. Many rural Afghans still need to be convinced that the central government will, and should, survive.

In the meantime, the international community must give Kabul the tools of survival. A recurring theme in meetings with Afghan officials was concern about ANSF shortcomings in logistics, air support, intelligence and other technical aspects of modern security operations sometimes known as "enablers". Each case study points to ANSF deficiencies and gaps, sometimes involving the most basic equipment and ammunition.

The police commanders in Faryab who described riding to battle on horses said they did so because they lacked helicopters for tactical airlift across rough terrain.[299] Kunar and Kandahar officials said the Taliban roadblock threat was rising as the scarcity of U.S. and NATO helicopters was increasing their reliance on road movement.[300] Partly as a result of supply route issues, ANSF units complained of fuel, medicine and ammunition shortages. Commanders in three provinces reported buying bullets locally with personal funds.[301] In Kunar and Kandahar, loss of surveillance balloons dismayed Afghan personnel dependent on their signals intelligence.[302] A senior Western diplomat specialising in security issues said the concerns should not be dismissed: "They still need air support, intelligence and logistics".[303]

Enablers for Afghan operations are not only a matter of day-to-day requirements; they are also necessary for the long-term struggle to maintain morale and cohesiveness among the ranks. As described above, frustrated local officials are listening on their mobile phones as colleagues die of minor wounds, unable to evacuate them because they lack air support. A study concluded that such frustrations, in the absence of U.S. and NATO enablers, could result in "increased [ANSF] desertion and defection rates and the possibility of unit fragmentation or dissolution".[304]

The same study, while not an exhaustive survey of ANSF enablers, concluded that international advisers and funding would be necessary through at least 2018 to fill gaps in the areas of mobility, air support, logistics, intelligence, communications, and specialist recruiting and training. It also raised the possibility of expanding surveillance using balloons or sensor towers; training additional maintenance and logistics personnel; expanding the Mobile Strike Force (MSF) program; and improving countermeasures for disposal of roadside bombs.[305]

[299] Crisis Group interviews, Maimana, September 2013.
[300] Crisis Group interviews, district officials, Asadabad, Kandahar, 2013.
[301] Crisis Group interviews, police officials, Maimana, Asadabad, Kandahar, 2013.
[302] Crisis Group interviews, Kunar, Kandahar, 2013.
[303] Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 27 April 2014.
[304] "Independent Assessment of the Afghan National Security Forces", op. cit.
[305] Ibid.

VIII. **Conclusion**

As the above four case studies show, the job of fighting insurgents weighs more heavily than ever on Afghanistan's security forces. National measurements of the escalating numbers of incidents do not capture the gravity of the problem in the districts. Insurgents continue to enjoy sanctuary in Pakistan, negotiations offer little hope of de-escalating the conflict in 2014-2015, and splinter groups are eager to gain attention with spectacular attacks. The relatively successful April 2014 election is no guarantee of future stability, with the Taliban rejecting the process and its outcome as a U.S.-engineered sham: "It [the U.S.] will install a head of state who appears to be an Afghan but will have American mentality, vision, deeds, creed and ideals while openly in conflict with the clear teachings of the sacred religion of Islam".[306]

Some analysts have predicted that the Taliban will lose enthusiasm for the war after international forces withdraw. Paktia is an example of a place where such dynamics may be unfolding within the insurgency, but most locations examined in this report indicate a trend of worsening security as foreign troops depart. Such deterioration has often been a result of the ways the local power balance changed after 2001, and a new round of score-settling seems likely in the post-2014 environment. In Faryab, for example, ethnic tensions, with roots dating back at least to the 1700s, were aggravated by the post-2001 Uzbek dominance of the local government and security forces and resulting alienation of the Pashtun minority. It is reasonable to expect those tensions will contribute to a growing conflict, as insurgent groups continue to cut off roads and capture territory in outlying areas. Similarly, tribal rivalries in Kandahar seem poised to continue fuelling rising violence, as the insurgency exploits the grievances of a rural population that increasingly complains of abuse, torture and extra-judicial killings by security forces.

The animosity between Afghanistan and Pakistan also seems likely to drive the conflict forward, especially in border provinces such as Kandahar and Kunar, where insurgents enjoy access to safe havens, and where Afghan officials may be tempted to retaliate in kind, with direct actions against insurgents inside Pakistan or by supporting anti-Pakistan militant groups.

Continued escalation would put district administration centres at risk of capture by insurgents. Some of the most vulnerable locations, such as Ghorak district in Kandahar province, may be deemed strategically insignificant, but losing other districts – such as Chappa Dara in Kunar province – to the insurgency would choke off important supply routes.

Afghan elites sometimes appear unwilling to speak frankly about such challenges, or to be blind to them. "We don't know why people are afraid of 2014", a politician said. "It will be just another year".[307] A majority of local officials also seemed convinced the U.S. could halt the infiltration of militants from Pakistan if sufficiently motivated to apply pressure.[308] Given that belief, the fact that insurgents still arrive from across the border gives rise to wild theories about U.S. collusion with the Tali-

[306] Taliban statement, 10 March, cited in Emma Graham-Harrison, "Taliban threaten to attack Afghan presidential elections", *The Guardian*, 10 March 2014.
[307] Crisis Group interview, provincial council member, Maimana, 14 September 2013.
[308] Karim Amini, "U.S. Must Choose Between Afghanistan or Pakistan: Spanta", Tolo News, 30 January 2014.

ban.[309] For their part, the Taliban also seem to have a poor grasp of the situation, especially with regard to their chances of conquering the country. "We will capture all of Afghanistan", an insurgent supporter said.[310]

None of the fieldwork for this report suggests those Taliban ambitions are realistic in 2014-2015. However, it is fair to expect serious battles with an emboldened insurgency. The UN has already noted the insurgents are shifting toward ground engagements, instead of bombings, calling this "a new and disturbing trend in 2013".[311] The coming years may see a continued trend toward larger groups of Taliban becoming more ambitious in their objectives. In all corners of Afghanistan, a majority of interlocutors said they expect bigger battles ahead.[312]

Some officials said they look forward to this and that the Taliban and other insurgents might negotiate a peace deal once they are convinced of the government's resilience. "If both sides have a balance of power, in the future, maybe then we can ask for negotiations and get a serious answer", a senior politician said.[313] Others believe that the "Taliban will come to the peace table eventually, when they discover the ANSF are strong, but it will take some battles before they realise this".[314] In any case, a post-election, post-transition government, provided it has broad acceptance and legitimacy, would be best placed to explore new avenues for reviving the peace talks, including through outreach to regional countries, particularly Pakistan.

Of course, government forces need to convincingly win battles in the coming years if they hope to create conditions that bring the Taliban to the negotiating table.[315] At the moment, with foreign troops withdrawing, insurgents might reasonably conclude that the balance is swinging in their favour: they killed twice as many police in 2013 as the previous year, for example.[316] According to one estimate, the number of insurgents killed and injured in 2013 was roughly 9,500, while the number of ANSF casualties was about 8,200.[317] Those figures suggest some parity in the strength of pro and anti-government forces in 2013, at least in some rural districts, ahead of further reductions of firepower on the government side in 2014-2015.

Against that backdrop, some Afghan officials are justifiably concerned about a U.S. Congressional move to halt purchase of fifteen Mi-17 helicopters with a value of $345 million in November 2013 and with no apparent plans to source substitute

[309] Kevin Sieff, "Karzai suspects U.S. is behind insurgent-style attacks, Afghan officials say", *The Washington Post*, 28 January 2014.
[310] Crisis Group telephone interview, August 2013.
[311] "Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and on the achievements of technical assistance in the field of human rights in 2013", UN Human Rights Council, 10 January 2014.
[312] Crisis Group interviews, Kabul, Kandahar, Asadabad, Gardez, Jalalabad, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, Maimana, 2013.
[313] Crisis Group interview, Maimana, 14 September 2013.
[314] Crisis Group interview, veteran politician and tribal leader in Kandahar, Barakzai tribal leader, 24 June 2013.
[315] For further reading on this theory of conflict resolution, see William Zartman, "The Timing of Peace Initiatives: Hurting Stalemates and Ripe Moments", *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, vol. 1, issue 1, September 2001, pp. 8-18.
[316] "Afghan police deaths double as foreign troops withdraw", Reuters, 2 September 2013.
[317] Crisis Group interview, Western security analyst, January 2014. A far greater portion of the insurgents' casualties were deaths, as opposed to injuries, in part because the Taliban and other insurgent groups have less capacity for evacuating wounded fighters.

capacity for the Afghan forces.[318] "We really need those helicopters", a senior Afghan politician said. "Those are the only helicopters we know how to fix properly".[319]

Helicopters are only the most visible aspect of the ANSF's need for a variety of technical capabilities. These include specialised support for medical care, logistics, intelligence and bomb disposal.[320] As of January 2014, the $1 billion Mobile Strike Force (MSF) program had fielded four 58-vehicle units, giving the Afghan army the capacity to respond quickly with armoured vehicles. Another three 58-vehicle units were expected to be deployed by January 2015; senior NATO military officials said that would help but were sceptical the program would be expanded further.[321]

Purchasing extra military hardware for Afghan security forces may also bring a sense of confidence to pro-government figures, from whose ranks more than 1,000 were assassinated in 2013, a new record for targeted killings.[322] Nearly all the local officials, tribal elders and other government supporters interviewed for this report said they did not expect insurgents to capture any provincial capitals in the short term, but they usually conditioned that on the level of donor support. Several interlocutors noted that Najibullah's PDPA government survived for several years after the withdrawal of Soviet troops in the late 1980s and early 1990s, its collapse only coming when foreign assistance dried up.[323] Others were reluctant to hazard a guess about the near future. "Afghanistan is a country where you should never make a prediction", a tribal elder said. "Anything can happen".[324]

Kabul/Brussels, 12 May 2014

[318] Warren Strobel, "Pentagon cancels plans to buy Russian helicopters", Reuters, 13 November 2013. U.S. policymakers expressed concern about buying from Russian arms dealers. Such concerns have been heightened by the Ukraine crisis. A senior NATO official said there is no substitute for the Mi-17, because the Afghans have decades of experience with repairs and maintenance of its Russian technology. Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 11 January 2014.
[319] Crisis Group interview, Gardez, 29 November 2013.
[320] Crisis Group interview, senior NATO official, Bishkek, 14 November 2013.
[321] Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 11 January 2014.
[322] Crisis Group interview, Western security analyst, Kabul, January 2014.
[323] Crisis Group interview, Zhari district landowner, Kandahar, 25 June 2013.
[324] Crisis Group interview, Sulaimankhel (Ghilzai) tribal leader, Kandahar, 28 June 2013.

Appendix A: Map of Afghanistan

Appendix B: Map of Case Study Provinces

Appendix C: Map of 2013 Fighting Season in Faryab

1. The most violent district in Faryab province, Qaisar district continues to suffer escalating conflict. Worsening security has been blamed on a stronger insurgency and undisciplined local security forces.

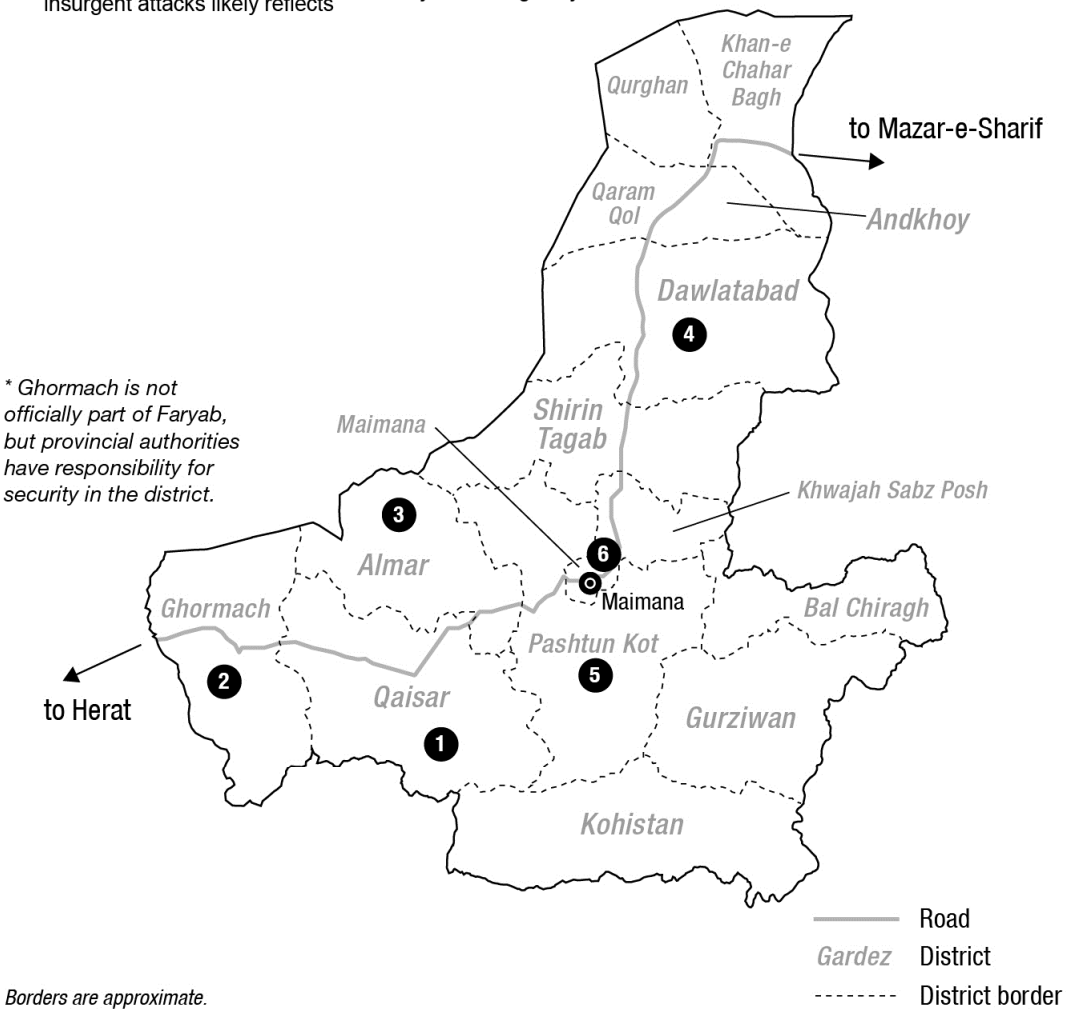
2. Ghormach district suffered fewer security incidents in 2013, but remained the second-most violent district in the province. The decrease in insurgent attacks likely reflects greater insurgent control and declining presence of security forces.

3. Security incidents tripled in Almar district over the last three years, making the district almost as violent as Ghormach.

4. Not as dangerous as the southwestern districts, Dawlatabad has still witnessed a rising number of attacks – many on the highway.

5. Violence declined somewhat in Pashtun Kot, although government forces fought intense battles to remove a Taliban provincial administration centre.

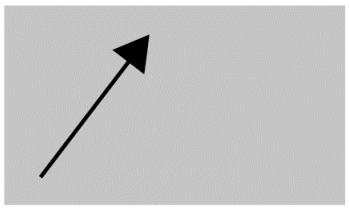
6. Security improved in Maimana after authorities took the extreme step of banning all motorbikes from the provincial capital.



** Ghormach is not officially part of Faryab, but provincial authorities have responsibility for security in the district.*

Borders are approximate.

DIRECTION OF CONFLICT: **SHARP ESCALATION**



Faryab's experience serves as a stark warning about how the situation may deteriorate in outlying provinces after the departure of foreign troops. Although hundreds of kilometres from the insurgent heartlands of the south, the Taliban has made significant gains in its western districts. Many local interlocutors feared further encroachment by the insurgency in 2014-2015.

Sources: Crisis Group interviews, Maimana and Kabul, 2013 and 2014.

Appendix D: Map of 2013 Fighting Season in Kunar

1. Insurgent attacks in Pech (also known as Manogai district) have steadily declined, and now amount to one fifth the number suffered in 2009. Afghan troops have replaced U.S. soldiers and no longer push into remote valleys with the same frequency.

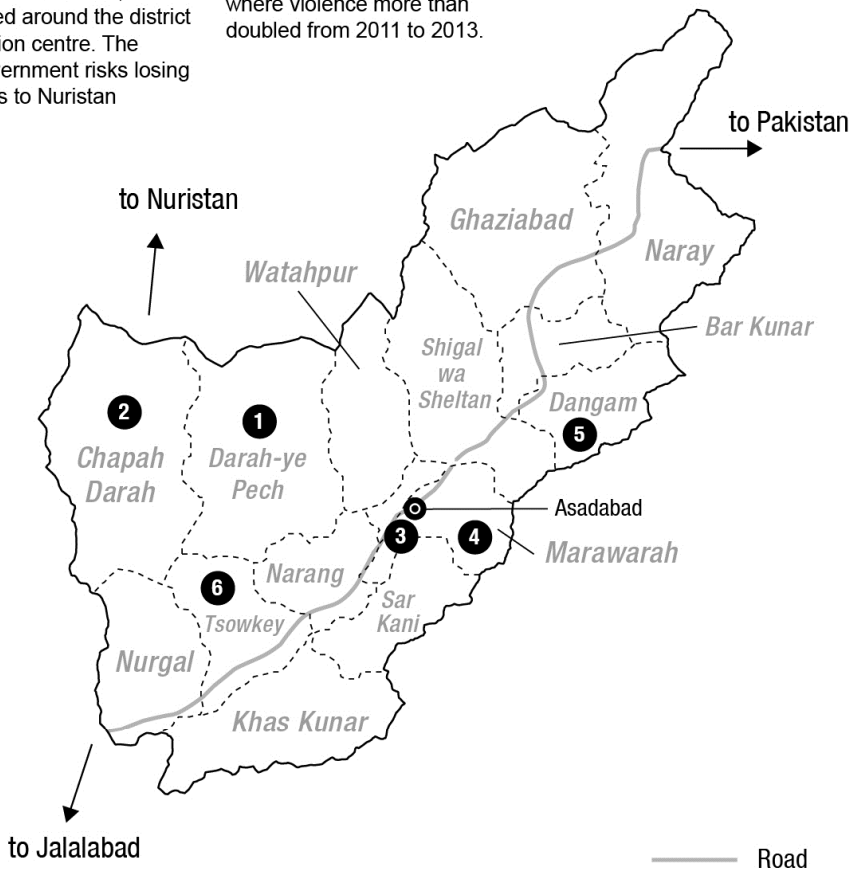
2. Further down the road in Chappa Dara, local security forces are struggling to keep the route open. Insurgent attacks doubled in 2013, concentrated around the district administration centre. The Afghan government risks losing road access to Nuristan province.

3. Attacks declined in the provincial capital, which suffered about two thirds the number of security incidents in 2013 as compared with the previous year.

4. Pressure on the provincial capital grew from the east, however, as violence more than doubled in neighbouring Marawarah district.

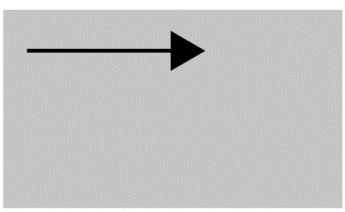
5. A similar degree of escalation has emerged in Dangam, where violence more than doubled from 2011 to 2013.

6. Fewer attacks are targeting Tsowkey and other districts along the main highway between Asadabad and Jalalabad, as compared with other parts of the province. Regular presence by Afghan forces allows travel between the major cities in daylight hours.



Borders are approximate.

DIRECTION OF CONFLICT: **INTENSE BUT NOT ESCALATING**



The withdrawal of U.S. troops from Kunar's outlying districts has brought a measure of calm to some of the war's most iconic battlefields but not reduced the overall number of insurgent attacks in the province. The conflict has shifted to new locations, generally from the highlands to the valleys. Government forces struggle to clear insurgents from the main road to Nuristan.

Sources: Crisis Group interviews, Asadabad and Kabul, 2013 and 2014.

Appendix E: Map of 2013 Fighting Season in Paktia

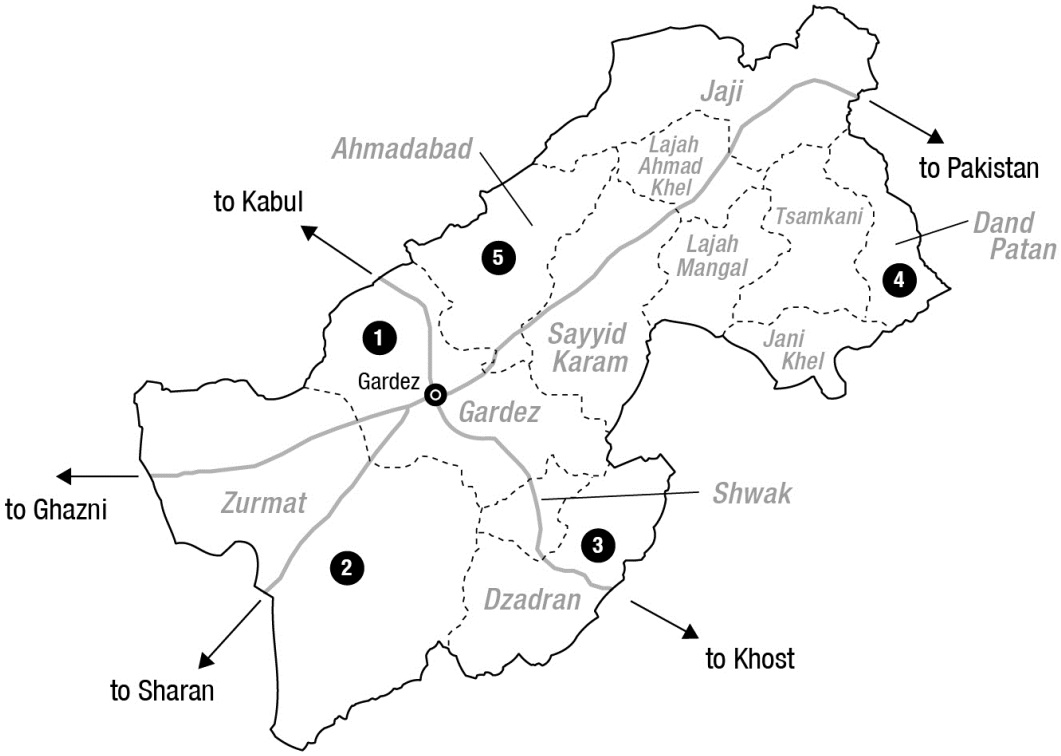
1. The district surrounding the provincial capital, Gardez, remains the most violent – largely because of highway attacks. Still, violence has declined about 25 per cent from peak levels in 2011.

2. Locals describe Zurmat as the most dangerous part of the province, with regular insurgent checkpoints on major roads. The number of security incidents in 2013 and 2012 declined to roughly one third of the heights of violence in 2011, as foreign troops decreased operations.

3. Security improved on the vital road to Khost over the last two years, as the number of violent attacks fell to one tenth previous levels in Shwak and Dzadran.

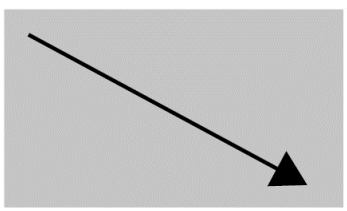
4. Violence is less than one third previous levels in Dand Patan, but tensions between tribes have embroiled Afghan Local Police into rare – but troubling – examples of internecine battles among ANSF units.

5. Insurgent attacks doubled in 2013 in Ahmadabad, which became the third-most violent district in the province.



Borders are approximate.

DIRECTION OF CONFLICT: **DECLINING**



Paktia provides a positive view of the transition, an example of how the insurgency might subside in places no longer patrolled by foreign forces. Reduced U.S. military presence coincided with sharp reductions in violence in 2012 and 2013. The insurgents failed to significantly block traffic on roads that link Gardez with Kabul and Khost. However, the insurgency continues – particularly in the southwest.

Sources: Crisis Group interviews, Gardez and Kabul, 2013 and 2014.

Appendix F: Map of 2013 Fighting Season in Kandahar

1. Violence declined within the city of Kandahar in 2012 and 2013, as pro-government forces grew stronger.

2. The conflict continues to grow in Maywand district, partly because of harsh tactics by pro-government forces.

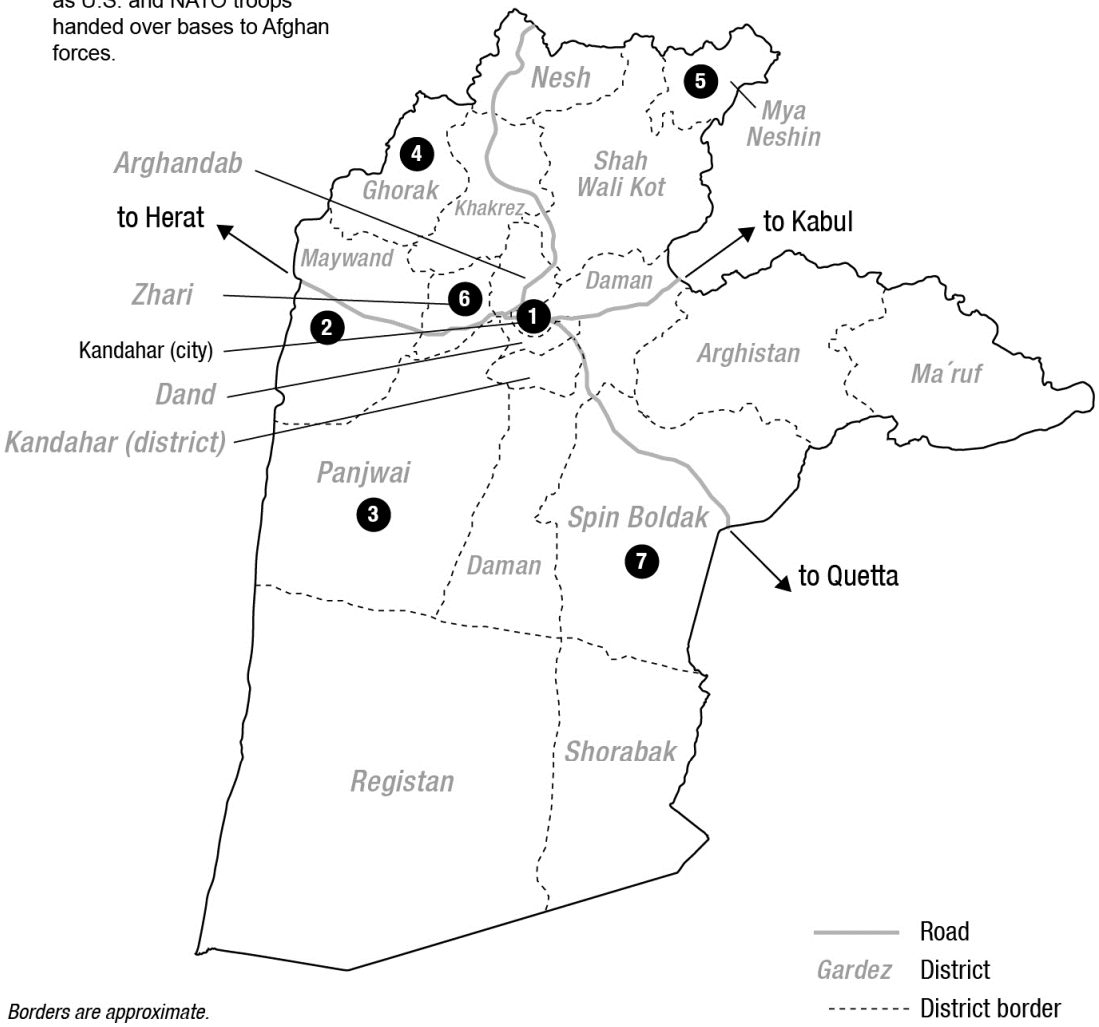
3. Violence has also escalated in Panjwa'j, although the zones of control within the district have not significantly changed as U.S. and NATO troops handed over bases to Afghan forces.

4. District administration centres such as Ghorak, difficult to reach from the provincial capital, are now more isolated and risk capture by the Taliban.

5. Escalating violence in Mya Neshin does not likely indicate greater control by the insurgency; more likely, the area is now contested.

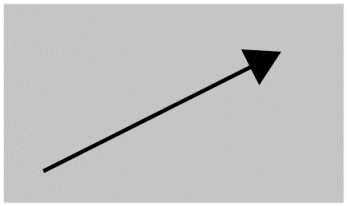
6. Insurgent attacks declined in Zhari district in 2013, as the Afghan Local Police recruited ex-Taliban and ex-tanzim factions. It's unclear whether this improvement will be sustainable.

7. The Afghan government maintains strong influence over the strategic border crossing at Spin Boldak, which continues to see fewer attacks than the districts west of Kandahar city.



Borders are approximate.

DIRECTION OF CONFLICT: **ESCALATING**



The high levels of violence in Kandahar are rising further. Afghan security personnel have saturated Kandahar's provincial capital and reduced attacks in the downtown areas for the first time in a decade; at the same time, however, the Afghan forces' brutal tactics are breeding resentment outside of the city.

Sources: Crisis Group inverviews, Kandahar and Kabul, 2013 and 2014

Appendix G: Glossary

ALP – Afghan Local Police.

ANA – Afghan National Army.

ANBP – Afghan National Border Police.

ANP – Afghan National Police.

ANSF – Afghan National Security Forces.

CIP – Critical Infrastructure Police.

CSTC-A – Combined Security Transition Command- Afghanistan.

BSA – Bilateral Security Agreement.

FATA – Federally Administered Tribal Areas, a region of Pakistan.

Haqqani network – Militant Islamist military group founded by Jalaluddin Haqqani.

Harakat-e Inqelab-e Islami – An Islamist party formed under the leadership of Mawlawi Mohammad Nabi, a Pashtun cleric, in the late 1980s.

Harakat-e Islami – One of the main Shia parties allied with the Northern Alliance to fight in the anti-Soviet jihad.

Hizb-e Islami-Gulbuddin (HIG) – One of the leading radical Islamist parties of the anti-Soviet jihad era; led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, an ethnic Pashtun from Kunduz province.

Hizb-e Islami-Khalis – A splinter group of Hizb-e Islami founded in 1979 by Mawlawi Mohammad Younus Khalis.

Hizb-e Wahdat Islami – A predominantly ethnic Hazara party founded by Abdul Ali Mazari, currently led by vice-president Karim Khalili.

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) – Militant Islamist group formerly led by the late Tahir Yaldashev.

ISAF – International Security Assistance Force.

Jamiat-e Islami – A majority Tajik party and the oldest among the seven anti-Soviet jihadist factions.

Junbish-i-Meli-Islami – A majority Uzbek party that began as an offshoot of the Parcham wing of the PDPA.

KPK – Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a province of Pakistan.

Lashkar-e Tayyaba – Pakistan-based jihadist group founded by Hafeez Mohammad Saeed.

Mahaz-e-Fedayeen – A Taliban splinter group, also known as the Suicide Group of the Islamic Movement of Afghanistan or Mahaz Fedai Tahrik Islami Afghanistan.

MSF – Mobile Strike Force, a lightly armoured quick-reaction unit of Afghan forces.

NDS – National Directorate of Security, Afghanistan's main intelligence agency.

NSP – National Solidarity Program, a development initiative by Afghanistan's rural rehabilitation and development ministry.

PDPA – People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, a socialist party that dominated Kabul politics from 1978 to 1992.

PRT – Provincial Reconstruction Team, a civil-military unit intended to assist with humanitarian and development projects.

Quetta *shura* – The top leadership council of the Afghan Taliban, headed by Mullah Mohammad Omar.

SIGAR – Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction.

SOFA – Status of Forces Agreement.

Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP-Taliban Movement of Pakistan) – an umbrella organisation of predominately Pashtun insurgent groups.

UNAMA – United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

Appendix H: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

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Appendix I: Reports and Briefings on Asia since 2011

As of 1 October 2013, Central Asia publications are listed under the Europe and Central Asia program.

North East Asia

China and Inter-Korean Clashes in the Yellow Sea, Asia Report N°200, 27 January 2011 (also available in Chinese).

Strangers at Home: North Koreans in the South, Asia Report N°208, 14 July 2011 (also available in Korean).

South Korea: The Shifting Sands of Security Policy, Asia Briefing N°130, 1 December 2011.

Stirring up the South China Sea (I), Asia Report N°223, 23 April 2012 (also available in Chinese).

Stirring up the South China Sea (II): Regional Responses, Asia Report N°229, 24 July 2012 (also available in Chinese).

North Korean Succession and the Risks of Instability, Asia Report N°230, 25 July 2012 (also available in Chinese and Korean).

China's Central Asia Problem, Asia Report N°244, 27 February 2013 (also available in Chinese).

Dangerous Waters: China-Japan Relations on the Rocks, Asia Report N°245, 8 April 2013 (also available in Chinese).

Fire on the City Gate: Why China Keeps North Korea Close, Asia Report N°254, 9 December 2013 (also available in Chinese).

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Nepal: Identity Politics and Federalism, Asia Report N°199, 13 January 2011 (also available in Nepali).

Afghanistan's Elections Stalemate, Asia Briefing N°117, 23 February 2011.

Reforming Pakistan's Electoral System, Asia Report N°203, 30 March 2011.

Nepal's Fitful Peace Process, Asia Briefing N°120, 7 April 2011 (also available in Nepali).

India and Sri Lanka after the LTTE, Asia Report N°206, 23 June 2011.

The Insurgency in Afghanistan's Heartland, Asia Report N°207, 27 June 2011.

Reconciliation in Sri Lanka: Harder Than Ever, Asia Report N°209, 18 July 2011.

Aid and Conflict in Afghanistan, Asia Report N°210, 4 August 2011.

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Reforming Pakistan's Prison System, Asia Report N°212, 12 October 2011.

Islamic Parties in Pakistan, Asia Report N°216, 12 December 2011.

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Sri Lanka: Women's Insecurity in the North and East, Asia Report N°217, 20 December 2011.

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Talking About Talks: Toward a Political Settlement in Afghanistan, Asia Report N°221, 26 March 2012.

Pakistan's Relations with India: Beyond Kashmir?, Asia Report N°224, 3 May 2012.

Bangladesh: Back to the Future, Asia Report N°226, 13 June 2012.

Aid and Conflict in Pakistan, Asia Report N°227, 27 June 2012.

Election Reform in Pakistan, Asia Briefing N°137, 16 August 2012.

Nepal's Constitution (I): Evolution Not Revolution, Asia Report N°233, 27 August 2012 (also available in Nepali).

Nepal's Constitution (II): The Expanding Political Matrix, Asia Report N°234, 27 August 2012 (also available in Nepali).

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Pakistan: Countering Militancy in PATA, Asia Report N°242, 15 January 2013.

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Drones: Myths and Reality in Pakistan, Asia Report N°247, 21 May 2013.

Afghanistan's Parties in Transition, Asia Briefing N°141, 26 June 2013.

Parliament's Role in Pakistan's Democratic Transition, Asia Report N°249, 18 September 2013.

Women and Conflict in Afghanistan, Asia Report N°252, 14 October 2013.

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Policing Urban Violence in Pakistan, Asia Report N°255, 23 January 2014.

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Timor-Leste: Reconciliation and Return from Indonesia, Asia Briefing N°122, 18 April 2011 (also available in Indonesian).

Indonesian Jihadism: Small Groups, Big Plans, Asia Report N°204, 19 April 2011 (also available in Chinese).

Indonesia: Gam vs Gam in the Aceh Elections, Asia Briefing N°123, 15 June 2011.

Indonesia: Debate over a New Intelligence Bill, Asia Briefing N°124, 12 July 2011.

The Philippines: A New Strategy for Peace in Mindanao?, Asia Briefing N°125, 3 August 2011.

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The Philippines: Indigenous Rights and the MILF Peace Process, Asia Report N°213, 22 November 2011.

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Myanmar: The Politics of Economic Reform, Asia Report N°231, 27 July 2012 (also available in Burmese and Chinese).

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The Philippines: Dismantling Rebel Groups, Asia Report N°248, 19 June 2013.

The Dark Side of Transition: Violence Against Muslims in Myanmar, Asia Report N°251, 1 October 2013 (also available in Burmese and Chinese).

Not a Rubber Stamp: Myanmar's Legislature in a Time of Transition, Asia Briefing N°142, 13 December 2013 (also available in Burmese and Chinese).

Myanmar's Military: Back to the Barracks?, Asia Briefing N°143, 22 April 2014.

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