

# Local Contours of Security in Afghanistan

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2009/2010 Stimson Center Visiting Fellow

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Dear Reader,

The Stimson Center is pleased to present *Local Contours of Security in Afghanistan*, an original study of the current challenges to Afghanistan's stability, written by Mr. Prakhar Sharma. In this study, Mr. Sharma synthesizes quantitative and qualitative research (gathered between December 2006 and May 2010) to provide a succinct and informed perspective on the country's key non-traditional sources of instability.

As a 2009/2010 Visiting Fellow at Stimson, Mr. Sharma analyzed non-traditional security challenges in Afghanistan and their implications on the prospects for internal political dialogue and regional consensus. *Local Contours of Security in Afghanistan* is a result of over two years (2007-2009) of research inside the country that involved undertaking provincial- and district-based assessments by traveling across all Afghan regions, and designing perception surveys to support the livelihood and broader stabilization initiatives in Afghanistan. The fieldwork consisted largely of conversations with diplomats, Afghan government officials, journalists, NGO workers, and researchers based in Afghanistan. It also entails a review of previous studies, research reports, publicly available perception surveys, statistics, and news reports.

In Section I, "Impediments to Security", Mr. Sharma identifies the issues that serve as the primary impediments to security in Afghanistan. In Section II, "Analyzing the Elements of Insecurity", Mr. Sharma then provides an insider's look at the roots of each of these issues and the local political dynamics and actors that continue to drive them. Among the key findings of Mr. Sharma's study are:

- There is a growing nexus between criminals and insurgents;
- There is an increasingly ethnic dimension to the insurgency that is being driven by perceptions of economic and political marginalization;
- International actors' partnerships with local groups with questionable human rights records are endangering international credibility;
- Reconciliation between ethnic groups is becoming increasingly difficult;
- The rearming of tribal militias is undermining the important Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) and Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) initiatives; and
- The continued return of Iran- and Pakistan-based refugees is placing an unsustainable strain on Afghan infrastructure and tribal relations.

It is our hope that this timely study will help to deepen the international community's understanding of key dynamics in Afghanistan and can help strengthen efforts to achieve lasting stability in the region.

Sincerely,

Ellen Laipson  
President and CEO, The Stimson Center

Amit Pandya  
2007-2010 Director of Stimson's *Regional Voices: Transnational Challenges* project

## **Section I: Impediments to Security**

This section discusses how security and governance challenges impact the prospects of stability in Afghanistan. The primary impediments to security in Afghanistan are the following: insurgency; rampant criminality (human trafficking, drug production and trade, and arms proliferation); ethnic/tribal feuds; and dubious local partnerships of the international community. Poor rule of law and governance, and demographic shifts also bear on security. As each of these issues is discussed below, it will become evident that they are all intertwined. Indeed, addressing one issue without taking account of its relationship to the others will hinder stabilization goals in Afghanistan.

### **Armed Conflict**

It is self-evident that armed violence is the most serious issue that is facing the international community's stabilization efforts in Afghanistan. The causes and the intensity of violence differ in each region of the country, with stark variations between neighboring provinces in the same region and among districts within the same province.

Security was not a primary concern for the Afghans between 2002 and 2004. During those years, they confidently anticipated economic development and improved livelihoods. Insurgent attacks escalated in 2005, primarily in the Pashtun-dominated southern, south-eastern, and eastern regions. The scale and intensity of violence changed drastically in 2006, when NATO took over security from the United States in the southern region. This coincided with a spike in poppy cultivation in the most restive provinces. In 2007, suicide attacks, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), rocket attacks, kidnappings, ambushes – all tactics successfully used in Iraq - were replicated in Afghanistan. Security continued to deteriorate in 2008 and 2009 in the south and east, and the insurgency grew in the once stable west and north.

### **Criminality**

Drug production and human trafficking are two pervasive aspects of criminality in Afghanistan. Across the country, weak government institutions and ineffectual enforcement of laws paves the way for criminal behavior, which is perpetrated mostly by the unemployed, drug traffickers, and local commanders. There is also a growing nexus between criminals and insurgents, which intensifies the conflict.

### **Arms: trafficking, disarmament and rearmament**

Guns are an embodiment of physical power in the male dominated conservative society of Afghanistan. The fact that the tribes on either side of the Pakistan border do not recognize the border also affects arms smuggling. Traditional arms manufacturing to meet Afghan demand is found across the border in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan. The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) and Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) programs were launched by the Afghan government, and foreign forces and donors. Their effectiveness has been undermined by weak enforcement, absence of sustained political will in the Afghan government, and the international community, arming of private militaries, and the international forces' dubious local partnerships on the ground.

## **Ethnic/tribal Issues<sup>1</sup>**

The Pashtuns, the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, have since 2001 been subjected to social, political, and economic marginalization in areas where they are the minority. This is particularly so in provinces in the north-west and north, and it is of concern because the state has failed to safeguard the interests of the Pashtuns. The argument would be incomplete without mentioning that other ethnic groups (i.e. Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras) have also endured marginalization in the past at Pashtun hands. It is important to note that the insurgency has an increasingly ethnic dimension to it, and perceptions of marginalization cannot be sidelined or ignored. With the minority Tajiks dominating Afghan security institutions, it is crucial to factor in ethnic issues to our overall understanding of these conflicts.

Tribal feuds among the Pashtuns are also a common and an essential feature of the conflict today. These feuds are more politicized in the south, where a large number of people consider the Karzai administration biased in favor of certain Pashtun groups and organizations.

## **Dubious local partnerships**

Because foreign forces have chosen to partner with local groups with shady human rights records, the people's trust of foreign forces and the international community has diminished. In many parts of the country, prominent warlords and local militia men now control key transit routes and serve as partners to the international forces. Deal-making goes beyond local pro-government armed strongmen (the "warlords"), and it is believed that the Taliban insurgents also profit indirectly from commissions paid to locals by the US Military, NATO, and international development agencies to implement reconstruction projects in the south and the south-east.

## **Demographic shifts**

Despite the Afghan government's engagement with UNHCR and several international NGOs in addressing the issues, the scale of demographic shifts is unprecedented, and the working conditions on the ground are inhospitable, at best. Battle-affected displacement is likely to escalate as the conflict continues and more forces engage in fighting. Ongoing drought and unfavorable economic conditions will likely exacerbate the already dire situation of the returnees. Secondary displacement is likely to proliferate if people return to homes and hometowns that are not functioning. And finally, unless land and property issues are addressed systematically, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is likely to increase with the land disputes.

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<sup>1</sup> The major ethnic groups in Afghanistan are: Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras. The Pashtuns are divided into several tribes, sub-tribes, and clans. The politically prominent tribes are the Durranis and the Ghilzais. Among the Durranis, President Hamid Karzai hails from the Popalzai sub-tribe.

## **Section II: Analyzing the Elements of Insecurity**

Armed violence in Afghanistan is actually a result of several sub-conflicts and inter-related conflicts that affect and are affected by the insurgency. Some conflicts are fuelled by ethnic and sub-tribal feuds, criminality, weak rule of law, and the dubious local partnerships of the international community. Other factors include geography (border with Pakistan/Iran and key transit routes), impact of operations by foreign forces (resulting in civilian casualties and turning the perceptions against the international community's presence), government presence and services, and access to resources affect security and people's perceptions of it.

Until 2005, the insurgency had its roots in the south and in certain parts of south-east and east. Since then, it has expanded to most districts and localities with Pashtun populations. Recent developments also indicate an expansion of the insurgency to the hitherto stable west and north. While the Taliban are the dominant group in the insurgency, the other key actors include networks, such as Haqqani, Hizb-e-Islami, and Al-Qaeda. The key reasons cited for the current insurgency are ideological<sup>2</sup>, economic<sup>3</sup>, ethnic<sup>4</sup>, tribal/clan<sup>5</sup>, social status<sup>6</sup>, and personal.<sup>7</sup>

### **Trends in Armed Conflict**

- The number of security incidents has increased dramatically every year since 2004. There were 326 incidents in 2004, 831 in 2005, 1922 in 2006, 2718 in 2007, 4169 in 2008, and 6671 in 2009.
- The Taliban and affiliates have installed their shadow governors in most provinces in Afghanistan today. Out of the 34 Afghan provinces, the Taliban had appointed 11 shadow governors in 2005, 20 in 2006, 28 in 2007, 31 in 2008, and 33 in 2009. These may not accurately reflect the extent of the Taliban's support base in the provinces, but given the deteriorating perceptions of people about the government, their waning access to justice and basic resources, and rising insecurity, these developments are significant because they mark expanded opportunities for the Taliban.
- The Taliban are variously: a Pashtun nationalistic movement; a political ideology; a group of disunited people with divergent interests; an insurgency fighting the occupation; a

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<sup>2</sup> People believing in a common cause of jihad against the "infidels." It is believed that the top leadership of the insurgent groups is driven primarily by ideological motives.

<sup>3</sup> People joining the insurgency for financial reasons, temporary or full-time jobs – allegedly most fighters in the insurgency belong to this category.

<sup>4</sup> Almost all districts that are facing the insurgency have Pashtun populations. This is because of several reasons, including the perceived disenfranchisement of the Pashtuns by the state and by other ethnic groups. These perceptions are fuelled by the evolving structure of the Afghan National Security Forces and other security initiatives where the non-Pashtuns play a dominant role.

<sup>5</sup> Tribal, sub-tribal, and clan-based feuds have propelled the insurgency as many people seek to avenge their losses, square personal enmities, etc., through manipulation of power and use of violence.

<sup>6</sup> Many youth want to be seen as carrying weapons because it gives them a perceived sense of accomplishment.

<sup>7</sup> Aerial strikes, house searches, and illegal detentions propel people to avenge their personal loss of family/honor or those of their tribe, community, or valley.

“government” delivering justice; a religiously motivated movement; and an employment provider.

- The highest intensity of violence remains in the large Pashtun belt in the south, south-west, south-east, and east. It is in these Pashtun areas where the Taliban have the strongest presence. The Hizb-e-Islami and Haqqani networks have strong presence in the south-east and east.
- In the central highlands (Bamiyan, most districts of Daikundi, Behsood districts in Wardak, and parts of Ghazni and Ghor provinces), criminality dominates the insecurity. Disputes over land and water, along with a brutal insurgency, are significant in Pashtun-dominated districts of Wardak and Ghazni provinces.
- Insecurity in the northern region is more about locally powerful former mujahedeen commanders fighting to expand or retain their individual fiefdoms. Increasingly, however, the insurgency is expanding to the north. In most districts inhabited by the Pashtuns today, inside the otherwise minority Pashtun provinces, there is a significant presence of the Taliban. Some notable examples can be seen in Faryab province in the north-west and Kunduz in the north. In those provinces, insecurity exists only in districts with Pashtun populations.
- The western provinces (Farah, Herat, Badghis, and Ghor) have experienced an influx of insurgents from Helmand (many driven out in the operations by the US Marines), Ghazni and Uruzgan. All Pashtun districts in these provinces, with otherwise Pashtun minorities, have a significant Taliban presence. The insurgency in the Shindand district in Herat, and in certain eastern districts in Farah, is also allegedly assisted from across the border. It is, however, fuelled by local popular resentment.
- The presence of insurgent groups by province:
  - **Taliban** – Helmand, Kandahar, Nimroz, Farah, Herat, Badghis, Baghlan, Zabul, Uruzgan, Ghazni, Daikundi, Kabul, Kunduz
  - **Jalaluddin and Sirajuddin Haqqani network** – Paktia, Paktika, Khost, Logar, Wardak, Ghazni
  - **Hizb-e-Islami Hekmatyar (HIG)**- Badakhshan, Kunar, Nuristan, Laghman, Kapisa, Kabul
  - **Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)**- Uruzgan, Zabul, Balkh, Kunduz, Jowsjan

### **Ethnic Dimensions of Conflict**

Despite the symbolism of having a Pashtun President and the key ministries in the current and the previous Afghan cabinet, led by Pashtuns--Defense, Interior, Finance, Education, Foreign Affairs, Border and Tribal Affairs--there is a growing resentment among the Pashtuns, who see themselves as being effectively marginalized by the state.

After the fall of the Taliban regime, deep-seated ethnic rivalries and a history of inter-ethnic abuses undermined the prospects for reconciliation. The Taliban were seen by many as a

movement dominated by the Pashtuns. Their departure from the power in Kabul led other ethnic groups to avenge the atrocities they had suffered at the hands of the Taliban. The Pashtuns bore the brunt of the excesses of violence and injustice where they lived as minorities.

In most districts inhabited by the Pashtuns today the Taliban are a significant presence. One of the key reasons why the Taliban are able to revive and expand their writ today to the erstwhile stable north and the west is the resentment among the Pashtuns who were left to their own devices by the Karzai administration.

Since 2002, economic marginalization of the Pashtuns has been carried out by non-Pashtun governors and district administrators who were handpicked to strike an ethnic balance in the government. Pashtun lands were taken away from 2002 to 2006 in Balkh, Samangan, Jowsjan, and Faryab. As the minorities see it, this was nothing but reversing the unfair gains made by the Pashtuns during the Taliban regime. Thus, while the current situation is unfair to the Pashtuns, it is important to understand the historical context, local dynamics, and perceptions.

Atrocities were committed against the Pashtuns from 2003 to 2009 in Badghis, Kunduz, Herat, Balkh, Samangan, and Saripul. They were driven out of their settlements and subjected to murder, beatings, physical abuse, torture, extortion, theft, and rape.

Some Pashtuns also feel that the government has, in certain cases, contributed to tribal and clan feuds in the east and the south to weaken the relations among the Pashtuns, particularly among the sub-tribes and clans. In Kandahar province, for instance, there has been a historical rivalry among the Barakzais, Popalzais, and Alokozais. A large number of Taliban recruits are from the Noorzais and Ishakzai tribes in Panjwai and the Alokozai tribe in Khakrez, driven by their mistreatment by government leaders in Kandahar.

Uruzgan is another province with tribal discrimination in local politics. The three prominent tribes are Popalzais, Achakzais, and Noorzais. Approximately 7 percent of Uruzgan's population is Popalzais compared to 35 percent Noorzais and 35 percent Achakzais. Yet the Popalzais occupy 35 percent of the positions in the provincial government. The allocation of positions has not been on merit but rather on the basis of patronage or payments. There is thus widespread resentment among the tribes. Local grievances have fuelled the momentum in favor of anti-government sentiment and activity.

### **Dubious Local Partnerships**

The way the international community chooses its local partners in Afghanistan also undermines the credibility of the Afghan government and the international community in Afghanistan. Some of these partners include warlords with abysmal human rights records and private militias with a history of committing atrocities. Foreign forces regularly hire private militias in areas controlled by the Afghan warlords to provide security for their forward operating bases and to guard convoys against the Taliban.

#### *Hiring/supporting of private militias by the international forces*

In *Parwan* province, Bagram Airbase (the key airbase for the US Military in Afghanistan) employs a Private Security Company (PSC) run by Asil Khan. He is a former Northern Alliance commander allied with Haji Almas, a member of parliament from Parwan and former Northern

Alliance military commander who is despised by the people for non-combat killings of opponents.

In *Uruzgan* province, both U.S. and Australian Special Forces have contracted with a private army commanded by Col. Matiullah Khan (from President Karzai's Durrani Popalzai tribe), called Kandak Amniant Uruzgan ("Uruzgan Security Battalion"), with 2,000 armed men to provide security services on which their bases depend. Col. Matiullah Khan's security force protects NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) convoys on the main road from Kandahar to Tarin Kowt, where more than 1,000 Australian troops are based at Camp Holland. Col. Khan gets \$340,000 per month – nearly \$4.1 million annually - for moving two convoys safely from Kandahar to Tarin Kowt (Uruzgan's capital) each month.

Matiullah Khan is the police chief in Uruzgan province. In 2001, he was given his private army by his uncle, Jan Mohammad Khan (Durrani Popalzai), a commander who helped oust the Taliban in Kandahar, and was subsequently rewarded by President Karzai by being named governor of Uruzgan in 2002. Popalzais are the minority sub-tribe in Uruzgan. Jan Mohammad Khan and Matiullah Khan's non-combat killings of the majority Noorzais and Achakzais have tarnished perceptions of the populace towards local government and international forces.

Uruzgan remains the only province in the country where most people believe that the Afghan and International Security Forces are the primary cause of insecurity.

In *Kandahar* province, the Canadian Forces have contracted protection services from Gul Agha Shirzai (via Commando Security) and Gen. Gulalai. Gul Agha Shirzai, current governor of Nangarhar province, was previously the governor of Kandahar. The Canadian Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) has hired the militia of Col. Haji Toorjan, an ally of Shirzai, to provide camp security services. Credible allegations suggest that Shirzai and Gulalai are involved in the opium trade in the south.

More serious is the rise of Commander Abdur Rezzaq (Border Police) in Spin Boldak, also in Kandahar. This rise was supported by officials in Kabul and Kandahar, as well as by NATO commanders in the south who found his control over Spin Boldak useful in their war against the Taliban. Abdur Rezzaq maintains private prisons where he conducts extra-judicial executions and is entangled in a network made up of corrupt high officials and major drug smugglers. He pulls in between \$5 million and \$6 million per month in revenues, which he invests in properties in Kabul, Kandahar, Dubai, and Tajikistan. His drug racket is run directly by a select group of his commanders, who facilitate shipments and collect payment from smugglers. They also import shipping containers from China full of acetic anhydride, a chemical used in heroin manufacturing. Rezzaq was also actively involved in the widespread fraud in the Afghan election of August 2009.

During the summer of 2006, Taliban fighters had infiltrated Panjwaii, a predominantly Noorzai district in Kandahar province. The district governor, an Achakzai, called in Abdul Razik's border force. The Noorzais, fearing their tribal enemies, rose up and joined forces with the Taliban. Rezzaq and his men responded to the unexpected resistance with brutality. The Noorzai shifted their loyalty, decisively and perhaps permanently, to the Taliban.



Such partnerships, between the international forces and local personalities who are feared more than the Taliban, have turned thousands of Afghans into Taliban sympathizers.

In *Badakhshan* province, security for the German PRT is provided by Gen. Nazri Mahmud, a former *mujaheddin* commander (Shura-i-Nazar party) who allegedly controls a significant portion of the province's lucrative opium industry.

*Businesses run by the political elite are supported by the international community*<sup>8</sup>

Ghazanfar is a leading example of the multimillion-dollar business conglomerates, financed by American and Afghan tax dollars, and connected to the political elite in Afghanistan. Since the fall of the Taliban, such organizations have emerged as a segment of the pervasive culture of corruption.

Ghazanfar, a company from Mazar-e-Sharif, is run by a family that is closely connected to President Karzai (Hosn Banu Ghazanfar is a former Minister). The company won \$17 million in diesel-supply contracts in the winter of 2006-2007, and then another \$78 million in new contracts for 2008-2009. In March 2009, Ghazanfar opened a new bank in Kabul. A few months later, the bank gave a \$2 million interest-free loan to President Karzai for his re-election campaign.

#### *Rearmament*

The failures of the last eight years and the realization of the need to expand the security umbrella in the villages has prompted the United States to replicate the "Anbar awakening" of Iraq in Afghanistan. By arming the Sunni militias in Iraq, and instituting the US troop surge at the same time, the insurgency was supposedly quelled. There is a perception among policy makers in the US and Afghanistan that re-arming the tribal militias will facilitate the security objectives of the Afghan government and the international community by expanding security down to the village level. Two key programs – the Afghan Public Protection Program (APPP) and the Community Defense Initiative (CDI) – have been piloted in a few areas. The objective is to negate the Taliban's influence and the local support base by providing cash to local tribal leaders to buy weapons to fight the Taliban.

The re-arming of militias is controversial and counterproductive. It undermines and jeopardizes the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) and the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) – two leading disarmament programs. It also allows former *jihadi* parties/groups to reemerge by having their people selected as volunteers. It will create new fiefdoms drawn on sectarian or tribal lines within districts. The excess of weapons in communities that are underdeveloped could be disastrous for long term peace and stability in the country. Finally, the ethnic dimension needs to be handled sensitively. The initiatives hinge on the flawed assumption that local tribal leadership based on legitimacy rather than brute force still exists in Afghanistan. Decades of conflict have fractured tribal leadership in most parts of the Pashtun belt. Most of the respected and influential tribal leaders have been killed or made irrelevant by the Taliban or by local commanders. Unlike the Paktia tribes in the south-east, the

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<sup>8</sup> "Afghanistan runs on well oiled fields", Pratap Chatterjee ([Asia Times Online](#), November 19, 2009)

Durrani and Ghilzai tribes in Southern and Eastern Afghanistan have no tradition of raising volunteer forces to maintain local security.

Such initiatives may, thus, end up creating more tribal militias, increasing the supply of weapons and providing legitimacy to local violence. The CDI initiative is also going to use a large number of the 12,500 militiamen in 22 provinces that Arif Noorzai (a hugely controversial militia commander with strong links to drug cartels in the south) had led to provide security for the Afghan election in August 2009. His militia is dominated by two tribes (Noorzai and Ishaqzai), and it is likely to marginalize other tribes. Arif Noorzai is also hardly a disinterested party. His sister is married to Ahmed Wali Karzai, President Hamid Karzai's brother, who is also the head of the provincial council in Kandahar.

In the case of APPP, most volunteers in the Jalrez district (Wardak province), where the program was first piloted, are Hazaras. The district is Pashtun-dominated. With Hazaras dominating the local militia, there is a high likelihood of Taliban resurgence in the district. Wardak is also the wrong province to pilot this program because the support of local Pashtuns for this program is unlikely to be substantial, owing to their strong Taliban sympathies.

## **A Culture of Arms**

Several social, cultural, and economic incentives propel the supply of arms and fuel the insurgency: a culture of retaining arms for personal safety or for reasons of pride and honor; non-recognition of the Durand line separating Pakistan and Afghanistan; unfettered movement across the border; and the presence of traditional arms manufacturing across the border in Pakistan. Because the international community is propping up local militias to secure foreign convoys in the east and the south, and legitimizing their use of violence, curtailing arms in the country remains a formidable challenge. Afghanistan has one of the highest concentrations of guns per person in the world. There may be up to 10 million small arms in a population of 29 million people.<sup>9</sup> This has worrying implications for democracy, development, and security in a country with a significant population of unemployed youth.

There is no weapon-manufacturing factory in Afghanistan. Many weapons were imported during the period of Soviet occupation from 1979-1989. Throughout the decade of Soviet occupation, the Soviet Union and the United States supplied vast quantities of small arms to the country. Arms continued flowing during Mujahedeen-infighting and the subsequent rise of the Taliban movement from 1992 to 1996. The trade continues. The four major arms bazaars in Pakistani tribal areas, close to the Afghan border, are the Dera-e-Adam Khil Market, Landi Kotal Market, Miramshah Market, and the Bara Market. These markets are located in areas that remain largely lawless and outside the writ of any government. The Panj River Bazaar, on the border between Tajikistan and the Afghan province of Badakhshan, is also a crucial meeting point for buyers and sellers of arms, and for dealers exchanging the arms for drugs.

Since the establishment of the interim government in 2002, Afghanistan has continued to receive arms from abroad to build up an effective Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP). Nearly 87,000 US-supplied weapons including rifles, pistols, machine guns, grenade launchers, shotguns, and mortars are missing. Of these, the serial numbers of 46,000

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<sup>9</sup> Oxfam, "The call for tough arms controls – voices from Afghanistan"

weapons were not recorded. The serial numbers of the remaining 41,000 were recorded, but the American military officials have no idea where those weapons are.

Afghan security forces today number 182,000 personnel, while the number of small arms imported and redistributed to the Afghan security forces, since 2002, amounts to 409,022.<sup>10</sup>

## **Criminality**

Criminality has long been a source of insecurity in the central highlands and in the northern and western provinces. It is increasingly becoming a source of insecurity in the east and the south because of a growing nexus between criminals and insurgents. The criminals pose as the Taliban to elicit or coerce support from the populace and to enhance their effectiveness.

Human trafficking and drug production and trade are two key criminal endeavors in Afghanistan. The spoils from both are enjoyed by individuals who benefit from partnerships with the international community--and thus have effective immunity from legal prosecution.

### *Human Trafficking*

Afghanistan is a source country, transit country, and a destination for men, women, and children trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation and involuntary servitude. Afghan children are trafficked internally and externally to Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Oman for commercial sexual exploitation, forced marriage, settlement of debts or disputes, forced begging, debt bondage, service as child soldiers, and other forms of involuntary servitude. Afghan women are trafficked internally and to Pakistan and Iran, for commercial sexual exploitation, and men are trafficked to Iran for forced labor. Afghanistan is also a destination for women and girls from China, Iran, and Tajikistan, trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation. Recently, women and children from Tajikistan are also believed to be trafficked through Afghanistan to Pakistan and Iran for commercial sexual exploitation.<sup>11</sup>

Facilitated by conflict and poverty, human trafficking is also enabled by weak law enforcement and a weak judicial system. It is difficult to identify and prosecute those involved. In some cases, traffickers are backed by powerful and influential warlords.

### *Drug Production and Trade*

While opium cultivation has dropped significantly since 2007, production has dropped less dramatically because farmers have found ways to extract more opium per bulb.

High opium cultivation remains geographically closely tied with armed conflict. Cultivation in Badghis increased dramatically in 2009, after rising steadily since 2004. Kandahar also experienced an increase in cultivation.

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<sup>10</sup> Amnesty International, Afghanistan: Arms proliferation fuel further abuses, April 2008

<sup>11</sup> "AFGHANISTAN: Human Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation" Accessed at: <http://www.rawa.org>

## **Population Movements and Implications for Governance and Security**

### *Refugees*

Between 1979 and 1996, around five million Afghans fled to Pakistan and over two million to Iran. A final wave of refugees, numbering 200,000 to 300,000, left Afghanistan during the U.S led invasion in October 2001. The mass migration of people, primarily for security reasons, resulted in a severe drain of human capital over a generation.

### *Returnees*

Afghanistan faces serious challenges because of an influx of returnees from Iran and Pakistan and the consequent resettlement and displacement issues. While Afghanistan has always been a cross-road for population movements for trade and livelihood, the recent trends have a crucial bearing on the capacity of the state to manage the migration and its impact on governance and security.

Over five million Afghans have returned from Iran and Pakistan since 2002. In a matter of years, Afghanistan has gone from losing a large percentage of population as refugees to reintegrating many of these returning citizens. A majority of the returnees have settled in (in order of the number of returnees) Kabul, Nangarhar, Kunduz, Baghlan, Ghazni, Kandahar, Herat, Jowsjan, Laghman, and Balkh. The large influx of returnees from Pakistan and Iran challenges the limited resources available to absorb them in the society, socially, and economically. Kabul's population soared from 1.5 million in 2001 to 4.5 million in 2008. Shelter has become scarcer; 80 percent of Kabul's population, including many returning refugees and IDPs, live in squatter settlements.

The resettlement of returnees poses the potential for feuds among ethnic and tribal groups. Disputes over land ownership and tenure are major sources of ethnic/tribal conflict; many returnees have found their lands occupied. Without documentation to prove ownership, these returnees in turn occupy the land of others. Many Pashtuns are denied access to their lands and properties in northern provinces (Takhar, Faryab, Jowsjan, Balkh, and Kunduz). Land disputes are also prominent in Kandahar (between Popalzais and Barakzais), Uruzgan (Popalzais versus Noorzais and Achakzais), Helmand (Alizai versus Noorzais and Achakzais).

People's basic needs for healthcare and education remain unmet in urban centers where they are most urgently needed. Because Afghanistan can no longer absorb its former residents, voluntary repatriation has come to a halt. Those who remain abroad are likely to return only if they are forced by their host country.

The return of the refugees has not yet ended. There are still about 2.1 million Afghan refugees living in Pakistan and about a million in Iran.

### *Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)*

The number of people internally displaced in Afghanistan after the ouster of the Taliban regime in 2002 was around 1.2 million. Since then, most of these people have been able to return to their areas of origin. The actual number of people who remain displaced in Afghanistan is debatable. The UNHCR and OXFAM put the number around 235,000, while the Afghan government's is around 413,890.

Today in Afghanistan, internal migration and movement is more pervasive than external migration, primarily because of the gradual movement of people towards urban centers and provincial capitals to seek employment, healthcare, and education.

### **Political Legitimacy and Government Authority**

Weak institutions, non-functional courts, rampant corruption, crony appointments, an inefficient police force, and the failure to deliver minimal health or education services have undercut government legitimacy. The government is, however, able to exercise its influence through sophisticated layers of patronage networks across the country. These networks constitute ties that are forged by personal, family, and tribal/ethnic relationships and political-commercial interests. These ties have reduced government's dependence on the international community for its political survival. Given the foreseeable insecurity in the country, government institutions will continue to remain weak, and the politics of patronage will dictate the course of events in Afghanistan. However, the very elements that can provide short-term political equilibrium among the key power centers and a realistic reflection of local realities are also likely to foster popular cynicism and undercut government legitimacy.

Several examples convey the complexity and difficulty of constructing a state that is both legitimate and strong. Access to local courts and perceptions about their fairness and effectiveness have deteriorated consistently since 2007. While the informal local *jirgas* and *shuras* are far more accessible to the people than the state-run formal courts, even access to those has diminished during the last three years.<sup>12</sup> The police and the judiciary are perceived as the two most corrupt and ineffectual institutions in the government. In the south and east of the county, the Taliban have set-up their own courts to resolve disputes among the local people. Most of the people in the provinces of Kandahar, Helmand, Zabul, Badghis, Wardak, and Logar prefer referring their cases to Taliban than to the government courts. People believe that resolving cases through formal judicial mechanism is not efficient as it takes more time and resources, in form of bribery, to resolve simple issues.

Prison conditions have contributed to radicalization. Pul-e-Charki (Kabul) and Sarposa (Kandahar) prisons, among others, suffer from abysmal conditions for prisoners and the government remains unable or unwilling to address the systemic issues. The Taliban allegedly maintain a strong presence inside the prisons - providing medicines, counseling, and coordinating family.

The Afghan police are unable to maintain basic law and order. Kidnapping of rich Afghans in major cities in exchange for large sums of money is becoming a norm. In many rural areas, the old *Jirga* system of reprisals against wrong-doers remains in place.

Key impediments to effective policing include pervasive corruption, an outdated rank structure overburdened with senior-level officers, lack of communication and control between central and regional or local commands, poor pay, and a lack of professional standards and internal discipline.

The Taliban also recruit from the police and army, offering them at least twice the amount they receive from the Afghan government and the intangible benefits of security which is a rarity in

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<sup>12</sup> "A Survey of the Afghan People" The Asia Foundation, 2009

ANSF. Until this situation is rectified, the Afghan government will continue to experience high attrition rates in its staff. This has serious implications for training; graduates of the Kabul Police Academy receive little training in counterinsurgency tactics out of fear that defectors will use them against the police. Poor salaries also mean that unofficial check points are established everywhere, with police patrols demanding payment for right of passage to augment their income. The recent decision by Minister Atmar to increase the salaries of those police serving in high-threat areas (from USD 180 to USD 240) and those who aren't serving in those areas (USD 120 to USD 200) is a welcome move.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> “Afghanistan Hikes Police Salaries” CBS News, November 25, 2009. Accessed at: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/11/25/ap/asia/main5771299.shtml>

## **Conclusion**

There is already a resentment of foreign occupation and a feeling of alienation across the population because of a perceived exclusion from the access to power and resources, intra-tribal and ethnic polarization, government corruption on all levels, and the re-insertion of the warlords and commanders in positions of power. Anger arising from the conduct of foreign forces has already brought groups closer to the insurgency that were erstwhile supporters of the international engagement in Afghanistan. Tribal feuds remain among the more troublesome sources of conflict. Further demographic shifts (exodus, return, and internal displacement) are likely to be triggered by the conflict and will, in turn, contribute to instability and violence. Only a well-coordinated strategy that encapsulates all these challenges and addresses them as part of a broader stabilization strategy has a chance to succeed.

In this stabilization, the imperative of short-term success runs against that of sustainable stability. As international and local support for the international community's engagement in Afghanistan has declined, the Afghan government has cut deals with and has resurrected the power of warlords and commanders who had been made largely irrelevant by 2004. This is likely to continue and deepen if the international commitment is perceived as time-bound.

The international community is contributing to this imperative by forming alliances with the same dubious local partners for short-term gains. These local commanders are often more feared by ordinary Afghans than are the Taliban. They constitute a ready recruitment and propaganda tool for the insurgents.

These local partnerships give certain personalities a local monopoly over the use of violence at the expense of others.<sup>14</sup> The lucrative financial rewards from the partnerships and a possible fear of local uprising makes these personalities excessively brutal in their conduct. This has been seen as spiraling into ethnic and tribal/sub-tribal feuds, increased lawlessness and support for the Taliban.

Detailed attention will need to be paid to precise local conditions in any given locality, if sustainable local processes of security and stabilization are to be established.

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<sup>14</sup> Under normal circumstances, only the Afghan government should have a monopoly over the use of force.