

Towards transition: prospects for progress in Afghanistan during 2011

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The war in Afghanistan continues regardless of the demise of the leader of the al-Qaeda terrorist network, Osama bin Laden, over the border in Abbottabad, Pakistan, in the early hours of 2 May 2011. Hard fighting is expected throughout the 2011 fighting season now underway, as the Taliban attempts to regain influence in historical safe havens in southern Afghanistan that it lost over the past six months to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and its Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) partner. For their part, the forty-nine members of the 146,000-strong coalition in Afghanistan, including Australia, must ensure that ISAF's governance and development lines of operation keep pace with recent gains in security if the Afghan Government is to assume responsibility for the entire country by the end of 2014. This will require more people with the requisite skills—not necessarily an increased military commitment, but certainly a larger civilian contribution.

The transition challenge

Notwithstanding the immediate boost to coalition morale, the death of the world's most wanted terrorist may make the task of transitioning the security lead in Afghanistan to its government an even greater challenge for interventionist forces—and not simply because of an expected spike in attacks from violent jihadists intent on avenging the killing of a man they revere as an inspirational leader. The core goal of the US strategy in the region is to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to remove its capacity to threaten the US and its allies in the future. With the terrorist movement's apex leadership either neutralised or hiding in Pakistan, there's a real temptation among lawmakers in Washington DC, and other coalition capitals, to reassess the timetable for withdrawing their troops. Already at issue among President Barack Obama's civilian and military advisers are the scale and pace of the planned drawdown of some of the 99,000 US military personnel currently serving in Afghanistan, which is set to commence from July 2011.

At the NATO Lisbon Summit of 19–20 November 2010, alliance members and non-NATO ISAF troop-contributing states declared their support for President Hamid Karzai's objective of having the ANSF lead and conduct military operations across all of Afghanistan's thirty-four provinces by the end of 2014, a time frame that happens to coincide with the constitutional limit on Karzai's

second (and final) presidential term. The framework for *Inteqal* ('transition', in the Dari and Pashto languages of Afghanistan) was developed over the preceding year, after participants at the January 2010 International Conference on Afghanistan (the London Conference) agreed to back a plan for a phased transition to the Afghan Government responsibility for security.

Transition is intended to be an irreversible conditions-based process, and not an event. It's governed by the following eight core principles:

- *Conditions-based*. Transition recommendations are to be based on an assessment of conditions on the ground.
- *Bottom-up assessments*. Transition will be informed by local assessments, as well as by assessments from mentors of key Afghan Government institutions at the local level.
- *Start at the district and progress to the province*. Transfer of security will take place at the district level and progress to the provincial level.
- *'Thin out'*. As ANSF capabilities develop, ISAF will thin its forces in certain locations as conditions allow, and progressively shift from a partnering to a mentoring relationship that supports continued ANSF professionalisation.
- *Retain headquarters elements*. Headquarters elements will be retained, even as combat elements thin out, to facilitate and enable ANSF operations.
- *Reinvest some of the transition dividend*. As ISAF forces thin out in one district or area, some of the 'transition dividend' should be reinvested in other contiguous geographical areas or in the training effort to accelerate and/or enhance transition.
- *Transition institutions and functions, as well as geographical areas*. Transition does not apply simply to geographical areas, but also to key Afghan Government institutions, and functions such as Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs).
- *Ensure that transition will be irreversible*. A successful transition of security responsibility requires the ANSF, under effective Afghan civilian control, to be capable of addressing security challenges on a sustainable and irreversible basis, albeit with some level of continued support.¹

The decision to begin security transition in a particular geographical area is determined by four conditions. First, the ANSF must be capable of handling security responsibilities with less assistance. Second, the security in the given area must be at a threat level that permits the population to pursue routine daily activities. Third, local governance must be sufficiently developed to pursue a complementary layer of stability as ISAF assistance is gradually reduced. Fourth, ISAF must be properly postured to reduce its presence as ANSF capacity and capabilities increase and the security environment improves.²

In his March 2011 *Nowruz* (Afghan New Year) address to the nation, Karzai announced the first of a total of six tranches of geographical areas to be transitioned by 2014. Following a recommendation by the Joint Afghan–NATO *Inteqal* Board (JANIB)³, seven provinces and municipal districts at all four cardinal points in Afghanistan are to begin transition to Afghan Government control by July this year.⁴ Together, they account for 25% of the country's population of 29 million and contain its major Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara ethnic groups. Later this year, the JANIB will nominate a second set of areas to be transitioned. Together with the initial tranche, they will include up to 50% of the Afghan people.

Ultimately, the goal of transition is to bring about a polity that coalition leaders refer to as 'Afghan authentic' and not merely 'Afghanistan good enough'. The transition end-state shouldn't just be a territory free of terrorist safe havens that threaten the international community. Instead, the Afghan people must have a government that is legitimate and compatible with their history, culture and traditions. The

government must also be accountable, functional and responsive to the needs of its citizens. Moreover, the Afghan state must have exclusive control over the legitimate use of force, so that its security forces can defend its borders and enforce the rule of law.

Afghanistan OPLAN

A sustainable transition outcome can only be delivered through the successful execution of the ISAF Operations Plan (OPLAN 38302). Until last year, the coalition's response to declining security in Afghanistan was largely an act of improvisation. Now, for the first time in the decade-long intervention, the commander of ISAF and US forces in Afghanistan, General David Petraeus, has the 'right inputs' to conduct a comprehensive civil–military campaign to help the Afghan people secure their own country. The inputs are refined counter-insurgency (COIN) concepts, a robust organisational structure, effective leadership, and adequate but finite resources.

The coalition continues to apply a basic 'clear–hold–build' COIN approach, as it's done for a number of years, but to create the conditions for transition the revised OPLAN now features six distinct lines of operation to deal with the complex causes of the insurgency. Falling under the broad categories of security, governance and development, ISAF lines of operation are intended to protect the population, develop the ANSF, neutralise insurgent networks, neutralise criminal patronage networks, support the development of legitimate governance, and support sustainable socioeconomic development.

The various elements of the OPLAN are drawn together in the so-called Anaconda Strategy that Petraeus has devised to 'squeeze the life out of the insurgency'. This multidimensional approach deprives insurgent groups of key needs through the coordinated application of a broad spectrum of civilian and military instruments. A fundamental component of the strategy is intelligence fusion⁵, which drives coalition Special Forces operations that have degraded the insurgent command and control structure and depleted its ranks of improvised explosive device (IED) specialists and materiel. In the first three months of 2011, ISAF and US Operation Enduring Freedom Special Forces 'tribes' partnered with ANSF elements conducted roughly 1,400 counter-network operations that resulted in more than 400 insurgent leaders being either captured or killed. Insurgents are faced with a stark choice—either leave willingly or be removed from the battlespace.

ISAF supports an Afghan Government-led reintegration process that's showing some early success as an honourable way for rank-and-file fighters to quit the insurgency in exchange for guarantees of safety, immunity from prosecution and employment. The Pakistan-based Taliban leadership—the Quetta Shura—on the other hand shows little interest in higher level political reconciliation with the government, despite attempts at outreach by Afghanistan's High Peace Council.⁶

Nevertheless, reintegration has so far seen the demobilisation of more than 700 insurgents, and a further 2,000 are currently in negotiations with authorities. The scheme is being implemented by Provincial Peace Councils in a number of areas, and is funded through Afghanistan's Peace and Reintegration Trust Fund. Following vetting by the Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS), registered former militants are reintegrated into mainstream Afghan society and paid a stipend of US\$120 per month for three months. Their home communities are provided with development incentives to accept erstwhile insurgents into the fold.⁷ While the tribal code of *Pushtunwali* may ensure compliance on the part of 'reintegratees', they require village-level security initiatives to protect them from possible Taliban retribution.

The Afghan Local Police (ALP) and complementary US Special Forces Village Stability Operations programs are designed to strengthen governance and defend isolated populations against insurgent exploitation. The ALP program involves the mobilisation of local communities, and was established at 79 sites across Afghanistan by March 2011. The program is controlled by the Afghan Ministry of Interior, and its sites fall under the authority of district police chiefs. ALP outfits are raised by village *shuras* (councils) and generally consist of 300-strong companies mentored by twelve-man US Special Forces teams. The ALP is set to rise to a ceiling of 30,000 men; however, this irregular force is only an interim measure and will eventually become part of conventional ANSF structures.

The critical path to long-term Afghan self-sufficiency lies in the development of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP); this is recognised in the NATO slogan, 'Trainers are the ticket to transition'. The goal of the NATO Training Mission—Afghanistan is to create a professional and sustainable ANSF capable of providing security to the Afghan people. This subsidiary ISAF command is largely responsible for the ANSF achieving its March 2011 force level of around 286,000 ahead of schedule. However, due to excessive attrition among Afghan forces, a high recruitment tempo must be maintained if the ANA and ANP are to attain their November 2011 targets of 171,600 and 134,000, respectively.⁸ The ANSF will eventually reach an authorised ceiling of 352,000. Once it matures, it will cost US\$6–8 billion a year—a cost that Afghanistan won't be able to bear until the mid-2020s, according to the most favourable estimates, and then only if its much vaunted mineral resources come on stream.

Whereas last year's efforts towards ANSF development were focused on growing the force, the main priority now is on the professionalisation of Afghan soldiers and police. This involves leader development and mandatory literacy and numeracy training for all personnel. Although there's still a shortfall in training elements, most ANSF units are now operating alongside coalition partners and mentors under the operational control of ISAF Joint Command. By March 2011, 95% of all ANA *kandaks* (battalion-sized units) and 89% of ANP elements operating in Afghanistan's 'key terrain districts'⁹ were partnered with coalition personnel.

Other challenges are to establish enduring institutions, systems and enablers to sustain the ANSF. One notable innovation is the Operational Coordination Center structure that functions mainly at the regional (OCC-R) and provincial (OCC-P) levels. These centres are overseen by ISAF mentors and can be a powerful force multiplier by bringing together ANA, ANP and NDS headquarters personnel in one establishment to create a common operating picture. In this way, the OCC-R/P enables the synchronisation of intelligence, current operations and future plans to support a joint Afghan security framework.

Strategic risks

Despite some tangible advances towards security transition, ISAF has not yet reached a tipping point in Afghanistan, and progress there is still described as fragile and reversible. A range of internal and external strategic risks militate against the prospects for attaining overall success in the OPLAN. They include the enduring presence of insurgent sanctuaries in neighbouring Pakistan, ineffective and corrupt Afghan governance, loss of coalition cohesion, and a major deterioration in security across a region that stretches from North Africa to South Asia.

The existence of sanctuaries in the Pakistan tribal belt is a substantial impediment to coalition and ANSF efforts to extend control over contiguous areas in Afghanistan because it provides the insurgency with a space in which to regenerate and from which to mount further attacks. Although the presence of militant groups ranged along the Durand Line has negative impacts on Afghanistan and Pakistan, cross-border cooperation to dismantle the safe havens is limited. Furthermore, the

Operation Neptune's Spear mission to capture or kill Osama bin Laden in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province has worsened an already tense relationship between Pakistan and the US and, by extension, ISAF and the Afghan Government. Pakistani leaders regard the mission as a violation of their territorial sovereignty.

Manifold issues drive the insurgency, but fundamentally it's a challenge to the political legitimacy of the Afghan state. Poor Afghan leadership erodes the trust of people through ineptitude, malfeasance and greed.¹⁰ Already weak institutional capacity is further reduced by a culture of dependency on the international community that also insulates the Afghan Government from its poor decisions. In addition, badly managed development assistance feeds criminal patronage networks, which further subverts governance.

The ongoing Kabul Bank crisis has exposed the sort of wholesale corruption prevalent among Afghan elites. The Kabul Bank is the country's largest private lender and also handles the Afghan Government payroll. It was placed under conservatorship after the discovery that US\$1 billion in unsecured loans was paid to shareholders—many of whom are close to the Karzai government. A failure to reform such institutions is a strategic risk to transition, forestalling a much-needed International Monetary Fund credit extension and potentially holding up billions of dollars in donor funding.

The July 2011 drawdown of US surge forces presents an immediate challenge to coalition cohesion if it involves significant combat elements, and if the rationale for their redeployment out of Afghanistan isn't communicated effectively to other coalition members. In the medium term, transition shouldn't be the signal for individual troop-contributing states to exit the theatre prematurely. Instead, ISAF will be required to provide logistics, close air support, and intelligence, surveillance reconnaissance (ISR) to the ANSF beyond 2014, while maintaining tactical and, later on, strategic overwatch. In any case, sustainable transition must be underwritten by enduring partnerships between Afghanistan and NATO, and bilaterally between Afghanistan and the US and other major ISAF members.

Despite Afghanistan being the longest campaign of the 'long war' against international terrorism, it risks once again becoming the 'forgotten war' as the international community inevitably deals with new crises, such as the tumult from the Arab Spring still playing out across North Africa and the Middle East. Right now, NATO appears to be preoccupied with quelling the Libyan civil war through Operation Unified Protector, which may threaten to divert military resources from the alliance's ISAF mission that is finally stabilising Afghanistan. Besides, the possible bleed of sophisticated military technology such as man-portable air defence systems out of Libya would be a 'game changer' for the way coalition forces operate if that type of weapon appears in Afghanistan.

Winter war and spring offensive

President Obama's December 2010 Afghanistan–Pakistan Annual Review concluded that the US and its allies had made progress on the strategic objectives of denying safe haven to al-Qaeda and degrading the ability of the Taliban to overthrow the Afghan Government.¹¹ ISAF and its ANSF partners built on those successes in the first quarter of 2011, providing the time and space to build sufficient capacity in Afghan Government institutions to secure and govern the country.

There was no traditional let-up in campaigning over the winter as brigade combat teams from the 2010 US and ISAF force uplift of 40,000 troops expanded aggressively into previously insurgent-dominated areas in southern and eastern Afghanistan. Those formations were bolstered by an 'Afghan surge' of an additional 70,000 ANSF personnel raised throughout the previous year. The improved



coalition and ANSF force density resulted in an overall decline in Taliban influence in Afghanistan.

The 2010–11 winter campaign was carried out according to ISAF's 'key terrain district and area of interest district' framework, which ensures that available resources are applied to locations where they'll realise the greatest advantage. A total of 138 out of 403 districts in Afghanistan are assessed as 'key terrain' and 'area of interest' districts¹²: together they contain the country's most important economic, transport and population corridors.

The concept of operations is for decisive efforts in the south and south-west of Afghanistan, shaping activity in the east, expanding security in the capital region, and a supporting role in the north and west of the country utilising an 'economy of force' approach. The outcome of these operations is that insurgent momentum has been arrested in much of Afghanistan, and reversed in some areas. A similar concept of operations will be implemented through Operation Omid (Hope) 1390 in the 2011 fighting season.

The most significant security gains have occurred in southern Afghanistan, where coalition forces assisted by the increasingly capable ANSF wrested control from the Taliban in the central Helmand River Valley and the Arghandab River green zone in Kandahar—an area critical to success in the war. A marked improvement in the security environment is now evident in Kandahar City, its surrounding districts, and Uruzgan Province to the north.

Much of the progress in the greater Kandahar area can be attributed to the arrival of the US 10th Mountain Division Headquarters as the final component of the surge, which assumed responsibility for ISAF's Regional Command—South (RC-S) in November 2010. The substantial divisional organisation that it commands comprises five brigade combat teams and a combat aviation brigade located in a 112,000 km² area of operations taking in Kandahar, Zabol, Uruzgan and Daikondi.

The IED is still the main element of kinetic activity faced by coalition forces in RC-S. However, targeted operations against IED facilitators and the removal of large quantities of homemade explosives from the battlefield have led to an increasing use of direct fire by insurgents—often at stand-off distances and intended to provoke civilian casualties.¹³ Combat pressure is also resulting in more hastily emplaced IEDs, many of which are now being reported by local civilians through a 'tip line' established through the OCC-R. Nonetheless, the insurgency remains resilient and will continue to adapt its tactics to coalition strengths.

The objective of the Taliban spring offensive is to reclaim vital ground in southern Afghanistan in order to regain influence and dominance over population centres. The Taliban is likely to focus its efforts through an armed propaganda campaign in the southern Pashtun heartland of Helmand, Kandahar and Uruzgan. This area is of enormous economic, social and psychological importance to the Quetta Shura Taliban. In each of the provinces insurgents will try to intimidate local people, undermine governance, and oppose local defence initiatives and the reintegration process.

The strategic narrative of the insurgency—that the defeat of Western interventionist forces and their puppet government in Afghanistan is imminent and of the inevitability of the Taliban's return to power—drives its operations. Insurgents attempt to subvert the coalition and Afghan Government COIN campaign through a combination of spectacular attacks against security forces and assassinations of government officials to create an impression of deteriorating security. Shortly after announcing its spring offensive at the beginning of May 2011, the Taliban launched a series of complex attacks involving up to sixty fighters against government facilities in Kandahar City, which paralysed the provincial capital for days. This brazen episode followed close on the heels of the mass breakout of Taliban inmates from Kandahar's Sarposa Prison.

Consolidating the gains

As Afghanistan enters yet another fighting season, the coalition and the Afghan Government must consolidate security gains in the priority districts and manage inevitable setbacks. ISAF should resist the urge to clear more areas before stabilising the districts that it already holds. Most importantly, it can't allow a governance vacuum to form behind the security bubble it's created because of a lack of capacity in Afghan Government institutions. The risk is unfulfilled expectations among local people. It's also essential to exploit the post-fighting space in cleared areas to create stability by linking the population with development initiatives.

The coalition's governance and development lines of operation haven't kept pace with improvements in security. Unless soon resolved, this may inhibit movement towards security transition, which must be underpinned by progress in governance and socioeconomic development. However, many civilian positions within ISAF are unfilled, despite President Obama's call for a 'surge' of non-military personnel vital to the stabilisation space. Nevertheless, Afghanistan continues to suffer from a lack of political will, endemic corruption, and the absence of the rule of law in many areas. Insufficient capacity in Afghanistan's unwieldy bureaucracy impedes budget execution and service delivery.¹⁴ At the subnational level, this hinders the reach and effectiveness of the Afghan Government.

What the Afghan people crave most of all are the public goods of security and acceptable justice. It's here that the government must compete for legitimacy with the Taliban, whose mobile sharia courts presided over by 'motorcycle mullahs' have been more responsive to the needs of conservative rural Pashtun communities.

While there's a growing Afghan Government presence in most districts in RC-S, the formal justice sector isn't being established as quickly as desired. Needless to say, extending the rule of law at the subnational level is subject to insurgent threats. To compensate over the short term, coalition rule-of-law advisers are assisting the Afghan Government in reconstituting traditional tribal structures to provide dispute resolution in several of Kandahar's districts. A US Rule of Law Field Force now provides force protection and support to project teams working in some contested areas.

Development has generally lagged behind improving security in most of Afghanistan, with the exception of parts of the country's south. In RC-S, the coalition has concentrated its development efforts on agriculture and trade—both significant features of economic life in Kandahar. The focus there is on increasing the capacity of the Afghan Government's Agriculture and Rural Development¹⁵ cluster of ministries in order to increase licit agricultural productivity, generate jobs in the rural sector and develop supporting infrastructure. However, delivering Afghanistan's high-quality fruits and nuts to regional markets requires assistance in trade facilitation. Indeed, better border control measures can turn a historical source of vulnerability into opportunity and increase Afghan Government revenue from customs duties.¹⁶

Pushing out in Uruzgan

Uruzgan Province is to some extent a microcosm of much that has happened across southern Afghanistan over the past year. It's also the focus of Australia's \$7 billion Operation Slipper military commitment¹⁷ and, more recently, its enhanced civilian presence in Afghanistan. Most of the 1,550 Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel deployed in-country serve in Combined Team Uruzgan (CTU). This multinational task force operates under an ISAF flag and is part of the 10th Mountain Division's battle remit. Although CTU is US-led, most of the principal staff positions at Multinational Base Tarin Kowt, including Director of the Uruzgan Provincial Reconstruction Team (UPRT), are filled by Australian military and civilian officers.

Australian force elements in CTU are more thoroughly integrated in the RC-S command structure than ever before. They can draw on considerable coalition logistics, aviation support and ISR assets as they work to secure Uruzgan with their ANSF counterparts. Whereas the troop-to-task ratio for the ADF and other ISAF military personnel in Uruzgan is about right, CTU needs additional civilian enablers, including police mentors, if the Afghan Government is to assume responsibility for securing the province over the next three years.

The coalition is stabilising Uruzgan by targeting insurgent structures, conducting security sector reform, extending subnational governance and creating an environment conducive to development. The major development zones where CTU operates are in the districts of Tarin Kot, Deh Rawud and Chorah. Those areas are largely stable and perhaps a year away from attaining the same level of progress as the more settled districts of Kandahar. While it was never envisaged that Uruzgan would be among the first few tranches of areas to be transitioned to Afghan Government control, the municipal areas of the Tarin Kowt bowl and the Deh Rawud triangle are already effectively secured by local authorities.

Security has improved considerably in most of Uruzgan through synchronised conventional and Special Forces operations in partnership with the ANSF.

Furthermore, a number of ALP sites overseen by US Special Forces teams have created secure areas in the more isolated parts of Uruzgan. Taliban safe havens are now mainly restricted to Shahid-e-Hasas in the north-west of the province and Khas Uruzgan in the east. In any case, US Special Forces maintain patrol bases in both those districts to keep the insurgent presence in check.

Although the main goal of CTU this fighting season is to stabilise areas cleared over the winter months, ADF-mentored ANSF elements continue to push out of the development zones and into the river valleys that connect Uruzgan's districts.¹⁸ Security bubbles are now being extended simultaneously along the Tangi Valley (Deh Rawud), Kamisan Valley (Chorah) and Mirabad Valley (Tarin Kot).

Patrol Base Muhammed in the Heydar–Kuchkel area at the eastern edge of the Mirabad Valley is the latest in a network of ANSF bases in Uruzgan, which have doubled in number since the handover of responsibility for the province from the Netherlands-led Task Force Uruzgan to CTU in August 2010. The construction of the base by ADF and ANA engineers following a six-week clearing operation effectively blocks an important insurgent infiltration route into Tarin Kowt District from the Charmestan Valley in Chorah.

The ADF Special Forces Task Group (known as Task Force 66) has been quite successful in interdicting these 'rat lines' that allow insurgents to move across the battlespace to where they can exploit gaps in security and governance. Even so, Tarin Kot and Deh Rawud have recently experienced an uptick in security incidents. Taliban fighters have emerged from their winter fastnesses to challenge CTU and Afghan Government control in both of these 'area of interest' districts, and kinetic activity has drifted into Kajaki in the upper Helmand River Valley.

Australia's primary operational objective in Afghanistan is to bring about security transition by raising the combat effectiveness of the Uruzgan-based 4th Brigade, 205th *Atal* (Hero) Corps. An ADF Mentoring Task Force is guiding development of the brigade headquarters and all six of its *kandaks* through the ISAF Operational Mentor and Liaison Team methodology. The 2nd Kandak is close to achieving independent status, and others are rated as 'effective with assistance'. No further ANA units are required to secure Uruzgan after the recent establishment of the 6th Kandak.

The 4th Brigade is undergoing increasing professionalisation. Its rifle *kandaks* are learning higher combat functions, including offensive support, route clearance, reconnaissance and the ability to conduct COIN operations. The combat support and combat service support *kandaks*, which are centrally located at Multinational Base Tarin Kowt, must be taught a 'push' style of logistics if they are to effectively support forward deployed elements. More generally, the 4th Brigade is also being trained to be proactive through conducting intelligence-led operations. However, it's still challenged by night operations, requiring high levels of illumination due to technical limitations such as an inability to maintain sophisticated night vision equipment.

Nonetheless, the 4th Brigade is on track to achieve transition in the next two to three years and has the foundations of a capable, well-disciplined force. However, it will look and feel like an Afghan formation. It's for that reason that ADF mentoring personnel may require greater cultural awareness training before deployment if they're to more thoroughly understand the people and the organisation with which they're partnered.

The growing capabilities of the 4th Brigade were put to the test when, through the ADF-mentored Uruzgan OCC-P, it led planning for a provincial peace *shura* held in Tarin Kowt on 27 March 2011. As a result, this important political event proceeded without incident. It was attended by a number of Afghan Government ministers and more than 700 elders representing seven major tribes, who gathered to discuss

key needs in the province. The *shura* also witnessed the first major reintegration event in Uruzgan: around forty-five insurgents from Shahid-e-Hasas presented themselves to the provincial governor, Mohammed Omer Shirzad, as candidates for reintegration.

In contrast to the encouraging state of ANA development in Uruzgan, there's a pressing need for police trainers to mentor ANP recruits and teach them the basic counter-insurgency principle of 'protecting the population' to help mitigate predatory behaviour that only fuels the insurgency. In addition to providing security, the ANP must also enforce the rule of law. The task of mentoring local police currently falls to soldiers drawn from the US Army's 4th Battalion, 70th Armor Regiment, which primarily serves as the CTU Battlegroup. However, it is unsatisfactory that military personnel must staff Police Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams when there are dedicated Australian Federal Police¹⁹ trainers at Multinational Base Tarin Kowt who are better suited to professionalising the ANP 'outside the wire', and provided robust force protection measures are in place.

Australia assumed the lead of UPRT following the withdrawal of Dutch forces last year. This civil–military body is essentially responsible for executing CTU's governance and development lines of operation. It functions as a consolidated structure and, with a total of 178 civilian and military staff from Australia, the US and Slovakia, it's one of ISAF's largest PRTs. In addition to its engineer component, the ADF provides UPRT with an organic force protection element, while its logistic support function and overland movement are both facilitated by US Navy personnel. These combined capabilities have allowed UPRT to begin establishing a nascent presence in the province's more remote districts.

Uruzgan remains a difficult political space to comprehend, let alone operate within. While UPRT officials have a good knowledge of tribal networks, they're still developing an understanding of underlying social dynamics. And it is not only the Taliban competing with the Afghan Government for control in the province, but also deeply entrenched patronage networks that extend beyond southern Afghanistan. Mitigating the influence of these malign actors is an ongoing challenge for UPRT as it endeavours to connect the people with their government.

Despite measured progress in building upon programs established by the Dutch, UPRT still deals with significant development challenges in Uruzgan. The province urgently requires improved roads and rural infrastructure, and a range of municipal works in Tarin Kowt, Deh Rawud and Chora await approval and funding. Also somewhat disappointingly, crop substitution efforts in the development zones have met with limited success, and opium poppy cultivation continues at high levels.²⁰

Mindful of governance- and development-related impediments to progress, the Australian Government as the lead partner in UPRT should as a matter of priority help to staff three more district support teams, in addition to the two district-based and one mobile support team currently operating in the province. Each team comprises four to six Australian and American civilian advisers specialising in governance and the rule of law, development assistance and agribusiness. This measure would capitalise on the improving security environment in Uruzgan and strengthen efforts to stabilise all of its five districts and the associated Gizab District in Daikondi Province.

Conclusion

In 2011, ISAF has for the first time gained a narrow window of opportunity to make a lasting difference in Afghanistan. Intelligence-led operations by the coalition in partnership with the ANSF, enabled by last year's surge, have placed unprecedented pressure on the insurgency. Together, those efforts have cleared the Taliban from many areas at the seat of the insurgency in southern Afghanistan.

As the insurgents start to fight back, these hard-won security gains must be consolidated by advancing all lines of operation, including the more challenging areas of governance and development. This will require committed ISAF members like Australia to provide additional civilian resources. Only through maintaining the sense of urgency that was created over the past six months can the coalition shift from stabilisation to the 2014 goal of irreversible transition to Afghan Government responsibility for securing its own territory.

Endnotes

- 1 Department of Defense, *Report on progress toward security and stability in Afghanistan and United States plan for sustaining the Afghanistan National Security Forces*, Washington DC, 2011, p. 49.
- 2 Department of Defense, *Report on progress toward security and stability in Afghanistan*, pp. 49–50.
- 3 The JANIB is co-chaired by the Chairman of the Afghan Transition Coordination Commission, the Commander of ISAF and US Forces in Afghanistan, and the NATO Senior Civilian Representative.
- 4 The first seven areas to undergo transition are the municipal districts of Mazar-e-Sharif, Lashkar Gah, Mehtr Lam and Herat, together with the provinces of Bamyan, Panjshir and Kabul (except Surobi District).
- 5 Intelligence fusion brings together military and civilian personnel from a range of agencies, with diverse expertise, unique skills and access to a large in-theatre intelligence database, who work collaboratively to provide a more comprehensive picture of insurgent targets.
- 6 A reintegration and reconciliation structure was established in August 2010 following the Afghan Government's National Consultative Peace Jirga held on 2–4 June 2010.
- 7 It's important to note that 90% of insurgents captured or killed in Afghanistan were found within 10 kilometres of their home communities.
- 8 To grow the ANSF from its March 2011 strength of 286,000 to its November 2011 goal of 305,600, the Afghan ministries of Defence and the Interior, assisted by the NATO Training Mission—Afghanistan, must recruit and train 71,600 new personnel.
- 9 Key terrain districts are defined as areas the control of which provides a marked advantage to either the Afghan Government or the insurgents.
- 10 Afghanistan was ranked 176th out of 178 countries on the Transparency International Corrupt Practices Index 2010.
- 11 <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/12/16/overview-afghanistan-and-pakistan-annual-review>
- 12 'Area of interest' districts are of secondary importance to key terrain districts.
- 13 Civilian casualties are the most significant problem in Afghanistan's propaganda war; however, 75% of civilian casualties are attributed to insurgent-initiated action.
- 14 By March 2011, the Afghan Government had executed only 33% of its US\$2.2 billion 2010–11 development budget.
- 15 The Agriculture and Rural Development cluster is chaired by the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, and includes the ministries of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Energy and Water, and Counter-Narcotics.
- 16 Afghan Government tax revenue is a mere 10.9% of GDP.
- 17 Australia's military involvement in Afghanistan as part of ISAF takes the form of a peace enforcement mission under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, authorised by UN Security Council Resolution 1943 (ending 13 October 2011) and at the invitation of the Afghan Government.
- 18 Uruzgan's five official districts are Tarin Kowt, Deh Rawud, Chorah, Shahid-e-Hasas and Khas Uruzgan.

19 The Australian Federal Police mission to train the ANP in Uruzgan is known as Operation Illuminate.

20 The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime's *Rapid winter assessment 2011* expects the area under poppy in Uruzgan to remain stable at the 2010 figure of 7,337 hectares.

Acronyms and abbreviations

ADF	Australian Defence Force
ALP	Afghan Local Police
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
COIN	counter-insurgency
CTU	Combined Team Uruzgan
IED	improvised explosive device
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISR	intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance
JANIB	Joint Afghan–NATO Inteqal Board
NDS	National Directorate of Security
OCC-P	Operational Coordination Center—Provincial
OCC-R	Operational Coordination Center—Regional
OPLAN ISAF	Operations Plan
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
RC-S	Regional Command—South
UN	United Nations
UPRT	Uruzgan Provincial Reconstruction Team

About the author

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