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Understanding Afghan
Insurgents: Motivations,
Goals, and the
Reconciliation and
Reintegration Process

Who Are They? What Do
They Want? Why Do They
Fight?

By Andrew Garfield & Alicia Boyd

July 2013



*"A nation must think before it acts."
— Robert Strausz-Hupé*



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1528 Walnut Street, Suite 610 • Philadelphia, PA 19102-3684

Tel. 215-732-3774 • Fax 215-732-4401

About the Authors

Andrew Garfield, a U.S citizen since 2010, served as a British military then senior civilian intelligence officer, finishing his U.K. government service as a policy advisor in the UK Ministry of Defense (MOD). As a policy advisor his three briefs included Information Operations (IO) and Asymmetric Warfare. His professional specializations include Combating Terrorism (CT), Counter Insurgency (COIN), Psychological Warfare (PSYOP), Information Operations (IO) and Strategic Communications (SC). In 1995, he became the first Information Warfare (IW) staff officer within the UK Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS) and was part of the British interdepartmental team that oversaw the introduction of Command and Control Warfare (C2W) and then IW doctrine and capabilities in the UK. In 2006, he led a DIS study that recommended and implemented new capabilities and organizational structures within the DIS to understand, protect, and exploit emerging threats and operations related to Information Warfare, later renamed Information Operations (IO) by the UK. During this period until 2001, he was also a regular lecturer at the UK's 15 PSYOP group.

Since emigrating to the U.S. in 2004, he has worked exclusively for US clients including the U.S. Department of Defense, U.S. Army, and more recently the Department of State. He lectures extensively for the U.S. Army, through the Naval Post Graduate School sponsored Leadership Development and Education for Sustained Peace pre-deployment cultural education program. This is a three-day graduate level program provided to deploying Brigade, Division and Corps Commanders and their Staffs. In this capacity, from 2005 to 2012, he has taught two modules on “Winning the War of Ideas” and “Exploitation of the Human Terrain” to the commanders and staffs of almost every Army and National Guard brigade, division and corps that has deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan since 2005, as well as multiple supporting formations and specialist units. From 2003 until 2010 he also taught a module on Information Operations and Counter Terrorism as part of the PSYOP Officers course held at Fort Bragg NC.

Between 2005 and 2006, he was head of operations for a U.S. Strategic Communications company providing direct IO and public relations support to Multi National Corp Iraq (MNC-I). This included the development, testing, production and dissemination of broadcast and print media products and the management of a nationwide near real time Electronic News Gathering (ENG) capability. In 2006, he developed and implemented an advanced ENG capability that was adopted by MNC-I.

In late 2006, Mr. Garfield founded Glevum Associates LLC a company that specializes in conducting Face-to-Face Research and Analysis (F2RA) in conflict and post conflict societies. Since its inception, Glevum has supported numerous U.S. Government and military clients providing actionable and vital political, security and quality of life information on local populations including in Iraq (550,000 interviews to date) and Afghanistan (250,000 interviews to date). Clients for the F2RA service have included MNC-I in Iraq and ISAF in Afghanistan and the US Embassies in both countries. Mr. Garfield's company continues to be a provider of Measurement of Effectiveness and Evaluation and Monitoring services for the Department of State in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Mr. Garfield is a Senior Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute. For FPRI, Mr. Garfield has produced two significant and widely read and downloaded studies, one on US Army performance in Iraq (Succeeding in Phase IV) and the other on the Afghan National Police (Reforming the Afghan National Police).

Alicia Boyd is the Vice President of Research at Glevum Associates, LLC. Since 2007, Ms. Boyd has overseen the design, fielding and analysis of primary source data in the form of survey interviews, focus groups and depth interviews, and subject-matter expert engagements in Iraq, Afghanistan and Yemen.

Starting with a project on governance and the provision of services in RC-East in 2007, Ms. Boyd has managed Afghan-related research projects ranging from access to health services to elections and media use habits to drivers of alienation and radicalization. The bulk of the research conducted by Glevum in 2009-2012 under Ms. Boyd's oversight, which consisted of hundreds of thousands of survey interviews and thousands of focus group discussions and depth interviews, was focused on the research requirements of ISAF regional commands as they sought to understand the human terrain in their area of responsibility. Ms. Boyd continues to travel to Kabul regularly in support of ongoing projects in Afghanistan.

Ms. Boyd also has extensive experience conducting research in Iraq, where she provided in-country analytical support to the US operational command in Baghdad as early as 2006, as well as from 2009 to 2011. Research executed by Glevum Associates and directed by Ms. Boyd was used by US Army divisions and brigades throughout Iraq to understand Iraqis' opinions of their government, services, and security.

Glevum's Afghan Researchers

The primary field research conducted for this study of the Taliban would not have been possible without the assistance of several determined and dedicated Afghan researchers with whom Glevum Associates has partnered on projects addressing a variety of contemporary issues in Afghanistan and culminating in these interviews with active Taliban fighters.

One of the researchers, Akhtar Jan Kohistani, who was instrumental in building the capability that would later be used to conduct the interviews with the Taliban, was killed in the Pamir Airways crash in 2010. Although he passed away before the Taliban study was completed, his vision was carried out by his colleagues who recognized the importance of hearing the Taliban in their own words.

The interviews for the Taliban study were made possible by the hard work of an Afghan researcher who is from Wardak Province and currently resides in Kabul. In addition to his medical degree, he holds a certificate in statistics and data management from the Agha Khan University in Pakistan. Using personal and family connections in his home province and in eastern and southern Afghanistan, he guided the work of a handful of determined interviewers who conducted the face to face discussions with the Taliban fighters at considerable personal risk to themselves. For their safety, their names cannot be revealed but their dedication and bravery should be an inspiration to everyone.

PREFACE

I have been studying Afghanistan since the late 1980s and the much broader topic of counterinsurgency since the early 1990s. From 2003, I took a direct interest in Iraq following Operation Iraq Freedom. In 2005 and 2006 I served in Iraq as the Operations Director for a company in the private sector focused on information operations. In 2007/08, on behalf of the Foreign Policy Research Institute, I undertook a research project that reviewed U.S. Army performance in Iraq (“Succeeding in Phase IV”). My first-hand experience reinforced the truism that fully understanding the local population, or the “Human Terrain,” as it is now called, is critical to the success of any counterinsurgency operation. During my time in Iraq in 2005/06, I found that even after three years of occupation, the U.S. military’s understanding of the Iraq population was superficial at best, and to help remedy this critical information gap, I formed Glevum Associates, in late 2006. Since 2007, Glevum and its local field research partners have interviewed over 550,000 Iraqis and produced hundreds of socio-cultural reports that have informed operations and decision-making successfully from platoon through Corps level.

Also in 2007, Glevum began to take a much more direct interest in Afghanistan, securing contracts to conduct socio-cultural field research in the volatile Regional Command East (RC-East) Area of Operations. By 2008, this research support had extended to all of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces, in direct support of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the U.S. Embassy and the Human Terrain System (HTS) Program funded by the U.S. Department of Defense. Glevum has since undertaken more than 300 major Afghan-related research projects, covering a wide range of topics from rule of law to quality of life and interviewed over 300,000 eminent and ordinary Afghans, using a variety of techniques including polling, depth interviews and focus groups. Glevum’s Afghan research partners have visited more than 5,000 Afghan towns and villages. Glevum continued to operate in Iraq until February 2013 and remains in Afghanistan in support of U.S. Government-funded efforts.

In the process of executing these research projects, designed to help soldiers, officials and commanders better understand the Iraqi and Afghan populations, it became apparent that no one was asking our adversaries, such as the Afghan Taliban, what they needed, wanted or thought. Of course, ISAF is able to interview captured Taliban and use other sources to eavesdrop on Taliban conversations. But the results derived from this intelligence, are either distorted by the fact that captured Taliban are incarcerated and under psychological duress or the fact that eavesdropping severely limits one’s ability to ask questions or follow up on key issues. In discussing this vital information gap with Glevum’s Afghan research team, it quickly became clear that not only did some of these researchers have direct access to Taliban fighters through personal and family connections but that many of the fighters were willing to provide their perspective, openly and honestly. In the winter of 2009/2010, Glevum therefore undertook, on its own initiative, a systematic study of Afghan insurgents to help shed light on who they are as individuals, the reasons why they fight, and to determine from their own

perspectives, what they believe the future of Afghanistan should look like.

A reliable and dedicated indigenous Afghan researcher who was able to leverage local connections and his status within the Afghan community to gain access to these Taliban fighters conducted these interviews. The winter months were chosen because this is the period when many Taliban fighters return home at the end of the summer “fighting season.” Tragically, this courageous researcher was killed in an airplane crash while returning to Kabul from the field. While preliminary indications suggest that our researcher had interviewed more than 50 Taliban fighters and had collected invaluable insights, all of the data he collected was also lost in the plane crash. It was, therefore, decided that Glevum would seek to replicate this research effort during the winter of 2010/2011.

A new team of dedicated and well-connected Afghan researchers, whose reliability and integrity had been proven over multiple research projects, was trained to conduct this new research project. After much negotiation, the Glevum team was able to organize 27 in-depth interviews with active insurgents operating in the restive provinces of Kandahar, Kunar, and Wardak. Over the following three winters, culminating in a final 10 interviews conducted in October 2012, our Afghan researchers undertook a total of 78 in-depth interviews with active insurgents, living and operating in many of Afghanistan’s most volatile provinces.

This report contains the key insurgent comments and findings derived directly from those 78 in-depth interviews, conducted with self-identified Afghan insurgents in Baghlan, Ghazni, Helmand, Kandahar, Khost, Kunar, Kunduz, Nangarhar, Nimruz, Nuristan, Paktia, Parwan, Uruzgan, Wardak, and Zabul. Interviewees are between the ages of 16 and 53 and vary considerably in educational and professional backgrounds. These interviewees are predominantly ethnically Pashtun; however, one identifies himself as Tajik and another as an Arab. (Please reference the “Respondent Demographics” section of the Chapter Appendices for more detailed information on individual interviewees.)

In each interview, interviewees were asked to provide personal information including their place of birth, current residence, level of education, tribal affiliation, and marital status. Interviewees were then asked to detail their experiences within their respective insurgent group and to describe factors that influenced their decision to join and actively participate in insurgent operations against the Afghan Government and ISAF. Next, interviewees discussed their goals, hopes for the future, and how they believed the conflict in Afghanistan might be brought to an end. Finally, interviewees commented on the efficacy of—and prospects for—the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP). They even offered suggestions for what could be done to improve its effectiveness, or commented on the impending withdrawal of ISAF forces and the Afghan presidential elections, both scheduled for 2014.

The in-depth interview method was chosen because it is designed to explore topics in

considerable depth in a semi-structured discussion, enabling sensitive and thoughtful responses. However, it is not intended to produce results that are statistically representative. Thus, the general conclusions and findings of this report cannot be guaranteed to carry over to the wider district, provincial, or national populations. At interviewees' request, audio from the interviews was not captured. Moderators recorded interviewees' responses by hand; these responses were then translated into English for analysis. This method has been used extensively and successfully by Glevum in Afghanistan and has proven to be a reliable way of conducting this type of field research. Significantly, Afghans have an oral tradition, which typically means they are able to listen, hear and memorize what they are told, far more reliably than researchers from other communities and ethnicities. Interviewers were also provided with training to improve their interview and recording skills. Interviewers were also debriefed and questioned each other to further illuminate their interaction with the insurgents.

Quotes are edited for readability and to preserve anonymity, but no substantive changes were made and any edits sought to preserve the respondent's original intent. The interviews were conducted in Pashtu by ethnic Pashtun interviewers and the original transcripts were written in Pashtu. Subsequent translation has been quality checked to ensure accuracy and reliability.

These interviews were analyzed by, and this report was written by, Alicia Boyd, Director of Research, Glevum Associates, and me, with an important contribution made by former Glevum analyst Pascale Siegel.

Included with this report are extensive "analysts' comments." These are deliberately highlighted to differentiate them from the findings of the report, which are derived only from the interviews we conducted. These analyst comments seek to further explain interviewees' insights, provide context, and to highlight what we see are the wider strategic consequences and implications of the findings of this study. In doing so we draw heavily on the findings we have derived from interviewing hundreds of thousands of Afghans, including through the polling of representative samples of the population from the district to the national level. We also draw upon our own personal experience and study of Afghanistan over several years including living and working "in-country". We have also taken the liberty of recommending policy and operational actions that could be taken to mitigate what otherwise to seem to us to be a dire situation for the future of Afghanistan. At all times we have sought to differentiate our opinions from the words and thoughts of our interviewees. These opinions are exclusively those of the authors of this report.

The collection of data, analysis, and development of this report has been funded at private expense by Glevum Associates, LLC.

- Andrew Garfield

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

78 in-depth interviews were conducted with self-identified Afghan insurgents in Baghlan, Ghazni, Helmand, Kandahar, Khost, Kunar, Kunduz, Nangarhar, Nimruz, Nuristan, Paktia, Parwan, Uruzgan, Wardak, and Zabul. Interviewees were between the ages of 16 and 53 and varied considerably in educational and professional backgrounds. These interviewees were predominantly ethnically Pashtun; however, one identified himself as Tajik and another as an Arab.

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The in-depth interview method was chosen because it is designed to explore topics in considerable depth in a semi-structured discussion, enabling sensitive and thoughtful responses. However it is not intended to produce results that are statistically representative. Thus, the general conclusions and findings of this report cannot be guaranteed to carry over to the wider district, provincial, or national populations. At interviewees' request, audio from the interviews was not captured. Moderators recorded interviewees' responses by hand; these responses were then translated into English for

From the Transcript

On why insurgents fight:

"I fight against the government because it's an infidel government and made by the occupiers. It is in infidel government." (31-year-old insurgent from Chack, Wardak)

On insurgent operations:

"I have not fought for the past 45 days. I participated in many operations before. We had an operation on ANA checkpoint and we arrested 3 of them and killed 8 of them. We got lots of weapon and bullets." (41-year-old insurgent from Asadabad, Kunar)

On how the war ends:

"If the government talks to its opposition, the war will be over. Karzai should step down and the foreigners should leave." (24-year-old insurgent from Arghandab, Kandahar)

analysis. This method has been used extensively and successfully by Glevum in Afghanistan and has proven to be a reliable way of conducting this type of field research. Significantly, Afghans have an oral tradition, which typically means they are able to listen, hear and memorize what they are told, far more reliably than researchers from other communities and ethnicities. Interviewers were also provided with training to improve their interview and recording skills. Interviewers were also debriefed and questioned each other to further illuminate their interaction with the insurgents. The interviews were conducted in Pashtu by ethnic Pashtun interviewers and the original transcripts were written in Pashtu. Subsequent translation has been quality checked to ensure accuracy and reliability. Our primary findings are below.

Ordinary Men

When one studies the demographics and words of the 78 Taliban fighters interviewed for this project, one is struck by just how ordinary they really are. While these insurgents represent different backgrounds, experiences and allegiances, they are all similar in one key respect. They are average ordinary men, similar in almost every respect to the majority of Pashtun Afghans. They are not exceptional men by any measure but they are highly motivated and committed to the cause and seem likely to have the endurance needed to fight for years and even decades. They are not a small cadre of indoctrinated fanatics whose elimination will undermine the fighting ability of the Taliban. Rather, they are ordinary men motivated to fight against those who they feel are destroying their way of life and attacking their values, community and faith. Some are motivated by need, fear and a desire for revenge but most— if not all—are motivated by a complex range of goals, beliefs and emotions that are not going to be easily changed nor undermined. In many respects, this is a far more dangerous and enduring adversary than the radicalized zealots in groups like al Qaeda.

A Sense of Impunity

Perhaps the most significant finding of this project is simply the fact that not one of the Taliban fighters interviewed voiced any concerns, fears or objections about participating in this project. All 78 interviewees agreed to participate in a lengthy and intensive in-depth interview, with an Afghan interviewer from outside of their group, extended family and even district. They freely admitted that they were active members of an illegal insurgent group. They offered detailed insights into their insurgent activities and motivations. And they offered all this sensitive information to a relative stranger, albeit to an ethnically similar Afghan researcher.

Almost all interviewees were living in, or close to, their homes when interviewed and did not seem unduly concerned that they were putting themselves, their friends and family at risk. Although most indicated that they did not carry out insurgent activities in their home districts.

However, it seems that their summer “occupation” is reasonably well known to neighbors, friends and family, yet they did not fear being “turned in” to the authorities. They were clearly able to hide – one might even say live – in plain sight, apparently without fear of compromise, detection, arrest or death.

Their elaborative answers suggest that this sense of relative impunity is real rather than simply an act of collective bravado for the benefit of the interviewer. Given that this impunity was replicated across multiple districts and provinces, it is likely that their individual feeling of relative safety was genuine and shared by all. This is clearly disconcerting, given that the ability to hide in plain sight, within a sympathetic community, is a huge advantage to the Taliban. It provides them with multiple safe havens within Afghanistan, as well as in neighboring Pakistan, which most interviewees also confirmed.

Fighters’ ability to return home during the winter months and enjoy a period of rest, recuperation and reorganization is also of concern as it reduces the combat fatigue they probably endure during the summer “fighting season,” although most claimed that they suffered no fatigue at all.

These interviewees, drawn from multiple districts and provinces, also indicate that numerous Pashtun dominated areas of Afghanistan are at a minimum, sympathetic to the Taliban, if not altogether under direct Taliban influence.

Pakistan as a Safe Haven

The ability of these fighters to travel to and from Pakistan for both insurgent and personal reasons is also telling. Clearly, Pakistan is not simply a safe haven to which the Taliban retreat at the end of the summer “fighting season.” Indeed, almost all interviewees have no need to do so, given that they can winter much closer to home. Rather, Pakistan is far more important as a location for key insurgent activities to be conducted in relative safety. This includes such vital activities as resupply, training and to plan future operations. These findings reinforce our

Insurgent Snapshot from Wardak

- Born in Wardak Province
 - Resides in the same district where born
 - Between 23 and 29-years-old
 - Single
 - No children
 - Most likely to be unemployed, student, or farmer
 - Likely to fight for Islam and for country
 - Believes that Karzai should not be in charge after the United States leaves
 - Travels to other areas of Afghanistan to conduct personal business, pursue work opportunities, or visit family members
 - Has at some point traveled to Pakistan to prepare for *jihad*
 - Has religious and government schooling
 - A member of the Noori, Wardak, Merkhil, or Mayar Tribes
-

understanding of the critical importance of the Pakistan as a safe haven for the Taliban and why it must therefore be denied to the Taliban if they are to be defeated or at a minimum forced to reconcile with the Afghan Government. It is worrisome that these fighters said they could travel to and from Pakistan with relatively impunity, despite the best efforts of ISAF and the Afghan Government to prevent them from doing so.

Key Insurgent Motivations

Implacable opposition to Western presence, values, and influence over the Afghan government, as well as the perceived severe shortcomings of the Afghan Government itself, are clearly the primary factors that motivate the fighters interviewed for this project. While they may have been motivated by diverse factors to join their group, they continue to engage in the insurgency on the side of the Taliban or the Hizb-i-Islami for broadly the same reasons. They are committed to remove foreign forces and influence and to restore a more traditional and strictly Islamic form of governance in Afghanistan. Most interviewees believe that the presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan (almost universally identified as Americans) results in the type of political and social ills they do not want. The presence of foreign troops is exclusively framed in negative terms. No interviewee had anything positive to say about NATO or the United States; meanwhile almost all argue that the U.S. presence results in the killing and abuse of Afghans (women in particular); the commensurate subservience of the Afghan government to foreign interests: and in the imposition of extraneous secular, non-Islamic values. Meanwhile, practical issues of good governance and good stewardship of the nation's resources for the common good also motivated some interviewees, although far less so than the impact of foreign forces.

Many interviewees repeated Taliban propaganda themes, most often about egregious U.S. behaviors, accusing them of killing innocent Afghans, assaulting women, mishandling the Quran (e.g., throwing it into the bathroom at Bagram), sexually assaulting elderly men, torturing Muslims with dogs, brutalizing people, and burning crops. Interviewees from Kandahar were more likely to talk about this type of abuse than interviewees from other provinces. References to U.S. forces' supposed bad behaviors involve mostly the victimization of highly sacred objects (Quran) or of vulnerable populations (women and elderly), probably because it is easier to admit that those who can't defend themselves are the ones being victimized. Given the consistency of views across so many provinces, one cannot attribute such views only to the impact and effectiveness of Taliban propaganda; rather this propaganda successfully reflects, exploits and reinforces widely and long held beliefs and perceptions. Indeed, our interviews of tens of thousands of ordinary Afghans strongly suggest that many of these "Taliban" views and misperceptions are also held by ordinary Pashtu and even Tajiks. Most grievances are sadly founded on actual events. Therefore, disrupting and countering Taliban propaganda will likely not change many Afghan's perspectives about ISAF or the Afghan government.

Personal victimization is one of the reasons fighters join the insurgency. Indeed, a majority of interviewees indicate that they or close family members have been victims of coalition operations. The remainder of interviewees expressed that while they or their close family had not been victimized, they knew of villagers or “other Muslims” who had been killed or wounded. A few interviewees also stated that it does not matter whether they or their loved ones were victimized so long as fellow Muslims were targeted.

For the interviewees, religious and patriotic motivations are intertwined and mutually reinforce each other, as the overwhelming majority of interviewees used both Islamic and patriotic values to define their rationale for fighting against the Americans and the Afghan government. Many believe that the West intervened in Afghanistan as part of a broader war against Islam and explain that they act patriotically against the Afghan government because it is a “slave government” defending America’s interests, not the Afghans. If they had a bumper-sticker slogan, it would read: “In defense of land, religion, and women.”

While all interviewees express their desire, to a greater or lesser extent, to secure the Taliban espoused goals of removing foreign forces and the current Afghan government, and imposing a pious Islamic government, it is worth highlighting that many also express commonly held views that are shared by many moderate and nonviolent Afghans. Both the Taliban fighters interviewed for this project and the many thousands of Afghans interviewed by Glevum and others are equally concerned about personal, family and community security, good governance, provision of services, reconstruction, and expansion of economic opportunities. However, such practical issues are clearly more important to ordinary Afghans than to the Taliban. Similarly these insurgents, like a growing segment of the Afghan population, do not trust the Afghan government. Most of them would like to see a more honest and pious, less corrupt, and far more efficient government in power. This is concerning, as a confluence between a growing percentage of Afghans and the Taliban can only bolster support for its activities at the expense of the Afghan government.

Traditional Values and the Role of Women

Most interviewees espouse a very traditional and conservative set of values. In part their values are based on a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam and Sharia Law and a very strong desire for piety in their own lives and in Afghanistan. However, Pashtu society in particular and to a lesser extent Afghan society overall remains very conservative. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the interviewees’ attitudes toward women. Not only do these interviewees wish to preserve the subservient place of women in Afghan society, as it existed under the previous Taliban regime, they also see the more secular nature of Afghan society since 2001 and the limited emancipation of women to be a source of great offense and a key motivator for

opposing the Afghan government. Most likely this is a widely held view within the Taliban. Other Glevum research suggests that this is also a strongly held view by many Pashtun males and a significant and surprising number of other Afghans. It is, therefore, likely that a condition of any peace settlement will be a significant diminishing of the rights of women in Afghanistan, and a defeat of the present government would probably return Afghan women to their status under the last Taliban government.

Taliban Commitment

The interviewees in this study appear deeply committed to the fight and most have been engaged in operations for years. The majority clearly believes that they are fighting for compelling and honorable reasons such as patriotism (the defense of their land) and religious values (the defense of Islam). Most feel that their commitment to, and participation in, the fighting reflects positively on their personal character. For it makes them an example, a shahid (martyr), and/or a Ghazi. A few say they hope their example will encourage others, like their children, to follow in their footsteps. This dedication and commitment strongly suggests that a government reconciliation strategy based solely on an amnesty and financial inducements will not persuade many of those interviewed, and perhaps by extension many other fighters, to reject the Taliban cause, and certainly not without their having first achieved some of theirs and the Taliban's political goals.

Taliban Endurance

Not surprisingly, given that interviewees typically describe the fight as a moral and religious obligation, they also tend to deny that they suffer from combat fatigue. Many interviewees also say that they don't fight all the time, although the operational tempo varies enormously on a case-by-case basis. Nonetheless, leaving the personal boasting and ideological "grandstanding" aside, a sizable minority of those interviewed are willing to admit that fighting is variously difficult, bad, tiring, or boring. Acknowledging fatigue during jihad, which is considered an obligation, is inappropriate and/or emotionally difficult, but it is clearly happening, at least for a minority. Interestingly, those interviewees living in Kandahar are more likely to deny any fatigue because "jihad is a requirement," despite the higher level of fighting that has occurred in that province. However, they are also more likely than interviewees in both Kunar and Wardak, for example, to indicate that fighting is difficult and that war is bad. This suggests that they too, on occasion, become fatigued. The relatively light operational tempo under which most indicate that they operate, and the obvious down times, especially during the winter months, may also help to explain in part, the declared absence of combat fatigue.

This evidence also suggests that at a minimum morale remains relatively high, which can offset physical exhaustion. It also suggests that while efforts to focus on kill-or-capture operations are most likely having an immediate negative impact on Taliban operational effectiveness, these tactics will not lead to their defeat. In fact, these efforts may not result in the kind of fatigue that encourages willingness to compromise in peace discussions. The opportunity for periods of rest and recuperation, combined with solid ideological underpinnings and a desire to retain and enhance one's own honor, appears to provide these fighters with a resilience that may well enable them to continue to endure even more effective and destructive kill-or-capture operations. This reinforces and validates the necessity for both the Afghan leadership and ISAF leadership to continue a multifaceted and holistic COIN strategy. This strategy should include but not be dominated by kill-or-capture operations. After, typically five years of fighting, it does not appear that these interviewees and perhaps many of their seasoned colleagues, are sufficiently fearful for themselves or their families to be intimidated by Afghan National Security Forces and ISAF operations, thereby forcing them to consider unconditional reconciliation simply in return for an amnesty and money or modest concessions from the present government.

Taliban Operations

Interviewees' recollection of a typical operation virtually always includes detail of the attack type, their target, and a post-attack damage assessment. They report attacking U.S. forces more often than Afghan forces and they usually gauge operational success based on the attrition of their enemies. Understandably, they are far less open concerning the specific tactics they use. This reticence to reveal operationally sensitive information is potentially significant in that it indicates that there are topics they are unwilling to discuss in any detail. This suggests that they have been both honest and forthcoming on other topics. When describing the sources of their supplies and support, interviewees point mostly to local sources, with minimal mentions of international donors or providers. Frequently mentioned sources of material and financial support include war spoils, looted items, which interviewees refer to as *ghanimat*, personal and family resources, and *zakat* and *ushr*¹ (claimed to be collected on a voluntary basis). Such sources suggest a significant degree of self-sustainability and may indicate that efforts to interdict supplies and funds emanating from Pakistan, while necessary, may be of limited utility. If correct, this evidence also suggests that the endurance of individual

¹Zakat – Part of the Five Pillars of Islam, *zakat* is a religious tax incumbent upon all Muslims who can afford to pay it. Typically estimated at 2.5percent - 3percent of an individual's income, these funds are used to help needy individuals, families, or communities in a variety of ways. The amount of *zakat* collected, method of collection and disbursement, and use of funds varies considerably among Muslim cultures and nations.

fighters may be indefinite unless local support and supplies are also eliminated as well as continued interdiction of supplies from elsewhere.

Sensitivity to Atrocities

The way many insurgents describe their operations suggests that they take precautions to avoid antagonizing the general public at least in their home districts. In discussing their jihad-related activities, insurgents' responses often indicate that they avoid conducting operations close to their homes. In the first instance, this is clearly to avoid their families being impacted by their activities. However, it may also indicate a desire to avoid a backlash from the community in which they live/hide, given that many of the Taliban's operations target innocent civilians and fellow Muslims. Arguably, if the people in their home community cannot connect the dots between the atrocities committed and the perpetrators, they are more likely to leave the insurgents alone. Also, they tend to report attacking military rather than civilian targets as any acknowledgement of targeting civilians is likely to play badly with the public—particularly in the areas they regard as safe havens.

The Fighting Will Continue After 2014

Support for continuing the fight against the Afghan government after the withdrawal of NATO forces is almost universal. Very few interviewees say they will cease fighting after U.S. and NATO forces leave Afghanistan. In other words, the removal of what interviewees consider to be the primary source of Afghanistan's problem (the presence of foreigners) would still not stop them from engaging in violent operations against the government. In fact, all interviewees, as well as a growing percentage of the population, consider the government illegitimate, corrupt, un-Islamic and ineffective. Interviewees also don't trust the government to honor any promises made during peace negotiations. Less than half believe that negotiations will end the war. And even this group will only countenance a settlement if the government first accepts three key Taliban demands: (1) the departure of foreigners, (2) full implementation of Sharia law, and (3) complete replacement of the current Afghan government leadership.

This staunch opposition to the current government, with or without foreign support, is not surprising as it mirrors that of the Taliban leadership. The interviewees' hardline position, however, is almost certainly not simply a reiteration of the "party line." Not least, because their own significant dissatisfaction is shared by a majority of ordinary Afghans. The overall hostility toward the government suggests that a new President will not change these attitudes, unless he addresses the reasons why these fighters and so many other Afghans are dissatisfied. It is possible, given the ambiguity and/or softness of some answers on this issue, that

fundamental reform or the formation of a new Afghan government—one that is perceived as not influenced by the United States—might be sufficient to encourage some Taliban members to seek reconciliation without their return to power. However, based on these interviewees, this outcome seems highly unlikely. Only the replacement of the existing government with one that addresses all of their primary goals and perspectives will likely suffice.

Given that many other Afghans would resist a fundamentalist Pashtun-dominated Taliban government, especially the Tajiks and Hazara, this evidence strongly suggests that the conflict will continue after 2014. Indeed a full-scale civil war similar to the early 1990's seems almost inevitable, if international and US support is withdrawn entirely.

Return of Mullah Omar

Interestingly, declared support for the current Taliban leader Mullah Omar, to take over from a Karzai administration is relatively low. Many older interviewees have fond memories of the previous Taliban regime, which they praise for maintaining security and Islamic virtues. A few are willing to accept some “insufficiencies” of the former regime, focusing on its lack of independence, its worldwide isolation, and its lack of good relations with other Islamist groups. However, despite these largely positive memories, many interviewees do not wholeheartedly support the return of the old regime from Pakistan. In total, only about one-third of the insurgents feel that the current Taliban leadership are best suited to run the country, while another third simply state that a “good Muslim” should take charge of the country. The remaining third suggest a variety of groups—including the Afghan public or smaller individual extremist factions like Hizb-i-Islami—or decline to offer an opinion, often claiming that they do not feel qualified to answer. Only one interviewee clamors for the return of Mullah Omar at the helm of Afghanistan.

These divergent views and the softness of support for the current Taliban leadership to run Afghanistan may be simply the result of Taliban propaganda not focusing on the aftermath of the war and local insurgents not yet having a clear direction to follow. Or it may be that there is not a broad appetite for a return of Mullah Omar and his commanders—even among local fighters. This would be a positive development suggesting that reform of the Afghan government and a willingness to compromise on some key issues and demands, might facilitate the reconciliation process at least with certain segments of the Taliban, especially in places such as Wardak.

Conclusions

While it is obviously dangerous to extrapolate the findings from 78 interviews to the rest of the

Taliban, the evidence collected from these interviews and from the dozens of other research projects undertaken by Glevum in Afghanistan over the last four years does suggest that the future of Afghanistan is grim. These fighters live in plain sight, within either a supportive or acquiescent population, without fear of being killed or captured. Their ability to take extended breaks from the fighting, usually during the winter, their strong sense of religious duty (jihad), their need to retain individual honor, and their strong sense that they will ultimately prevail, helps most of these fighters to overcome any combat fatigue that they may feel. And they can largely sustain themselves, probably indefinitely, by securing limited funds, weapons and supplies locally.

While the removal of foreigners from Afghanistan is an essential prerequisite for these interviewees to accept any peace and reconciliation process, this outcome alone will probably not end the fighting. Only the return of a fundamentalist pious Islamic government, purged of current government members, and which reverses many of the reforms of the last ten years will satisfy these fighters. It seems unlikely that the next Afghan President will implement such fundamental reforms, which would anyway be opposed by many non-Pashtun Afghans and most international supporters. In the absence of a peace settlement, it is probably inevitable therefore that the Taliban will continue to fight the Afghan government after 2014. If the ANA does not hold together, then the fragmentation of the country will likely reoccur relatively quickly and civil war will almost certainly follow. The collapse of the country would be accelerated by the all but inevitable flight of funds and elites. Such an outcome can only be averted, at least temporarily, if direct US and international community military assistance and financial support continues after 2014, albeit at much reduced levels from today.

Can continued conflict be avoided? It is certainly possible that the United States, the Afghan Government and the Taliban leadership, could negotiate a “face saving” peace settlement that would likely need to include a degree of national power sharing. Such an agreement could even allow the US to withdraw completely relatively soon, if not by the end of 2014 then certainly by 2016. Indeed, the withdrawal of foreign forces is likely to be a condition of such an agreement. And Taliban leaders could probably force through such an agreement over the objections of the rank and file. However, accepting such an agreement could also simply be a strategy designed to ensure the removal of all foreign forces and direct military support for the Afghan National Army.

This presents the United States in particular with a terrible dilemma. Continue to support the Afghan government after 2014 with significant direct military support and financial aid, perhaps indefinitely, and hope that necessary government reform can be achieved and that a distasteful peace settlement with the Taliban can be secured, thereby allowing for an eventual US withdrawal but perhaps only postponing the collapse of the Afghan government and the

civil war that would probably ensue. Or withdraw all support at the end of 2014 and live with the consequences, which would very likely include government collapse and civil war probably within twelve to twenty four months. It would appear that for all of the parties involved, the future looks grim.

INSURGENTS' DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Individuals from 15 provinces were interviewed for this study, with a majority of interviews clustered in Kandahar, Kunar and Wardak Provinces in order to illustrate the variations and similarities in the composition and viewpoints of the different “strains” of Taliban.

Place of Birth and Current Residence

Many interviewees report that they continue to reside in the same district where they were born.

Five of the 78 interviewees were born outside Afghanistan. Four were born in Pakistan, as their families had fled to either Quetta or Peshawar during the anti-Soviet jihad. In spite of their place of birth, each of the Pakistani-born interviewees indicates that he considers himself to be Afghan. One Kuwaiti-born insurgent appears to be the only “foreign fighter” among the interviewees.

Age and Marital Status

The mean age of interviewees is 31 years old. However, interviewees range considerably in age; the youngest being 16 while the oldest interviewee is 53.²

Interviewees are equally likely to be married as they are to be single and very few interviewees identify themselves as engaged or a widower. Older interviewees are more likely to be married than their younger counterparts.

***Analyst Comment:** The age spread of the interviewees is important for several reasons. In the first instance, it suggests that the Taliban enjoys popular support across a broad cross section of the Pashtun population. It also suggests that there is a wide range of experience within each individual group from the very young and inexperienced to the surprisingly mature and vastly experienced insurgent. The numbers who are or who have been married also shows that Taliban fighters are able to continue living ordinary lives for much of the time, while being free to join the battle during the “fighting season.” Overall, this data reinforces the perception of a popular, broad-based and enduring insurgency movement.*

² It should be noted that, driven in part by poor official recordkeeping, many Afghans are only able to approximate their age.

Education

Most interviewees indicate having received some schooling but their levels of education vary greatly from young men who are able to read and write to middle-aged men with six years of attendance at government schools up to a Malawi with 21 years of religious education.³ Religious education is slightly more common among the interviewees than government schooling. A slight majority of interviewees were enrolled at a religious school (madrassa or darul ulum) at some point in their lives. Almost as many insurgents have attended both a government-run and a religious school. Few interviewees reported attending a government-run school exclusively.⁴

Analyst Comment: *These answers illustrate a dilemma that needs to be addressed. Significant numbers of fighters have received at least a partial religious school education. Typically this is because a madrassa style education provides a higher quality and more traditional education than most government schools. In addition, many madrassa also provide basic social services including regular meals. However, it is likely that some madrassa, especially those located in Pakistan, promote and reinforce Islamic extremism and are recruitment centers for the Taliban. The challenge for the Afghan and Pakistan Governments and for ISAF (at least for two more years) is to find a way to support the provision of a traditional religious education to those that desire it, while preventing this type of education from becoming a source of radicalization and terrorist recruitment. Simply shutting down most madrassa and forcing Afghans in particular to rely solely on a more secular and often lower quality public education is not a solution. Rather, such action is likely to incite further opposition and resentment. However, allowing the madrassa to remain a center for radicalization of the most vulnerable segment of the population is no solution either. A further significant improvement in Afghan government fund education and the provision of school meals to the poor will reduce the attraction of religious schools to some. For others, however, it will remain the education of choice. It is therefore vital that a pragmatic Muslim-led, and international community supported solution be developed, to reduce the prevalence of Islamic extremism in Muslim religious schools.*

Travel within Afghanistan and Abroad

To understand the interviewees' mobility and the extent to which they have seen areas of Afghanistan beyond their home districts or other countries, interviewees were asked about the

³ Eighteen of the 31 interviewees in the August/September 2011 interviews did not report their age or education.

⁴ It is not uncommon for Afghan men to have both government and religious education. Madrassa education is often a supplement to, if not a replacement for, government schooling where government schools are unavailable or rejected in favor of religious education.

farthest place from home they had visited.⁵ While most interviewees currently live in the district where they were born, many report traveling to neighboring provinces and more distant areas of the country. Overall, about one third of interviewees report they have travelled to other countries. Nearly all who have left Afghanistan have visited Pakistan; only one says he has travelled to Iran.

Those interviewees who have visited Pakistan traveled mostly to cities and territories located in western Pakistan, namely Peshawar, Quetta, Waziristan, Baluchistan and Islamabad, along with one mention of Karachi. Those who have visited Pakistan have done so for these reasons, listed in order of frequency: jihad/training, work, visiting family and friends, religious education, medical treatment and trade.

Analyst Comment: *Given the proximity of Pakistan, Pashtun Afghans' ethnic, economic and family ties to Pakistan, and the role of Pakistan as a safe haven for the Taliban, it is unsurprising that so many interviewees had traveled there. The fact that so many of those interviewed openly admitted that they travelled freely and easily to Pakistan, for Jihad-related activities, illustrates the crucial importance to the Taliban of Pakistan as a safe haven, a place where they can rest, train, plan and equip with relative impunity. These answers also demonstrate that Taliban fighters can move easily in and out of Pakistan with little stated fear of interdiction. Clearly much more still needs to be done, on both sides of the border, to interdict Taliban fighters travelling to and from Pakistan. It is also fairly safe to assume that unless the Pakistani safe haven can be denied to the Taliban, achieving a decisive defeat of them in Afghanistan will be elusive.*

With regard to the ease with which these fighters appear to move in and out of Pakistan, they are clearly assisted by the fact that so many ordinary Afghans also travel regularly to Pakistan, thereby providing the Taliban with a legitimate cover. Extensive survey research undertaken by Glevum in Southern Afghanistan over the last four years has shown that travel to Pakistan is commonplace for many Pashtun Afghans, particularly to visit family, to receive an education (predominately at religious schools) and often most importantly to receive medical treatment. The same, non-Jihad reasons for travel to Pakistan were provided by interviewees. While in Pakistan, ordinary Afghans are particularly susceptible to Taliban propaganda and recruitment activities. Afghans will always travel for personal reasons but if more could be done in Southern Afghanistan, to provide a decent education (including a less radical religious school education) and to improve the availability, quality and affordability of health care, then it is likely that far fewer would feel the need to visit Pakistan. Fewer ordinary Afghans travelling to Pakistan should make the detection of Taliban fighters that much easier.

⁵ This question was asked only of the 27 interviewees from December 2010.

Earning a Living

Few of the interviewees are engaged exclusively in insurgent activity throughout the year: since the pace of fighting ebbs and flows based on the weather and the availability of weapons and ammunition, and may halt altogether in some areas for the winter or the harvest season, most interviewees also have a peaceful, conventional means of making a living such as farming.

Among those who discussed their occupation, slightly more interviewees describe themselves as fully committed to fighting jihad and not engaging in other work. Although these interviewees do admit to taking time off from participating or planning operations, much of their down time still revolves around insurgent activities such as religious education, recruiting, or marshaling supplies for future operations. The remainder, revert to other work when not actively participating in insurgent missions. A respondent in Wardak's Saidabad district offers a typical multi-occupational description: "[I am a] jihadist, farmer, and kasabkar (handyman)."

Analyst Comment: *The interviewees' level of involvement in either kinetic actions or Taliban recruitment and propagandizing may be an indicator of their commitment to the cause and also an indicator of the level of difficulty in convincing them to reconcile and reintegrate. Men who have completed more than a decade of religious education and use their knowledge to recruit and encourage Taliban fighters are unlikely to put aside their views without significant persuasion and significant concessions on the part of the Afghan Government. Even then, they may be unwilling to compromise unless compelled to do so by the Taliban leadership.*

Tribal and Social Bonds

Except in Kandahar Province, where many interviewees identify themselves as Alkozai Pashtuns, no particular tribe is represented more often than another.

Analyst Comment: *This is not surprising because the Alokazai, despite being the third largest tribe in Kandahar Province, have been disenfranchised since President Karzai was elected and have consequently gravitated toward the Taliban. Interviews were conducted before a recent decision by Alokazais in Helmand to turn against the foreign fighters in Sangin District (January 2011).*

Interviewees in Wardak tended to identify themselves either as members of the Wardak tribe or one of the smaller sub-tribes (Mayar, Mirkhel, and Nuri).⁶ Several interviewees sought to downplay tribal identity, saying that qawm (tribal identity) does not matter because the

⁶ Source: Wardak Province. "Human Terrain: Wardak Pashtun," <http://www.nps.edu/programs/ccs/MaydenWardak.html>.

insurgents are all Muslim.

Of the interviewees who were asked about key individuals who had influenced them when they were growing up, interviewees mention family members and relatives more than any other group or individual. Interviewees mentioned the influence of Taliban figures second most often (about one-fifth of the total mentions), followed by friends, classmates, villagers, and religious leaders.

Interviewees who cited family members and relatives as having been most influential in their lives did not elaborate on the nature of this influence, whereas interviewees who identified Taliban members as important influencers in their lives mentioned those individuals' Islamic piety, personal character, or battlefield experience as the reasons for their importance. Those who grew up among anti-Soviet mujahedeen in Pakistan thank them for the lessons they imparted about how to observe Islam and credited them with showing them the path to their current jihad.

Analyst Comment: *It is common, within an insurgent or terrorist group, for its members to become isolated from the outside world and external moderating influences. This isolation leads to dependency on the group for their own survival, identity and sense of purpose and as the primary source of validation. Typically, leaders and other influential members of the group also become the primary influencers of its members. The fact that so many of those interviewed included family members and friends as significant and influential persons in their lives is, therefore, a positive factor, although not surprising given that most of those interviewed were still living in their home districts.*

It means that, potentially, there are external influences, from outside the Taliban, who might be able to reason with these fighters and encourage them to leave the group or at least reconcile with the Afghan authorities, if they were so inclined. The negative implication of interviewees living at home, during the winter months, is that family and friends are clearly well aware of their affiliation and by implication many must also be tacit or explicit supporters of the Taliban or at least supportive of their friends and relatives who are members. It is therefore imperative that reconciliation and counter-radicalization efforts also focus on the local community rather than simply on the Taliban members themselves. If the family and friends of Taliban fighters can be persuaded to reject the Taliban cause and encourage reconciliation, then Taliban fighters will have a positive and clearly influential alternative to the arguments, inducements and intimidation of Taliban leaders.

The fact that religious piety and personal character are important reasons why Taliban members are influential in the lives of some interviewees may also be significant. It suggests that those seeking to persuade Taliban fighters to reconcile with the Afghan Government also need to display similar qualities and/or employ spokespersons with these same qualities, in

order to provide a credible counter balance to Taliban leaders and other negative influencers—particularly radical clerics. General research Glevum conducted seems to indicate that religious piety is a quality that is desired by many Pashtun Afghans, not just Taliban members, particular in the context of good governance. That this is a quality most often attributed to Taliban governance, including, for example, in descriptions of Taliban courts and judges but is rarely used to describe Afghan government officials is concerning. It may, therefore, be prudent to consider how the Afghan Government might better promote its own Islamic credentials and its collective and individual piety to persuade more Pashtun Afghans to support it and reject the Taliban.

Insurgent Group Affiliation

Most of the interviewees, by far, state that they fight for the Taliban, or describe their allegiance as being to the “Islamic Emirate” or Mullah Omar. Of those directly queried about their affiliation,⁷ seven say they fight with Hezb-i-Islami Gulbuddin (HiG), five of whom are from Kunar, one from Wardak and one from Kandahar. Three interviewees state they are affiliated with the Haqqani Network: two say they are with the forces of Malawi Sahib Jalaludin Haqqani and the third reports that he fights under the leadership of Malawi Sahib Haqqani son Sirajudin. The interviewees affiliated with the Haqqani Network are from Khost, Paktia and Nangarhar. The Kuwaiti interviewee indicates his affiliation only as being with the people who fight for “the spread of Islam throughout the world” but he was contacted and interviewed in Wardak. Excepting those interviewees who say that they fought in the anti-Soviet jihad or participated in the Taliban government, interviewees on average took up arms for the first time against foreign forces five to six years ago. Some joined the insurgency as recently as two years ago and other as long ago as ten. Seven others indicate that they fought against the Soviets and/or continued to fight and work alongside the Taliban government. A further five men were either raised in refugee camps in Pakistan where jihadist networks were active or their fathers were insurgent commanders for the Taliban or HiG and, therefore, have been exposed to the respective groups’ ideology and activities throughout their lives.

Analyst Comment: *It is disconcerting that all of those interviewed freely admitted their affiliation to a relative stranger (Glevum researchers typically share many of the same demographics as the persons they interview and are often from the same district or at least the same province, to build trust and elicit honest answers but they are generally not known personally to the interviewees). Clearly, interviewees feel reasonably secure living in their own district during the winter months and do not fear Afghan government or ISAF interdiction. This reinforces one of the overall conclusions of this report-- that all of those interviewed are able to hide in plain sight in their home districts and that, by implication, many residents in these districts are unwilling or unable to inform on the Taliban. It is, therefore, extremely*

⁷ Interviews in December 2010, December 2011 and October 2012 were asked to identify the group they fight with, but those in August/September 2011 were not.

difficult to see how Taliban influence can be dislodged from these provinces given the level of support or at least acquiescence that they enjoy and/or extent of their intimidation, which has clearly cowed most of the rest of the population in the fighters' own areas. Hence, a strategy that focuses too much on the kill or capture of Taliban leaders and members is not likely to lead to their defeat and may indeed enrage many more Pashtun Afghans whose family and friends are the ones being killed or captured. A population- centric approach is the only method that can work but the task is far more complex than simply meeting community needs and introducing good governance, given that the Taliban seems to enjoy possibly widespread support in many districts.

WHY THEY FIGHT: IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The insurgents interviewed for this study almost universally mention two interrelated reasons for why they fight: the presence of foreign military forces in Afghanistan and the conduct of the Afghan government, which is seen as corrupt, predatory, and a puppet of the foreign military presence. The insurgents' fight is framed as a religious obligation that is a required response to the declaration of jihad by religious Ulema, which calls for obedient Muslims to defend their faith against infidel invaders.

Opposition to the Presence and Actions of Foreigners

The overwhelming majority of interviewees cite the presence of foreigners—specifically foreign military units—as the primary motivation for participating in insurgent activity. The insurgents interviewed here consider Afghanistan a beloved homeland that should be ruled by a strong Islamic government, so that the Afghan people can live according to Islamic law. The presence and actions of infidel foreigners are perceived to constitute the single most significant threat to Afghanistan and primary impediment to the realization of the Taliban fighters' goal to implement Sharia law.

The interviewees accuse foreigners of various crimes against the Afghan people and violations of Islamic law. Foreigners are accused of attacking Afghans physically via military forces (aerial bombardments, night raids) and morally or spiritually by imposing Western ideas and preventing the realization of an Islamic State. Foreigners are also accused of using the Afghan government as a proxy for furthering Western goals in Afghanistan. The insurgents say they fight to defend their families, country and faith from these assaults, thereby depicting their position as defensive and both morally and religiously justified. An insurgent from Kunduz's summary of the situation is typical of the sentiments of all interviewees:

“Jihad against the foreign invading forces and their puppet government is a duty of each and every Muslim. The foreigners have invaded our country. They came in here and toppled the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. They have stepped on Islamic sharia. They have set up lots of television and radio stations, through which they are corrupting the youths of Afghanistan. They have broken our national pride. The government in Afghanistan right now is completely corrupt. It consists of a gang of thieves who keep pressuring the Afghan people. Therefore, as a Muslim and as an Afghan, I take it as a duty to continue fighting until the foreign forces withdraw from Afghanistan and the government that consists of the forces of evil is toppled.”

Direct Physical Attacks against Afghans

According to the interviewees, the foreign armies that invaded Afghanistan in 2001 and toppled the Taliban's Islamic Emirate perpetrate physical crimes against the Afghan people through the use of military force. Aerial bombardments are viewed as an attempt to kill Afghans—active insurgents and innocent civilians alike—and foreign soldiers kill and injure Afghans in raids and house searches, and in escalation of force incidents on roads. Says an interviewee from Nuristan: “American, English, German, and other countries’ armies—armies of those countries that are against Islam—have invaded our country. They continue killing the Muslim people of Afghanistan with their tanks, cannons, and bombings. Late in the night, foreign troops attack peoples’ houses and kill men, women, old, and young.” Foreigners also arrest and imprison Afghans suspected of engaging in insurgent acts; these detainees are subjected to torture, left naked and terrorized by dogs and may be sent to distant prisons such as Guantanamo Bay. Some interviewees also mention sexual assaults of Afghan women and the intentional killing of children by foreign forces.

In addition to exploiting the population of Afghanistan, interviewees assert that foreigners seek to exploit the territory of Afghanistan by stealing the natural resources of the country, especially its mineral wealth. Numerous interviewees echo what an insurgent in Helmand asserts. He says that the Afghan Government has sold the country to the Americans, “[who] want to loot all of our underground mineral mines. For every dollar they are spending in Afghanistan, they intend to take a thousand dollars back.”

***Analyst Comment:** Such accusations are prominently featured in both al Qaeda and Taliban propaganda and are designed to enrage ordinary Afghans and to give supporters and sympathizers the moral foundation for their involvement in violent operations. That said most of these concerns, grievances and perceptions are widely held by both interviewees and the Afghan population alike. Our research has shown that even Afghan elites hold negative and seemingly illogical perceptions of “foreign” involvement, actions and motivations. These perceptions can only be changed by addressing genuine grievances such as “friendly fire incidents,” recognizing the huge negative impact of certain types of operations (night raids) and finding credible spokespersons, who can counter misperceptions.*

Direct Attacks on Afghans’ Unity and Religion

The foreigners in Afghanistan are perceived to be forcing their Western, un-Islamic ways on Afghans and depriving them of their national independence and self-determination. As Afghans and Muslims who prize their freedom and religious virtues, living under these conditions is perceived as intolerable. As an insurgent from Nimruz says, “We accept hunger, we accept joblessness but we do not accept life under another’s authority.” Foreigners, according to the interviewees, not only position armed soldiers within Afghanistan but also

impose a constitution and government that is insufficiently Islamic and in the process block the full application of Sharia Law.

Further, foreigners are said to seek to divide the Muslim community by converting Afghans to Christianity, encouraging various un-Islamic behaviors such as drinking alcohol, introducing secular values and female emancipation, and inciting ethnic divisions by favoring certain groups (Tajiks, Hazaras) over others (Pashtuns). These actions by which the “sacred values, beliefs, and culture” of Afghans are being trampled and replaced by “Western” values, are considered an effort by foreigners to incite further ethnic and religious wars in the country in order to cause disunity. “They made the Afghans ‘disunited’ and made problems between the people of Afghanistan.” They divided Afghans based on different languages and tribes. “They fanned [the] fire between Afghans [and] they benefit from this [disunity],” says an insurgent from Kunar. By wearing down Afghanistan’s position as a defensive bulwark against un-Islamic Western cultural expansion, the foreigners can continue their global campaign against Islam.

Foreigners are accused of trying to weaken the Islamic faith of Afghans by bringing, for example, Western culture into Afghan homes via media outlets, especially television stations, which show Islamically inappropriate shows. And perhaps most importantly foreigners insult the physical embodiment of Allah’s word communicated to the Prophet Muhammad by desecrating the Quran.⁸ These accusations are prominently featured in al Qaeda and Taliban propaganda and are designed to give supporters and sympathizers the moral justification for violent actions against ISAF, the ANSF, and the Afghan government.

Analyst Comment: *It is remarkable that after ten years the Afghan Government and ISAF have still not been able to convince the majority of Afghans of the Islamic underpinnings of the Afghan Constitution. Our extensive face-to-face research shows that a majority of Pashtun Afghans and not just these Taliban interviewees want a return to a more pious and Islamic government and the restoration of traditional conservative values. Both interviewees and many other Afghan males cite the emancipation of Afghan women as an example of both the undermining of Islamic and traditional values and a primary reason why they oppose the Afghan government at least on some levels. It is clear that from the perspective of many Afghans, especially these fighters, the introduction of “Western values,” such as religious tolerance, sexual freedom and equality are among the primary causes of continued conflict in Afghanistan. It is difficult to see how this perception and the commensurate desire even among ordinary Afghans to reverse this “progress” can be reconciled with Afghanistan’s international partners. And yet concessions on these issues are likely to be demanded, if a*

⁸ Among several comments about desecration and disrespect for the Quran is that of an insurgent from Kandahar interviewed in fall 2011 who said that among the many reasons he fights is that the Quran is “placed in the bathroom,” a reference to the incident in which personnel at Guantanamo Bay were alleged to have flushed a Quran down the toilet.

peace settlement is to be deemed acceptable by at least the Afghanistan-based Taliban.

Holding Foreigners' Responsible for the Errors of the Afghan Government

In addition to the physical and moral abuses and violations that foreigners are accused of perpetrating, insurgents interviewed for this study also hold foreigners responsible for the wrongs committed by the Afghan government. In their eyes, the Afghan government was established to fulfill the nefarious goals of the Americans and British. The government, they believe, would not be able to withstand the insurgents' jihad, if it did not have the material and financial support of foreigners. The interviewees depict a symbiotic relationship that has evolved since 2001 in which the Afghan Government does the bidding of the foreigners, and Afghan Government officials' wealth and power grow as they exploit the Afghan people in the course of serving the foreigners' interests. See section on Afghan Government for the specific transgressions detailed.

Analyst Comment: *These interviews and our research conclusively show that the futures of the Afghan Government and ISAF are inextricably and totally intertwined. Mistakes on the part of ISAF, such as "friendly fire" incidents, reflect just as badly on the Afghan government, perhaps more so, as they are the Afghans' own elected representatives. And the rampant corruption and ineffectiveness of the Afghan Government reflects just as badly on ISAF and the international community, as its perceived sponsors. Any difference in strategy or goals of either party and/or any failure to coordinate all activities only serve to reinforce ordinary Afghans negative perceptions of both entities, increase support for the Taliban, and bolster the resolve of its fighters. This evidence also shows that the unwillingness and/or inability of ISAF and the international community to address Afghan Government corruption continues to undermine seriously the legitimacy of "foreign" involvement in Afghanistan, as well as that of the government itself.*

Apportioning Blame among Foreigners Present in Afghanistan

When interviewees specify the nationality of the foreigners who have invaded Afghanistan, Americans are mentioned most often. A handful mention the British; of them, three maintain that the British are currently in Afghanistan to take "revenge for the defeat that their grandfathers suffered," an allusion to the 1880 British defeat at Maiwand, Kandahar during the Second Anglo-Afghan War, a battle that several interviewees refer to by name.

Very few ascribe any responsibility to Pakistan. And Iran and India are not mentioned as having any part in the foreign interference that the insurgents seek to remove. The only negative comments about Pakistan originate from an insurgent in Kunar who asserts that Pakistan pressures Afghans to continue fighting in Afghanistan or else all benefits provided to the fighters' family members living in Pakistan would be revoked. Criticisms of Pakistan come

to the fore when interviewees are asked directly about the relationship between Pakistan and the Afghan insurgency.

Insurgents' Rejection of the Afghan Government

The shortcomings and misdeeds of the Afghan Government constitute the second of the interviewees' primary justifications for fighting. The interviewees' complaints against the government do not typically focus on the inability of the Afghan Government to provide reliable services and utilities like safe drinking water, electricity, and healthcare. Instead, their criticisms revolve around the government's legitimacy, its policies, and the behavior of government officials and other politically influential figures. The Afghan government is seen to be guilty of three things:

- Acting in the interests of foreign powers, namely the United States
- Lacking the ability and willingness to sufficiently enforce Islamic law
- Engaging in and tolerating corruption and various unjust acts by government officials

These three government failings are seen to emerge from a single underlying problem: insufficient obedience to the principles and laws of Islam. Many of the interviewees insist that if the Afghan Government were a truly Islamic government in every respect, as it was with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan under the Taliban, there would be no need for them to engage in armed jihad. The interference of foreign powers allows this un-Islamic government to survive: without foreign backing, the government would crumble and the insurgents would ensure the formation of a government that enforces Islamic law and does not tolerate corruption and injustice.

The corrupting effect of foreign influence is seen to pervade the government from the highest to the lowest levels, and is made possible by the large sums of money pumped into Afghanistan via the international security and development effort. As articulated by a Nuristani insurgent: "The current government of Afghanistan is not an Islamic state. All these government officials, starting with [President] Karzai and down to the lowest rank, are all Muslims in appearance but in reality are at the service of the infidels. They have sold their homeland, their integrity and their religion for American dollars." As a result, says an insurgent from Helmand, "we are doing jihad against the government because they stand beside and are supporting the infidels (emphasis added)."

Evidence of the Afghan government's inability and unwillingness to enforce sharia, the interviewees say, is seen in all of the government's failures but is most glaringly evident in its alleged tolerance of prostitution, consumption of alcohol, the building of churches and conversion of Afghans to Christianity, and the emancipation of women. An insurgent from Greshk (Nahr-e Sarraj) District, Helmand represents the sentiments of his fellow fighters with

this statement about the wrongs committed by the Afghan government:

“Which government are you talking about? Are you talking about these corrupt individuals who have occupied government positions and are drinking the blood of this Muslim nation day and night? Are you talking about these elements of evil who have in the past have killed and maimed these poor people and have looted their property and have raped their women? These are the people who have built castles for themselves at the expense of people’s blood. This is a traitorous government. This is the government of the forces of evil. This government is a puppet of the Americans. In fact, this government is the biggest enemy of the Afghan nation.”

As the Helmandi insurgent states, the interviewees accuse the Afghan government of corruption of many kinds including theft of public land, bribery and extortion of the population, and filling their pockets with money from foreigners that is intended for aid or development contracts. The government is further described as being full of traitors and thieves who have sold the country to foreigners for their personal benefit. Some of these individuals are described as fighting jihad against the Russians but who have since sold their dignity to the invading infidels while others are referred to as exiles who used to “wash dogs” in Western countries and have returned to be Afghanistan’s leaders.⁹

Some among the interviewees also assert that there is an ethnic and regional element to their conflict with the government, referring to Panjshiri enslaved to the will of foreigners, saying that control of the government is in the hands of persons described as the “forces of evil” (a term that is used to refer to people who fought against Taliban control of Afghanistan as the Northern Alliance), and pointing to General Abdul Rashid Dostum and Vice President Marshall Fahim as examples of how Northern Alliance leaders, who killed many Pashtuns and Taliban, are now in power in government. Several interviewees say they believe that their older brothers, who fought alongside the Taliban prior to 2001, were victims of the massacre at Daisht e Laila.

Among those asked if it is justified to kill Afghans in the course of an operation,¹⁰ several made a clear distinction between Afghans whom they describe as innocent and their killing unjustified, and government officials who are seen as not only illegitimate but primary targets. Afghans, such as government officials, who join the ranks of the enemies of Islam, are, in the words of an insurgent in Kandahar, not Afghan or Muslim. Having sold their own

⁹ The insult “dog washer” (sag shoy) is used to refer to Afghans who left the country and returned in the post-Taliban period, often in positions affiliated with foreign donors. The notion that Muslim would wash a dog, an animal that is in general considered unclean, is a severe insult.

¹⁰ The insurgents interviewed in December 2011 were asked their views on whether it is justified to kill Afghans during an operation.

consciences for money and power and having abandoned their religious values, it is therefore legitimate to “to kill those people who are the servants of the infidels and are working to weaken Islam.” (See “Killing Afghans in Operations” for further discussion of this topic.)

Islamic and nationalist values appear deeply intertwined; many interviewees use both to frame their opposition to the Afghan Government. Comments from an insurgent in Helmand reflect this popular religious-nationalistic stance: “The government in Kabul is dancing to [foreigners’] drumbeats like a puppet. [Accepting] such a government and not doing anything against it is beyond any Muslim Afghan with even a little bit of conscience and faith left. Death is better for us than living like slaves...under the influence of foreigners who are against our religion.”

Analyst Comment: *Many of the Afghan government’s faults identified by interviewees are also concerns shared by a majority of those interviewed by Glevum. Representative samples of Afghan population polled in multiple surveys, we conducted by over a period of four years from the national level down to the district level, have shown that most Afghans despise what they see as rampant government corruption. These ordinary Afghans see corruption, the ineffective provision of services and the lack of personal security as the biggest problems facing Afghanistan. They also cite lack of jobs and other opportunities as important problems they face. All too often they also attribute these problems to government shortcomings, as well.*

While the perceived lack of Islamic piety in the Afghan government is not as prevalent an issue for most Afghans as it is for Taliban fighters interviewed for this study, many conservative Pashtun males and other Afghans are equally concerned about the erosion of Islamic and traditional values. This popular and Taliban dissatisfaction with the Afghan government does not bode well for the future stability of the country, unless a fundamental reform of the government follows the next Presidential election. Ironically such reform may satisfy many Afghans and perhaps even some Taliban fighters. However, it is just as likely to alienate many international supporters, especially if what follows is the erosion of individual freedoms and equality.

Forced versus Ideological Taliban

The interviewees explain why they fight in terms that are unique to their individual situations and experience, and their responses echo the dichotomy which writer Tom Ruttig refers to as the majburi (forced) Taliban vice the maktabi (ideological) Taliban.¹¹ While the interviewees’ responses correspond with the forced/ideological dichotomy, it is clear that within this study ideologically motivated insurgents greatly outnumber those who have been forced to fight. Among the 78 interviewees in this study, many more assert that they wage jihad in defense of the Islamic ‘umma and the people of Afghanistan than the number of interviewees who

¹¹ www.aan-afghanistan.org

indicate that they fight to right wrongs done to them personally or due to a lack of employment.¹² While this study alone cannot prove irrefutably that they represent the numerical majority of the insurgency, those fighters with strong ideological motivations will be the most difficult to reconcile and reintegrate because they demand the change to the fundamental basis of the rule of law and governance in Afghanistan.

As noted in the section “Why They Fight,” the reasons interviewees give for participating in jihad are to expel the foreign occupiers and replace the corrupt Afghan government with a pious Islamic government that fully implements Sharia. The majority of interviewees who express these reasons for fighting do so in the context of defending Afghanistan and Islam against foreign infidel invaders. There are a handful of interviewees within the “ideological” category who are especially committed, among them are men who have been associated with the Taliban since the 1990s and/or fought during the anti-Soviet jihad and returned to the fight. Although most of the 78 interviewees offer similar reasons for their participation in the insurgency, a few interviewees are worthy of further examination because they represent the extremes. On the one hand are those interviewees who demonstrate an enduring commitment to jihad, having been engaged in fighting since the anti-Soviet resistance. On the other hand, are those interviewees who have recently taken up arms to fight for purely personal reasons.

Examples of Exceptionally Committed Insurgents

Four of the interviewees stand out for the duration and depth of their commitment to the Taliban or associated insurgent groups and the effort to create an Afghan state founded on a fundamentalist interpretation of Sharia Law.

Tajik Former Taliban Official - One interviewee is an example of how, although the core of the Taliban may be composed of Pashtuns, the Taliban’s mission and message have appeal across ethnic lines. This 47-year-old Tajik is a native of Pul-e Khumri. He stated that he served as the Head of the Department for the Promotion of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice in Baghlan Province during the Taliban government. He describes the Taliban era as “the best time ever for Afghanistan from a governance perspective because Sharia rules were implemented in all aspects of people’s lives.” His fighting for the Taliban now is essentially a continuation of his previous commitment that he put on hold when fleeing to Pakistan after the Taliban’s fall. He explains that he continues to fight because the country has been invaded by the Westerners who have trampled Islam and Afghans’ dignity. He also says that “there is a corrupt government in place which is looting public and private property day and night, and in such circumstances it is the duty of each and every Afghan man and woman to use all the power

¹² As the total number and composition of the Afghan insurgency is unknown, the interview subjects of this study do not qualify as a representative sample, but the number, geographic variety and demographic variety of the interviews provides a broad cross-section that is in line with other studies of insurgents in Afghanistan.

they have to fight against this corrupt regime and rescue the country from the black claws of this evil. Our goal in our struggle is to make the foreigners leave our country, and a new, Islamic government, one that would work for the purification and betterment of Afghanistan takes power in the country.” He asserts that the withdrawal of foreign military forces is not the Taliban’s only goal, saying, “If the foreigners leave our country, Karzai’s government must also be toppled. So long as this corrupt government is present, war would never end in Afghanistan.”

Kandahari Maulawi - A 40-year-old Maulawi in Kandahar illustrates the role of religious authorities, who not only impart lessons to young men to encourage them to join the fight and remain dedicated to it but also participate in attacks themselves. After studying for 21 years to achieve “advanced religious knowledge,” this interviewee taught at the Dar Uloom Haqqania that operated in Kabul during the Taliban government. The Maulawi went to Peshawar for a year after the American invasion in 2001 and returned to Afghanistan to continue jihad. The interviewee recalled that under the Taliban “the mullahs had respect and the government gave much power to the mullahs. In each part of the country, the law of the Quran was respected.” The interviewee seeks a return to this scenario, and says that he fights the government to restore the Islamic Emirate and the governance of Mullah Omar as its leader. Because the current Afghan government destroyed the Islamic Emirate and continues to oppose its reformation, the interviewee considers the Afghan government to be un-Islamic and unacceptable. The Maulawi also refers to ethnic tensions as a motivation for his participating in the insurgency: members of his family were killed in the alleged 2001 Dasht e Laila massacre of captured Taliban by Abdul Rashid Dostum’s forces in Jowzjan Province. He further asserts that if Taliban fighters can defeat the infidel foreign forces, the path will be cleared for Pashtuns to defeat the Afghan government in a day. He vows to fight until the Taliban and the Pashtuns have their rights restored, and criminals and murderers like General Dostum are hanged. Until this vision is realized, he pledges to talk to the government only with the “language of guns.”

Hizb-e-Gulbuddin Propagandist - A 41-year-old Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin (HiG) propagandist is an example of an insurgent who, after growing up in refugee camps in Pakistan attended an Arab-supported Islamic university in Peshawar and works on a HiG “newspaper.” Originally from Kunar, the interviewee attended school at the Shamshatoo refugee camp where HiG networks were active during the anti-Soviet jihad and then studied at the University of Dawat and Jihad in Peshawar. Having grown up in close proximity to HiG members, he fought against the Soviets while studying but stopped fighting and went to Pakistan when the Taliban took power in Afghanistan. When the Taliban fell, he resumed fighting “at the request of Hekmatyar” and returned to Kunar to fight nine years ago. This interviewee strongly identifies with HiG as distinct from the Taliban. He asked, “when the Hezb-i-Islami was fighting the Russians, where were the Taliban? The Taliban are not the only ones that are important.

Hezb-i-Islami...should be considered and the government should accept their demands. Peace with only the Taliban won't solve the problem. It will make more problems. Why has the world forgotten the achievements of the Hezb-i-Islami?" He says that he works constantly to plan operations but does not participate in direct fighting because it is difficult to fight directly with foreign forces that have modern technology. In addition to fighting, he works to encourage fighters through the HiG newspaper and teaches children in the winter.

Kuwaiti Jihadist - the fourth example of extreme dedication among the 78 insurgent interviews is a 32-year-old Kuwaiti, His father was likely an Arab who came to fight against the Soviets in the 1980s. He says "my family raised me for jihad: my parents went to Pakistan when there was war with the Russians. My father was killed when I was 12 years old. After that we went to Waziristan and I started military education and training. I have spent most of my life with the mujahedeen, fighting." During the Taliban government period, he worked in Nangarhar and Peshawar disbursing funds and facilitating medical care in Pakistan for wounded Taliban fighters. This interviewee did not specify who he fights for, saying that his goal is the spread of Islam in the world and he is with the people who fight for this goal. His ambitions are not limited to Afghanistan. He says that if the Muslims of Afghanistan succeed in beating the infidels, he will then go to Palestine for jihad. This interviewee, while pursuing the same goals as other Afghan insurgents of expelling foreign forces and instituting a Sharia law government, also thinks in terms of global jihad.

Examples of "Forced" Taliban Fighting for Personal Reasons

On the other end of the spectrum, in terms of ideological commitment and time spent fighting the Afghan government and foreign forces, there are a few men whose decisions for joining the insurgency are related to personal circumstances rather than deep religious or ideological commitment.

An interviewee from Parwan Province exemplifies how 30 years of conflict in Afghanistan have made fighting a way of life for many men, and how one can transition to and from peaceful work to fighting and from one side in the conflict to the other frequently, quite apart from ideological commitment. The interviewee relates how he took up arms at age 15 against the Soviets and kept fighting during the subsequent civil war, first against the Jamiat-e-Islami faction (affiliated with Ahmad Shah Massoud and Burhanuddin Rabbani and the United Front/Northern Alliance) and then with them against the Taliban as the Taliban cornered Jaamiat forces in Parwan and Panjshir Provinces. When the Taliban fell to Western forces, he stopped fighting and returned to his father's village. However, for reasons that he declined to explain in precise detail, he had personal problems that threatened his life so he made contact with a Taliban commander who accepted him as a fighter. Now fighting for the Taliban, he has an income and a purpose, as well as protection against anyone who might wish to take

revenge on him for his past actions. This interviewee says that he does not care about the presence of foreign forces and has no real affinity for the Taliban, who are very traditional and against any kind of freedom. Yet, he feels obliged to continue to fight for them, if only for his self-protection against people who blame him for the death of their relatives. He has considered surrendering to the government but fears his enemies in positions of government power would imprison or kill him, saying that the security letter offered to him by the Peace and Reintegration Committee cannot really protect him from these men of power.

Another interviewee in Kandahar recounts similar personal reasons for associating with the Taliban. As a member of a poor family and a minority tribe among the Noorzai majority in his district, he was accused of spreading Taliban leaflets at night. Although he says he was not involved, he was arrested and jailed. Only after the interviewee's brother sold half of the family's land to pay a 400,000 Afghani bribe was the interviewee released. After this mistreatment by the government and police forces, he contacted a Taliban commander and joined his group to fight against the Afghan government. He further states that he thinks the presence of foreigners in Afghanistan is good. If the Afghan government were honest and caring, he says, it "would have used the foreigners and their assistance for the benefit of the country but unfortunately the corrupt and evil politicians have destroyed the country, looted the nation and given a bad name to the foreigners." He continues that if the Afghan Government was a good government, the majority of fighters would put down their weapons but as it stands they see no alternative but to fight in order to depose it.

An interviewee from Kunar explains that he fights because if he does not, his family who are living in Pakistan would be expelled and sent back to Afghanistan. Life in Pakistan, he says, is good: "my father has a job and the family can live in peace" whereas in their home province of Kunar, they have no property, no house, no land to farm or money to do business. In short, "if I don't pick up a gun and fight in Afghanistan, the government of Pakistan will force our families to leave their country. If they force us out of Pakistan our families will die of hunger." If the government of Afghanistan was able to provide a situation in which his family could return and could provide a house and employment, he would stop fighting and his family would happily return to Afghanistan. However, "it is the government of Pakistan that makes us fight: the truth is that if the Pakistani ISI did not force us to continue fighting and if they did not take our refugee cards from us in Pakistan, we could be able to live freely and in peace with our family in Pakistan." Without the opportunity to live with their family and provide for them, fighters like this interviewee are obliged to fight for the Pakistani ISI against the Afghan Government.

The final example of an insurgent interviewee who does not espouse a strong ideological or religious position regarding the Taliban is a 16-years-old in Wardak. He still attends a government high school but also emplaces improvised explosive devices on behalf of the Taliban. He describes becoming acquainted with and socializing with Taliban who visited his

village for about a year before participating in any insurgent activities. None of his family members have been injured or killed by ISAF or Afghan security forces. He summarizes his involvement with the Taliban in uncomplicated terms: “I want to shoot Americans. If they kill me, I will be shaheed (a martyr) and if I kill them I will be a ghazi.” He targets Americans, but regarding ANSF “we don’t bother ANA and ANP and they don’t bother us. Boys from our village work in the ANA.” He also says that he doesn’t fight all of the time. He still goes to school because he wants to study at a university. His responses to questions about the government and negotiations with the Taliban are succinct but he had no thoughts on the matter of future governance. Rather he advises that the government should make peace with the Taliban, tell the ANA not to go into the villages, and the Americans should neither drive on the roads in the district nor fly airplanes to attack people’s houses. This interviewee is striking as an example of how a young man may be drawn into the insurgency over time through the persistent but unnoticed influence of people around him. It is also evidence of how joining the insurgency is enticing, particularly for young men, when there are few other opportunities.

Impact of Civilian Casualties

About one third of interviewees¹³ indicate that a close family member (parent, sibling, uncle, aunt or cousin) has been killed or injured by violence involving foreign military forces. Of this portion, it is far more common that relatives were killed than injured, and most often in night raids or aerial bombings. In all but one case, they attribute the deaths to ISAF not the ANSF. Five interviewees mention either the current or previous detention of their male relatives at Afghan prisons, the Parwan Detention Facility at Bagram or Guantanamo Bay. A handful also mentioned separately the death or injury of their brothers and fellow Taliban fighters while engaged in a fight with foreign forces, indicating that male siblings often join and fight alongside each other. Of note, however, is that when asked why they fight against the government, the interviewees do not mention their relatives’ deaths as a motivation but instead emphasize the offending presence of foreign forces, the corruption of the Afghan Government and their desire to implement a Sharia Law based State.

Although many report that they have not been personally impacted by ISAF violence, many do claim to know of local villagers or “other Muslims” killed or wounded as a result of ISAF operational activities. Among these interviewees, a few stressed that a lack of personal connection to a fellow Muslim would not necessarily mitigate their desire for revenge. Stated an insurgent from Wardak Province, “ISAF and ANA have not killed anyone from my family. It does not mean that if no [one] is killed from my family, I shouldn’t fight. I become sad when any Muslim is killed or hurt in any part of the world. It doesn’t matter if she or he is in another Islamic country. We Muslims are all brothers and sisters.”

¹³ Interviewees in December 2010, December 2011 and October 2012 were asked if anyone in their family had been killed or injured by ISAF or Afghan security forces.

Analyst Comment: *It seems likely that most insurgents are motivated by a combination of factors and that the death or injury of family and friends either innocently or while engaged in insurgent activities does motivate most interviewees; even those who are primarily ideologically motivated. This also fits the pattern of most other insurgencies. What is often forgotten is that the insurgents who are killed or captured are someone's family member, friend or fellow tribesman. And their death or arrest will likely motivate others to join or support the insurgency. This fuels a cycle that cannot be broken even with more effective kill/capture operations. A more holistic COIN strategy is therefore needed – one that includes substantial efforts to delegitimize the insurgents' cause thereby mitigating community anger at the death or capture of one of their own sons or daughters.*

Social and Economic Problems

In spite of the significant economic hardships experienced by most Afghans, interviewees do not show particular concern with economic issues. They cite only three economic difficulties: food scarcity, unemployment, and high prices for basic goods; however, few explicitly mention any of these problems in their discussions nor state that economic problems were a factor in their becoming insurgents. They did however speak frequently of the downtrodden Afghan population that is abused and extorted by the corrupt government. So even if economic hardship did not influence them to fight, they are using it as a justification to continue to fight.

Moral and Religious Obligations to Fight

Interviewees strongly believe that they are performing fardh, a religious obligation and holy duty by opposing the presence of foreign military forces and a government they see as discriminatory, greedy and in league with foreigners' efforts to undermine the Islamic foundations of Afghan society. They depict their position as defensive, with the current situation imposed on them by the foreigners and their Afghan enablers who toppled the Taliban's Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. An insurgent from Nuristan voices these sentiments in the following terms: "Whenever the land of Islam is invaded by the infidels, or whenever a government that is not bound by the Sharia is imposed on Muslims, it becomes fardh (a sacred duty) to all Muslims to commence jihad and rescue their country from the invasion of the infidels and establish an Islamic government in their homeland."

Many of the interviewees strongly assert that they do not simply fight but engage in jihad, which is an altogether different and virtuous endeavor. Several explicitly mention that the ulema of the country have declared jihad against foreign forces and the Afghan government, and as Muslims they are obliged to respond to the ulema's call. Several also perceive an assault not only on Afghanistan and its Islamic identity. They accuse Americans and indeed all Western civilization, of perpetrating a broader war against Islam, of which the invasion of

Afghanistan is just a small part. For the vast majority of the interviewees, however, the obligation to engage in jihad is Afghanistan-centric and they do not express an intention to expand their mission beyond the borders of their own country.

For interviewees, these nationalistic and Islamist values are complementary and mutually reinforcing. The overwhelming majority of interviewees define their fight against ISAF and the government as both a religious and nationalist struggle. Interviewees want to defend Afghanistan from “occupiers” (primarily the United States, but also, to a lesser extent, Great Britain) whom they allege aim to “destroy Islam” by imposing “foreign laws” (democracy, civil rights, gender equality, etc.) on victimized Afghan communities who are then lured from the “righteous path” of Islamic law. Mentioned often but less frequently than religious justification, many interviewees also consider their activities a patriotic defense of their homeland. Many condemn the government as the “lackey” of Western (predominately American) actors, and believe it has little interest in the needs of the average Afghan citizen.

Analyst Comment: *The interviewees’ clear commitment to the cause reinforces the need for a holistic COIN strategy that includes kill and capture operations but is not underpinned by a primarily kinetic approach. While it is clear that not all of those interviewed are motivated solely— or even primarily—by ideology, their clearly stated moral and religious commitment likely has subsumed other factors as the primary reason why they remain in an insurgent group. Assuming that each is willing to endure more years of combat, particularly if they can enjoy a period of R&R each winter, then a successful COIN strategy must include multiple approaches that include efforts to undermine the Taliban’s ideological foundations. For example, the perceived divine legitimacy of the Taliban must be countered by Afghan Muslims and especially by moderate Muslim scholars and clerics. Equally, the Afghan Government must demonstrate its legitimacy far more effectively than it has to this point. The government must show that it and not the Taliban is best able to defend Afghans from all threats “foreign or domestic.” This goal can only be achieved through a combination of words (to undermine Taliban arguments and counter Taliban propaganda) and deeds (through, for example, the provision of fair, pious and effective governance and by protecting the population). ISAF operations must reinforce both their own legitimacy and that of the Afghan Government. Other of our research indicates that many other Afghans increasingly question the legitimacy of both, which further complicates the challenge. The solid ideological underpinnings of many interviewees’ commitment to the Taliban’s cause also suggests that an amnesty and modest financial inducements are of limited utility with this type of fighter, let alone more senior insurgent leadership.*

The unanimity of the insurgents’ reasons for fighting against the foreign military presence and the Afghan Government align with the Taliban’s ongoing propaganda campaign. It is unclear whether the interviewed insurgents adopted their positions after being exposed to Taliban propaganda or more likely that this propaganda merely reflects and reinforces the preexisting

sentiments of the insurgency's membership. However, the reality is that the content of the Taliban's external communications are extremely similar to that voiced by almost six dozen insurgents, each individually engaged at different times over the course of several years. Given that many of the ordinary Afghans interviewed by Glevum over a period of four years expressed similar sentiments to the insurgents interviewed, it is likely that Taliban propaganda is effective because it taps into and exaggerates popular bias, ignorance, resentment and grievances. Given that much of this resentment is real (government corruption) and that many grievances are real (death or arrest of family and friends), Taliban propaganda is also for all intent and purposes based on fact, as seen by Afghans, lending it credibility. It is therefore hard to see how ISAF information activities have any hope of sustained success, especially given that most campaigns seek to promote the Afghan Government, which is perceived by so many Afghans as corrupt and illegitimate. Taking a leaf out of the Taliban's book, the best IO is likely to be that which publicizes and reinforces the good deeds of the Afghan government and quickly explains missteps, accepting blame where appropriate. Unless founded in fact, IO messaging is likely to fall on deaf ears.

Positive Personal Reflection

The interviewees' emphasis on obedience to their religious obligation to defend Islam in Afghanistan does not prevent them from considering how they want their efforts to be remembered. Of those asked to reflect on what they hope people will say about them should they die fighting, a slim majority state that their commitment to—and participation in—insurgent activity reflects positively on their personal character. If Allah wills them to survive their fighting missions, a few look forward to the status of ghazi.¹⁴ Several interviewees say that they hope their relatives and friends will be proud of their individual sacrifice. Others believe they will be honored as shahid (one who dies in the course of fulfilling an Islamic commandment, such as jihad) if they are killed while fighting. Several other interviewees feel their death will inspire others, especially close relatives or fellow fighters. A few interviewees indicate that they would command their sons to follow in their footsteps.

Analyst Comment: *The sense of fulfillment, personal self-worth and self-importance are powerful motivators and bolster the morale of members of insurgent and terrorist groups. In a society such as Afghanistan, where retaining one's honor is of paramount importance, the perception that one's actions earn the respect of one's family and friends can sustain a Taliban fighter's morale even in the face of severe setbacks. For most Taliban fighters, their self-worth is reinforced by a perception of religious honor and divine legitimacy that the Taliban actively encourages. However, like most individuals, perceptions of self-worth can be a fragile edifice. Past experience has demonstrated that if an insurgent's family and community reject and vilify their actions and motives, then insurgent morale and sense of self-worth can collapse quickly.*

¹⁴ Ghazi – one who fights jihad but survives the battles whereas a shahid is martyred (dies).

If this community rejection is further reinforced by religious leaders who demonstrate that an insurgent's murderous actions attract God's opprobrium rather than his blessing, then morale and commitment to the cause can collapse precipitously. If the insurgent group then reacts by using violence to retain loyalty, as they often do, this can accelerate defections and even induce mutiny. The challenge in Afghanistan is finding and exploiting ways to erode community and family support for the Taliban and enlisting the support of Muslim leaders to counter the Taliban's ideology, actions and arguments. Without such support it is hard to see how highly motivated, honor bound and well supported insurgents like the Taliban can be defeated.

INSURGENT OPERATIONS

The interviewees in this study range from men as young as 16, who implement the orders of higher ranking insurgents to experienced fighters who plan attacks themselves or help maintain the morale of fighters via insurgent propaganda. Their descriptions of personal participation in operations, training, and sources of weapons and support vary widely as a result. Their comments about their respective training, participation in attacks and logistical support activities and sources of weapons, ammunition and financial resources provide important details regarding insurgent operations.

Where They Train

Eight of the interviewees' volunteered specific information about where they have received training for jihad.¹⁵ All of them indicated receiving training on weapons, explosives and fighting tactics at different locations within Pakistan. The eight men fall into two categories: those who received training prior to 2001 (either during the later years of the anti-Soviet jihad, the civil war or during the Taliban government period) or after the fall of the Taliban government. The three men who received training prior to 2001 lived in Pakistan in the Shamshatoo refugee camp and were trained by HiG or, in the case of the Kuwaiti-born insurgent, lived in Pakistan with his family in support of the anti-Soviet mujahedeen.

Five men received training after 2001. One insurgent from Kandahar says he received training in laying "mines" (referring to IEDs) and military tactics at Chaman while another Kandahar insurgent explains

From the Transcript

On operational tempo

"We don't fight every week or every month because we don't have enough resources to fight often. We look to opportunities. We take turns in fighting. Once one group does fight and another time another group." (25-year-old male from Chack, Wardak)

On downtime

"We don't fight during harvest time because we don't want people to lose their harvest." (24-year-old male from Arghandab, Kandahar)

On Zakat

"The people of this area don't give ushr. We don't collect ushr and Zakat by force." (20-year-old male from Nirkh Hizb, Wardak)

¹⁵ In the December 2010 interviews, interviewees were asked where they had traveled and spent time growing up. In answering these questions, the men provided details about experiences receiving training in Pakistan.

that he learned how to use remotely triggered bombs in Quetta. A third Kandahari insurgent says he was trained to do jihad against Americans in Baluchistan.¹⁶ Two insurgents from Wardak have received training in northern Pakistan. One states he received training on how to use a weapon sight, to clean and use a gun, and other fighting tactics in Waziristan during the winter of 2009-2010. Finally, a HiG insurgent from Wardak describes his experience receiving training on weapons and operations at a mountainous location he was told was part of Kashmir. After the training, they returned to Peshawar and those who wished to return to Afghanistan were provided with weapons and sent to their home provinces across the border.

Where They Fight

Interviewees indicate that their operations are regionally limited and defined. Most say that they fight in neighboring districts, with some ranging farther throughout their own province or neighboring provinces. There are indications of a hierarchy regarding mobility in that many of the younger men do not leave their home area (their own and adjacent districts) whereas more seasoned fighters appear to travel farther for operations. As a Wardaki insurgent notes, he fights under a commander, who has control over the operations in a defined area and he cannot independently go to another area to fight. An insurgent in Kunar, age 18, states that he does not travel, but the leaders are mobile, going from one place to another and travelling to Nangarhar, Nuristan, and sometimes Pakistan. Numerous interviewees, especially those who worked for the Taliban government¹⁷, emphasize their willingness to go to areas beyond their own districts and provinces to fight foreign forces.

In Wardak, insurgents were interviewed in Saidabad, Chack Jaghatoo, and Nirkh districts, and most interviewees indicate that their operations are generally restricted to these districts. Several mentioned going to Jalrez district in Wardak for operations or to Ghazni Province to acquire supplies needed for fighting. Four interviewees mentioned either going to Logar Province personally or reference cooperation between Taliban fighters in Wardak and Logar Provinces.

In Kunar, the insurgents stay close to their home area with the exception of travel to Nuristan for operations. One insurgent from Kunar reported that he has been to Laghman Province for fighting. Insurgents from Kandahar indicate that they generally fight within their own or adjacent districts. One interviewee explained that while he lives in Arghandab, it is difficult to fight there due to the presence of foreign forces so he goes to Panjwai to fight at regular

¹⁶ This interviewee also states he has been to Iran; therefore his reference to Baluchistan could indicate the portion of Pakistani Baluchistan near Iran.

¹⁷ Interviewees in December 2011 tended to be older with enduring connections with the Taliban that predate 2001.

intervals. A second Kandahari insurgent remarks that many Taliban fighters from Arghandab came to Panjwai during the U.S. operations in Arghandab, whereas Taliban leaders left the area entirely. The Taliban sought refuge in Panjwai “because here all of the people are Taliban. The Americans cannot put everyone in prison.”

Who They Fight

The insurgents interviewed report attacking Americans (ISAF) forces about three times as often as Afghan forces, based on the specified target of the operations in which they participated most recent recently. Two insurgents in Kunar were very specific, however, that they fight “the Americans,” not the Afghan government. Most of those interviewed acknowledge mounting attacks against U.S. (by extension, ISAF) or ANSF targets, but in Wardak there are several instances of attacks on supply convoys, as well as a road construction security detail. When describing their targets, most use objective terms like “Americans,” “Afghan Army,” “Afghan Police,” or “Afghan Security Forces” while a few generalize or use politicized identifiers like “enemies,” “unbelievers,” “infidels,” or “slaves of America.”

How They Fight

Tactics

Typical operations are ambushes against foreign forces, attacks on Afghan National Security Forces positions (checkpoints, police stations) and the emplacement and detonation of improvised explosive devices targeting both ISAF and ANSF vehicles. When queried about their most recent mission, most interviewees readily identify their targets and speak of the incident with pride, regardless of whether their fellow fighters were killed or injured in the course of the attack. Several asserted that they are always successful regardless of the outcome of the engagement because they are acting on Allah’s commandment to wage jihad to protect their religion. All of the attacks described by interviewees rely on the element of surprise and involve some measure of stealth and concealment. “Mines,” as the interviewees refer to IEDs, are the most often mentioned means of attack, followed by ambushes. Some interviewees describe attacks that begin with the detonation of an IED followed by the use of small arms (AK-47 or PK-47) and RPGs. Interviewees most often mention the destruction of vehicles, which they refer to generically as “tanks” when the vehicle is large and armored such as an MRAP or as “cars,” likely when the vehicle is a HUMVEE or SUV.

Examples of Recent Operations

An insurgent in Khanabad, Kunduz recounts an attempt to attack a district governor's office. By his telling, a group of 50 men assaulted the target at 2 a.m. and fought for three hours.

Although the group advanced close to the building, the “enemy” resisted and after one man was killed, the group decided to retreat. While the insurgent did not know the exact number of government casualties, he says, “as the rumor goes, three policemen were killed and two were injured. Only God knows what really happened.”

An insurgent in Kunar affiliated with HiG participated in an insurgent attack in Barg-i-Matal district where his feet were injured and he was unable to fight for some time. He asserts that in that fight, “we cost the enemy lots of property and men.” Another interview in Kunar recounts an operation in Nuristan province in which he claims insurgents were able to destroy an entire camp of “Salibians” (“cross worshipers”) and recovered most of the weapons and equipment.¹⁸

In Kandahar, an interviewee recounts how, in an attack on an ANA checkpoint the insurgents killed eight soldiers and took three hostages, as well as collected eight rifles, one PK gun, an RPG launcher and many RPG rounds.

A 16-year-old insurgent in Wardak’s Chack District recounts his involvement in a recent attack on an ISAF convoy: “Two months ago, my friends and I hid a bomb on the road. It was one o’clock in the [morning], we brought the wire to the village and connected [it] with a car battery. The next day, we were waiting for the Americans to come, but they didn’t show up. The next day, they came and we exploded the bombs on the second car and killed all the Americans in the car.”

Operational Self-Assessments

Interviewees’ descriptions of their most recent operations tend to be similar in nature and tone and often mirror typical Taliban/AGE propaganda. When asked about their last fighting mission, interviewees’ almost always describe:

- The type of attack (e.g. ambush, Improvised Explosive Device) and the weapons used (RPG, PK machine gun)
- The target (almost always “Americans” in vehicles or Afghan police or army checkpoints or convoys)
- An assessment of the damage inflicted on both the target and the insurgents who launched the attack, including in some cases the number of insurgents injured or killed.
- The impact of their operations by the number of enemy casualties (injuries or deaths) inflicted and the amount of enemy equipment damaged or destroyed. Interestingly, few make any direct mention of enemy casualties. Instead, interviewees often describe the corrosive nature of enemy attrition.

¹⁸ The interviewee provided scant details but his version resembles what occurred at COP Keating in 2009, which would correspond with the timeframe of his description of the operation.

What is notably absent from these descriptions is any mention of injuries to—or deaths of—Afghan civilians who might be in the vicinity at the time of the attacks. While it is not possible to verify the various attacks the interviewees mention, they do cite locations where insurgent activity is common, such as Barg-e Matal district of Nuristan, Manogi district of Kunar and Wagez district of Ghazni.

Resources

Weapons and Ammunition

Interviewees concur that fighters either use their own weapon or are given one by their commander. Ammunition is provided to the fighters by commanders, and is typically obtained either from abroad (namely Pakistan) or collected in the wake of attacks on Afghan or foreign forces. No one mentions other sources for acquiring weapons except an insurgent from Wardak who says “*we bring weapons from Pakistan that we buy in the Dara area*”¹⁹ and there is an Islamic organization that sends us weapons.” An insurgent in Wardak explains how his group of fighters has an individual who is responsible for distributing weapons for an operation and collecting the weapons afterward.

Sources of Funding

Interviewees affirm that they are not explicitly paid to fight but their commanders provide food, clothing and weapons/ammunition when they are fighting. Otherwise they are responsible for their own welfare. They indicate that they sustain themselves through a combination of their own personal resources, such as income from farming or other jobs, assistance from their respective insurgent leaders and commanders, and the help of local people in the area where they live and fight. One notable exception is an insurgent from Wardak who transports Taliban fighters and explosives and is paid for the service he provides. A second insurgent, from Kandahar, had also been a driver for the Taliban transporting explosives for which he was paid but lost a foot after driving over a mine and now fights alongside the Taliban wearing a prosthetic limb.

Analyst Comment: *The common assertion that many join the Taliban for an income – the so-called “ten-dollar a day Taliban” may be inaccurate or at least not prevalent among these interviewees. If correct for the wider Taliban, this again reinforces the point that financial inducements and an amnesty alone are not necessarily going to encourage committed fighters to reconcile with the Afghan Government. Given that commanders often provide resources*

¹⁹ Dara Adam Khel, in the FATA area of Pakistan, is known as a center for the production of weapons copied from popular models such as AK-47s.

during operations, efforts to interdict Taliban funding and supplies is certainly important and will likely reduce the effectiveness of Taliban operations at least in the short term. However the ability of interviewees to sustain themselves and forage for weapons and ammunition further suggests that Taliban operations will continue even if efforts to interdict supply routes become more effective.

Zakat and Ushr

The collection of Zakat and ushr can help an insurgent group continue operations without the need for significant support from outside of their base area. That said, only six of the insurgents acknowledge that their commanders collect Zakat and ushr on their behalf. Of them, four are from Kandahar and specify that the ushr is collected on the poppy harvest, with one explaining that for each jerib [Middle Eastern measurement] of land, they take one seer of poppy as ushr. When Zakat and ushr are collected, it is the responsibility of insurgent commanders, not regular fighters to do so. The rest of the interviewees, when queried about sources of material support, say that donations from the local populace are provided voluntarily. These donations range from financial support from the wealthy, especially businessmen, and food from villagers.

Other Source of Funding

Numerous interviewees state that they benefit from collecting the spoils of war, referred to in Pashtu as Ganimat, from their attacks on foreign forces, Afghan army and police, and ISAF supply trucks. Supplies collected from attacks against ISAF and Afghan forces include weapons and ammunition. Insurgents in Wardak are also most likely to report attacking supply convoys and collecting such items as fuel canisters, mattresses, and foodstuffs which they either use or sell to the populace at low prices to collect funds to sustain their fighting force. Other sources of funding, as mentioned by one insurgent in Kunar, are donations from “our friends who live in Arab countries” whose assistance is spent supplying the mujahedeen and one in Wardak who mentions the kidnapping of government officials and foreigners who are ransomed for profit.

Resource Limitations

Several interviewees make it clear that a limited supply of weapons causes insurgent commanders to rotate fighters in and out of missions according to the availability of guns. As one insurgent from Wardak’s Chack District explained: “Fighters are selected according to their turn because there are not enough guns.”

Supply Lines

An interviewee from Wardak provides insights on how weapons and Taliban fighters move about the country. The man does not participate in direct fighting but transports explosives and insurgents from one area to another. When Taliban fighters are injured in an operation, the interviewee transports them to a safe area for medical treatment. Two years ago while transferring explosives from another car to his own, the driver recalls, a Kuwaiti insurgent was killed in a premature detonation.

Analyst Comment: Interviewees' comments on the use of Zakat, ushr, self-sustainment, and captured material and their admission of the limited support they get from the Taliban itself are both a positive and a negative. It is a positive development because it suggests that efforts to interdict Taliban supply lines are limiting the amount of funds and combat supplies reaching fighters, even in border provinces. It is a negative because it suggests that at least those fighters who were interviewed are able to support themselves and secure sufficient combat supplies to conduct limited operations perhaps indefinitely, if alternative external sources and support are denied to them. Clearly the incomes they secure for themselves, the support they garner from family and friends, Zakat, ushr and the "spoils of war" also have to be denied to these fighters, along with combat supplies smuggled into an area by the Taliban. If not, they will be able to sustain low intensity operations probably indefinitely.

Limitations on Insurgent Operations

In addition to a shortage of weapons for all willing fighters, interviewees note that foreign forces have the advantage of air power and modern technology, which makes direct fighting difficult for the lesser-equipped insurgents. ISAF use of air support makes it difficult for insurgents to engage in sustained attacks and leads them to engage in quick strikes such as ambushes and IEDs emplaced on the roads. An interviewee from Kandahar stated that when fighting starts, airplanes arrive and begin to fire on insurgents so they cannot engage with ISAF forces for more than 15 minutes. He assesses that in the absence of air support, it would be easy for insurgents to engage with foreign forces. And that after foreign air support leaves the ANA will be easy to defeat.

When They Fight

Frequency of Fighting

Operational tempo appears to vary depending on a variety of factors, including: strength of ISAF or Afghan forces in a particular area, presence of and access to targets, and availability of weapons both in terms of firearms and material for IEDs. There are no indications that there is a shortage of willing fighters. The insurgents interviewed in December 2011 and late 2012,

report that they have engaged in attacks much more frequently than the fighters interviewed in December 2010. More recent interviewees report that they have participated in attacks undertaken between one day and several weeks before the interview. Several claimed to fight on a near daily or weekly basis. In contrast, interviewees in December 2010 often averred from giving timeframes for their most recent mission, and those who did often fought no more recently than two weeks to two months prior to the interview. Interviewees in Kunar tended to avoid answering the question about their most recent operation. Interviewees in Kandahar last engaged in operations between 25-45 days earlier except for one who claimed to have detonated three IEDs against U.S. forces in the month prior. Interviewees in Wardak reported their most recent engagements between two days to two months earlier than the interview.

Breaks in Fighting

There are two primary reasons for extended and intentional breaks in fighting: the winter season and the harvest season. The winter, particularly in central and northern provinces brings extreme cold weather, which the insurgents are not well equipped to deal with. Several also noted that there is no foliage to conceal them in the course of attacks. One interviewee says the winter halt to fighting lasts three months. In Kandahar and southern provinces, the poppy harvest is the primary cause of a temporary halt in fighting that lasts about one and a half months. An insurgent in Wardak alleges that the Americans will burn the harvest if insurgents continue attacks at that time of the year. When the interviewees are not fighting, they teach religious students (to include lessons about the obligation to engage in jihad), study, farm their own land and prepare for the next season of operations.

Pakistan as a Source of Support and Refuge

Half a dozen interviewees spread across Kandahar, Kunar, and Wardak state that they have received training in Pakistan since 2001. Insurgents from Wardak received training in Waziristan and Kandahar insurgents trained in Quetta or Chaman. Two interviewees have received medical care in Pakistan for injuries inflicted during insurgent operations in the last three years. Interviewees refer to Pakistan as a safe haven for Taliban leaders who sought to evade ISAF's 2010 offensive in Arghandab. Five men, four of whom had been serving in the Taliban government, explained that they took sanctuary in Pakistan when foreign forces invaded Afghanistan in 2001. These men eventually returned to Afghanistan to fight the foreign forces and the Afghan Government. These men, and an additional 11 others, have lived in Pakistan for an extended period and many still have family residing there, so they visit often. As one Kunari interviewee noted, the welfare of his family residing in Pakistan depends on his continued cooperation with the Taliban in Afghanistan. Another interviewee from Kunar explains that he takes turns with his brother fighting and tending their shop in Pakistan. He spends three months on the front line and is relieved by his brother and vice versa.

In October 2012 the interviewees were asked about the relationship between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban. In their responses, the interviewees draw a sharp distinction between the population and the government of Pakistan. About the people of Pakistan, the interviewees say they are more supportive of the mujahedeen's efforts compared to the Afghan people. There is an affinity between the Afghan and Pakistani people as Muslims. For "as infidels help each other so do Muslims," says an insurgent from Kandahar. The interviewees have only criticism for the Pakistani government. One interviewee from Kandahar derides the Pakistani government for being Punjabis who create movies full of sex and other immorality. He, like the other interviewees, accuses the Pakistani government of interfering in Afghanistan at the behest of the United States and Great Britain.

Several of the October 2012 interviewees described past cooperation, such as planning meetings, between Afghan Taliban and Pakistani mujahedeen in Pakistan but they reject the idea that the Afghan Taliban are in any way subordinate to the Pakistani government. Two interviewees indicate that any relationship that existed between the Afghan Taliban and Pakistan has deteriorated recently due to Pakistani attempts to kill Taliban leaders. The comments of one interviewee hint at the complicated nature of the relationship between the Taliban and Hizb-e-Islami factions within the Afghan insurgency and Pakistan. This individual from Kunar, who has been engaged in jihad for Hizbe-Islami since the Soviet invasion, insists that the Taliban takes guidance from Pakistan. According to him, the Americans and British support Pakistan, which, in turn, helps the Taliban to fight in Afghanistan. This sows instability there, which allows foreigners to do as they like and exploit the people and wealth of the country. This interviewee depicts the Taliban as upstarts who do not appreciate the efforts of jihadists like HiG that predate the Taliban. He continues that it is time for the "wolf" (the Taliban) to turn on its trainer (Pakistan) so that those they have trained will destroy the foreigners.

Combat Fatigue

Among those who were willing to answer questions about how long they have fought in the insurgency, all see fighting for the Taliban or another anti-government group as a long-term commitment. Indeed, interviewees have spent between five and six years, on average, involved in insurgent activity, with little variation by province. Some have fought for much longer. Only a few reported having elected to join the insurgency recently (less than two years ago). There is a notable subset of interviewees who either fought against the Soviet occupation and/or worked in the Taliban government, who resumed fighting post-2001.

Despite such a lengthy commitment, most interviewees say that they have not grown tired of fighting. In fact, just three acknowledged a sense of fatigue. However, as most interviewees

consider their fight a moral and religious obligation, it is not surprising that so few admit feeling worn out. A few also state that, since jihad continues perpetually, there can simply be no fatigue.

Many are willing to admit that fighting is difficult and physically tiring but simultaneously assert that engaging in operations against foreign forces spiritually revives them. Those who discuss the strain of insurgent activity often appear exhausted or frustrated with the perpetual nature of the fight and make statements like: “War is bad,” “fighting has been going on for too long,” and “Afghans are in mourning.”

Interviewees’ responses appear to vary considerably by geographic location. For example, many in Kandahar, a province that has witnessed a considerable uptick in ISAF presence and operational tempo, are much more likely to stress the compulsory nature of jihad and deny fatigue. However, these same interviewees more readily admitted that fighting is difficult or unpleasant than those in other areas.

Analyst Comment: *These responses show that there is both an ideological and a practical answer to questions of combat fatigue. When asked directly about this issue, interviewees appeared duty bound to reiterate their commitment to the cause. But when questioned indirectly, they appeared more willing to admit both to the difficulties of fighting and to fatigue. It seems likely that most of those who refused to answer, share the same perspectives as those that did admit to general tiredness. That said this tiredness does not appear to be undermining their morale.*

Given that many have been fighting for an average of five years or longer, it is understandable that they are feeling tired. It is intriguing that two interviewees did not think that combat was too onerous because they did not fight “a lot” or “all the time.” This seems plausible, given that all of the interviewees were being interviewed at or close to home in the winter months when fighting is far less frequent. The ability of many Taliban fighters to return to their home districts or travel to Pakistan each winter and effectively enjoy a period of rest and recuperation (and retraining) in relative safety, helps sustain the Taliban war effort for an extended period, despite significant setbacks and the high level of casualties suffered during recent summer fighting seasons. If these interviewees are typical of most seasoned Taliban fighters, unless these winter “safe havens” can be denied to them, and/or the ideological foundations of Taliban support can be undermined, it seems unlikely that combat fatigue and war weariness will be a decisive factor in this conflict—certainly not by the end of 2014.

The fact that the majority of interviewees have fought for an average of five to six years suggests that while recent ANSF and ISAF interdiction efforts have been successful and the Taliban has suffered many casualties, there appears to remain a sizable cadre of experienced fighters able to continue the fight and to fill leadership positions vacated by those leaders who

have been killed or captured. The Afghan Government and ISAF leadership are, therefore, correct to ignore “body counts” and to continue their focus on efforts to undermine Taliban resolve, reduce popular support, eliminate safe havens and to pursue all avenues for reconciliation with the reconcilable. Kill and capture operations are an essential element in a holistic COIN strategy but they cannot be the primary solution given the resolve and endurance of the Taliban.

Killing Afghans during Operations: Justified or Not?

The interviewees were not unified in their views on whether it is justified to kill Afghans in the course of an operation. While several interviewees come close to unequivocally denouncing the killing of average or “real” Afghans, many more of the interviewees commented on the characteristics that make someone a legitimate target. There is some consensus on the distinction between which Afghans may be considered a legitimate target of attacks and those that are not. Several interviewees even offered succinct categories by which to gauge whether an Afghan should be killed or spared. People who actively support the foreigners by serving as a government official (President Karzai, Kandahar MP Khalid Pashton are mentioned by name), by serving in the ANA or ANP, by delivering supplies to ISAF, ANA, ANP or acting as “spies” for the government or foreign forces are legitimate targets for attack. Afghans such as doctors or teachers who are employed by the government but do not support the infidels in the course of their work should not be killed. Common people who have nothing to do with the government or NGOs should be left alone.

Rather than condemn the killing of Afghans during an operation, interviewees imply they are aware that their own tactics cause mortal harm to average Afghans and in essence absolve themselves of responsibility, saying “it is not a crime if a Muslim dies by accident” in the crossfire of an operation or if the people do not heed Taliban warnings to hide when an attack is imminent. One interviewee, in particular, remarked that Afghans should not complain about the fighting or about being hurt or killed in the course of the jihad that is being waged by their countrymen. According to a Kandahar insurgent, Afghans who do not fight are in the wrong because they do not fulfill their obligation to commit jihad and defend Islam. Although it is better to avoid killing Afghans, and even though the foreign forces do not refrain from doing so, the death of Afghans in the course of jihad is acceptable.

Two interviewees were overtly willing to use the kidnapping of Afghans as a source of fundraising through the application of the concept of Jizya, a tax on non-Muslims living in an Islamic state. Afghans who work for the government or for an NGO who are kidnapped and pay a ransom, couched as a Jizya payment, and subsequently give up their work on behalf of the government or foreigner organizations are to be spared from harm.

Insider Attacks

All of the interviewees say they are pleased with these attacks because they inflict harm on the occupying forces but only one explicitly describes insider attacks as the deliberate actions of Taliban who have infiltrated the ANSF. Most of the interviewees describe the attacks as being carried out by ordinary Afghans who, having joined the security forces, are now coming around to realize the merits of the insurgency and find themselves in a position to attack from within. One interviewee dissented, saying that the insider attacks are only based on emotion and are not carried out in the interest of jihad. Yet, he nevertheless admits that it is good to see infidels (the ANA and ISAF) fighting among themselves. Most also agree that these attacks contribute to achieving the mujahedeen's goals whether or not the perpetrators intend their actions as such. The comments of the interviewees indicate that the Taliban will call upon ANSF members who are disenchanted with the government, their superiors or ISAF forces to use their positions within the security forces to prove themselves strong and faithful Muslims by attacking foreign military forces. Likewise, the Taliban will continue to claim credit for insider attacks even when the impetus was a strictly personal matter without insurgent direction.

Also of note, the interviewee affiliated with HiG in Kunar made several astute observations about the insider attacks. His comments attested to the degree to which the insurgency studies not only the ISAF's military capacity but also the political will and financial constraints of the NATO coalition. He says that the insider attacks are evidence that the foreign forces wasted the money spent to train 200,000 ANA soldiers because the very people they trained are now attacking their trainers. He also describes the insider attacks as embarrassing for NATO and as a reason why members of the alliance are withdrawing soldiers from Afghanistan ahead of the 2014 timeline.

Reflections of the Past and Hopes for the Future

Interviewees do not share a single, cohesive vision for the future of Afghanistan. Despite fighting for the Taliban, surprisingly few wish for a full reinstatement of Taliban rule (helmed by Mullah Omar) as it had been in the late 1990s. That said, a large majority of interviewees still recall the Taliban era in very positive terms. At present, rather than a particular political resolution or outcome, insurgents appear largely united by their vehement distrust of the government and the reconciliation process and their desire for the removal of foreign forces.

Memories of Taliban-Administered Afghanistan

Among the interviewees are young men who are too young to remember the years when the

Taliban controlled Afghanistan or were living as refugees in Pakistan. There were interviewees who were active in enforcing Taliban rule as, for example, the head of the provincial offices of the Department for the Prohibition of Vice and Promotion of Virtue, specifically in Baghlan or Nangarhar. Of those interviewees who are old enough to remember the era of Taliban rule, nearly all recount positive memories of life during that time. Although these interviewees present diverse reasons to support their particular viewpoint, nearly all cite feeling safe and secure and they praise the government's enforcement of Islamic laws. The Taliban era is also described as a time of peace, justice and freedom from corruption.

A respondent in Nangarhar remembers the Taliban era: "During the rule of the [Taliban], there was no kind of corruption [or] vice anywhere in Afghanistan, except for the areas under the control of [Tajik Northern Alliance commander Ahmed Shah] Massoud. All [of the] people of Afghanistan—men and women—were dressed in accordance with Islam... There was no alcohol drinking. There was no gambling [or] prostitution. Corruption, bribery, and robbery had completely vanished. There was absolute peace and security in all areas under the control of the [Taliban]."

Peace and Security

Many interviewees remember the Taliban era as a brief period of stability in Afghanistan's otherwise tumultuous recent past. Many point out that, along with the group's rigid enforcement of Sharia, areas under Taliban control were virtually crime-free. Several also note that, during those years, the Taliban executed or marginalized most of Afghanistan's notorious warlords who had brutalized the Afghan people for more than a decade. With these individuals removed from positions of power, the Taliban effectively ended the period of lawlessness and instability that had followed the withdrawal of the Soviet Army. A 31-year-old interviewee in Wardak's Chack District praises the Taliban's swift removal of Afghan warlords: "When the Taliban took power, they stopped the warlords from collecting [bribes] from trucks at road checkpoints. They stopped corruption. The people [were] very happy."

A few interviewees also described Taliban-era Afghanistan as "peaceful," often contrasting the stability of Taliban rule with the persistent violence of the last ten years. One interviewee from Wardak condemns ISAF and the Afghan Government's inability to properly protect Afghan citizens: "[The Taliban] had very limited resources, but they were able to secure people's property, women, and reputation. Now, over 45 countries can't provide security for a single province."

Analyst Comment: *In extensive survey research we have undertaken over several years, many older Pashtun Afghans and not just the insurgents interviewed in this study contrast their lack of security today, including greatly increased criminality, with a more secure and peaceful time under the Taliban. Even some of those who do not welcome a return to a harsh fundamentalist*

Islamic state, still comment that they felt safer under the Taliban. This shared desire for peace and security affords an opportunity for the Afghan Government to erode a key attraction of the Taliban, if it can show that it is capable of protecting the Pashtun. However, failure to do so will likely increase the Taliban support base over time as well as the determination of fighters. The Taliban for their own benefit and at the expense of the Afghan government expertly manipulates such sentiments.

Islamic Law (Sharia)

Interviewees also often nostalgically recall the Taliban's strict enforcement of Islamic law during their rule. These interviewees flatly prefer the Taliban's strict adherence to Sharia as the sole source of law, as opposed to the dual system incorporating both Islamic and secular laws currently enshrined in the Afghan Constitution. Some deeply resent what they believe to be an imposition of "Western laws" like "freedom" and "democracy" on Afghan society. Some interviewees also contrast the relatively recent development of social ills (namely prostitution and financial corruption) with Taliban-era Islamic virtues.

Analyst Comment: *In common with most Pashtun Afghans, interviewees share a desire for piety and an adherence to Islamic laws and practices in the administration of governance and justice in Afghanistan. Numerous of our surveys have recorded the importance, to many Afghans, of the Afghan Government demonstrating Islamic virtues and piety and providing justice based on Sharia law.*

Our research also shows other aspects of Taliban rule are still remembered positively and even sought out today. In particular Taliban courts remain popular and are considered by a surprising number of Afghans as much more effective than "corrupt" government courts. It is also clear that the Pashtun are by and large traditionalists, and at least a minority, are at a minimum uncomfortable with what are perceived as "Western" secular values such as gender equality and religious freedom. While only a minority appears to want a return to the Taliban's extremist interpretation of Sharia, a majority seems to want their constitution and society to be more fully underpinned by Islamic values and laws. The Afghan Government, with the support of the International Community, must therefore do a far better job of presenting its Islamic credentials and demonstrating Islamic virtues while still respecting basic human rights. The Afghan Government must also do a far better job of highlighting the un-Islamic views and behavior of the Taliban and the other insurgent groups. And the Afghan government must do a better job of enforcing its own laws and ensuring that its legal system is free of corruption. Until it does, Taliban courts provide for many Afghans what they perceive to be fairer and more timely sources of justice, and this bolsters their support for and the legitimacy of the Taliban.

Criticisms of Taliban Rule

Few interviewees offered any criticisms of the Taliban. Nonetheless, in their recollections of Taliban rule, a handful of interviewees identify a few areas of negative performance:

- Poor relationships with other Islamic groups
- Lack of independence
- Diplomatic isolation
- Dearth of employment opportunities
- Overly harsh treatment and interference in Afghans' personal affairs in excess of Sharia law principles

In a sign of a perceived evolution of thinking, perhaps to show their willingness to compromise in the face of possible negotiations, seven interviewees criticize how the Taliban closed schools, especially for girls. These interviewees couch learning as a sacred obligation that all Muslims regardless of gender should fulfill provided that the students and teachers are appropriately attired and the textbooks are in accordance with sharia. These interviewees ask rhetorically how Afghanistan can develop if the population is not educated.

ENDING THE AFGHAN CONFLICT

Interviewees are almost unanimous that the only way to end their armed struggle is for their objectives to be achieved, that is, for the foreign forces to leave Afghanistan, and Sharia Law to be implemented to its fullest extent, which requires a complete overhaul of the composition and conduct of the government. Having couched their effort in terms of a religious duty that they are willing to die for, they cannot contemplate an alternative outcome.

Prospects for Negotiations

Interviewees indicate little interest in negotiating an end to the violence in Afghanistan and voice their commitment to fighting until they realize their goals. Most think that negotiations will yield no benefit for the following reasons:

- The Taliban will not negotiate until they have secured their military, social, and political goals
- Foreign influence on the Afghan Government will not permit fair negotiations with the Taliban or other anti-government elements
- The current Afghan Government is not genuinely interested in negotiations or in a resolution to the conflict

Most interviewees assert that negotiations can only be successful if the Taliban's goals are met first. A 41-year-old interviewee in Kunar concisely captures interviewees' opinions concerning preconditions for Taliban negotiations with the Afghan government: "[ISAF] should be [expelled] out of the country. The power should [rest] in the hands of the real representatives of the country... A real Islamic government should be built with Islamic laws and principals."

Foreign influence over the Afghan government is seen to be the primary impediment to negotiations. Since foreign influence is seen to prevent the Afghan government from

From the Transcript

Comments from the Interviewees

Negotiating an end to conflict

"[ISAF] forces should be [expelled] out of the country. The power should [rest] in the hands of the real representatives of the country... A real Islamic government should be built with Islamic laws and principals." (A 41-year-old male in Kunar Province)

Memories of Taliban rule

"[The Taliban] had security... People were happy with them because they were implementing Islamic law." (A 32-year-old male in Wardak Province)

On trust in GIROA

"The government shouldn't be trusted. Because the government is made by the westerners." (20-year-old male in Arghandab, Kandahar)

acting in good faith towards the insurgency and the population of Afghanistan, negotiations with the Afghan government while it is under the sway of foreigners would be fruitless. Only if the influence of foreigners over the Afghan Government were removed would the insurgents consider talks with the government.

Almost all of the interviewees reject negotiations with the current government because they do not trust it to treat them fairly during the negotiation process. Only three interviewees explicitly stated that they could potentially trust the current Afghan Government. Yet even then, they would only agree to talks after foreign forces have been fully withdrawn. Several expressed the concern that if Taliban go to Kabul for talks, the government will arrest or kill them. At the same time, several interviewees suggest negotiations with Americans or the United Nations, with the possible involvement of Arab countries, in lieu of talks with the government, saying that the real power is in foreign hands and the government is illegitimate and disqualified from participating in a negotiated settlement.

It is not enough that foreign influence over the Afghan government be removed entirely, but the Afghan government itself must be reformed for the insurgents to accept the government as a partner in negotiations. Just as the insurgents are pledged to fight against the current government because it has abused Islam and the Afghan people, they perceive they are prohibited from surrendering their weapons to the present Afghan Government or cooperating with it in any way. As the current government has proved itself unable and unwilling to fully implement Islamic law, a new government is required. A re-formation of government that allows for the complete enforcement of Sharia Law is often described as the only path for creating an acceptable negotiating partner. Says a fighter from Nuristan,

“If the infidel armies leave our country, and the present government that is a puppet of the Americans and their allies is deposed and in its place a new government that is made by true and faithful and patriotic men that follows the instructions of the holy religion of Islam is established, we would have no incentive to keep fighting.”

Interviewees claim that seating a wholly new government would encourage members of the Taliban to peacefully negotiate an end to the conflict in Afghanistan. Few interviewees detail their vision for a new government. Several stress the need for genuine representation, honest Afghan politicians, fairly contested elections, and the use of Jirgas to select Afghan political leaders and representatives. Interviewees generally do not elaborate on exactly what shape or form the proposed new Afghan Government should take, but many hold that the Taliban must have some form of direct involvement in the proposed new Afghan Government, if not outright control.

A few interviewees are concerned about the influence wielded by traditional “ethnic enemies

of the Taliban,” namely non-Pashtun public figures like General Abdul Rashid Dostum, Afghan Vice President Mohammad Fahim, political leader Yunus Qanuni, and (until his assassination in September 2011) head of the High Peace Council and former President of Afghanistan Ustad Burhanuddin Rabbani. These figures have all been outspoken critics of the Taliban. Some have fought against the group; a handful of the interviewees themselves fought as Taliban against the Rabbani Government in the mid-1990s and refer to it and the Northern Alliance as “the forces of evil.” Interviewees believe that these individuals exploit their positions to discriminate against Afghan Pashtuns for supporting the Taliban, and will continue to do so if they remain in positions of influence, regardless of ISAF’s presence.

The current Afghan Government too is seen as benefitting from the ongoing conflict and therefore disinclined to negotiate in good faith. President Karzai and his associates, as well as the non-Pashtun leaders mentioned above, are perceived to profit financially and politically from perpetuating the conflict. Aid funds intended for the Afghan population are misappropriated by government officials who retain their power in spite of “building castles for themselves at the expense of people’s blood.” Since current government officials would face punishment for their conduct under the future government the interviewees describe, they are perceived to resist efforts to come to a settlement in which their own safety and status might be at risk.

Interviewees leave one possible opening for progress when they indicate that ceasing anti-Taliban military operations, and the vilification of the insurgents in the media, might be taken as a trust building measure. Many insurgents also plead for leaders like Karzai and his family, and Northern Alliance figures such as General Dostum, Marshall Fahim, Yunus Qanooni to face the consequences for their alleged crimes against Pashtuns and engaging in various forms of corruption.

Successful negotiations are also dependent on a unified Taliban position and direction from the Taliban leadership to its fighters to cease their resistance. As an insurgent in Zabul said, “If the government wants peace, they should talk to our leaders, I will accept the decisions that our leaders make with the government.” Until the Islamic Emirate signals a cessation of hostilities, fighters will fear retaliation for reconciling with the government and reintegrating into their communities. As reported by an insurgent in Kandahar, “the Islamic Emirate announced that people who put down their weapons and join the government are bagiyān (traitors) and they should be killed. So, we can’t put down our weapons individually because our lives will be in danger.” Until the Taliban and other insurgent groups rescind the threat of retaliation for embracing peace with the government, any fighters who are willing to reconcile will hesitate to do so out of fear for their own safety from attacks from other insurgents.

Analyst Comment:

The demand of these fighters for the removal of the current Afghan Government, as a precondition for peace, is hardly surprising given both the perceived illegitimacy of the current government and a desire for a much more fundamentalist Islamic alternative. That said, the political demands of those interviewed might be met, at least in part, if there were a legitimate path to local power for reconcilable Taliban leaders. The inclusion of a path to shared power, through local elections, for the political wing of the IRA was a key element of the Northern Ireland Good Friday Peace Accord and it has ensured that this agreement has endured since 1997. Unfortunately, there is no such electoral path to local power for Taliban leaders in provinces such as Kandahar and Wardak because Provincial and District Governors, and indirectly all local government officials, are appointed solely by the Afghan President. As a result, the only discussion on both sides of the divide revolves around Taliban inclusion in national government, which is unpalatable to many Afghans, as well as the international community. The clearly political aspirations of the fighters interviewed for this project, combined with what is obviously widespread local support or at least acquiescence, strongly suggests that political devolution in Afghanistan is an essential prerequisite for successful reconciliation with the reconcilable elements of the Taliban.

Given that a political settlement is probably the only way to secure peace, the only alternative to devolution and local power is direct Taliban involvement in national government. Such involvement would likely be resisted by some non-Pashtu Afghans. It should also be remembered that in 1992, a peace and power-sharing agreement (the Peshawar Accords) led to the formation of a “unity” government but this quickly disintegrated leading to civil war and the emergence of the Taliban. There is no guarantee that if the Taliban is included in national Government after 2014, that they will not still turn on their partners, especially if all of their political goals are not met. The hard-line attitudes of those interviewed for this study suggest that such an outcome is likely, especially if it is a view shared by the Taliban’s leaders.

ISAF Withdrawal: A Necessary but Not Sufficient Step to Ending the Insurgency

Almost without exception, interviewees assert that they would not stop fighting even if U.S. and other foreign forces were to leave Afghanistan. This is because two of three primary reasons for fighting would still remain unfulfilled: replacing the current Afghan government and full implementation of Sharia Law. A handful of interviewees answer that they may cease fighting if foreign forces left Afghanistan but this group of insurgents still pose a number of conditions that would nevertheless require substantial changes to the government, such as that Islamic principles must be respected, a new leader must be installed and corrupt government officials must be punished.

Most of the interviewees do not believe that foreign military forces will leave Afghanistan in

2014 voluntarily²⁰ and expect that some number of forces will remain in the country on permanent bases that have been granted to them by the Afghan government, which the foreign forces will use to attack Iran and extend their power in Central Asia. The few interviewees who said that foreign forces would likely leave Afghanistan soon, also mention the financial cost that the NATO countries have paid already but to little avail. If foreign military forces do withdraw from Afghanistan in 2014, either in full or part, the interviewees intend to sustain their attacks on foreign forces with the same or greater intensity to impress on the NATO alliance and the world that the foreign forces are leaving in defeat just as the Soviets did decades before. If in 2014 the foreign forces do leave Afghanistan, the insurgents will turn their attention to the Afghan Government, which they are confident they will be able to defeat easily once the government is not protected by foreign military forces, especially air power. According to insurgents interviewed for this study, President Karzai and his political associates and members of the Northern Alliance, such as General Dostum, will be the first targets for retribution.

Analyst Comment: *It is not uncommon for both conventional and asymmetric conflicts to be ended by the protagonists' leaders, without the support of all subordinate commanders and hardcore fighters. Indeed, insurgent leaders sometimes have to violently enforce the conditions of a peace settlement on recalcitrant supporters within the rank and file. It is therefore feasible for senior Taliban leaders to reconcile with the Afghan Government, despite the opposition of some supporters and fighters. However, the significant level of opposition detected in this project, to any sort of unconditional reconciliation with the government of President Hamid Karzai, even after the withdrawal of "foreign forces," is disconcerting.*

These findings suggest that the Afghan Government's current reconciliation efforts based in large part on an amnesty and on financial inducements are probably insufficient to sway the seasoned fighters interviewed. This research strongly suggests that reconciliation efforts must be combined with the reform of the Afghan Government and efforts to address many of the common concerns and grievances shared by most Pashtun, as well as Taliban fighters. While this may still be insufficient to persuade hardcore Taliban supporters, it is likely to erode, over time, their vital support base of sympathetic or acquiescent friends, family and neighbors. When combined with carefully targeted kill and capture operations, such a strategy may even erode the support and morale of all but the most extreme and irredeemable fighters, who will still need to be eliminated, quite possibly without community remorse. That said, without government reform, improvements in quality of life for most Afghans and a multifaceted reconciliation effort, to include a legitimate path to local power for reconciled Taliban leaders, it seems unlikely that sufficient Taliban supporters and fighters will be assuaged to facilitate the ending of this conflict.

²⁰ Interviewees in October 2012 were asked if they believe that foreign military forces will leave Afghanistan in 2014 as planned.

One other conceivable outcome is that Taliban leaders agree to reconciliation and peace in return for power sharing at the national level. However, it is quite probably that this would simply be the next stage of an overall strategy that leads to the re-establishment of a Taliban dominated government and the full imposition of Sharia Law. While such a settlement may provide a face-saving exit for the international community, it would likely doom Afghanistan to yet another civil war. The hard-line attitudes of almost all of those interviewed for this study strongly suggests that such a strategy would be fully supported by Taliban fighters.

Elections in 2014

Given that the next Afghan presidential elections will roughly coincide with the withdrawal of most U.S. forces from Afghanistan, it raises the question of how the insurgents view the prospect of a presidential election amidst a reduced foreign military force presence. About half of the interviewees, who were asked to consider the 2014 elections, reject elections entirely and prefer the installation of leaders who have been selected by other means. Several mentioned by name Mullah Omar who has been selected as the Amir al Mumineen by a body of Islamic scholars. Others advocate for power to be handed to the Taliban Shura or to a “good and honest” Pashtun who will rule in the style of Ahmad Shah Baba or Mirwais Nika.

The other half do not reject elections per se but do not want an election to be held in 2014 because they believe that the current electoral laws would favor Karzai or the voting would be manipulated by the Americans. Several of the interviewees stated that an election would be held once the electoral laws have been changed and the Americans and their spies are no longer able to fix the election to their liking. Most of the interviewees are sure that if an election is held, the candidate with American support will win, but when the foreign forces are no longer present in enough numbers to protect the government, the Islamic Emirate will force the president from power.

PREFERRED COMPOSITION OF FUTURE AFGHAN GOVERNMENT

Interviewees concur that the current Afghan government is unacceptable but disagree about which group or individual is best suited to replace it. Only about one in four believes that the current leadership of the Islamic Emirate should regain formal control of the country. Many others simply feel that a “good Muslim” could responsibly govern. A few suggest a variety of groups (including the entire Afghan public or smaller individual factions like Hezb-i Islami) or decline to offer an opinion, claiming that they do not feel qualified to answer. About six interviewees explicitly state the need to reinstate Mullah Omar as the leader of Afghanistan, and two suggests Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Many make reference to a selection process whereby Afghans can choose a true Muslim” leader or in which the ulema or mujahedeen select a suitable leader.

Responses vary by the location of the interviewees. It is not surprising that many interviewees in Kandahar Province think that the current Taliban leaders should govern Afghanistan in place of President Karzai. A 20-year-old interviewee in Kandahar’s Arghandab Kandahar describes his vision of a reinstated Taliban government: “At that time, there will be an Islamic society. The government will [be] respectful. Islam will be implemented and the [Afghan] people will continue their lives.” Interviewees in Wardak favor the rule of a “good Muslim” with only a few explicitly preferring the Taliban.

Improvements Expected Under an Islamic Government

Regardless of who interviewees prefer to lead a future Islamic government, they expect that the new leaders will ensure that Sharia Law is enacted and enforced, which will then lead to more effective governance and the eradication of injustice. Corruption and other immoral behaviors will cease, as severe punishments for such transgressions will deter future crimes. A number of interviewees also expect that an Islamic government in Afghanistan will also bring a “better future,” unity among the various Afghan ethnicities on the basis of Islamic solidarity, independence from foreign influence, and

From the Transcript

Comments from the Interviewees

Envisioning post-conflict Afghanistan:

“If all [Muslim insurgent] groups get together, they will make an effective government. Afghanistan will have a brighter future. The war will be over. People will live in peace and under Islam.” (27-year-old male in Wardak Province)

“Today, Afghanistan should be left to Afghans. A qualified, honest, and Muslim person should lead the country to provide services for the people. The occupiers should leave; Islamic law should [be] implemented in every aspect of life. All Afghans should take part in the government (32-year-old male in Wardak Province)

“If God is willing Mullah Omar will come again and there will be beautiful government. There won’t be American, British and their slaves. People will have good life. No one will be able to steal or kill people.” (24-year-old male from Kandahar)

improved living conditions for the poor.

The Reconciliation and Reintegration Process

Interviewees profess that they are almost entirely uninterested in the existing reconciliation / reintegration process as it currently stands. Excepting only a single respondent, none mention specific incentives or programs that could potentially encourage them to reconcile and reintegrate.²¹ Interviewees' complaints are primarily linked to the following perceptions:

- Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) officials are affiliated with the very government that the insurgents are fighting against
- The APRP officials, like the current Afghan government, are under the influence of foreigners
- The APRP officials are unable to offer anything except material incentives and lack the authority to fulfill insurgents' demands for the withdrawal of foreign forces, reformation of the government and implementation of Islamic law
- The Government of Afghanistan is exploiting the reintegration process to cheat the Taliban out of political power and minimize its influence

The incentives that the Peace and Reintegration Commission has at its disposal are described as seriously lacking, because they focus on material matters such as small cash payments and offers of employment, which do not address the substantive issues motivating the interviewees to fight. Interviewees know that the effort is supported by foreign funds and interviewees from provinces in RC-South are especially concerned that the APRP is controlled by foreign interests (ISAF, in particular), and as such, it should not be considered a legitimate means to ending conflict in the country because it equates to selling out to the infidels. That the late Burhanuddin Rabbani, a Tajik against whom the Taliban government fought in the 1990s, led the commission further undermined its legitimacy according to the interviewees.

Individuals who are willing to negotiate without first securing the Taliban's primary goals—expelling foreign forces and implementing Sharia—are generally dismissed as weak-willed religious hypocrites or opportunists willing to surrender for financial offers from the government. An interviewee in Nimruz disparages fighters who consider reintegrating: “I think the efforts of the [APRP] would only sway a few weak-faith mujahedeen who are not real mujahedeen to start with. I think whoever would fall prey to the propaganda of this commission are those who are fighting for money, not for Islam and the country. But the real mujahedeen have immaterial goals. They have sacred goals that cannot be achieved by material offers.”

²¹ All 78 interviewees were asked some version of the question what would make them want to reintegrate.

It is unknown if the sentiments expressed by the interviewee in Nimruz and others are a genuine reflection of their personal commitment to the Taliban or simply inflated insurgent rhetoric. However, the fact that choosing to reconcile with the Afghan Government is seen as a poor reflection of individual character and piety limits the APRP's appeal to only the least dedicated fighters.

Analyst Comment: *Based on these interviews and other research, it would appear that the type of reconciliation effort most likely to bring temporary peace to Afghanistan, would be one that includes significant reform of the Afghan government, the removal of many of its current members and the inclusion of the Taliban in national government. And this would likely only be possible after the removal of all "foreign forces." It seems unlikely that a settlement could be achieved that includes the continued presence of US forces, even if these number is less than 5,000, not least because these forces are intended to bolster and support ANA operations against the Taliban. Such a settlement also seems unlikely if the 2014 elections result in the current Afghan political elite staying in power albeit with a different President.*

CONCLUSIONS

While it is dangerous to extrapolate the findings from 78 interviews to the rest of the Taliban, the evidence collected from these interviews and from the dozens of other research projects undertaken by Glevum in Afghanistan over the last four years does suggest that the future of Afghanistan is grim. These fighters are able to live in plain sight, within either a supportive or totally acquiescent population without fear of being killed or captured. They are not exceptional individuals; nor are they fanatics but they are exceptionally well motivated and determined. They are angry at the presence of foreigners, the imposition of so-called “Western” values, the deaths of innocent Afghans at the hands of ISAF or the ANA, and the corruption and lack of piety of the Afghan government. These grievances are, sadly, shared with many ordinary Afghans. They also share with most Pashtun males a very traditional and conservative set of values that are at odds with the more secular values of the Afghan government, for example, in the area of women’s rights and religious freedom. It is therefore no surprise that ordinary Afghans often describe the Taliban as their “Afghan brothers” even while opposing their methods and position on most issues.

Many interviewees have considerable experience of fighting and while they respect the capabilities of ISAF and to a lesser extent the ANA, they do not fear them. While most probably do experience some level of combat fatigue, regular breaks in the fighting, particularly during the winter, does lessen its effects – especially as they can rest and recuperate at home without any apparent fear or danger of being killed or captured. Their strong sense of religious duty (Jihad), their need to retain individual honor, and the sense that they will prevail also helps them overcome any combat fatigue that they may feel.

They report that they can largely sustain themselves and are able to secure funds, weapons and supplies locally. While lack of weapons in particular can curtail operations, it would appear that they could sustain, at a minimum, a low level of operational activity without external assistance. The importance of Pakistan as a safe haven and source of training, support and recruits is clearly stated but it is not critical for these fighters. This is because their own districts and villages are local safe havens, where they can live and work in relative safety and without fear of being compromised.

While the removal of foreigners from Afghanistan is an essential requisite for these interviewees to accept any reconciliation process, this outcome alone will not end the fighting. Only the return of a fundamentalist, pious Islamic government purged of current government members, and which reverses many of the “reforms” of the last ten years, will satisfy these fighters. As it seems unlikely that the next President will implement such fundamental reforms, many non-Pashtun Afghans would oppose them anyway, and most international supporters would not accept a rollback of key reforms, it seems all but inevitable that the Taliban will

continue to fight the Afghan government after 2014. If the ANA does not hold together, then the fragmentation of the country will likely recur relatively quickly and civil war will almost certainly follow. The collapse of the country would be accelerated by the inevitable flight of funds and elites.

Based on the research conducted by Glevum over a period of five years, it is assessed that this dire scenario is only likely to be averted in the short to medium term if the following measures and actions are taken:

- Substantial reform of the Afghan Government occurs after the 2014 elections. This reform probably needs to include devolution, leading quickly to provincial and district elections, allowing a path to local power for Taliban leaders, which may be sufficient to fragment the Taliban.
- Such reform would have to include at least a partial reversal of certain freedoms introduced after 2001, including religious freedom and gender equality.
- Rampant corruption at all levels of Government must be greatly reduced.
- Government effectiveness must improve significantly and quality of life must be maintained at current levels for most Afghans, and ideally improved over time.
- The U.S. continues to discreetly support the ANA including in kill and capture operations but the ANA must take the lead in all operations and targeting would need to focus on those Taliban leaders and groups unwilling to take part in local or national reconciliation talks.
- Significant funds must be provided on an ongoing basis by the international community to sustain the Afghan government demonstrating to the Taliban leadership that victory cannot be had quickly or cheaply.

Even if all of these measures were implemented, which seems unlikely, they would only buy time and would not likely lead to a sustainable long-term peace settlement with the Taliban (not even a settlement on a par with the Good Friday Peace Accord in Northern Ireland). Based on the answers of the 78 fighters interviewed, it is considered remotely possible that an agreement could be reached if substantial concessions were made and a national power-sharing arrangement could be agreed by all parties. The Taliban leadership, if so inclined, could probably force through such an agreement over the objections of the rank and file, some of whom might need to be eliminated or suppressed. However, the determination and hostility of these interviewees towards the current Afghan government suggests that such a power-sharing agreement might not last long, especially if all of their demands are not met. Accepting such an agreement could also simply be a useful strategy to ensure the removal of all foreign forces and support before a resumption of the conflict. Based on these interviews and

other Glevum field research, this seems the most likely reason for the Taliban accepting any form of compromise.

Assuming that the views, goals and determination of the Taliban fighters interviewed in this study are reflected across the entire group, which these analysts believe to be the case, a civil war appears to be likely whether the US withdraws completely in 2014 or stays on until a distasteful, temporary settlement is achieved. Given that the United States and its international partners have been unable to secure the necessary reforms while it has had substantial influence from 2002 until relatively recently, it seems unlikely that such reforms will occur after 2014. It may therefore be best to help ensure that the Presidential elections to be held in 2014 are free and fair (which they patently were not the last time) and withdraw at the end of the year, leaving Afghanistan to its own devices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Analytical insights drawn from interviewees' comments lead us to suggest the following policy adjustments for a more effective approach to ongoing conflict between the Afghan government and AGEs:

- Keep Insurgents on Their Toes
 - *Increase Operational Tempo*: Insurgents continue to engage ISAF and the ANSF largely at their leisure. When exhausted, pressured, or facing the end of the fighting season, they are easily able to retreat to sanctuaries in Pakistan, or more importantly, hide among sympathetic or cowed populations in their home districts. Denying access to these sanctuaries is critical. Proactively engaging AGEs helps the Afghan government combat public fears of an inevitable, if still distant, Taliban victory and demonstrate its commitment to Afghan citizens.
 - *Pakistani Sanctuaries*: AGEs continue to exploit the Afghan-Pakistani border with little interdiction. ANSF troops must regularly patrol Afghan borders (in tandem with Pakistani authorities), especially in more remote, mountainous areas. Afghan Border Police units must be trained to actively identify and apprehend insurgents who attempt to use official border crossings. Keeping watch on the long, rugged, and porous border will still pose a significant challenge to the ANSF. But renewed efforts may help disrupt insurgent operations and inhibit their ability to weather ISAF and ANSF pressure by avoiding the fight altogether.
 - *Hiding among Afghan Populations*: Maintain pressure on insurgent groups through

carefully targeted kill/capture operations. Vetting local intelligence and, where possible, avoiding culturally insensitive operational procedures (namely “night raids”) helps minimize civilian casualties and offensive behaviors that risk further alienating an already resentful Afghan public. However, in many areas, Taliban intimidation campaigns have been extremely effective. If local populations are not confident in the ANSF’s ability to protect them, they will not risk their lives to defy the Taliban.

- Reform of the Afghan Government

- *Reduce Corruption:* The Afghan Government must do far more to deal with corruption at all levels in order to improve its image with all segments of Afghan society. This must include the removal of former war lords from Government
- *Devolution:* The constitution must be amended in order for Provincial and local elections to be held by no later than 2016. All key appointments at the local level must be made by these elected officials, not by officials based in Kabul. This will provide an acceptable path to power for at least local Taliban leaders.
- *Taliban Political Involvement:* The Taliban must be encouraged to develop a political wing (similar to Sinn Fein), which should then be allowed to participate in provincial and district elections following devolution.

- Focus Efforts on Improving Afghans’ Quality of Life

- Mitigate the Taliban’s appealing promises of uncorrupted Islamic governance and social justice by improving the local quality of life. Efforts should concentrate on the following areas:
 - Implementing more rigorous training programs for the Afghan National Police (ANP) and Afghan National Army (ANA) to improve performance and professionalism and limiting the impact of corruption
 - Expanding the ANSF’s presence, especially in more remote communities
 - Improving the utility and impartiality of government-administered courts by removing corrupt judges and streamlining the dispute resolution process
 - Ensuring communities are able to reliably access needed public services and utilities (e.g. electricity, educational facilities, healthcare)
- Encourage local economic activity and develop educational opportunities – including vocational skills and trades – to help alleviate unemployment, potentially providing another critical boost to public support for the government.

- Eventually, as public confidence in the government grows, many may be less willing to tolerate Taliban presence in their district, cutting off one of the group's primary means of re-energizing and continuing the fight. Without the key support (or at least acquiescence) of the Afghan public, the Taliban will be unable to maintain its operations.
- Undercut the Taliban's Religious Legitimacy
 - Secure the support of respected and well-known Afghan clerics and religious scholars from all ethnic backgrounds to combat the Taliban's perceived religious legitimacy among Sunni Pashtuns. With the backing of these individuals, effective counter-messaging broadcast campaigns can dramatically reduce the persuasiveness of Taliban propaganda.
 - However, policymakers should be aware that tacitly endorsing one particular religious interpretation, regardless of intent, risks alienating other non-Sunni / non-Pashtun citizens (e.g., the predominately Shia Hazaras).
 - Help the Afghan Public Understand the True Impact of Taliban Violence
 - Despite bearing responsibility for nearly 80 percent of civilian deaths in 2011, the Taliban continues to enjoy a substantial degree of public support. As many insurgents choose to conduct operations in neighboring districts, communities are rarely able to directly implicate locally based insurgents in violent attacks. If residents are able to personally witness the consequences of AGE operations, especially those in which civilian bystanders have been injured, they may begin to withdraw their support from the Taliban. While they may not be willing to resist the Taliban, some may become willing to inform on their activities and presence/location. Such an approach has worked in other conflicts, where the supportive population has eventually been encouraged to connect the insurgent cause with the terrible consequences of the violent campaign executed in the name of that cause. The result is a decline in support for the use of violence and an increased willingness to consider a non-violent solution to the conflict. It should be noted that, while potentially useful in driving down public support for the Taliban and AGEs, this approach might strengthen inadvertently Taliban intimidation campaigns in resistant communities.

- Understand the Limitations of the Current Reintegration Process
 - Noting interviewees' unwavering ideological and religious commitment, it appears that the Taliban has little interest in negotiating with the present government. Unless the government intends to demand the complete withdrawal of ISAF units and hand the Taliban effective control of country, attempting to coax fighters back to the negotiating table seems to be an exercise in futility. Rather than attempting to dissuade fighters directly, driving a proverbial wedge (as outlined in the preceding recommendations) between insurgents and local communities may prove far more effective.
 - If the government still intends to pursue reconciliation, efforts must be retooled to address many of the concerns and grievances shared by both Taliban fighters and the greater Pashtun community. While it may still not be enough to persuade hardcore Taliban supporters, these efforts could potentially erode the group's vital support base of sympathetic or acquiescent communities. Supplemented by carefully targeted kill/capture operations, such a strategy may eventually wear down all but the most committed and irreconcilable fighters.
 - Final American withdrawal must be used as a bargaining chip to encourage what would still be limited compromise from Taliban leadership in return for a "cessation of hostilities."

APPENDICES

Methodology

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 78 Afghan males in the provinces of Baghlan, Ghazni, Helmand, Kandahar, Khost, Kunar, Kunduz, Nangarhar, Nimruz, Nuristan, Parwan, Paktia, Uruzgan, Wardak, and Zabul. Interviewees were between the ages of 16 and 48, and of different occupational and educational backgrounds. Nearly all interviewees self-identified as ethnically Pashtun; one identified himself as Tajik, and one respondent chose to identify himself as an Arab.

In-depth interviews were selected as the appropriate method to gather the desired information because of the sensitive nature of both the subjects discussed and the interviewees' connection to Afghan insurgent elements.

The interviewees were interviewed using a list of questions to prompt open-ended responses. The interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis, with one interviewer speaking with one respondent. Interviewees gave their informed consent to the moderator prior to the interview. At interviewees' request, audio of the interviews was not captured. Moderators compiled written notes, which were then translated into English for analysis.

Over the last year, a small, dedicated team of well-connected indigenous researchers exploited personal connections to interview insurgents. Local citizens who are friends or relatives of the interviewers helped identify potential interviewees. All interviewers are trained in basic interviewing methods and have previous experience in conducting interviews.

All of the English transcripts were read and analyzed in order to identify themes within the responses by highlighting points about which interviewees agreed as well as divergences in perspectives. While common responses are important in the analysis, references to minority opinions are presented when especially illuminating.

Respondent Demographics

Respondent Set 1

ID	Province	District	Marital status	Age	Occupation	Tribe
1	Kandahar	Arghandab	Married	24	Farmer	Alkozai
2	Kandahar	Panjwayi	Single	24	No occupation	Noorzai
3	Kandahar	Panjwayi	NR	32	Mullah and Talib	Alkozai
4	Kandahar	Arghandab	Single	20	Talib	Saidan
5	Kandahar	Panjwayi	Married	40	Preacher	Alkozai
6	Kunar	Asadabad	Married	41	Jihadist	Shinwari
7	Kunar	Asadabad	Single	20	No occupation	Safi
8	Kunar	Watapoor	Single	29	Teacher and member of the Emirate	Safi
9	Kunar	Watapoor	Married	48	No occupation	Momand
10	Kunar	Nari	Single	18	No occupation	Kohistani
11	Kunar	Nari	Married	42	No occupation	Naroji
12	Wardak	Chack	Widower	31	Employee of the Emirate/farmer	Noori
13	Wardak	Chack	Single	25	Student	Wardak
14	Wardak	Chack	Single	31	Teacher	Noori
15	Wardak	Chack	Single	16	Student	Merkhil
16	Wardak	Jaghatoo	Married	30	Jihadist	Mayar
17	Wardak	Jaghatoo	Married	34	Mullah and member of the Emirate	Mayar
18	Wardak	Jaghatoo	Single	26	No occupation	Ahmadzai
19	Wardak	Nirkh	Single	29	Student / jihadist	Merkhil
20	Wardak	Nirkh	Single	20	No occupation	Pashtun
21	Wardak	Nirkh	Engaged	27	Mullah	Hotaki
22	Wardak	Saidabad	Single	24	Student	Noori
23	Wardak	Saidabad	NR	-	Jihadist/farmer/ Kasab Kar	Wardak
24	Wardak	Saidabad	Engaged	24	No occupation	Noori
25	Wardak	Saidabad	Single	27	NR	Merkhil
26	Wardak	Saidabad	Single	32	Taliban	Arab

27	Wardak	Saidabad	Married	35	Farmer	Wardak
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Respondent Set 2

ID	Regional Command	Province	Gender	Age	Education (years)
1	East	Nangarhar	Male	-	-
2	East	Nangarhar	Male	-	-
3	East	Wardak	Male	-	-
4	East	Wardak	Male	-	-
5	East	Nuristan	Male	-	-
6	East	Nuristan	Male	-	-
7	East	Khost	Male	-	-
8	East	Kunar	Male	-	-
9	East	Parwan	Male	-	-
10	East	Ghazni	Male	-	-
11	South	Zabul	Male	-	-
12	South	Zabul	Male	25	-
13	South	Zabul	Male	43	-
14	South	Zabul	Male	33	-
15	South	Kandahar	Male	-	-
16	South	Kandahar	Male	-	-
17	South	Kandahar	Male	-	5 Years
18	South	Kandahar	Male	45	12 Years
19	South	Kandahar	Male	19	Illiterate
20	South	Nimruz	Male	-	-
21	South	Nimruz	Male	27	5 Years
22	South	Nimruz	Male	30	12 Years
23	South	Uruzgan	Male	39	Illiterate
24	South	Uruzgan	Male	-	-
25	South	Uruzgan	Male	44	Graduate Degree
26	South	Uruzgan	Male	23	-
27	South	Helmand	Male	-	-
28	South	Helmand	Male	-	-
29	South	Helmand	Male	35	9 Years
30	South	Helmand	Male	26	9 Years
31	South	Helmand	Male	29	12 Years

Respondent Set 3

ID	Province	District	Marital status	Age	Occupation	Tribe
1	Kunduz	Khanabad	Married	25	Farmer	Safi
2	Kandahar	Panjwayi	Single	35	Cobbler	Alizai
3	Kunar	Watapoor	Single	22	NR	Safi
4	Paktia	Shwak	Married	45	Farmer	Zadran
5	Uruzgan	Deh Rawood	Married	29	Insurgent	Alizai
6	Helmand	Gereshk	NR	22	Insurgent	Norzai
7	Khost	Ismael Khel	Married	40	Insurgent	Mandozai
8	Nimruz	Khashrod	Married	40	Insurgent	Barekzai
9	Baghlan	Pul-e-Khumri	Married	47	Farmer	Tajik
10	Nangarhar	Surkh Rod	Married	32	Insurgent	Salarzai

Respondent Set 4

ID	Province	District	Marital status	Age	Occupation	Tribe
1	Helmand	Marja	Single	28	Student in Pakistan	Wardak Khandkhil
2	Helmand	Marja	Single	18	Farmer	Pashtun
3	Kandahar	Zheri	Married	33	Farmer	Noorzai
4	Kandahar	Kandahar City/Chaman	Engaged	27	Shopkeeper	Suleimankhel
5	Kandahar	Daman	Married	34	Medic	Eshaqzai
6	Kunar	Nari	Married	45	NR	Shinwari
7	Kunar	Shigal	Single	18	Madrassa Student	Mullahkhel
8	Wardak	Saidabad	Married	42	Insurgent	Mirkhel
9	Wardak	Saidabad	Engaged	21	Student in Pakistan	Noori
10	Wardak	Saidabad	Single	19	Insurgent	Sayed

Interview Questions

Respondent Set 1

1. Where were you born? (District and quadrant of district) Do you consider the district where you were born to be your home district?
2. How old are you? Are you married? Do you have children?
3. What is your tribe?
4. Did you go to school? What is the highest grade you completed? Did you attend a Government school or a madrassa?
5. 5. What is the farthest place from home that you have travelled to? Why did you travel there? Did the trip have a special meaning for you?
6. When you were growing up, whom did you spend the most time with? Who were the most important people in your life? Why were they important to you?
7. What are your memories of the time when the Taliban controlled Afghanistan?
8. When did you start to fight the occupiers?
9. Who (or which organization) do you fight for? (example: Taliban, Mullah Omar, Hezb-i Islami)
10. Has anyone in your family been killed or injured by ISAF? By Afghan military forces?
11. How do you get the things that you need to live and to fight, things such as food, shelter? Weapons? Do you get Zakat, ushr from the people in this area?
12. Do you travel around to other districts? Which districts? To other provinces? Which provinces?
13. When was your last fighting mission? Do you feel you accomplished the mission?
14. Are there times of the year when you have another job and when you do not fight? What is your other job?

15. Why do you fight against the government?
16. Do you ever feel that you are tired of fighting and want to find another way of living?
17. What do you think are the biggest problems in Afghanistan right now?
18. Can the fighting be finished if the government negotiates with the Taliban?
19. What must the government offer the Taliban in these negotiations in order to end the fighting? or What should the Karzai government do in order to convince you to stop fighting?
20. Can the government be trusted to keep their promises during negotiations on reconciliation?
21. If foreign forces left Afghanistan, would you stop fighting and accept the Karzai Government? Probe: If foreign forces left Afghanistan and the respondent says that they would still fight the Karzai government, ask: Why would you still fight? What do you object to about the Karzai government?
22. Who do you think should rule Afghanistan today?
23. And if _____ ruled Afghanistan today, what would the country be like?
24. The observation of the interviewer about the client

Respondent Set 2

1. Why do you choose to fight?
2. What prevents you from wanting to reintegrate?
3. What changes or events would motivate you to reintegrate (i.e. “What changes need to be made in order for you to put down your weapons and live a peaceful life?”)? What would make fighters more willing to participate in the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Program? Promises of amnesty (no reprisals)? The handover of security to the ANSF and the departure of ISAF from the area? Assistance for family members in Pakistan?
4. What could the Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Program offer that might cause you

to abandon fighting?

Respondent Set 3

1. Where (in which district) were you born? Do you consider the district where you were born to be your home district?
2. How old are you? Are you married? Do you have children?
3. What is your tribe (qawm)?
4. Did you go to school? What is the highest grade you completed? Did you attend a government school or a madrassa?
5. What are your memories of the time when the Taliban controlled Afghanistan? Is there anything that the Taliban did then that you think they should not do now?
6. When did you start to fight?
7. Who (or which organization) do you fight for? (Example: Taliban, Mullah Omar, Hezb-Islami)
8. Has anyone in your family been killed or injured by ISAF? By Afghan military forces?
9. How do you get the things that you need to live and to fight, things such as food, shelter, and weapons? Do you get Zakat, ushr from the people in this area?
10. Do you fight in your own home district or do you fight in other places?
11. When was your last fighting mission? Do you feel you accomplished the mission?
12. Are there times of the year when you do not fight? When you do not fight, do you have another job? What is your other job?
13. Why do you fight against the government and foreign forces? What do you want to achieve by your fighting?
14. Can the fighting be finished if the government negotiates with the Taliban?

15. If foreign forces left Afghanistan, would you stop fighting and accept the Karzai government? If you would not accept the Karzai government, what do you object to about the Karzai government?

16. Who do you think should rule Afghanistan today? What would the country be like if _____ ruled Afghanistan today?

17. Do you think that it is justified to kill Afghans during an operation? When is it justified? When is it not justified?

Respondent Set 4:

1. Where (in which district) were you born? Do you consider the district where you were born to be your home district?

2. How old are you? Are you married? Do you have children?

3. What is your tribe (qawm)?

4. Did you go to school? What is the highest grade you completed? Did you attend a government school or a madrassa?

5. What are your memories of the time when the Taliban controlled Afghanistan? Is there anything that the Taliban did then that you think they should not do now?

6. When did you start to fight?

7. Who (or which organization) do you fight for? (Example: Taliban, Mullah Omar, Hezb-Islami)

8a. Why did you join with the insurgency and start to fight?

8b. Has anyone in your family been killed or injured by ISAF? By Afghan military or police forces?

9. How do you get the things that you need to live and to fight, things such as food, shelter, and weapons? Do you get Zakat, ushr from the people in this area?

10. Do you fight in your own home district or do you fight in other places?

11. When was your last mission? What was your last mission? Do you feel you accomplished the mission?

12. Are there times of the year when you do not fight? When you do not fight, do you have another job? What is your other job?
13. You told me before about the reasons why you started to fight. Please tell me more about why you continue to fight against the government and foreign forces? What do you want to achieve by your fighting?
14. Do you think the fighting can be finished if the government negotiates with the Taliban?
15. Foreign forces say that they will leave Afghanistan in 2014. Do you think that the foreign forces will leave Afghanistan in 2014 as they say they will? Why do you think this?
16. What will you and other fighters like you do in the next year to get ready for when the foreign forces leave Afghanistan in 2014? How will you prepare for the future when foreign forces have left the country?
17. What do you think will happen in Afghanistan if foreign forces do leave in 2014? Do you think you will stop fighting and accept the government or will you continue to fight against the government? Why?
18. An election to select a new President of Afghanistan is scheduled to be held in 2014. Who do you think will win the election to be President of Afghanistan? Regardless of who wins the election to be President of Afghanistan, who do you think should be in charge of the Government of Afghanistan? Why?
19. Recently there have been a lot of attacks on foreign forces by members of the Afghan Police and Army. What do you think about these attacks? How do these attacks help the insurgents achieve their goals?
20. Some people say that Pakistan tells the Afghan Taliban what to do. Do you think this true? In your opinion, what is the relationship between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban?
21. Do you think that it is justified to kill Afghans during an operation? When is it justified? When is it not justified?



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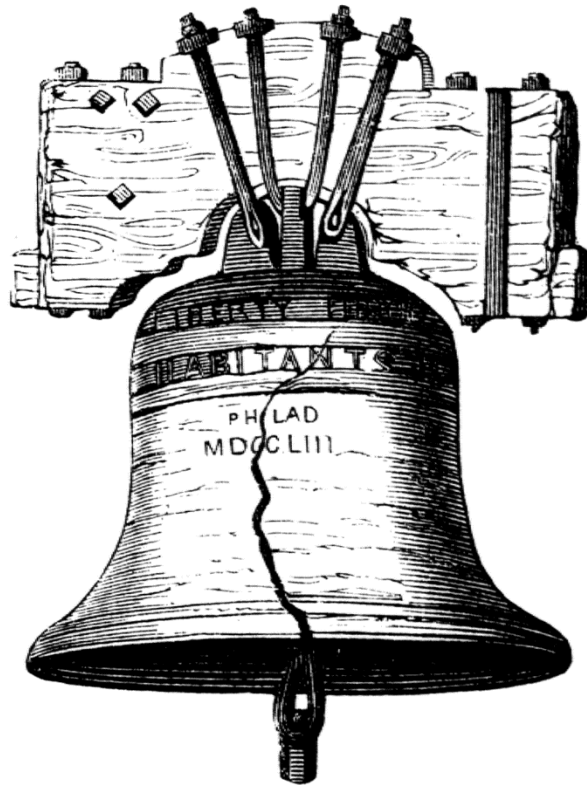
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