



# COUNTERINSURGENCY, LOCAL MILITIAS, AND STATEBUILDING IN AFGHANISTAN

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

Much international effort and funding have focused on building and bureaucratizing the means of violence in Afghanistan. At the same time, parallel government and NATO experiments have armed local defense forces, including local militias, under the Afghan Local Police (ALP) program to fight the insurgency and provide security at the local level. This report—which is based on a year's research in Kabul and the provinces of Wardak, Baghlan, and Kunduz—seeks to understand the role and impact of the ALP on security and political dynamics in the context of ongoing counterinsurgency and stabilization operations and the projected drawdown of international troops in 2014.

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Cover photo: Afghan Local Police candidates, Daykundi Province, by Petty Officer 2nd Class David Brandenburg, supplied by DVIDS

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[The greatest threat to stability in Afghanistan is less the existence of a few hundred militias per district in the form of the ALP and more the danger that after 2014 an oversized and unevenly trained armed force will decompose and fragment into myriad competing militia groups.]



## Summary

- International intervention in Afghanistan at the end of 2001 marked less the beginning of a war-to-peace transition and more a new phase of an ongoing conflict.
- The fundamental contradiction has been attempting to build peace while fighting a war.
- Post-2001 Afghanistan exemplifies the deleterious effects of exogenous, militarized statebuilding, which has undermined peacebuilding and statebuilding at many levels.
- The paradox of counterinsurgency doctrine in Afghanistan is that its success depends on a high-capacity regime to put it into practice but that exogenous statebuilding prevents the emergence of such a regime in the first place.
- The growth of the insurgency, the failures of top-down statebuilding, and the influence of counterinsurgency doctrine all help explain the proliferation of militias since the mid-2000s.
- Militias are formed to engage in protective violence but often mete out predatory and abusive violence.
- No necessary or straightforward connection exists between militia formation and state breakdown or collapse.
- Preceded by several other militia programs, the Afghan Local Police (ALP) emerged as a U.S.-funded effort.
- ALP militias are less a threat to national-level stability and more a danger that after 2014 an oversized and unevenly trained national armed force will fragment into numerous competing militias.
- Outsourcing community protection and defense to the ALP—rather than extending state power and legitimacy—may have had the opposite effect.
- The ALP will not go away, has already left a long-term legacy that Afghans will have to deal with, and is symptomatic of a wider deficiency of the post-2001 intervention.
- The long-term future of the ALP program remains uncertain. If it continues, however, it should not be expanded. Stronger state oversight and support are needed, and plans should be developed to facilitate the absorption of the ALP into the Afghan National Police (ANP).



## Introduction

In the context of the Afghan security transition of 2014, when the bulk of foreign military forces are due to withdraw, policy debates have focused on the role and capabilities of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).<sup>1</sup> Much effort has been devoted to building up and bureaucratizing the means of violence in Afghanistan with a view to establishing a legitimate monopoly over the means of coercion. Yet this has been paralleled by a series of government and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) experiments in arming local defense forces, including local militias under the ALP, to fight the insurgency and provide security at the local level. Frequently, notions of Afghan ownership, local solutions, and cost-effectiveness are invoked to justify such programs. This strategy is not without controversy, however. It has prompted concerns about the efficacy and impact of such interventions on the Afghan state's capacity to rein in armed groups, impose a monopoly over the means of violence, improve security, balance civil-military relations, enforce the rule of law, create political stability, and end the internal conflict. These debates on the role of irregular forces tend to be driven by agency interests and based on limited or disputed evidence.

This report attempts to provide an empirically based and independent analysis of the ALP program.<sup>2</sup> It aims to show how the program and its previous iterations evolved and its impacts at the local and national levels. The research addresses the roles and impacts of the ALP program on security and political dynamics in the context of ongoing counterinsurgency and stabilization operations and the transition of security responsibilities from Western forces to Afghan security forces.<sup>3</sup>

## Background

International intervention in Afghanistan has been driven and shaped by different (and competing) logics, justifications, and modalities.<sup>4</sup> Although it is often claimed that all good things come together, in practice, major contradictions and trade-offs are involved in pursuing multiple objectives simultaneously.<sup>5</sup> The most fundamental contradiction is attempting to build peace while fighting a war (Suhrke 2011). This contradiction manifests itself in the sphere of policing in the form of tension between a U.S. focus on paramilitary policing to pursue the war and a European focus on civil policing to consolidate the peace.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to a complex range of often contradictory interests, the international response has shifted over time. Intervention began as a relatively minimalist endeavor involving a limited presence of U.S. ground forces fighting al-Qaeda and the Taliban through local proxies.<sup>7</sup> This changed over time to a more expansive, top-down form of statebuilding—encompassing all the transformative ambitions and recognized deficiencies of what is generally called liberal peacebuilding—radical institution building, good governance, reconstruction, security sector reform, rule of law, and so forth.<sup>8</sup> This was followed by a third phase, returning in some respects to a modified version of the first phase, in response to the intensification of the insurgency and the evident failures of statebuilding. The terminology, if not always the practices, changed to incorporate what are known as more bottom-up, Afghan-led, culturally appropriate, quick-impact stabilization measures. This approach was influenced by wider trends in military doctrine, shifts in personnel—particularly the arrival of General Stanley McChrystal as the commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)—and imperatives from the field. This was paralleled by a massive surge in international troops and financial resources aimed at turning the situation around. Thomas Barfield (2012) nicely captures the shift in how the international community defined and responded to the 'Afghan problem': In



2002, the absence of a strong centralized state was viewed as the driver of insecurity and terrorism, yet by 2011, a corrupt, illegitimate central state was considered the core of the problem. A fourth and most recent phase has been transition, the drawdown of foreign troops by 2014 and the handover of ownership to the Afghan government, including responsibility for fighting the Taliban and providing security for the population. This latest phase has involved a further and hasty redefinition of the problem and the criteria for success—leading to a search for pragmatic solutions—and the ALP can perhaps be understood as one manifestation of this shift toward expediency. This phase has also been marked by the surfacing of long-standing tensions between the Afghan government and international actors, particularly the United States. President Hamid Karzai has openly distanced himself from the U.S. war agenda and emphasized Afghan sovereignty and independence.

### *Shifting Security and Policing Environment*

International intervention at the end of 2001 marked the mutation of thirty years of conflict into a new phase rather than the beginning of a transition from war to peace. The preceding war years had seen the growing decentralization of the means of violence, associated with the emergence of a new class of military entrepreneurs and a political economy shaped by military patrimonialism. The collapse of the Najibullah regime was followed by a demodernization of the army, in which, over time, fragments of the regular army in the north gradually assumed the character of militias, similar to other military forces in the rest of the country (Giustozzi 2009a).<sup>9</sup> The Taliban regime to some extent centralized the means of violence, including through an effective disarmament campaign, a process that was reversed by internationally promoted regime change, leading to the further fragmentation of the political-military landscape.

International military intervention, the exclusive elite pact forged in Bonn in 2001,<sup>10</sup> the failures of statebuilding, and the absence of meaningful reconciliation efforts galvanized the insurgency, which over time intensified and spread geographically. Although patchy attempts at disarmament were attempted in the north and less so in the south, as the insurgency intensified, the U.S. military embarked on arming Pashtun rivals of the Taliban in the south. If war is, as Ariel Ahram suggests, “an effective auditor of institutional performance” (2011, 16), the growing insurgency exposed deficiencies in the capacity and legitimacy of the Afghan state.

Western efforts to regulate what was in effect a security market have been contradictory and often ill considered. On the one hand, interventions were directed toward bureaucratizing coercion by building up a monopoly on the means of violence through security sector reform, which was defined as the five related pillars of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and ANP; judicial reform; disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR); and counternarcotics. On the other hand, foreign forces continued to support and fund local power brokers, creating militias and deploying private security companies, who operated either above or below the law.<sup>11</sup> Unsurprisingly, given the continued high levels of insecurity and the absence of real socioeconomic opportunities to encourage the reintegration of fighters, DDR programs were a failure. Warlord democratization by absorbing jihadi factions into key ministries succeeded in relation to some of the senior figures within the northern alliance. However, many provincial strongmen resisted the extension of centralized state power into the periphery, while mid- to low-level fighters had few options beyond military-patrimonial networks or engagement in the drug economy. The underlying structural conditions that explain the continued persistence of illegal militias, far from being transformed,

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***The underlying structural conditions that explain the continued persistence of illegal militias, far from being transformed, have intensified.***

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have intensified over time. Programs that attempted to centralize the means of coercion and establish effective policing were a threat to the interests of many, both within and outside the state (Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2013).

Efforts to invest in policing reflect and have contributed to this security environment. Initially, investment in policing was limited and muddled (Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2013; Wilder 2007), though in 2006, the Afghanistan Compact<sup>12</sup> stated that by the end of 2010 there would be a fully constituted, professional, functional, and ethnically balanced ANP and Afghan Border Police (ABP) with a combined force of up to 62,000 that had the ability to meet the security needs of the country and be increasingly fiscally sustainable. The ANP's growth targets expanded, paralleling the increase in size of the ANSF more generally, and the ANP numbered some 148,500 personnel in February 2013 (Planty and Perito 2013, 1).<sup>13</sup> Between 2001 and 2011, the international community spent more than \$15 billion on Afghanistan's police. The focus for the United States, however, was primarily on the paramilitary dimensions of policing rather than on building an institution to enforce the rule of law.<sup>14</sup> As the United States became more involved in funding and organizing policing, the strategic goal was increasingly to fight off organized challenges to state power.<sup>15</sup> This emphasis on training and using the police in offensive counterinsurgency roles reflected the institutional preferences of the U.S. Department of Defense, which has had primary responsibility for police assistance in Afghanistan since 2005 (Rosenau 2008, 10; Perito 2009, 5). Between 2005 and February 2013, the United States, the largest donor in this sector, spent some \$14 billion to train and equip the ANP (Planty and Perito 2013). Efforts directed at restructuring and training the police achieved mixed success, and even by 2011, the uniformed police "was still more like a fragmented coterie of militias than either a paramilitary police or a civilian police force" (Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2011,18).

This combination of protracted conflict and invasive international intervention has led to a militarized and volatile security landscape inseparable from the wider regional conflict system, given that both Afghanistan and Pakistan use asymmetrical warfare to pursue statebuilding goals.

The decentralization of violence and remobilization has arguably accelerated in the run-up to the transition deadline. When General David Petraeus took over for McChrystal in 2010, the rules of engagement shifted from counterinsurgency back to counterterrorism. This shift was reflected in an increased reliance on night raids, aerial bombardment, and drones. Some argue that Afghanistan has increasingly become a dirty war whose brutality has increased insecurity, which in turn has been used to justify the arming of communities by U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOFs), the Afghan state, or regional strongmen (Boone 2011). A negative spiral is in evidence as concerns about a chaotic post-2014 scenario contribute to a spontaneous rearmament by communities and militias.

## Emergence of the ALP

Historically, state formation has involved the creation of a military specializing in the monopoly of large-scale violence (Giustozzi 2011; Tilly 1992; Olson 2000). Policing, which tends to occur in the shadow of this process, involves the management of small-scale violence (Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2013, 3). The increased provision of state policing has often gone hand in hand with the gradual disarmament of the population and the expropriation of policing capacities from the communities. This is associated with what Michael Mann characterizes as a shift from states that rule through despotic or raw coercive power to those that govern

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***The focus for the United States was primarily on the paramilitary dimensions of policing rather than on building an institution to enforce the rule of law.***

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through infrastructural power associated with policing and technologies of governance, such as census making and mapping, that make society more legible and therefore more manageable (1984). However, the creation of a military and police force is costly in financial and political terms. Historically, states and imperial powers have frequently acted as brokers rather than monopolists, seeking to extend their control through franchising the means of coercion. This pattern was typical of feudal Europe and the norm for pre-twentieth-century states in much of Asia (Scott 2009). Imperial powers such as the British developed a policy of indirect rule, which involved creating irregular armies to police and administer the empire, particularly in frontier zones.<sup>16</sup> Such armies and constabularies were less costly in manpower, resources, and political risks. One example is the Sandeman system, developed on the northwest frontier in the nineteenth century and recreated in the form of the watch and ward system in the early twentieth century and echoed in U.S. counterinsurgency strategies in the Philippines and Vietnam. Policing by tradition is therefore not new. The Sandeman system of frontier management introduced and institutionalized the *jirga* system, irrevocably changing Baluch society in the name of its preservation (Marsden and Hopkins 2011, 73).<sup>17</sup> Contemporary counterinsurgency (COIN) and development policy literature on Afghanistan similarly reinvent and reify local traditions, including older forms of community policing, such as *arbaki*.<sup>18</sup>

Historically, a symbiotic relationship between bandits, warlords, and states has been common (Gallant 1999). The assumption that building a Weberian monopoly over the means of violence is a necessary condition for state formation is not always born out by historical experience. As Ariel Ahram notes, violence devolution can be seen as a mode of military development rather than as a defective mode of state formation (2011, 130). In Burma, for example, the state has deployed militias effectively to regain control over and pacify its unruly borderlands (McCoy 1999; Woods 2011). Similarly, the Sri Lankan state created Tamil militias to fight the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and police the Tamil population in the north and east.

This body of literature suggests that militias are not necessarily a manifestation of state breakdown or agents of *statecide*, to borrow Antonio Giustozzi's term (2009b). They may contribute to disintegrative or integrative dynamics, depending on context. Critics of the ALP point to the Najibullah period as a warning about the danger of militias, given that government-created militias ultimately contributed to the downfall of the regime once Moscow ended the external subsidies that held the system together. However, the relative importance of militias was much greater during Najibullah's time, leading to a symbiotic relationship between government and irregular forces.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Western donors are unlikely to suddenly curtail subsidies to the Afghan state as the Soviets were forced to do, which made the militias defect and sealed the downfall of the Najibullah regime.

States and empires have frequently deployed surrogate forces to extend their control and counter violent resistance to their rule. How these forces are deployed and the forms they take vary from place to place. The term *militia* is frequently used as a catchall that lumps together dissimilar phenomena. For this study, the distinction between home guards and militias is important. The former are recruited from a particular locale and are responsible for policing that locale. Their role is primarily defensive and policing. This most closely resembles the *arbaki* model, which was meant to maintain law and order and defend the borders and boundaries of the tribe or community. In the context of counterinsurgency operations, home guards are meant to secure control over the population and minimize insurgent abilities to establish a support network among civilians (Hughes and Tripodi 2009, 11).<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, militias

are larger and more powerful than home guard units and combine policing with an offensive military role and frequently operate over a wider geographical area.<sup>21</sup> The boundaries between the two structures may frequently be blurred, particularly given that organizations have a tendency to mutate over time.

### *Antecedents*

International actors have funded and supported efforts to disarm factions and centralize the means of coercion. DDR was launched in April 2003 in the form of the UN-created and Japanese-funded Afghan New Beginnings Program (ANBP), which targeted what was known as the Afghan Military Forces. This program was followed by the Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) program.<sup>22</sup> Both, however, were largely failures in terms of achieving stated aims (Bhatia and Sedra 2008; Giustozzi 2008; Sedra 2006). As noted earlier, opportunities for rank-and-file combatants were limited; only a few went into the newly constituted ANA, and many joined local militias or semiprivate police forces (Suhrke 2011, 142).

In parallel with these programs, other international actors were supporting rearmament and contributing to the further decentralization of violence. This support occurred from the time of the invasion, when the CIA channeled funds to Northern Alliance warlords to pursue the war on terror. This model—promoted by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld—of deploying special forces and arming local proxies, initially appeared to be successful in achieving regime change. It was followed in subsequent years by a succession of experiments in local policing or community militias, including the Afghan National Auxiliary Police (ANAP), Afghan Public Protection Program (APPP or AP3), Community Defense Initiative (CDI), Local Defense Initiative (LDI), arbaki, Critical Infrastructure Program (CIP), counterterrorism pursuit teams, the Kandahar Strike Force, and the Khost Protection Force. Some of these programs were locally initiated—sometimes spontaneously by provincial governors, regional strongmen, and local communities as the growth of the insurgency increased the demand for paramilitary policing, particularly in the north—and others were pushed from the center or the provinces by foreign forces. The management of the various militia groups was located in different parts of the Afghan government (although they often had closer relationships with foreign forces than with the government), including the Independent Directorate for the Protection of Public Properties and Highways by Tribal Support, Ministry of Interior (MOI), President’s Office, and National Directorate of Security (NDS). The rationale for their formation was linked to a range of tactical and strategic objectives, including fighting the Taliban, winning election campaigns, strengthening local power bases, pursuing local vendettas, strengthening the central government, or promoting Taliban reintegration.

The experiments reflected wider developments in COIN doctrine, which as a body of knowledge and set of practices appeared to mesh with the statebuilding and stabilization agenda. The dissemination of this practical knowledge was associated with a number of what David Miller and Tom Mills (2010) call warrior intellectuals and associated policy institutes and academic institutions, which at the end of the Cold War were influential in helping carve out a new role for Western militaries in relation to expeditionary forces, statebuilding operations, and counterinsurgency campaigns.<sup>23</sup> COIN doctrines involved reframing warfighting, from being conceived as purely a military task to primarily a battle for governance. Counterinsurgency is understood to be “an umbrella term that describes the full range of measures that governments take to defeat insurgencies. These can be political, administrative, military, economic, psychological or informational, and are almost always used in combination” (Kilcullen

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2011, 42). Soft power is deployed alongside hard power to win local hearts and minds and to engage in more nuanced ways with the local terrain. This requires deep knowledge of civilian populations. COIN represented a shift from the Weinberger-Powell doctrine of using overwhelming force to achieve a decisive victory, but U.S. COIN doctrine does not hide the fact that, as Kilcullen concedes, “There is always a lot of killing, one way or another” (cited in Gregory 2008, 19). Nor ultimately does it provide a convincing answer to what happens when the priorities of the military occupation are not aligned with those of the host political system. For example, the arming of Sunni militias in Iraq or the military's involvement with traditional justice institutions in Afghanistan are in tension with the putative establishment of a monopoly of force or the state's universal legal jurisdiction (Ledwidge 2009). Afghanistan, like Iraq, became a testing ground for this supposedly new but actually very old doctrine. It was picked up and embraced enthusiastically by military planners, special forces, and politicians desperately seeking solutions to what they saw as the lack of progress in Afghanistan and seeking to justify and legitimize what had become an increasingly difficult enterprise to package and sell to Western electorates.

Yet there was a growing perception among Western policymakers that the state was part of the problem, especially the formal policing structure.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, as the insurgency expanded and changed tactics to target major population centers, the regular police were increasingly deployed to either protect urban centers or to fight in operations alongside or in support of the ANA and foreign forces. Consequently, the police were taking heavy casualties, an estimated twice as many as the ANA. Attrition rates for the ANP have remained at an annual rate of 25 percent overall with rates up to 70 to 80 percent in some units (Planty and Perito 2013, 5). One of the rationales for militia programs such as the AP3 and Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF) was to free the regular police force from protecting government installations and officials and return them to civilian policing and rule of law duties.

COIN experts also drew on—or reinvented—Afghan traditions of community policing to justify the promotion of such programs.<sup>25</sup> Since 2006, the United States has supported several efforts to establish militias. The first was the ANAP, when in February 2006 the Afghan Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Finance approached the Americans with the idea of creating a new force involving an additional two hundred to four hundred police per district (Jones 2012). Under this plan, provincial governors could recruit 11,271 men from 124 high-risk districts in twenty-one provinces. The program aimed to train villagers for ten days and equip them with guns. By July 2007, some 8,300 ANAP members received training. They were then sent to secure checkpoints and conducted operations with coalition forces in Helmand, Zabul, Kandahar, Farah, Uruzgan, and Ghazni, reaching a strength of nine thousand men. It was ostensibly managed by the MOI in close collaboration with the U.S. Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A). However, the force was widely criticized for reversing the effects of DIAG. Many of its participants were thought to be Taliban agents, and nearly all were members of forces loyal to provincial power brokers (Perito 2009, 9). The force was disbanded in May 2008.

In 2009, MOI and U.S. special operation forces piloted the AP3 in Wardak. It was funded and implemented by SOFs until mid-2010, when U.S. regular forces took over. The plan initially provided for between one hundred and two hundred guardians to be recruited in four insecure districts, but no more than a total of twelve hundred in the entire province. The AP3 was in the theory part of an integrated, sequenced program to improve security that included four elements: deployment of U.S. troops that were part of the surge, training of locally based ANP officers un-

der the Focused District Development program and their interim replacement by the ANCOP constabulary, the recruitment of an AP3 cadre, and provision of development assistance from the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP). Districts that cooperated were eligible for an additional \$500,000 in CERP funds as an incentive to participate (Perito 2009, 10).

Haneef Atmar, the minister of interior at the time, saw the AP3 as a pragmatic solution to the problem of local insecurity. However, he also explicitly linked it to the wider project of centralization and institutionalization and therefore emphasized the need for central control and regulation of surrogate forces. Local *shuras* were to select local recruits, who were to be vetted by government institutions, trained by SOFs, paid directly by the MOI, and required to report to the district police chief, bypassing their commanders. Atmar's preference was for small groups linked to local shuras and not for either commanders pursuing personal agendas or large militias that could pose a military risk to the government. Paying local recruits directly through the bank and not through their commanders was one way of engendering loyalty to the state rather than to militia commanders. Further, Atmar envisaged the gradual replacement of private security companies (PSCs) with the APPF.<sup>26</sup> The AP3 and APPF were envisaged as two sides of the same coin.<sup>27</sup> The AP3 were to serve guard duties as a defensive force at the provincial and district level to free regular police from those tasks. The model envisaged a government-controlled stopgap measure tied to the growth of the ANSF, whereby militia units would be demobilized or integrated into regular forces as the ANP and ANA developed. This was a pragmatic way of building state power by extending control over armed groups and the means of violence. Atmar saw AP3 as a means of registering existing weapons belonging to local villagers willing to join the force and in so doing promoting the goals of DDR and DIAG.<sup>28</sup> However, the gap between the theory and the practice was wide, largely because the theory was based on an outmoded set of assumptions about the capacity of tribal leaders to command the loyalties of local villagers. In practice, it was the militia commanders who held the real power in post-2001 Afghanistan.

### *Emergence*

In 2009, General Stanley McChrystal, commander of the ISAF and U.S. Forces Afghanistan, conducted a thorough interagency assessment of the situation. It concluded that the insurgents had increased their control of territory in most parts of rural Afghanistan, in particular the Pashtun areas in the south, west, and east. As the AP3 was getting under way in March 2009 in Jalrez district in Wardak province, U.S. and Afghan officials began discussing options to establish rural militias under the CDI, later branded the LDI. U.S. planning was led by Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command—Afghanistan (CFSOCC-A) under the leadership of Brigadier General Edward Reeder. The program's goal was to "identify local communities that seek outside help against insurgents" and to "assist the local population to provide their own security with defensive 'neighborhood watch' type programs."<sup>29</sup> Reeder's staff claimed to have analyzed the history of militias in Afghanistan. It was, they claimed, a "model built consciously on Afghanistan's previous stable periods" (cited in Jones 2012, 30).

The CFSOCC-A plan involved deploying U.S. and Afghan special operations teams to live and operate in villages that had decided to resist insurgents. They would focus on three tasks: improving informal governance through village shuras, establishing or co-opting village defense forces, and improving development. The militia had to number fewer than three hundred, be defensive, fall under the oversight of village jirgas, and be closely monitored by the Afghan government and NATO. The deployment of U.S. and Afghan SOFs to villages



facilitated oversight. At this stage of the program, no formal role was envisaged for the MOI or any other Afghan central state institution, which meant that the SOFs would work with local shuras they either found or established for that purpose. It was thus presented as a truly local initiative, far removed from the corrupting influence of Kabul.

Four criteria were set down to determine where CDI-LDI units would be established:

1. The locals had already resisted insurgents.
2. The area was strategically important for the Taliban and other insurgent groups.
3. The area was strategically important for the Afghan government and NATO.
4. An assessment team found that it was feasible, based on local support, terrain, and population density.

In July and August 2009, CFSOCC-A briefed McChrystal and won his approval for the concept. In August, CFSOCC-A briefed the ministers of interior and defense, Haneef Atmar and Rahim Wardak. Both ministers reportedly supported the formation of local militias (Jones 2012, 31). It was also in August that CFSOCC-A deployed a special operations team to Nili in Daykundi province to train forces with the help of the ANP. By December, the United States had teams training a total of one hundred militia members in four other districts.<sup>30</sup>

However, the CDI-LDI initiative proved controversial with Afghan officials and the U.S. political leadership in Kabul. The LDI was never a full-scale program but more a series of experiments tried in Arghandab (Kandahar), Nili (Daykundi), Achin (Nangahar), Gereshk (Helmand) and parts of Paktia.<sup>31</sup> The program, which Haneef Atmar later called illegal, involved turf battles between the Independent Directorate of Local Government (IDLG), the MOI, and the Independent Directorate for the Protection of Public Properties and Highways by Tribal Support led by Wolesi jirga member Aref Noorzai, a relative of Hamid Karzai.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, in mid-November, U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry reported that CFSOCC-A was conducting survey work and tribal engagement and outreach to local shuras on CDI-LDI. Although ISAF had sought ministerial approval for the scheme, by the end of October, Karzai had not given the Afghan government's formal approval. The ambassador insisted on a firm approval by the president and the cabinet before implementation, even though by August, CFSOCC-A had already deployed special operations teams to four provinces. The U.S. political leadership in Kabul feared that local militias set up by SOFs outside the framework of Afghan institutions would come at the expense of formal institutions and distract from efforts to build the Afghan army and police by potentially undercutting popular and international support for funding formal security forces, especially in the absence of plans to eventually reintegrate them into the ANSF or disarm and disband them. They could also reverse the rather modest progress made under DDR and DIAG programs in disarming mujahideen militias (U.S. Embassy Kabul 2009c).

In April 2010, Brigadier General Scott Miller took control of CFSOCC-A and, though the Afghan government had not yet granted a formal approval, began a significant expansion of the program with the support of McChrystal. He coined the term 'Village Stability Operations' to capture the governance and development aspects of the program. When Petraeus took command of the ISAF that July, he pushed for and succeeded in extracting a formal agreement from Karzai. Keen on expanding the ISAF's local militia initiatives to fight the insurgency, Petraeus must have realized that an expansion of the program could not have gone ahead without the approval of the Afghan government. He needed legal cover and political legitimacy for the operation. Following intense wrangling between Karzai and

Petraeus, the program was officially authorized in August 2010 under the MOI, calling the militia members Afghan Local Police.<sup>33</sup> As a result, most of the existing militias were eventually incorporated into the ALP. For example, the MOI directive of June 2011 affirms that the aim of the ALP program was to incorporate all previous village and district defense programs (MOI 2011). The U.S. Department of Defense stated that the ALP program incorporated previous village-level defensive programs, such as the CDI-LDI (DOD 2012a, 2). In many places, the ALP label became a seal of approval to legitimize existing local militias that SOFs often set up outside any agreed framework. It was an attempt to “legitimize what was really a militia program by calling it ‘police’ and making it part of the MOI.”<sup>34</sup> By December 2010, the ALP had three thousand men in fifteen districts. By December 2011, it had ten thousand in fifty-seven districts.

The idea of the APPF, as noted earlier, developed in parallel with the ALP. It was discussed in July 2010—about the same time that negotiations over the ALP heated up—but was actually created in early 2011 to replace the hundreds of private security companies that had protected institutions and infrastructure throughout the country. President Karzai issued a decree in August 2010, ordering the disbanding of all PSCs by December 2010. However, following pressure from the ISAF and development contractors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that depended on PSCs for their security, a one-year extension to March 2013 was negotiated (DOD 2011b; Aikins 2012). These firms had operated without government oversight, and the majority of them were owned by Afghan power brokers allied with Karzai. The APPF is supervised by the MOI and operates under the presidential decree that disbanded private security providers. The APPF’s fourteen thousand Afghan personnel are a static guard force that protects public buildings, development projects, and vital infrastructure (Planty and Perito 2013, 4–5).<sup>35</sup>

The ALP, as described by the Department of Defense, is a village-focused local defense initiative that complements the ISAF’s counterinsurgency efforts by targeting rural areas affected by the insurgency to enable conditions for improved security, governance, and development (DOD 2010; 2012a). The ALP is a complementary component to the VSO program (DOD 2011b). It focuses on rural areas that have limited ANSF and ISAF presence, where Afghan communities were already resisting the Taliban and providing for their own security (DOD 2011a). However, before the ALP was formally launched, the U.S. military’s priority of containing the insurgency at the local level empowered militia commanders who received direct U.S. military patronage, such as former PSC commander Azizullah in Urgan, whose forces were eventually transitioned into the ALP (Reid 2011). The Afghan government perceived such armed units as a threat to its authority and aimed to bring U.S.-supported local militias under central government control. The ALP and the APPF were thus seen as instruments to further the goal of centralizing the means of coercion.

The ALP, in its final manifestation, was a compromise solution. On the one hand, it allowed the U.S. military to legalize and legitimize its existing network of ad hoc local militias and expand it in support of its counterinsurgency strategy. On the other hand, the Afghan government, at least in principle, managed to put an end to such ad hoc initiatives as the CDI-LDI and extended its control over the means of coercion by reining in U.S. military patronage. Two important questions to ask in relation to the CDI-LDI and ALP are why the U.S. military chose to adopt the CDI-LDI model following the AP3 and why the Afghan government, in particular President Karzai—who initially raised objections—agreed to U.S. plans to expand its local militia program and make the ALP a national force, albeit with a local mandate.

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The answer to these questions can be partly found in the SOFs' experience with AP3 in Wardak in 2009. U.S. military officers in Wardak argued that setting up "local defense forces is done better when SOFs live and work with them and are under their direct control."<sup>36</sup> However, this model "lacked broader legitimacy and links to Afghan government institutions."<sup>37</sup> The ALP as a presidentially approved and MOI-run program had "strategic level buy-in and legitimacy, but at tactical level," as military officers noted, "it is a mess, and MOI is unable to service it properly."<sup>38</sup> As a result, the LDI program was launched to overcome the limited success of the AP3. The general conclusion among the SOF community in Wardak was that the bureaucratic nature and the centralized control by the MOI had complicated AP3 implementation. The LDI was launched to remove the central government's control and free the hands of SOFs to experiment with more locally driven initiatives to raise village-based militias. With the rollout of the LDI, the view that local militias independently operated by SOFs were more successful gained traction within U.S. military circles and paved the way for Petraeus to propose its expansion nationally. However, when he presented the idea to Karzai, he faced opposition. As Karzai's national security advisor admitted in early 2012, there were intense negotiations and numerous disagreements between Karzai and Petraeus on this issue.<sup>39</sup> To some extent, this was also a fight over control of patronage and the people it empowered.

As noted earlier, the Afghan government had objected to what it perceived as unilateral efforts by U.S. SOFs to create local militias outside the control of the central government. Furthermore, the government's objections may have been linked to Karzai's preference for and prioritization of rebuilding the ANSF. In fact, in 2005, Karzai proposed increasing the size of the national police to improve security in the border areas with Pakistan, indicating a preference to train and equip more ANA and ANP to meet the security needs of the population and to fight the insurgents. When his request was turned down by U.S. and NATO officials, he then proposed creating what he called community or local police, modeled on the *arbaki* concept.<sup>40</sup> His plan was to arm local villagers in those areas so they could provide their own security and protect their homes. They would receive funds and military equipment in exchange for agreeing to operate under the control of the MOI.

It appears that Petraeus was not in favor of international forces or of the ANSF conducting COIN operations in insecure areas. According to Afghan officials involved in the negotiations, Petraeus's proposal was influenced by his experience with the Sons of Iraq program in Iraq. It involved setting up small anti-Taliban local armed groups paid by the U.S. military to work directly under SOFs command without links to central government institutions.<sup>41</sup> Karzai argued that such a plan would lead to *militia-sazi* (proliferation of militias), the destruction of the state, and a new form of warlordism.<sup>42</sup> To prevent this outcome, Karzai argued for Afghan government control and proposed an alternative in the form of the ALP, which allowed the creation of thousands of local police under the command of the MOI. This option enabled the Afghan government, at least in principle, to exercise some control over SOF-supported militias while legitimizing the U.S. expansion of its existing militia program.

The future of the ALP by early 2013 was unclear. Some argued for its absorption into the regular police, others for its disbandment, and others still for its extension. The Afghan government did not articulate a clear policy on whether to keep, expand, or disband it. The U.S. military indicated that it had plans to expand the more cost-effective ALP and to shrink the more expensive army and police units. The ALP's strength in January 2013 stood at 19,600 in

more than one hundred districts, covering roughly 17 percent of the Afghan population, some five million people being protected by ALP units according to the Special Operations Command. These numbers were projected to increase to twenty-two thousand in July 2013 and thirty thousand by July 2015. In February 2013, plans were revealed for the Special Operations Command to extend a financial lifeline from the Pentagon to the ALP for at least five more years, providing \$1.2 billion to train, arm, and pay forty-five thousand fighters. Although the expansion plans won the approval of U.S. commanders, and Afghan officials from the MOI also gave their support, Karzai and his cabinet did not officially approve the request, and the president remained critical of the program (Cloud and Bengali 2013; Hodge 2013).

### *Rationalities and Incentives*

In practice, the way that the ALP program emerged and was implemented was the result of a complex bargaining process involving international actors, national political elites, and provincial level elites.

For international actors, the ALP was attractive because of cost efficiencies and risk transfers.<sup>43</sup> It helped overcome manpower shortages while reducing costs and political risks. Like colonial systems of policing, the metropolitan centers of power seek to reduce the costs of policing the periphery by devolving these responsibilities to the periphery itself. As William Rosenau notes, local police are in effect low-cost trigger pullers (2008).

Militias were revived or created because of a perceived tactical deficit—the inability of regular forces to respond effectively and efficiently to insurgent activities in remote insecure areas where government and ISAF forces had no or limited presence. As well as being more cost-effective, according to their special forces mentors, they do not desert, have low attrition rates, and tend to win their battles, though their casualty rates are three times higher than those of regular forces. Their lack of institutionalization ensures a more rapid response, they know the local terrain, and they can generate effective intelligence—all critical factors in counterinsurgency operations.

As noted earlier, European donors were more skeptical about what they perceived as the paramilitarization of the police force. Whereas the American military was mostly concerned with increasing the capabilities of the police force to suppress the insurgency, Europeans were mostly worried about the weakness of the rule of law. Afghan reformers, on the other hand, were intent on strengthening the institutions of the Afghan state (Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2011, 17).

Therefore, from the beginning, their role, status, and institutional home were ambiguous. Should they be a military or paramilitary force or a policing force? What should be their duties? Should they enforce the law or bring security? What was their legal status? Should they be subject to criminal or military law? Should they be housed in the Ministry of Interior or the Ministry of Defense? The Americans and Europeans had different answers to these questions, with the former wanting them to be more of a paramilitary force and the latter a civilian policing force. As one European official noted, “If they’re police, they shouldn’t be on the frontlines or manning checkpoints.”<sup>44</sup>

For national elites, the calculations were quite different. It is important to distinguish between centralizers like Karzai, who have sought to build up their power base through brokerage and patronage, and centralizers like Atmar and former finance minister Ashraf Ghani, who are essentially donor-dependent reformers and have sought to build the institutions of the central state and to disempower the men of violence in the periphery—in the process making

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enemies who contributed to their downfall. There are also political elites who are physically located at the center but are there primarily to strengthen their power bases in the provinces. Each of these types of actors had different reasons to support or oppose the ALP.

Karzai was initially very outspoken against all militia formations but ultimately backed the ALP. He appears to have seen it as an opportunity to regularize and assert control over the various militia experiments. In addition, earlier forms of militia creation were linked with attempts at building a stronger electoral base, including, for example, Aref Noorzai's election militias and the IDLG's Afghanistan Social Outreach Program (ASOP) shuras, both of which were vehicles for strengthening patronage relationships in relation to the 2009 presidential elections. The issue subsequently became mixed up with a number of other questions that set the president on a collision course with the United States, including the issues of regulation of PSCs, Afghan control over the Bagram prison, night raids by SOFs, and civilian deaths caused by NATO air strikes. These can also be seen as bargaining chips, used by Karzai to increase his regime's control of the means of coercion and patronage and to bolster his domestic legitimacy, countering his image as a Western puppet.

Reformers such as former interior minister Atmar had a different take on the ALP and its previous iteration, the AP3. He conceptualized the AP3 as a border force based on the arbaki model to prevent incursions by the Taliban across the Afghan-Pakistan border. As mentioned, he saw it as having a specific and limited role in relation to a broader state institutionalization and state legitimation strategy, which in practice would have amounted to indirect rule, using tribes as brokers in security arrangements in the border areas.

Massoum Stanekzai, the president's adviser on reconciliation and integration, saw the LDI, which evolved into the ALP, as an opportunity to reintegrate fighters and pave the way for a political settlement with insurgents. This perspective to some extent was in conflict with the goal of the U.S. SOFs, who saw them as an instrument in defeating the Taliban militarily, rather than as an inducement to reintegrate existing or former Taliban (PTRO 2011).

Initially, therefore, some SOF officers wanted to delink militias from reintegration, but government officials overseeing the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) saw it as a funding disbursement mechanism in the absence of viable employment or livelihood opportunities in the provinces. As the case studies show, SOFs in practice gave in to the temptation to reintegrate insurgents into the ALP, arguing that "the north was too difficult, we had no choice but to accept them."<sup>45</sup>

Provincial elites, including members of parliament (MPs), provincial governors, and regional strongmen, saw the ALP as another resource flow that could be captured to consolidate their power bases. Further down the political chain, local commanders and ALPers, who were trying to access resources and employment, drew on the ALP for this purpose. This attitude can be understood as part of a complex core-periphery bargaining relationship. For example, local commanders elected to parliament felt the need to maintain their power base in their districts and tried to use the ALP to reinforce their power but ended up clashing with former interior minister Bismillah Mohammadi, who refused to recruit some groups into the ALP.

Those who felt disempowered and excluded from the formal provincial security architecture saw the ALP as a way to protect themselves and as a bargaining chip with provincial elites. In the provinces, roads and infrastructure are strategic resources, or sources of rent, and the ALP can act as force multipliers for local elites who want to extend their control over these assets. The program can also enable local power brokers to access their constituencies, which would otherwise be too insecure for them to visit.

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***Provincial elites saw the ALP as another resource flow that could be captured to consolidate their power bases.***

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Map 1. Afghanistan Provinces



## ALP in the Provinces

The selection of the three case studies was based on the following criteria. Wardak constituted the first joint U.S.-Afghan government effort to set up local militias under the MOI and provided the intellectual soil for similar initiatives elsewhere. Both Baghlan and Kunduz were strategically important in relation to the insurgency after 2008 and became sites of militia formation, leading to very different outcomes. The three cases therefore allow comparison between geographical spaces, over different time periods, and with varying outcomes (see map 1).

### Wardak

With an estimated population of more than half a million, and lying a mere thirty-five kilometers from Kabul, Wardak province is divided into nine districts and borders Kabul and Logar in the east, Parwan and Bamyan in the north and west, and Ghazni in the south. It is home to an ethnically mixed population of Pashtuns, who constitute a majority in the province, and Hazaras and Tajiks.<sup>46</sup> Areas along the Kabul-Kandahar highway are more densely populated.

Despite its strategic value to Kabul, Wardak is graded as a third category province, which means that it does not attract the same level of financial and political support as grade one provinces like Kandahar and Balkh. In relative terms, it is resource poor, given that it has no border with a neighboring country to generate custom revenues, little industry, and few large-scale commercial enterprises, though an unexplored mining sector holds modest economic potential in the future. The majority of the population lives in rural areas (97.7 percent), and about half of those live in remote mountainous areas. Wardak's economy is based mainly on revenues from subsistence and commercial agriculture (46 percent of households) and labor migration and remittances (16 percent); moreover, 21 percent of household income is derived from livestock, 24 percent from trade, and 45 percent from nonfarm labor. The predominately Hazara district of Behsud-e-Markazi is responsible for the bulk of the agricultural production, including wheat, vegetables, and animal products.<sup>47</sup> The Kabul-Kandahar highway through

the provincial capital Maidanshahr and Sayedabad is a major transport route for commercial goods and ISAF supplies as well as a source of instability and rent-seeking by both government officials and insurgents.<sup>48</sup>

Wardak is politically and strategically important because of its proximity to Kabul and its status as gateway to the south. This explains why the province has remained so insecure and why, since 2009, it has become a testing ground for local governance and local defense initiatives as part of U.S. military efforts to bring stability to Wardak in order to secure Kabul.<sup>49</sup>

The politico-military environment in Wardak has been shaped by a succession of armed groups dating back to the years of conflict before 2001, including Hizb-e-Islami, Harakat-e-Inqilab-e-Islami, Itihad-e-Islami, Hizb-e-Wahdat-e-Islami, and the Taliban.<sup>50</sup> Competition for power among the different armed groups frequently led to open conflict. For example, factional rivalries in the 1980s and 1990s between Hizb and Harakat resulted in more than three thousand deaths in and around Maidanshahr alone.<sup>51</sup> Political and military fragmentation continued as a result of power struggles among mujahideen factions after the fall of the Taliban in November 2001. This fragmentation was reflected in the structure of the provincial administration in late 2001 and early 2002. Commander Abdul Ahmad of Sayyaf's Itihad-e-Islami faction took the provincial police chief's post. The governor's authority was disputed by commander Ghulam Rohani Nangyalai of Hizb-e-Islami (Khalis). The Shura-e-Nizar-dominated government in Kabul appointed a local Tajik as head of the intelligence bureau.<sup>52</sup> Military control fell to General Muzafaruddin, a former Hizb-e-Islami commander close to Shura-e-Nizar. He took over the army's 42nd division, which numbered 4,300 personnel.<sup>53</sup> In this capacity, Muzafaruddin received support from the Northern Alliance security structures in Kabul during the power struggle against commander Nangyalai. Mohammad Musa Hotak and his brother Ghulam Mohammad Hotak maintained significant quantities of weapons and armed men under their command and were believed to be more powerful than the provincial governor.<sup>54</sup> According to Ghulam Mohammad, he commanded more than three thousand armed men before they were demobilized in 2004.<sup>55</sup> Months later, the two brothers were arrested by U.S. forces and detained in Bagram. Ghulam Mohammad spent two and half years in U.S. detention and following his release was appointed commander of the U.S.-supported AP3.

Apart from Pashtun power brokers, a prominent Hazara politician from Hizb-e-Wahdat, Vice President Karim Khalili, is from Wardak and has a strong political base in the Hazara areas of the province. Relations between Pashtun nomads and settled Hazaras have frequently erupted in conflict, particularly in Behsud-e-Markazi, Hesa-e-Awal Behsud, and Daimirdad districts. Armed clashes between the two groups have intensified since they were first reported in April 2008 (Coghlan 2008). In response, thousands of Hazara took to the streets of Kabul demanding government action (Reuters 2008). Karzai issued a decree banning Kuchis (Pashtun nomads) from entering the Hazara areas of Wardak and the central highlands.<sup>56</sup> Despite attempts by Kabul to settle the issue, renewed clashes in 2010 coincided with parliamentary elections, which increased external meddling and contributed to violent riots in Kabul with protesters firing at the police (Foschini 2010).

When the Taliban retreated toward Kandahar in late 2001, Wardak was handed over to local mujahideen groups, including Ghulam Mohammad and Haji Musa Hotak. Maidanshahr remained under the control of commanders loyal to Kabul, but most other districts were controlled by Hizb-e-Islami and Harakat fighters. Signs of insecurity appeared in the lead-up to the 2004 presidential and 2005 parliamentary elections, mostly in the districts of Sayedabad and Nerkh, where Hizb-e-Islami initially enjoyed military superiority. However, its dominance



gradually declined as the Taliban intensified their military campaign, and by the end of 2008, most parts of Wardak were under Taliban control. This rising power was linked to a broader expansion of the insurgency from the south to central and northern Afghanistan.<sup>57</sup> However, the district of Nerkh remained divided. Jalrez district, which is home to a number of prominent local power brokers, emerged as the most contested region, with both Hizb-e-Islami and the Taliban carrying out attacks against NATO and government forces.<sup>58</sup> When American forces set up a base there in 2009, they nicknamed it “the valley of death”. Likewise, Maidanshahr also remained insecure. After his appointment as governor of Wardak in July 2008, Halim Fidai traveled to Maidanshahr to assume his duties. The security situation there had deteriorated to the extent that insurgents were able to fire fifteen rockets into the governor’s compound on the day of his inauguration.<sup>59</sup> The insurgents had become so confident that they frequently carried out attacks against government offices located a few hundred meters from the governor’s compound. Fearful of Taliban retaliation, civil servants rarely stayed overnight in Maidanshahr, preferring to escape to the safety of Kabul. The governor of Nerkh district (eight kilometers from Maidanshahr) relocated his office to a shop in the local bazaar because the district center had fallen under Taliban and Hizb-e-Islami control. Although security improved, insurgents were still able to stage a devastating bomb attack in the Maidanshahr bazaar in December 2012.

Reliable aggregate figures on the level of aid to the province are difficult to obtain. The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan has been working in Wardak for decades providing assistance in education, health, and rural development. U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) aid funding to the province between 2002 and 2012 was around \$112.8 million and included assistance to agriculture, education, health, and stabilization initiatives (USAID 2011). The Turkish government established a provincial reconstruction team (PRT) in Wardak in 2006 to promote health, education, agriculture, women’s rights, and police training, among others. The Turkish PRT, consisting of a limited number of military and police officers, presented itself as a nonbelligerent and development-centered organization and therefore avoided an active role in the security sector except in police training. In 2009, for example, the Turks provided police training to more than one hundred ANP throughout Wardak (U.S. Embassy Kabul 2009b). The Turkish PRT did not take part in any military operations against insurgents, and in general avoided contact with U.S. forces. Governor Fidai was unhappy with the Turkish PRT because of its limited reach and poor quality of projects. For example, of the fifty-six projects approved by the Turkish government for 2009, only five were launched. One reason was the deteriorating security situation. Another was the passive approach of the Turkish PRT. The PRT had a seventy-man security teams to support the civilian development team (U.S. Embassy Kabul 2009d). In 2009, Governor Fidai asked the United States to take over the PRT from Turkey, possibly motivated by the lure of far more resources coming into Wadak than what the Turkish government could provide (U.S. Embassy Kabul 2009d). The arrival of U.S. forces in early 2009 as part of President Obama’s mini-surge signified the importance of Wardak to the ISAF’s counterinsurgency campaign and opened the flow of additional U.S. resources to the province.

### A Laboratory for Coalition Forces

In response to rising insecurity and the ineffective implementation of the ANAP program from 2006 through 2008, Afghan and U.S. officials began planning in October 2008 to establish a 1,200-strong force of the AP3 in four districts in Wardak province: Jalrez, Nerkh, Maidanshahr, and Sayedabad. Each district was to have between one hundred and two hundred

armed men. In March 2009, the implementation of AP3 began in Jalrez district. The AP3 guardians, as the U.S. military called them, received twenty-one days of training, AK-47 rifles, and a small quantity of ammunition. They also received a vehicle for every twenty-five men and one radio for every ten men. Individual pay was \$170 per month and sometimes not paid for months. By 2010, the AP3 had 1,100 recruits.<sup>60</sup> The initiative, at least on paper, was part of a broader security effort that included deployment of additional international troops, training of the ANP, recruitment of AP3 cadres, and development assistance of up to \$500,000 per district from CERP funds as an incentive to participate in the program (Perito 2009, 10). The AP3's mandate was a product of competing interests and rationales. Among other things, it sought to improve security by denying insurgents safe havens in rural villages that had been cleared in ISAF and ANSF military operations, prevent insurgent attacks on government and NATO forces, protect infrastructure, and build the peoples' trust in their government. Once security had been established and the government's authority expanded into remote areas, the program intended to improve not only development outcomes but also government legitimacy (Lefèvre 2010).

The AP3 faced many of the same problems as the ANAP, especially in terms of recruitment, logistics support, and appropriation by local commanders. The central government and provincial authorities sought to use the unelected ASOP shuras to recruit AP3 members. However, European donors objected to the use of ASOP, as did provincial council members and local elders. This objection, combined with the insecurity, meant that ASOP shuras played a limited role in the process.<sup>61</sup> The AP3 was funded by the U.S. military because European donors objected to payments to a paramilitary force. The European objections were also related to a broader U.S. plan to encourage villagers to form local militias against the insurgency, a step that seemed to undermine earlier disarmament efforts. As a result, the AP3 was seen from the beginning as an American program designed to defeat insurgents rather than to improve policing or the rule of law. Initial recruitment in Jalrez began positively where the Tajik population was encouraged by the local NDS chief to take up arms and Hazaras were eager to access weapons and resources to use in their ongoing clashes with Pashtun nomads in both Behsud districts. On the other hand, recruitment among Pashtuns was slow and met with resistance in southern Pashtun-dominated districts, where locals feared Taliban retribution. In addition, skepticism was widespread in Wardak and based largely on people's bitter experiences with local militias during the 1980s and early 1990s (Lefèvre 2010, 9–10; HRW 2011, 44).

### Early Beginnings

As insecurity increased in 2008 and posed a threat to Kabul, provincial authorities demanded more regular police to protect government offices, senior officials, and public infrastructure. The AP3 emerged partly as a solution to overcome the manpower gap given the shortage of regular police. Accounts differ as to the origins of the demand for AP3. Governor Fidai claimed it came from elders, yet in a two-day meeting in Kabul in October 2008, tribal elders and representatives of district shuras and provincial council members rejected a government declaration that intended to show popular support for the initiative (for discussion of meetings between elders and government officials, see Lefèvre 2010, 9; HRW 2011, 44–45).<sup>62</sup> Instead, local elders asked for the deployment of more ANA and ANP units in Wardak. The U.S. military and Afghan government pushed ahead with the AP3 implementation regardless. The lack of local support and Pashtun fear of Taliban retribution help explain why recruitment was a problem and largely limited to the Tajik and Hazara populations.



After almost a year of limited progress, the U.S. military and Afghan officials, including Fidai, reached out to Ghulam Mohammad Hotak, former Taliban commander and Bagram inmate, to rescue the program by taking up arms against his former colleagues.<sup>63</sup> A rival of Wardak Police Chief General Muzafaruddin, Hotak reportedly brought five hundred of his supporters to the force, but after a few months of poor government support through the MOI, he quit the program (Lefèvre 2010, 10; HRW 2011, 46).<sup>64</sup> Hotak bitterly regretted his decision to join the AP3 and accused the government and U.S. forces of harming his reputation among the people of Wardak. He added that funding for the program was always late, and he had to buy basic supplies for the force. As a result, he accumulated considerable personal debt.<sup>65</sup> Many other local commanders also became heavily indebted because of late payments and inadequate logistical support, forcing them to dig into their own pockets to support their men, resources for which they allegedly were never properly compensated.<sup>66</sup>

In interviews, former commanders and their men complained about the lack of weapons, ammunition, and winter supplies, as well as the late salary payments. Although part of a plan that required additional U.S. and Afghan forces to clear areas before the AP3 was deployed to those areas and hold them, most AP3 units said they were used for clearing purposes and were described by local commanders as ‘shields of meat,’ stood up to receive Taliban bullets.<sup>67</sup> As a result of poor support from the MOI, the AP3 remained dependent on U.S. SOFs and was in turn relied on for joint operations, including outside the province.<sup>68</sup> Despite Fidai’s repeated attempts to get the U.S. military and the MOI to intervene to address the emerging problems with the AP3, he was largely ignored. The main points of concern were the lack of trust and support both from the Afghan government and local communities, unclear operational procedures, poor coordination among stakeholders, lack of sustainable resources, poor logistics, weak command and control structure, and lack of strong backup or Quick Reaction support from the ANSF.<sup>69</sup>

The impact of the AP3 is difficult to assess. Mathieu Lefèvre, who wrote the first comprehensive report on the AP3, came up with mixed conclusions: The U.S. military considered it a success but remained skeptical of expanding it to other provinces because it was slow to take off, resource intensive, and bureaucratically cumbersome. They had hoped for a more nimble approach that would bring about rapid improvement in security and win hearts and minds, which did not unfold in practice. Although security along the roads had improved, especially in Jalrez where AP3 was most heavily deployed, and people could visit the districts, government officials did not consider district centers safe enough to spend the night (2010, 12). Although even the critics of the AP3 admitted it had helped bring about relative security, Afghanistan NGO Safety Office data showed that violence levels had in fact increased in 2010, when the AP3 had reached its full strength.<sup>70</sup> Proximity to Kabul also meant that central state elites had greater influence in destabilizing the situation as support flowed to competing armed groups for military and political dominance, as the case of Hizb-e-Islami illustrates.<sup>71</sup>

### Shift from AP3 to ALP and Beyond

By summer 2010, the AP3 had transitioned into the newly approved ALP. However, the problems inherited from the AP3—including limited popular support, insufficient resources, poor recruitment and logistics, and weak command and control—were considered so serious that the ISAF finally took steps in the winter of 2011 to address them. In the summer of that year, the MOI had established new guidelines for the implementation of the ALP. This led the U.S. military to announce an ambitious plan to fix the ALP and “redo it all over again,” according

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to newly established operational guidelines.<sup>72</sup> The first step in reforming the ALP in Wardak involved the demobilization of 260 members of the AP3 from Maidanshahr and Sayedabad, who had earlier been transitioned into the ALP. They were demobilized because they did not meet the new ALP recruitment guidelines, which stipulated among other things that the ALP recruits should be recruited from local villages through shuras and vetted by local elders and government institutions and report to the district police chief. Most of the targeted recruits were from Bamyan, Laghman, and Jalalabad, though some belonged to other parts of Wardak where the ALP had not yet been established. In violation of procedure, most of them served guard duties in Maidanshahr and provided personal protection to provincial officials, who were not happy to have their personal guards dismissed as part of the reform process.

The application of the new ALP guidelines paved the way to establish ALP units in other districts. However, the U.S. military's attempts in the spring and summer of 2012 to expand the ALP to Wardak's insecure southern districts of Chak, Daimirdad and Jaghatu petered out when the program encountered similar problems as before. The U.S. military's figures indicated only a handful of new recruits in Chak (DOD 2012b, 81). The difficulty of expanding ALP to southern districts in Wardak had been evident in February 2012 when Governor Fidai and the U.S. military tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade the elders of Sayedabad to "give their sons" to the ALP.<sup>73</sup> In response, the local elders requested more army and police in place of the ALP and indicated their readiness to send their sons instead to the ANP. A prominent member of the provincial council, echoing the sentiments of his people, pointed out that "the people wanted more ANA and ANP, but the Americans forced AP3 and ALP on them."<sup>74</sup> Realizing that public opinion was coalescing against the ALP, by the summer of 2012, Fidai had given up trying to fix it in Wardak.<sup>75</sup> With pressure mounting ahead of the Taliban's spring offensive, he wrote to Karzai on March 12, pointing out that the ALP had not worked in Wardak and recommended that the 1,600 strong ALP force be disbanded and replaced with one thousand regular police (at the time, Wardak had slightly more than eight hundred ANP personnel).<sup>76</sup> The governor argued that the ALP was not suitable for Wardak because tribal structures had been decimated by years of conflict, the tribes remained internally divided, and factional rivalries and conflicts among local power brokers ran deep. Most important, because the Taliban insurgency remained strong in most parts of Wardak and the government could not guarantee sufficient security, people generally feared for their lives and avoided a controversial program like the ALP.

In private, senior U.S. military officers and the political leadership in Kabul had more or less come to the same conclusions as Fidai.<sup>77</sup> However, the government did not immediately react to Fidai's recommendation, possibly to avoid souring already tense relations with the U.S. military locally. Subsequently, Fidai suggested an alternative strategy to defeat the Taliban insurgency in Wardak.<sup>78</sup> This occurred in early Spring 2012 amid closely guarded discussions with local elders and SOFs allegedly involving the idea of supporting local Hizb-e-Islami factions in Nerkh district, and possibly other areas, against the Taliban in a war that had been going on between the two factions for the past two years.<sup>79</sup> In 2010 and 2011, skirmishes broke out between the two sides, which observers believed had been supported by the provincial government and the U.S. military (Tabee 2011).<sup>80</sup> By late 2012, the suggested alternative to the ALP had failed to materialize, possibly because of U.S. objections and the unwillingness of key Northern Alliance power holders in Kabul to empower their historic rival in the process of fighting the Taliban. More important, the strategy of building up the ANA and ANP, as advocated by Karzai, would likely have been undermined by relying on groups like Hizb-e-Islami to defeat the insurgency.<sup>81</sup>

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In summary, the difficulty of reforming and expanding the ALP to the southern districts in Wardak finally convinced local officials and SOFs to try a different approach. This was the clearest indication of the failure of the strategy to use a government-backed militia to bring about security in a contested environment.

Meanwhile, Fidai had become increasingly scathing in his criticism of U.S. military strategy in Wardak, especially over the question of transitioning security responsibilities to Afghan forces, which he claimed was irresponsible because the Afghan forces were not ready, and for its overreliance on the ALP (Tolo News 2012). As early as February 2012, a month after the U.S. military started transitioning security responsibilities to Afghan forces in Wardak, Fidai aired his views publicly, describing Wardak as a “laboratory for coalition forces” and criticizing U.S. plans to transition security responsibilities to poorly trained and poorly equipped Afghan forces in Wardak (Sieff 2012).

The failure of the ALP in Wardak in the summer of 2012 and the purported plans to arm local anti-Taliban factions perhaps indicated a shift away from McChrystal’s population-centric counterinsurgency, which claimed to protect the population against insurgents, and toward a new strategy of exclusively fighting America’s enemies through targeted killings by SOFs and the CIA’s counterterrorism pursuit teams, as well as working with local proxy forces like Hizb-e-Islami as part of an attempt to mobilize the population for offensive operations against insurgents. This shift, in turn, may be understood as part of the strategy for extracting Western forces from Afghanistan by leaving behind a rural paramilitary force to hold the ground and fight the insurgency, rather than prioritizing the more demanding task of building regular forces to do so instead.

However, these plans were partly thrown into disarray when, in late February 2013, allegations of abduction, torture, and extrajudicial killings by SOFs and Afghan units associated with them in Wardak emerged, prompting Karzai to order all SOFs out of Wardak within two weeks (Rosenberg 2013a, 2013b; Welch and Shalizi 2013). Provincial authorities claimed that around seven hundred families had been displaced as a result of insecurity created by the abusive actions of SOFs and their Afghan proxies.<sup>82</sup> The incidents in Nerkh and Maidanshahr districts indicate that the problem of militias in Wardak extends well beyond the ALP program.<sup>83</sup> One implication of restrictions placed on SOFs as a result of these incidents is that without their presence in villages, support to and further development of the ALP has become difficult. Moreover, it can be expected that the risks to local villagers who participated in the ALP will increase as foreign forces are pulled out.

One interpretation of events is that Hizb-e-Islami-affiliated politicians close to Karzai, in an alliance of convenience with local power brokers, manipulated popular sentiments to persuade Karzai to evict SOFs from Wardak, especially Nerkh district, where Hizb-e-Islami and the Taliban had been involved in a prolonged power struggle. The aim of such an intervention would have been to protect Hizb-e-Islami from U.S. military action to safeguard its military capabilities against the Taliban.<sup>84</sup> Meanwhile, allowing Hizb-e-Islami some breathing space while the government sought to reach a peace settlement with the Taliban could also be a key reason political pressure on SOFs increased during this period. By March 10, when Karzai’s deadline for pullout came into effect, SOFs had not withdrawn from Wardak. In response, the government mobilized the Ulema Council, the country’s highest clerical body, to issue a statement calling on the U.S. government to respect Afghan sovereignty and implement Karzai’s decree without further delay.<sup>85</sup> However, a day later, media reports indicated that it looked likely that a compromise solution was on the table, with the government allowing SOFs to

stay in Wardak in exchange for a U.S. agreement to hand over control of the Bagram detention facility (Shalizi 2013). Finally, on March 20, reports indicated that the U.S. military had agreed to start the withdrawal of its SOFs, first from Nerkh district and later from other parts of the province (BBC 2013). In their place, the government deployed Afghan special forces to work alongside regular Afghan army units to ensure security in Nerkh (Dozier 2013).

### Impact of AP3 and ALP

The impacts of the AP3 and the ALP were mixed. Security along roads from the provincial capital of Maidanshahr to district centers like Jalrez and Nerkh, previously considered too risky, had seen visible improvement from 2009 onward. Villagers and government officials started traveling more frequently to these two districts. The Nerkh district administration returned to its compound in the district center after months of operating from a rented shop in Maidanshahr. When, in 2008, security had deteriorated in Nerkh and travel to the district center was not possible, the Nerkh district was relocated to the Maidanshahr bazaar. In 2009, amid tight security, the governor along with members of his administration took a symbolic walk from the provincial capital to the Jalrez district center. The return of the district administration to Nerkh and the symbolic walk showcased some of the improvements in security along the roads.

In Sayedabad district, security incidents dropped noticeably in 2012, although the majority of the insurgent attacks in Wardak continued to occur in Sayedabad, through which the highway passes. More generally, insurgent attacks nationwide declined by more than 25 percent in 2012. However, declining attacks do not necessarily translate into improved security for the population, given that most attacks occurred on ISAF troops and strategic highways. It could also mean that foreign forces leaving rural villages meant fewer targets. Afghan forces shouldering most of the responsibility for fighting insurgents certainly meant that their casualties soared in 2012 and 2013. In December 2012, the Afghan ministry of defense reported very high casualty figures of army and police personnel: about three hundred ANA and ANP per month, an average of 110 soldiers and 200 policemen (Associated Press 2012). This is on top of an annual attrition rate of 25 percent for the ANP and close to 30 percent for the ANA (Planty and Perito 2013, 5; Owen 2013). In February 2013, it was revealed that the U.S. military had suffered no casualties in a month, yet the war continued unabated, and Afghan civilians and security forces were its primary victims (Bengali 2013).<sup>86</sup>

Measuring the success of the ALP from a narrow security perspective may be possible, but the governance and development outcomes are much harder to assess. The empowering of abusive commanders and rival factions and human rights abuses committed by some ALP units have intensified concerns about the long-term impact of militias and undermined the program's main intent—to increase the population's trust in the government, expand government authority in insecure areas—where the Taliban offer a repressive but more predictable order—and to improve governance and development outcomes. Reports of extortion by AP3 members have also been documented along the Maidanshahr-Jalrez road, where Hazara members of the AP3 repeatedly harassed Pashtun travelers.<sup>87</sup> Although in public most government officials put on a brave face, in private discussions, provincial council members often reminded visiting dignitaries from Kabul and the governor of Wardak about the dozens of cases of murder and extortion involving AP3 and ALP members and the obstacles faced by the families of victims and the provincial military prosecutor in prosecuting the perpetrators. They argued that unless the government applied the rule of law and arrested these individuals,

the local population would be unlikely to change its negative views about government-backed militias in Wardak.<sup>88</sup>

Despite improved security along the roads, most AP3 units in the vicinity of Maidanshahr and Nerkh remained particularly vulnerable to insurgent attacks. The AP3, like the ALP later on, acted as a magnet for insurgent attacks. Casualty figures attest to this: One AP3 commander in Nerkh lost more than half of his 150 men to insurgent attacks in less than a year.<sup>89</sup> The strategically vital Kabul-Kandahar highway remained insecure for most of the period. Although in 2012 insurgent attacks in Sayedabad decreased overall by 35 percent, 90 percent of all attacks in Wardak were concentrated in Sayedabad, along the Kabul-Kandahar highway.<sup>90</sup> By design, the AP3 and ALP were not trained or equipped to seriously weaken the insurgency, and in that sense, the overall impact on security was limited. It would take many more conventional Afghan and U.S. forces as well as SOFs and night raids targeting key commanders to achieve a shift in the security environment during the period studied. Even that was no guarantee of success. On its own, the ALP has limited strategic value; it is too small and in proportion to the ANSF has suffered greater casualties: five hundred as of early 2013, twice as many as the ANA and ANP. It remains highly dependent on SOFs and ANSF support to remain effective.

The warning by the U.S. military that if SOFs working with the ALP are pulled from insecure villages where the ALP is deployed, they could fall into the hands of insurgents—with serious consequence for villagers who have participated in the program—is a tacit admission of its vulnerability (Hodge 2013). It also suggests that after a decade of fighting and an increase of thousands of U.S. troops as well as the expansion of the ALP to 136 districts and billions of dollars spent on training Afghan security forces, the security situation in much of the country remains extremely tenuous. The ISAF nevertheless claimed in late 2012 that 80 percent of the Afghan population lived in secure areas.<sup>91</sup> Such claims were challenged by reported abuses in late 2012 and early 2013 by SOFs in Nerkh and Maidanshahr districts. Alleged victims included young children, women, elders, government workers, doctors, nurses, and school and university students.<sup>92</sup> Neither the Afghan government nor the ISAF identified which armed group or groups had perpetrated the abuses. Perhaps the lack of attribution of responsibility in this case was intentional, because off the books and unaccountable militias provide plausible deniability to those who rely on them. In other words, by outsourcing violence and repression, states can reduce international and domestic legal and political liability. Therefore, reports in early 2013 about the long-standing roles of the CIA and SOFs in arming and using Afghan paramilitary units for counterterrorism missions intensified concerns about the post-2014 presence of U.S. intelligence and military assets in Afghanistan (Clark 2013).

### *Baghlan*

Baghlan province lies 250 kilometers from Kabul along the north-south axis connecting both sides of the Hindu Kush. Its fertile valleys and strategic roads link Kabul to northern Afghanistan. The province has fifteen districts; the provincial capital is in Puli Khumri. It borders Kunduz and Takhar in the north, Parwan and Panjshir in the south, and Bamyan and Samangan in the west. It has an ethnically mixed population of about 741,690, a substantial number of whom are Pashtun settlers from southern and eastern Afghanistan who arrived there toward the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>93</sup> Its main source of wealth is agriculture, boosted by the water sources of the Baghlan-Kunduz river system and the proximity to markets in Balkh and Kabul. Baghlan's



energy plants and modest industrial enterprises—notably the Ghorī cement factory, the sugar mill, hydropower plants, and coal mines—make it an important industrial zone.

With the fall of the Taliban, Jamiat-linked mujahideen commanders from Andarab district returned to power in Baghlan.<sup>94</sup> Although the former rulers of Baghlan, the Ismaili clan of Sayed Mansoor Naderi, briefly captured power in the confusion surrounding the fall of Taliban, his forces were quickly driven out of Puli Khumri by a coalition of Jamiat and Hizb-e-Islami commanders. The Andarabi commanders at the head of this coalition occupied most of the powerful positions in the local administration, especially in the security sector. As head of the Highway Police in 2003, General Khalil Andarabi awarded two-thirds of all senior positions in the Highway Police to his supporters from Andarab, 90 percent of whom were Tajik, and only one Pashtun (U.S. Embassy Kabul 2005). During Mir Alam's, and later Kabir Andarabi's, tenure as provincial police chief—in 2005 and 2009, respectively—the police were primarily drawn from Jamiat supporters.<sup>95</sup> According to Alam Jan, the total ANP force in Baghlan numbered some eighteen hundred policemen.<sup>96</sup> In 2009, the provincial ANP headquarters, the Komandani, was staffed by forty-six senior officers, six of whom were junior Pashtun officers.<sup>97</sup> To overcome dominance by one faction, the central government appointed General Abdul Rahman Rahimi, a professional Pashtun officer, as police chief in Baghlan in early 2010. He replaced Kabir Andarabi, and though his appointment signaled the change of leadership at the top, the rank and file of provincial police force remained loyal to Mustafa and Kabir Andarabi.<sup>98</sup>

The domination of the post-2001 provincial security architecture by Northern Alliance factions reversed the fortunes of local power brokers who had benefited from Taliban rule between 1997 and 2001. Most of these Pashtun commanders were cut off from government patronage and protection. Northern Alliance commanders with links to power brokers in Kabul folded their militias into the local security structure and avoided the UN-sponsored DDR program, but many Pashtuns were targeted, accused of having Taliban or al-Qaeda sympathies (HRW 2002). The Andarabi-dominated police force disarmed Pashtuns they suspected of previous ties to the Taliban or otherwise perceived as a threat to their power.<sup>99</sup> Although a few Pashtun commanders such as Amir Gul joined Jamiat commanders in power, others were hunted down by the security forces in the name of al-Qaeda and Taliban, thus driving them into the arms of the Taliban insurgency.

With the rise to power of Jamiat factions, rival groups in the central government have tried to weaken their power by appointing governors and police chiefs with links to Hizb-e-Islami factions from the local Pashtun community or trusted political allies from Kabul.<sup>100</sup> In the last decade, Baghlan has had more governors (by one count more than ten in nine years) than any other province in the country. The rapid turnover indicates the difficulty faced by the central government in maintaining political stability in the province. Vice President Fahim maintained links to Mustafa and Rasoul Andarabi, and Karzai relied on the support of former Hizb-e-Islami commanders such as Amir Gul, Mullah Alam, and Alam Jan to check the power of Tajik strongmen.<sup>101</sup> Centrally appointed governors often found it difficult to work with the provincial police chief and local strongmen from Jamiat factions.

On more than one occasion, local demonstrations organized by Jamiat strongmen forced Kabul-appointed governors from office, notably the pro-Pashtun former military commander of Hizb-e-Islami in Balkh and the current governor of Paktia, Juma Khan Hamdard.<sup>102</sup> During his brief governorship of Baghlan in 2005, Hamdard tried to rally disaffected Hizb-e-Islami supporters against Tajik strongmen from Andarab. He also played a key role in regional politics. For more than a decade, Juma Khan has stood in opposition to the governor of Balkh,

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Atta Mohammad Noor, who emerged as the north's undisputed strongman with an active influence in Baghlan and Kunduz. Atta has been accused of fanning insecurity and arming local militias to disrupt elections in Pashtun areas and undermine the incumbent's electoral chances and boost his rival Abdullah, a political ally of Atta.<sup>103</sup> However, the Andarabi clan is not a monolith. Political fragmentation among Andarabi factions has resulted in the creation of several armed factions, some loyal to Mustafa and Rasoul Andarabi, who rely on them to undermine their rivals during elections and to exert control over licit and illicit economic activities. Other factions are loyal to General Kabir Andarabi. They have resorted to highway robbery, setting up roadblocks and taxing traffic and other criminal activities while fearing no retribution. The insurgency is therefore not the only source of instability in the province.

### The Insurgency

The Taliban's penetration into Baghlan was facilitated by the political marginalization and persecution of local Pashtuns, who saw the insurgency as a possible source of protection and resources. Disgruntled Hizb-e-Islami followers allied with the Taliban and facilitated their penetration into key Hizb-dominated areas of Baghlan.<sup>104</sup> However, in provinces dominated by non-Pashtuns, as in Baghlan, the Taliban worked with the clergy to transcend ethnic divisions rather than solely championing the cause of disaffected Pashtuns.<sup>105</sup> The rerouting of NATO supplies through northern Afghanistan after attacks on NATO convoys increased in Pakistan enhanced the strategic significance of Baghlan for both NATO and the insurgents, resulting in increased Taliban and Hizb-e-Islami military operations in Dand-e-Shahabuddin and Dand-e-Ghori areas of Puli Khumri aimed at disrupting ISAF supply lines.

Taliban penetration began in the districts of Nahrin, Khost-wa-Fering, and Andarab as early as 2008, but the first serious signs of insecurity appeared in the spring of 2009 in Puli Khumri and Baghlan-e-Jadid. In Puli Khumri, Dahan-e-Ghori, and Baghlan-e-Jadid, the Taliban relied on local Hizb-e-Islami commanders to gain a foothold. The situation deteriorated further in the lead-up to the August presidential elections. For example, in Dand-e-Ghori area of Puli Khumri, Taliban and Hizb-e-Islami fighters attacked police patrols and captured police vehicles and ammunition without much resistance.<sup>106</sup> Local power brokers such as Mullah Alam believed the attacks against police convoys and capture of vehicles and weapons were orchestrated by those aligned with Atta Mohammed Noor, who wished to create insecurity so voting could not take place in Pashtun areas and thereby hurt Karzai's chances of reelection.<sup>107</sup> Security continued to deteriorate after the elections. In November 2009, the Taliban felt confident enough to try a military takeover of Baghlan-e-Jadid. Hundreds of Taliban fighters stormed the district center and the home of the district governor in a conventional-style military attack. The attack was repulsed after the district governor, Amir Gul, asked his former Hizb-e-Islami commanders for help against the Taliban. A jihadi militia of more than four hundred, many having successfully avoided the UN-supported DDR program, fought pitched battles lasting for days before the government regained control of the district.<sup>108</sup> According to Abdul Rahman Rahimi—the police chief of Baghlan from April 2010 to September 2011—in the spring of 2009, the Taliban's influence had reached the center of Puli Khumri. They regularly infiltrated the city at night and launched random attacks on government posts and then withdrew without much resistance.

In 2010, newly arrived surge troops, including U.S. special operations forces, showed growing NATO concerns for the situation in the north. Although Baghlan was of strategic importance to NATO supplies, the ISAF presence in the province had been negligible until spring

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2010 when a 126-man German Quick Reaction Force (QRF) was deployed (Demmer 2010). Earlier, in 2006, a small contingent of Hungarian military had taken over the PRT in Baghlan, but it lacked both the political will and the financial and military resources to aggressively police large parts of the province or take on the Taliban.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, the limited number of Afghan regular forces made it easier for the Taliban to spread its influence unchallenged.<sup>110</sup> In the run-up to the August 2009 presidential elections, the provincial police, made up of a coterie of local militias belonging to Jamiat commanders Mustafa and Kabir Andarabi, were used in an attempt to stabilize the situation. But the police chief, Abdul Rahman Rahimi, described the local force as ill disciplined, poorly led, in poor fighting spirit, and under the influence of local strongmen.<sup>111</sup>

### The Rise of Arbaki Militias

Puli Khumri was mostly threatened from Dand-e-Ghori and Dand-e-Shahabuddin areas, located a few kilometers to the north of the provincial capital, along the Baghlan-Kunduz and Baghlan-Mazar highways. The so-called arbaki<sup>112</sup> militias in Baghlan grew out of a specific security context, initially involving a small band of local fighters who adopted the Hizb-e-Islami banner to attract resources.<sup>113</sup> Although they originally cooperated with the Taliban, after making unsuccessful overtures to the local administration, the Taliban, suspecting them of collaboration with the government, launched a military operation in March 2010 and defeated the Hizb-e-Islami fighters in Dand-e-Shahabuddin. Afterward, around seventy fighters surrendered to the government. They were housed in an NDS compound in Puli Khumri, and after a few months, small groups began to return to their villages.<sup>114</sup>

On returning to their villages, the self-styled arbaki militias, numbering around forty, lacked proper training and were ill equipped to face off against a better-armed Taliban.<sup>115</sup> Only a few of them got back their arms from the NDS. The Taliban then launched a second and much larger attack in mid-September against Sher and his band of arbaki militias.<sup>116</sup> The battle of Shahabuddin lasted for three days and ended in Sher's death by an ISAF air strike, which was called in to disperse an estimated Taliban force of sixty fighters.<sup>117</sup> The battle also highlighted the overdependence of lightly armed government-backed militias on regular or special forces, be they government or ISAF, when they come under insurgent attack.<sup>118</sup> After Sher's death, Nurul Haq took over as arbaki commander and established his base at Gaji, a small distance from the spot where the battle had occurred.<sup>119</sup> The arbaki militias emerged around the same time as NATO supplies started coming through Baghlan and Kunduz. These steps led to an improvement in security as a force of around seven hundred local arbaki was gradually built up and deployed by the local administration in Dand-e-Shahabuddin, Dand-e-Ghori, and Baghlan-e-Markazi.<sup>120</sup> Initially, the arbaki mostly relied on whatever resources local villagers were willing to provide, but over time, they resorted to more coercive tactics to extract resources, including forced taxation of farmers. Otherwise, they lacked regular government support, which is one explanation for why such militias regularly abused the local population and committed human rights abuses.<sup>121</sup> The German military knew that the arbaki forces they were working with regularly engaged in criminal activities. According to a *Spiegel* report, "None of these men are angels. Until recently, Sher and his men used brutal methods, including the threat of slicing off ears, noses and heads, to exact protection money from their victims" (Demmer 2010).

They appeared to play a relatively limited role in military operations against Taliban insurgents in Puli Khumri. Most of the fighting was actually done by regular troops from the government and ISAF. The Afghan police and army and the SOFs played a far more important

role in clearing central and northern Baghlan from the Taliban. Rahimi claimed that his first act after taking over as police chief in the spring of 2010 was to increase the number of police check points in the city where the Taliban had influence and that he gradually expanded the security cordon out to Dand-e-Shahabuddin and Dand-e-Ghori. However, because of the shortage of police, especially from among the Pashtun community, and general distrust of a factionalized police force to hold territory and set up check points in Pashtun-dominated areas, the government inevitably relied on local fighters to hold key areas around Puli Khumri.<sup>122</sup>

Following Sher's death, Nurul Haq emerged as a prominent arbaki commander in Puli Khumri, especially after he established links with recently arrived SOFs. Embedded SOFs built new bases and began joint operations with arbaki militias. The arbaki could now get access to regular pay and supplies and, most important, get SOFs' military backing if attacked. The relationship with SOFs made Nurul Haq a formidable figure in Baghlan politics. After the addition of the coercive power of SOFs and the spread of arbaki militia in key areas, the security situation saw gradual improvements. In 2009 and 2010, the road to Kunduz and Mazar was "impossible to travel on."<sup>123</sup> However, both roads later became safe enough for travel, including at night in late 2011 and again in the spring and summer of 2012. Travel within Puli Khumri and to former insurgent strongholds in Dand-e-Shahabuddin and Dand-e-Ghori and Dahana-e-Ghori remained safe during the day. In fact, most fighting in Baghlan ended after the 2009 presidential and 2010 parliamentary elections. A similar pattern of conflict escalation seems very likely as the 2014 elections approach.<sup>124</sup>

### From Arbaki to ALP

As noted, Pashtuns switched to the government side when the local balance of power changed, particularly after the pressure from SOFs on insurgents increased in late 2010 and early 2011. Many joined the government's peace and reintegration program. The first group to benefit from the program was purported to be made up of Hizb-e-Islami fighters under Sher.<sup>125</sup> Those arbaki fighters who survived the battle of Shahabuddin were later rebranded as ALP when the program was first established in February 2011 in Dand-e-Shahabuddin. Other insurgents joined the ALP later on. Newly hired ALP members interviewed in Puli Khumri in June 2012 admitted to being, until recently, with the Taliban. They displayed open loyalty to the Taliban when asked whether they would ever side with Americans to fight the Taliban. They dismissed suggestions about any possible role given to local shuras or the provincial council—which is dominated by Rasoul Mohsini, the powerful former Jamiat-e-Islami commander from Andarab and a strong critic of the ALP—in recruiting new ALP members in Puli Khumri. Most of them had bypassed any vetting process and directly entered the ALP along with their commanders after formally surrendering to the government, following the example of Sher's Hizb-e-Islami fighters forming an arbaki unit.

After Nurul Haq and his arbaki fighters became the first recruits to join the ALP without vetting or approval from either elders or local shuras or the provincial council, the ALP program was expanded to Dand-e-Ghori in June–July 2011 and subsequently to Baghlan-e-Jadid and Dahana-e-Ghori districts. In the official MOI structure, the ALP covers three districts in Baghlan: Puli Khumri (Dand-e-Shahabuddin and Dand-e-Ghori), Baghlan-e-Jadid, and Danhana-e-Ghori. All three districts have majority Pashtun populations. Tajik-dominated districts like Andarab and Khinjan, which largely remained free of Taliban insurgency, have not been allotted ALP units, despite the presence of many illegal armed groups and insecurity. According to SOFs, the ALP numbered 325 in Puli Khumri<sup>126</sup> and 300 each in the other two

districts, for a total force of 900 in Baghlan.<sup>127</sup> When asked about the number of ALP in Puli Khumri and Dahan-e-Ghori, Nurul Haq reported 425 in Puli Khumri and 300 in Dahan-e-Ghori. He claimed that the 725 ALP recruits commanded by 33 commanders in both districts reported to him, though he admitted he was no longer officially an ALP commander.<sup>128</sup> By this time, the ALP was part of a much larger security architecture in Baghlan that included 2,500 ANP and 1,200 ANA along with the 900 ALP.

According to the head of the ASOP shura in Baghlan, the ALP was established in Dand-e-Ghori about a year after the battle of Shahabuddin. A local shura, which was supposed to vet ALP recruits in Dand-e-Ghori, was established months later and played no meaningful role in selection. The arbaki fighters were simply given a new ALP label. Mullah Alam, a former Hizb-e-Islami commander, reportedly used his own *shura-e-sulh-wa-musbarikat-e-mili*, a local development shura, to rubber-stamp decisions regarding the ALP. The recruitment and vetting papers of some recruits were signed by ASOP shura and others by a special committee in the provincial council, where Rasoul Mohsini tried to oppose the process. The ALP recruitment procedure was controversial in that provincial authorities felt that the U.S. forces took the lead in these decisions and left little room for the input of local authorities. The head of the provincial council, Rasoul Mohsini, was a strong opponent of the ALP and the role of SOFs, which according to him empowered men like Nurul Haq and undermined the authority of the provincial police, which were dominated by his Andarabi clan.<sup>129</sup> The Andarabis view the ALP as a Pashtun militia and a threat to their local power base. In this province, therefore, the ALP dynamic has intensified Tajik-Pashtun power struggles.<sup>130</sup>

Occasional armed rivalries between the ALP and ANP in Baghlan undermined the rationale for the program as a supplementary force to the ANSF. Although relations have improved since U.S. SOFs partly ceded control over the ALP to the provincial police chief, enabling him to subordinate the ALP to his command, rivalries between the two forces in the past have been serious. During one incident in late September 2011, an ALP unit backed by SOFs launched a full-scale attack against a QRF unit of the ANP in the center of Puli Khumri. The armed confrontation erupted after the ANP unit shot and killed an ALP member.<sup>131</sup> It quickly escalated, and when U.S. forces came under fire, a NATO air strike was called against the QRF unit. The air strike was called off at the last minute following direct intervention by a top-ranking police official in the northern region. The action narrowly avoided a massacre of police at the hands of their ALP subordinates and their SOF mentors. After the incident, Nurul Haq and his ALP commanders threatened an armed attack against the Andarabis in Puli Khumri. Pashtun politicians, notably Mullah Alam and Alam Jan, called for more patience and tried to resolve the issue without resorting to force. Although the Pashtuns insisted on the arrest and prosecution of commander Ghani, the head of the QRF unit, the case was eventually settled by the decision of a jirga and an award of 3.5 million Afghani to the family of the bereaved. Major power brokers in the north—notably General Baba Jan, the head of the ANP in the north (Pamir 303 regional command), and Governor Atta and Vice President Fahim Qasim—intervened in support of the Andarabis. The Pashtuns were told that they should not insist on Ghani's arrest and criminal prosecution and were instead advised to settle for less.<sup>132</sup>

Incidents like this reflect and accentuate lines of conflict. When Nurul Haq was asked whether he would turn his weapon in and demobilize when the ALP program ended, he responded that he would do so if the elders made that decision.<sup>133</sup> He added, however, that “as long as the government in Pul-i-Khumri remains the way it is now—an Andarabi organiza-

tion—we are going to protect ourselves however we can” (Mogelson 2011). As far as Nurul Haq is concerned, the state of war between the Pashtuns and Tajiks in Baghlan is perpetual, even though not all Pashtuns see the conflict in such terms. Other Pashtun power brokers, such as Mullah Alam and Alam Jan, have resisted Nurul Haq’s efforts by trying to act as brokers and mediators because they calculate that armed conflict with Andarabis would strengthen Nurul Haq and undermine their position in the local power setup. Pashtun power brokers who have benefited from the ALP, however, view it as a chance to regain power when the regular police and security sector remain in the hands of Andarabi Tajiks. The ALP has become an instrument of political aspirations for those Pashtuns, whose interests overlap with factions in the central government that wish to curtail the power of the Andarabi elite. The ostensible aim of the ALP to connect the population in insecure areas to the provincial government and enhance government legitimacy is secondary to the political game of ethnically aligned patronage politics. To some extent, all sides in this game have an interest in durable disorder. As long as the politics of difference and the notion of the hostile “other” are kept alive and struggles over power and resources continue, entrepreneurs of violence and politicians on both sides can be sure of the support of their fellow ethnics.

The U.S. SOFs shared the view of most Pashtuns that the dominance of the security sector by the Tajik-Jamiat faction was illegitimate. By siding with the Pashtuns and isolating the process from political interference by the dominant power brokers from Jamiat, the U.S. military made the ALP program in Baghlan even more controversial.<sup>134</sup> One paradoxical outcome of the U.S. military’s role in the formation and support to the ALP in Baghlan has been the reinforcement of two separate but interconnected governing orders, one for Tajiks and one for Pashtuns. Once this was acknowledged, the U.S. military began working on bridging the divide between the two sets of power holders in Puli Khumri and Dand-e-Shahabuddin—the former in the control of the ANP, and the regular police and the latter controlled by ALP forces.<sup>135</sup> Few Afghan politicians, however, are convinced by the SOF commander’s efforts in this direction. Alam Jan, deputy head of the provincial council, dismissed claims that the U.S. military’s presence in Baghlan had resulted in progress in all three aspects of the VSO-ALP initiative—namely, security, governance, and development. He stressed that the only positive outcome of the U.S. forces’ presence in Baghlan was in preventing ALP militias from turning to *chur-au-chaparwul*, or open banditry, and in preventing armed hostilities from erupting between the ANP and ALP. The Americans did so largely by wedging themselves between the two forces, which raises the question of what will happen when they are eventually withdrawn. Although in public the former governor of Baghlan, Munshi Majid, supported the ALP, in private, he had a poor view of Nurul Haq, the role of U.S. special forces, and the ALP, whose members he considered no better than criminals and murderers.<sup>136</sup>

Although the ALP might have a role to play in protecting local villages against Taliban attacks or preventing abuses by Jamiat-dominated government security forces, they have also engaged in abuses against civilians, including beatings, murder, land grabbing, rape, and forced taxation. The predominantly Pashtun ALP in Baghlan, for example, has a record of harming and abusing the Pashtun communities it is purportedly protecting. According to a local elder, the ALP played a role in improving security, illustrated by the fact that he could drive to Dand-e-Ghori, Shahabuddin, and Dahana-e-Ghori areas, which were off limits before the establishment of the arbaki and ALP. But he also pointed out that the ALP was mostly made of former Hizb and Taliban fighters—only the labels had changed.<sup>137</sup> This improvement in security is independent of, and even despite, the various police formations.

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Many other illegal armed groups are in the province, particularly in Andarab and Naharin districts. The ALP by comparison has less than one thousand men, a lightly armed force scattered over three districts. As a local elder lamented, although everyone complained about the ALP, no one was willing to discuss the much bigger problem of illegal armed groups in Baghlan.<sup>138</sup> The biggest threat to public security and state power may be from the so-called illegal armed groups, who have had a continued presence in the local security architecture and enjoy the protection of powerful regional and Kabul-based strongmen. Intra- and intergroup struggles are likely to intensify ahead of the NATO withdrawal and upcoming elections. This conflict will also create openings for the return of the Taliban.

### *Kunduz*

Kunduz province borders Tajikistan in the north and the provinces of Takhar in the east, Baghlan in the south, and Balkh in the west. Its ethnically mixed population, the result of successive immigration waves, is estimated to number some 820,000 people. The province is composed of seven districts.<sup>139</sup> It is an economically and strategically important region. Before the war erupted in 1979, it was part of the wider region of Qataghan—present-day Takhar, Kunduz, and Baghlan provinces—and was a major agricultural and industrial zone. Kunduz city, in spite of the destruction of the war, remains a major population center and economic hub and is strategically important given its location on the northern supply route for NATO forces.

With the emergence of a new transitional authority in Kabul after 2001 was dominated by Northern Alliance figures, jihadi-era commanders returned to power in Kunduz, including Mir Alam, from Jamiat. As a commander of the Northern Alliance army's 54th division, Mir Alam established himself in the provincial capital and his former stronghold of Khanabad. The political bargain struck between Jamiat and Junbish involved divvying up the rest of the province to local commanders with ostensible loyalty to one of the two parties.<sup>140</sup>

Pashtuns were largely excluded from the local political settlement, and the channeling of patronage in the form of resources and government positions reflected a new power balance dominated by Jamiat commanders. Jihadi factions folded their militias into local security structures, and although UN-supported DDR programs were launched, they did not significantly alter the coercive power of local commanders like Mir Alam.<sup>141</sup> For example, by the end of the decade, an estimated forty-five hundred to ten thousand militias remained throughout the province, and some three thousand to four thousand militiamen in Khanabad district alone. A German-led PRT became the center for security sector reform and reconstruction efforts, but German troops maintained a passive role, which involved working with commander power structures rather than challenging them. In spite of international efforts to build up the regular security and police forces, the ANP has maintained a total force of some seventeen hundred personnel in Kunduz.<sup>142</sup>

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***The Taliban expanded its presence in the north by exploiting Pashtun feelings of marginalization and by manipulating local conflicts.***

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### The Insurgency

From the mid-2000s onward, the Taliban insurgency in the south intensified and over time spread beyond the Pashtun heartlands. By 2009, the Taliban presence in Kunduz had grown, partly because of the increased strategic importance of the city with the rerouting of NATO supplies through northern Afghanistan. The Taliban expanded its presence in the north by exploiting Pashtun feelings of marginalization and by manipulating local conflicts. In the spring of 2009, Kunduz experienced a wave of Taliban violence, and insurgents established a pres-



ence in Chahardara, from which they expanded military operations to Aliabad, Imam Sahib, Dasht-e-Archi, and central Kunduz, all of which have a significant Pashtun presence.

### The Emergence of Arbaki Militias

By the summer of 2009, the provincial authorities had become sufficiently alarmed by the Taliban penetration to request additional police and army personnel, partly because German-led ISAF forces were reluctant to fight the Taliban. When the central government ignored the request, the provincial governor, engineer Mohammad Omar, asked for Kunduz to be included as part of the APPF, which at the time was being piloted in Wardak province. When this request was refused, the governor began arming local jihadi commanders, many of whom had fought the Taliban in 2001, to contain the insurgency and improve security. This was a local initiative and was not pushed by the Afghan MOI or U.S. forces. In fact, Karzai and his minister of defense were opposed to the initiative, although the minister of interior at the time, Haneef Atmar, who had supported the AP3 initiative in Wardak, was more agnostic about militias and prepared to support them as long as they remained under central government control. The German military command suggested sending 2,500 additional police to Kunduz instead of arming local militias, which they thought risked undermining the formal security structures and reversing the modest progress made through the DDR and DIAG programs.

Events on the ground generated their own momentum, however. Local commanders took advantage of the fluid and insecure situation to reactivate their old networks. General Mohammad Daud, the NDS chief and brother-in-law of Mir Alam, the powerful Kunduz-based Jamiat commander, was put in charge of recruiting local commanders and their private militias. The NDS became a coordinating office for local militias, and Daud relied almost exclusively on Mir Alam to recruit local commanders loyal to himself. Government efforts to arm local commanders initially focused on Imam Sahib, Khanabad, and Qala-e-Zal districts. The Taliban stronghold of Chahardara was considered too insecure to initiate a local arbaki force. In Kunduz, the anti-Taliban militias were mainly drawn from Turkmen, Tajik, and Uzbek communities. Only a few Pashtun commanders in Khanabad, such as Mohammad Omar from Sayyaf's Itihad faction, set up arbaki militias. In Imam Sahib, the Uzbek Ibrahim family, which controlled the district, played a key role in mobilizing local militias. In Qala-e-Zal, a former mujahideen commander, Nabi Gichi, was asked by the district governor to form local militias ahead of the August 2009 presidential elections.

With Mir Alam's militia of some five hundred, in addition to his local allies fighting alongside government forces, the Taliban were driven out from most parts of Kunduz.<sup>143</sup> As noted, the main effort in pushing back the Taliban from Kunduz is attributed to the arbaki forces, including Mir Alam's, recruited by the then governor, Mohammad Omar. At this stage, the SOFs did not play a role because they did not arrive in Kunduz until late 2010. The local militias had a clear incentive to fight the Taliban because their power was directly threatened by the rise of the Taliban in the north. Mir Alam thus consolidated his position as the provincial strongman. The real blow to the Taliban's control came in September 2010, in the lead-up to parliamentary elections, when a much larger effort was launched to clear the Taliban from Kunduz. On his arrival in September 2010, a month after Omar had been killed, Abdul Rahman Sayedkhaili, the new police chief, began to hand out cash to arbaki commanders to fight the Taliban. The interior minister, Besmillah Khan, reportedly provided \$100,000 to Sayedkhaili to pay local commanders and buy off insurgents willing to switch sides.<sup>144</sup> Before he

launched his offensive, Sayedkhaili delivered an ultimatum to local Taliban commanders to stop fighting and switch to the government's side. Many insurgent commanders took up his offer and crossed over.

The situation was turned around less by fighting and more by bribing Taliban commanders to switch sides, which heavily depleted the ranks of the insurgency. Sayedkhaili's efforts received a further boost when the ISAF deployed U.S. SOFs to Kunduz ahead of the September 2010 parliamentary elections. The arrival of the SOFs coupled with Sayedkhaili's campaign against the Taliban dramatically reduced the power of the Taliban and dislodged them from some of the most contested areas around central Kunduz, in particular the Gore Tapa area and in Imam Sahib, Dasht-e-Archi, and Chahardara.<sup>145</sup> SOFs' night raids and kill-capture operations also had a major military impact. By late 2010, Taliban commanders in Kunduz were under great pressure and had to constantly change their locations to avoid being targeted by SOFs. In January 2011, Sayedkhaili declared Kunduz cleansed of Taliban. Two months later, he was killed in a suicide attack.

After Sayedkhaili's death, the funding from the MOI stopped, and Sayedkhaili's successor could not continue the payment to hundreds of arbaki militias. This unsurprisingly led to predatory behavior from the militias. Many local militias resorted to extorting local farmers and traders and engaged in internal power struggles and turf battles. The government responded with disarmament efforts, but in 2011, only fifty-one people were disarmed. In August 2012, a second effort was made to disarm abusive commanders in Khanabad, but after a three-day operation, only twelve weapons were collected (Hewad 2012). Militia proliferation had reached such a level by April 2011 that German forces in Kunduz resorted to bringing some of them onto the ISAF's payroll, using the U.S. military's CERP funds. The incorporation of existing militias by the ISAF happened in parallel to SOFs' efforts to establish the ALP. These militias were renamed the Critical Infrastructure Protection (CIP) Force and located mainly in Qala-e-Zal, Chahardara, and Aliabad districts. CIP was another ad hoc response to deal with problems that might have been anticipated. The program was implemented without any clear policy direction from the ISAF. The total CIP force was slightly over 500: 225 in Qala-e-Zal, 150 in Chahardara, and 150 in Aliabad.<sup>146</sup> However, the Germans' policy of bringing local militias under the U.S. military's patronage did not sit well with Karzai's objective of centralizing the means of patronage. When Karzai learned about the initiative in late December 2011, he issued a decree disbanding CIP.<sup>147</sup> In June 2012, SOFs informed the German PRT in Kunduz that the U.S. military had decided to stop payments to CIP units in Kunduz.<sup>148</sup> In April 2013, a member of parliament from Qala-e-Zal confirmed the cessation of U.S. military payments to CIP units in the district. No longer paid, the CIP members "had gone back to what they were doing before they became CIP. They steal, collect *ushr*, and abuse civilians. Whereas a few years ago they drove the Taliban out and brought security, these days the arbaki militias have become a source of insecurity."<sup>149</sup>

### Arbaki's Transition to ALP

The final incarnation of militias in Kunduz was the creation of the ALP program. Compared with other provinces, the ALP was implemented relatively late in Kunduz. The strategic rationale was to serve, alongside arbaki militias, as a holding force to maintain the gains that had been made against the Taliban insurgency. The first ALP *tashkil* (the formal staffing structure of government ministries) for central Kunduz was approved in November 2010. A month later, three more districts were added: Imam Sahib, Dasht-e-Archi, and Chahardara, each be-



ing allotted three hundred ALP. The total ALP tashkil for Kunduz in June 2012 was 1,125. Khanabad, Aliabad, and Qala-e-Zal districts were left out of the tashkil.<sup>150</sup>

It appears that existing arbaki militias were promised inclusion in the ALP, which in turn prompted SOFs to delay ALP implementation.<sup>151</sup> A number of consequences followed. It is possible that delays prompted police chief Sayedkhaili to mobilize local arbaki militias to retain the initiative against insurgents. The restrictions on arbaki militias probably led to the decision to establish CIP as a way of removing pressure on the ALP as well as accommodating a large number of arbaki militias, which could not be included in the ALP. On the other hand, senior provincial officials accused SOFs of violating ALP guidelines when they began implementing the ALP in central Kunduz. The deputy governor, a Jamiat loyalist, resigned from a joint commission with the U.S. forces in protest when he realized that the Americans had already recruited preselected armed groups but expected the provincial government to approve them, in clear violation of ALP procedure.<sup>152</sup>

Despite these initial delays, the implementation of the ALP went ahead. By September 2011, 105 of 225 ALP recruits had been trained and deployed in central Kunduz and ALP recruitment in Imam Sahib had begun. By January 2012, the ALP in Dasht-e-Archi district was rolled out. In June 2012, the process had moved on to Chahardara district.<sup>153</sup> As of June 2012, the ALP had been completed in two of four districts: central Kunduz and Imam Sahib. The ALP focused on both Pashtun and non-Pashtun districts where the Taliban insurgency had been strongest. Because ALP forces were deployed after arbaki militias had done most of the fighting alongside SOFs, their role in direct combat was minimal, and security for the most part had improved. At this point, two very different kinds of local militia programs were going on in Kunduz: the ALP, which was officially approved by the Afghan government, and the CIP, which was run by ISAF but lacked central government sanction, even though in theory CIP units were subordinated to district police chiefs.

Arming Pashtuns through the ALP, as had happened in Baghlan province, was viewed with concern by Tajik-dominated Jamiat, who were determined to avoid such an outcome. As with the arbaki militias, the ALP in Kunduz was disproportionately captured by Tajik (mainly Jamiat) and Uzbek commanders, especially in central Kunduz, which is ethnically mixed. According to former interior minister Haneef Atmar, the ALP in Baghlan and Kunduz was hijacked by local power brokers because commanders rather than local elders and shuras became the channel for recruitment and selection of ALP members. Senior government officials, in particular Interior Minister Besmillah Khan, are believed to have used ALP resources to strengthen Jamiat's jihadi networks.

In central Kunduz, for example, where the first ALP units were established in early 2011, all the ALP commanders were former jihadi and arbaki commanders linked to Mir Alam and Mohammad Omar, a Sayyaf loyalist and Itihad commander in Khanabad.<sup>154</sup> Other prominent ALP commanders include Amir Shah, Aziz, Ghulam Ali, Juma Khan, Ishaq Nizami, and Ala Nazar, all of whom had fought the Taliban in 2009 and 2010 and maintained arbaki militias.<sup>155</sup> Ala Nazar is an Uzbek jihadi commander, at one point disarmed under the DDR program. In mid-2012, he was in charge of an ALP unit of twenty-five to thirty men in Dam Shakh village in the Alchin area of central Kunduz. All of his men serving in the ALP unit are close relatives. In 2009, he was asked by the head of NDS to start a local arbaki militia to fight the Taliban. Discussions with Ala Nazar in June 2012 revealed that he was approached by SOFs in the summer of 2011 to join the ALP. He and his men were given three weeks' training and then introduced to local elders as the new ALP unit in his village.<sup>156</sup>

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The ALP has also absorbed former insurgents, though sometimes with ambiguous effects, as illustrated by the case of Ishaq Nizami, a former Taliban commander and Sayyaf loyalist. After reconciling with the government, Nizami joined the ALP and emerged as a commander of five ALP units in the Tobrakash area of central Kunduz. He served as deputy to commander Hafiz Cherik. His men were involved in a highly publicized case of the rape of a Kuchi (Pash-tun nomad) woman named Lal Bibi. Two years earlier, Nizami had been fighting alongside the Taliban and eventually joined the government when military pressure on the Taliban increased. Like many other Taliban commanders, Nizami emerged as a pro-government arbaki commander. Eventually, he found his way into the ALP when SOFs began the program in central Kunduz in early 2011. In June 2012, he was named as a suspect in Lal Bibi's case. As ALP commander, he was invited to mediate between one of his subcommanders and the family of Lal Bibi. He ruled in favor of his deputy and arranged a forced marriage between the deputy and Lal Bibi.

Nizami's subsequent trial and conviction in November 2012 was the result of Karzai's direct intervention. Although a prominent jihadi leader and the provincial police chief, Samiullah Qatrah, tried to protect Nizami from prosecution, Karzai intervened after a public outcry and ordered Nizami's and his cohorts' arrest and disbanded the particular ALP unit in Tobrakash.<sup>157</sup> The conviction of Nizami and his men for rape, rather than a settlement through *baad*,<sup>158</sup> also shows that when the government had the will to act, it also had the power to bring perpetrators to account. Nizami and his four accomplices were sentenced to sixteen years in prison for the crime.

These brief accounts of the ALP units under commanders Ala Nazar and Nizami reveal the extent to which the ALP program has been manipulated to serve divergent agendas. They point to a lack of transparency in recruitment, vetting, command, and control and suggest how the power of a host of armed groups—including so-called illegal armed groups, former insurgents, and proxy forces linked to U.S. SOFs—has been reinforced by the ALP program.

Local human rights activists following the case confirmed that the vetting of ALP recruits under Nizami had been done by Kunduz police without any community engagement. This appears to be the case for most other units. The provincial peace council<sup>159</sup> is only involved if Taliban insurgents are being transitioned from the insurgency into the ALP.<sup>160</sup> According to a prominent member of the provincial council, despite repeated objections from the Kunduz governor, deputy governor, chief of police, and council members regarding violations of ALP procedure, the recruitment forms of ALP members in central Kunduz were brought to the council only after they had been selected, trained, and armed by SOFs, and then council members were asked to sign them.<sup>161</sup>

In conclusion, in Kunduz arbaki militias and the ALP emerged out of a specific set of security conditions associated with the reemergence of the Taliban, the deployment of U.S. forces, the holding of elections, and a precarious political settlement involving local, provincial, and national players. The counterresponse to the insurgency was organized by armed groups of Northern Alliance factions, whose power was directly threatened by the reemergence of the Taliban. Militia formation therefore had little to do with protecting communities and was primarily about protecting the new power structure at the provincial level. As a result, it was initially a local initiative with little involvement from the central government or U.S. or NATO forces.

This dynamic is quite unlike that in Wardak. Once remobilized, the arbaki militias remained a prominent element of the local security environment. After temporarily pushing the

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***Militia formation had little to do with protecting communities and was primarily about protecting the new power structure at the provincial level.***

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Taliban back and bringing a measure of security, their abusive activities gave rise to significant law-and-order problems. The presence of so many armed groups consolidated a highly variegated and decentralized security landscape where multiple armed groups were competing for power and resources. The ALP was just a small part of this landscape. The arbaki militias of local power brokers were well placed to co-opt the ALP program when it was implemented in Kunduz in early 2011, demonstrating how the programs tended to follow existing lines of power and feed into local struggles for control of coercive resources. By the end of 2012, this power game had been won by the dominant military force, Jamiat-e-Islami and Northern Alliance factions.

The dominance of the security and administrative structures in the province by non-Pashtuns in a majority Pashtun province in the north was already a problematic issue before the Taliban reemerged in 2009. It is likely to further contribute to Pashtun feelings of marginalization and in turn may invite overtures of protection from the Taliban, in which case further clashes can be expected. When the time comes for the withdrawal of U.S. forces, the balance of power among local armed groups may change once again in favor of Taliban insurgents. For the foreseeable future, the Pashtun populations of Kunduz will remain caught between the Taliban and a hostile local power structure from which they are excluded, a dynamic that will increase their dependence on the Taliban for protection.

## Findings and Analysis

A great deal of effort has been invested in assessing the impacts of various forms of intervention in Afghanistan.<sup>162</sup> Defining and evaluating success or failure is not merely a technical or scientific exercise, it is also tied up with particular normative and political judgments about what is desirable. NATO troop-providing countries keen to facilitate a hasty withdrawal have a vested interest in presenting an optimistic picture. This meta-narrative of success may also shape how the ALP is conceptualized and is seen to be delivering on a set of targets, which are defined differently by international and domestic actors.<sup>163</sup> There are strong institutional pressures to ignore evidence that declared goals are not being met.<sup>164</sup> This is particularly relevant to programs like the ALP, which, as shown, is the latest iteration in a series of experiments involving the constant recycling and reinvention of projects. The apparent failure to learn, though true across the board, may be a particularly acute problem in the military because of the rapid turnover of staff.

Lessons derived from the program will depend partly on how success is formulated and judged. The program was itself the result of a messy compromise involving different actors with competing rationales and interests. The motivations of those involved varied and included fighting the Taliban, securing the state, protecting self or community, maintaining the status quo, renegotiating power relations, extending patronage relationships, accessing external resources, and settling scores.

Even when stated goals are met, they are achieved at a severe cost—most obviously in terms of human lives but also the trade-offs and opportunity costs involved in prioritizing one goal or area of intervention over another.<sup>165</sup> A trade-off may also be temporal, in the sense that success in the short term may have severe and irreversible costs in the long term.

The difficulty of making judgments is also compounded by the challenges of accessing reliable data and evidence. Independent evaluation of the ALP and other militia programs has been limited. This is partly because of the sensitivity of the topic, related to problems of access

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to information, and the likelihood that data will be politicized or manipulated. Those with the most critical attitude at the outset are the least able to gain access, and those with the best access are often too close to the military to provide independent and critical analysis. Moreover, the literature is full of essentialized and simplified narratives about Afghan culture and society that clouds critical analysis.<sup>166</sup>

### *Explaining Different Outcomes*

The case studies illustrate the heterogeneity and complexity of the local security architecture in Afghanistan; the same program looks very different in one context over another. How does one explain this variability over time and space? What were the key variables that shaped the dynamics and outcomes of the ALP program? We have attempted to show through the case studies how the ALP is mediated and translated through complex bargaining relationships between international actors and both national and provincial elites in the context of an intensifying insurgency. These are ineluctable political processes, shaped of course by the security environment and the economic interests of diverse actors.

In Baghlan, for example, the ALP became a vehicle for politically marginalized local Pashtuns to renegotiate the Tajik Jamiat-e-Islami dominated post-2001 order. It can be seen as an attempt by the excluded to leverage external support to increase their access to power and resources. In Kunduz, a former Taliban stronghold in the north with a majority Pashtun population, the expansion of the Taliban insurgency threatened the power of the dominant coalition. Arbaki militias and later the ALP became the instrument to preserve the existing order against the threat of the Taliban. This brought short-term security but further marginalized the Pashtun population and thus increased the likelihood of a violent contestation of the political settlement in the future.

In Wardak, the ALP program was an implant by foreign forces aiming to stabilize a security context that was far more complex than originally imagined. Unlike Kunduz and Baghlan, where a dominant group had emerged, the political landscape in Wardak was open, fragmented, and contested. The fault lines in the struggle for ascendancy were more complex than the Pashtun-Tajik and Pashtun-Uzbek dynamics seen in Baghlan and Kunduz. Wardak remains a hotbed of internal factional power struggles among armed groups of more or less equal strength, all belonging to the same ethnic group—although Hizb-e-Islami remains the dominant political force in many districts.<sup>167</sup> Pashtun communities are divided in support for the government and the insurgency, and close family members may stand on opposite sides.<sup>168</sup> The Hazara and Tajik power brokers used access to AP3 and ALP resources to ensure the exclusion of Pashtuns from the economic resources of the Central Highland region. One might have predicted a counterresponse by the Pashtuns to rearm, but this did not occur, possibly because most Pashtuns feared Taliban reprisals if they joined government militias.

### *Impacts on Security*

The role of the ALP needs to be kept in perspective. In terms of funding and size, the program is relatively insignificant and certainly does not compare with the militias of the Najibullah era. In addition, the difference between the ALP and the ANP should not be overstated: The distinction in Afghanistan between state and nonstate, regular and irregular, is blurred in terms of the status, behavior, capacity, and legitimacy of the various “specialists in violence.” The same actors may be constantly switching sides or even simultaneously be a member of both. The ANP is also in part composed of militias that have simply been rebranded as na-

tional police after 2001, as the Baghlan case clearly illustrates, and at times the ANP has been more abusive than the ALP toward civilians. The greatest threat to stability in Afghanistan is less the existence of a few hundred militias per district in the form of the ALP and more the danger that after 2014 an oversized and unevenly trained armed force will decompose and fragment into myriad competing militia groups, as it did after the collapse of the Najibullah regime. The ANSF in their current form are not fiscally sustainable, which raises the question of how long Western donors can continue to fund the estimated \$6 billion per annum to sustain them.

When making judgments about the ALP's impacts on security, different conceptualizations of security are frequently conflated. The first is security in relation to the fight against the Taliban and whether the ALP is an effective force in gaining a tactical or strategic advantage in the war effort. Second is the security of the state and whether the ALP plays a role in strengthening the institutions and legitimacy of the state (not just the regime). Third is the security of the Afghan population and whether the ALP provides a form of protection to the rural Afghan population or acts as a magnet for insurgent attacks (as Karzai has argued).<sup>169</sup>

Making judgments about the effects of the ALP on any of these three dimensions of security is extremely difficult given the problems of data, counterfactuals, attribution, and time frames. The ALP may positively affect one dimension but adversely affect another: For example, the program may be effective at countering the Taliban, but at the expense of the population's security and ultimately undermining the security of the state if it leads to the uncontrolled fragmentation of the means of violence, as the Kunduz case illustrates.

Supporters of the program point to the fact that the ALP has been disproportionately targeted by the Taliban as a metric of success. According to ISAF data, 6.2 percent of ALP members have been wounded or killed versus fewer than 3 percent of the Afghan army and police. It is no coincidence that in 2012 the death rate of foreign forces declined markedly in parallel with the significant increase in the toll on Afghan forces. The number of ANSF forces being hit by IEDs increased by 124 percent, and an average of nearly three hundred Afghan security forces were killed on a monthly basis in late 2012 and early 2013 (DePetris 2013).<sup>170</sup>

Although the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported a 12 percent decline in civilian casualties in 2012, the Afghanistan NGO Safety Office data for the first quarter of 2013 showed a dramatic increase in violence, 47 percent more attacks by the armed opposition compared with the same period in 2012. The majority of these attacks targeted Afghan civilians and security forces. Attacks by the insurgents against international troops constituted only 4 percent of the total versus 73 percent against the Afghan security forces. In the first three months of 2013, 1,183 Afghan soldiers were killed, an increase of 40 percent versus the same period in 2012 (Nordland 2013b).

The ALP data can be interpreted in various ways:

- Lightly armed ALP units are located in exposed, frontline, contested areas and, as the first line of defense against better armed insurgents, are most likely to be attacked.
- The Taliban see them as challengers to their rule in the villages, more so than the regular forces—hence, for example, Taliban statements that the killing of one ALP member is worth ten U.S. soldiers.<sup>171</sup>
- ALP forces are easier targets because they have less weaponry to protect themselves and nowhere to run because they live in the villages.
- The ALP units have fewer financial resources than regular forces and therefore are less able to buy off or negotiate spot bargains or conflict management pacts with the Taliban—

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***The ALP may be effective at countering the Taliban, but at the expense of the population's security and ultimately undermining the security of the state.***

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though they do have the capacity to generate revenues through local taxation, as do the regular forces and the Taliban.

NATO's shift back toward counterterrorism rather than counterinsurgency following McChrystal's removal involved rebalancing the terms of engagement and a concomitant increased reliance on kinetic power. This shift is reflected in the upward trends in security incidents, night raids, and aerial bombardments in the three provinces studied, which, combined with buying off the loyalties of antigovernment elements, appeared to quell the insurgency.<sup>172</sup> Although the military strategy achieved some tactical successes in terms of pushing back the Taliban, the extent to which the creation of ALP units contributed to the clearing and holding of these areas is difficult to ascertain. Interviewees maintained that the ALP were more effective than regular forces in outlying areas because they knew the lay of the land and were an important source of intelligence. Some evidence, though not very systematic evidence, indicates that the ALP constituted a useful military asset that contributed at least temporarily to the Taliban's having to cede territory.

And though militias may be effective militarily and cost-effective in resource use, they can be politically costly; they are supposedly formed to engage in protective violence—though in practice have often been used as a combat force—but often mete out predatory and abusive violence, as shown in other cases (Kalyvas 2006). In the long term, increased insecurity of communities is likely to act as a further catalyst for the insurgency. An association between the ISAF and these militia forces increases resentment toward international forces and the government. For example, ALP forces in Baghlan were perceived locally as a criminal network involved in the forced extraction of *zakat* and kidnappings. In spite of the protestations of their supporters that “the misconduct is extremely low in comparison to the numbers that are out there,” community perceptions are important, and a small number of incidents can have a disproportionate impact.<sup>173</sup>

The positive gains in relation to the Taliban must be balanced against other costs. Over the war years, a patronage-based political marketplace has become monetized and regionalized, and shifting alliances are shaped by contending resource flows and changing power dynamics, making it an extremely volatile system. In some places, the ALP has created a perverse incentive structure in which groups compete for resources, including from the insurgency, to strengthen their position with respect to other local power holders and groups, as in the case of Hazaras in Jalrez and Pashtuns in Puli Khumri. In this context, the program may encourage a dynamic of competitive rearmament or an armament spiral in one place, but in another content, it may provide coercive resources to weaker actors to balance the power of stronger rivals. The ability and willingness of the government to disarm militias that have gone rogue varied across the cases. Nizami in Kunduz was ultimately dealt with, for example, but other arbaki militias linked to local and national power brokers were not.

Local conflicts frequently transcend the local. Small-scale conflicts usually become enmeshed in and influence wider conflicts at the provincial, interprovincial, or national levels. For example, conflicts in Baghlan were intimately connected to wider power dynamics, specifically in relation to the role of Atta Mohammad Noor, the governor of Balkh, and Pashtun power brokers around the president in Kabul.

Finally, although much of the critical writing about the ALP focuses on how it endangers rural communities, there is little acknowledgment that the program puts those who are recruited in extreme danger. It is worth remembering that many of those who join do so because they have little choice, being forced into militias as a result of coercive pressure or economic

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***In the long term, increased insecurity of communities is likely to act as a further catalyst for the insurgency.***

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necessity. The risks for ALP members and their communities are likely to increase with the drawdown of foreign troops. One of the analysts responsible for founding the ALP, Seth Jones, noted in a recent interview, “If you pull [special operations forces] out . . . the villagers are going to be the ones who pay the price” (cited in Hodge 2013).

### *Impacts on Statebuilding and Governance*

The case studies have highlighted how militias are influenced by and shape the spatial dynamics of conflict and statebuilding. They show the need to think carefully about how the state, including foreign forces, and counter-state formations seek to territorialize power and how peripheral elites collude with or resist the projects of political elites at the center. COIN analysts frequently claim that the insurgency and counterinsurgency have led to the bifurcation of territory into state and nonstate spaces. State space, according to several interviewees, contains the major population centers, critical infrastructure, and roads that are prioritized, defended, and protected by the state. It is commonly asserted that 80 percent of the fighting occurs where only 20 percent of the population live. Conversely, 80 percent of the population are assumed to live in relatively secure areas. To some extent, this follows the historical pattern, in which state spaces have been restricted to the major population centers and the most accessible areas of the country that can be most profitably administered. Nonstate or antistate spaces have always tended to be peripheral, rural areas, where tribal structures remain strong and where administration and governance is difficult and, thus, where the state has a comparative disadvantage (Barfield 2004).

The general literature on insurgency and counterinsurgency supports a more complex picture that is also evident in the case studies. At one level, this might be conceptualized as a three-way division of territory into state, nonstate, and gray zones, reflecting the fact that political actors in irregular warfare face three distinct population sets: populations they control, populations they share, and populations belonging to rivals (Kalyvas 2006). They are also constantly faced with an identification problem: Who is on our side? Who can be trusted? It is in the gray zones that defection is most likely and that the highest levels of indiscriminate violence are experienced. Yet this also simplifies a more complex reality. As noted, the boundaries between state and nonstate are blurred to the extent that they become almost meaningless. Gray zones can be state spaces during the day and antistate spaces during the night, and the correlation between peripherality and antistate status is not straightforward.

The stated aim of NATO forces has been to create what they call white space in the non-state spaces and gray zones in which to clear, hold, and build.<sup>174</sup> In many places, though, holding has been difficult when allies have been predatory. Outsourcing community protection and defense to the ALP may, far from extending state power and legitimacy, have the opposite effect.

To understand this issue, we need to appreciate the ways that the ALP reflects and helps shape core-periphery and intra-periphery bargaining relationships over access to resources and the means of coercion. State and nonstate actors compete with one another to gain access to what might be called violence rights and economic assets, and this competition in turn recalibrates core-periphery relations. The ALP influences politics at the local level by empowering and disempowering particular groups. To a large extent, there is a disjuncture between outsiders’ idealized notions of traditional shura, elder, and tribal institutions and the real power structures and actual practices of commanders who are key ALP members. Evidently, the extent to which the ALP has consolidated or undermined political order has varied from district to district and over time.

The Wardak, Baghlan, and Kunduz examples support studies showing that elections have shortened the time frames and destabilized the dynamics of elite pacts (Giustozzi and Orsini 2009). Elections have been important turning points in relation to the insurgency and local politics. The Taliban have made advances during these periods, partly because the state is even less coherent at these times, and corruption in the voting process further delegitimizes state officials in the eyes of the population. Militia formation may also be directly linked to election campaigns—the 2009 presidential election campaign, for example. Local militias also become entwined with parliamentary politics, with MPs often lobbying to have their people included within the ALP program.

The ALP may also become a vehicle for ethnic assertion as in Baghlan. In this case, Pashtuns were excluded from the state security architecture, as shown by the ANP tashkil, in which 2,400 of 2,800 are from one district (PTRO 2011), and consequently the excluded groups saw the ALP as a way to leverage power and protection. The resulting security arrangements pitted Tajiks in the regular forces against Pashtuns in the irregular forces, thus working at odds with declared statebuilding goals. Following a long-standing pattern, the weaker party (the Pashtuns) seek to leverage external support from more powerful actors, whether the Taliban or central government.

As the three case studies show, the picture is far more complex than a Taliban–anti-Taliban fault line. The micro cleavages of conflict get caught up in the meta cleavages of civil war, as Stathis Kalyvas shows in relation to the civil war in Greece (2006). Politics becomes privatized as individuals and groups seek to settle scores by drawing on wider discourses around the national conflict. Hizb-e-Islami and Taliban clashes in Wardak are one example of mobilizing the population for self-defense, constituting a means of fermenting old factional differences. In this context, the ALP can be an instrument to settle old scores. As such, it may prolong and intensify conflict, undermine state authority, and create competing power structures difficult for the state to control. International forces are also sucked into these local power games—for example, the U.S. SOF support for ALP units in a firefight with the ANP in Baghlan. One might contrast the haphazard attempts of the SOFs to identify and arm proxies with the patient and systematic efforts of the Taliban to penetrate areas of the north (Giustozzi and Reuter 2011).

As other studies have shown, in Helmand, the ALP has become inseparable from long-standing conflicts between indigenous and settler communities. The settlers see the program as an external force that has become involved in poppy eradication to further the interests of powerful actors linked to the state (Mansfield 2013). In Jalrez district in Wardak, as discussed, Hazaras and Tajiks were keen to join the ALP to keep Taliban and Pashtun nomads (often conflated) out of Hazara areas, but Pashtuns were more reticent, in fear of Taliban reprisals. Subsequently, when Pashtuns joined the ALP, recruits were dominated by one particular clan with links to a local jihadi commander, Ghulam Mohammad Hotak.

If COIN is truly a battle for justice, then the effects of the ALP are at best ambiguous or mixed. This situation is exacerbated by the absence of effective and timely state justice. Although the ALP program may be relatively cheap in resource terms, it involves significant opportunity costs. As a number of European informants argued, deploying the police as a paramilitary force leads to the neglect of what should be the primary peace mission, which involves protecting the public from serious crime.

The ALP is symptomatic of a wider deficiency of the post-2001 intervention in Afghanistan; there has been a constant search for temporary solutions that end up creating more

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***Deploying the police as a paramilitary force leads to the neglect of what should be the primary peace mission.***

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problems, which are in turn dealt with pragmatically and superficially. The creation and then disbanding of the CIP force in Kunduz, which in some cases were simply renamed as the ALP, is a case in point. Temporary solutions nevertheless create path dependencies. The ALP will not go away, and it will leave a long-term legacy that others, above all the Afghans, will have to deal with.

## Implications

This study has aimed to uncover and analyze the complex political and security dynamics surrounding the ALP program in three provinces. Rather than seek to extract generalizable policy lessons and prescriptions, the case studies aim to show the complexity and contingency of individual contexts and thus highlight the redundancy of off-the-peg policy advice in Afghanistan and elsewhere. However, the findings do have relevance for debates on transition in Afghanistan and statebuilding and state consolidation more broadly.

Statebuilding has historically been a violent, largely endogenous, and unplanned process that takes a long time and follows varied and unpredictable trajectories. Research on state formation in Afghanistan and other late-developing countries shows that the impact of violence devolution is also varied and unpredictable (Ahram 2011; Giustozzi 2009b). Historically, states have frequently franchised the means of violence to nonstate actors, and in the long term, this strategy may extend rather than diminish the authority of the state. Yet in other contexts, or at other times, violence devolution has contributed to processes of state collapse. A key variable is the role and capacity of the state and the extent to which it has the coercive power, resources, and legitimacy to enforce and shape political settlements and regulate the decentralized violence its agents exercise. State capacity is in turn shaped by processes occurring above and below the state—including the level and type of engagement of international and regional actors and the orientation and capacities of armed nonstate or antistate actors. It is important to appreciate the specific origins and characteristics of militias and their patrons, including their internal organization, leadership, and incentive systems, as well as the external context in which they emerged and evolved.

Analytically, it also seems to be important to distinguish between militias constituted as part of a process of endogenous statebuilding, characterized by Charles Tilly as coercion intensive statebuilding (1992), and those funded externally in the context of imperial wars or counterinsurgency operations. In some cases, imperial powers have successfully mobilized militias to prop up regimes in the context of decolonization struggles or in more recent statebuilding interventions such as Iraq. However, apart from the immediate costs in terms of human lives and rights abuses, such experiments in surrogate forces have often left baleful long-term legacies for the successor governments.

The positive albeit brutal examples of militia formation have involved states playing the preeminent role in creating, funding, and controlling their militias. This depends on a level of state leadership, coherence, and capacity based on a sufficiently inclusive political settlement, which currently does not exist in Afghanistan. The Afghan case has experienced both types of militia formation and is a powerful illustration of the deleterious effects of exogenous, militarized statebuilding, which at many different levels has undermined the statebuilding endeavor. This is reflected in the paramilitarization of the national police, the skewed distribution of aid funding, and the plethora of aid projects driven by a military rather than a development logic.

COIN experts are correct in highlighting the illiberal ways in which states have successfully dealt with internal insurgencies and consolidated their power; this more closely resembles historical experience than the liberal version of “nice statebuilding” (Mayall and de Oliveira 2011). Such reading of the evidence is highly selective, however, and these experts have rescued from the dustbin of history a set of colonial practices that, putting aside ethical concerns, have at best a mixed track record of success, particularly when applied in the contemporary context to expeditionary statebuilding. The paradox at the heart of this doctrine is that successful COIN depends on the existence of a high-capacity regime to put it into practice, but exogenous statebuilding prevents the emergence of such a regime in the first place.

The three case studies presented here suggest that U.S. special forces and other external military actors lack the capacity or legitimacy to make informed decisions about whom to support and why and, as the case of the ALP has demonstrated, that they have undermined efforts directed toward state consolidation. This is not to reify or romanticize indigenous actors. The simple fact is that they have a different opportunity-risk calculus from external players, who need not, in the long term, live with the consequences of their decisions. Choices have been made with little appreciation of either the long-term consequences for the state or the immediate consequences for the local populations. The primary driver has been the search for tactical advantage; the special forces have supported whomever they felt at the time was most effective in the fight against the Taliban, whether Abdul Raziq or Nurul Haq, even though they have a track record of human rights abuses and predation against the wider population.<sup>175</sup>

Based on the criteria of short-term tactical advantage, the ALP has on occasion worked as intended. Yet these positive impacts have often been short lived and often at the cost of the perceived legitimacy and capacity of the Afghan state. A central paradox of the ALP program is that it is least likely to work in the areas where the program is believed to be most needed. In other words, when the state presence—particularly a credible ANP presence, which can back up the ALP and monitor its activities—is strong, it may play a useful auxiliary role in holding ground and preventing Taliban penetration. However, in the outlying areas, where the state presence has always been limited and contested, the ALP is likely to live off the land and contribute to an existing law-and-order problem.

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## Recommendations

Clearly, the problem of militias has no straightforward solution. Militias grow like a mold in a particular security environment, and the long-term solution lies in changing that environment. To a large extent, the solutions are not military but political, ultimately depending on the forging of a more inclusive political settlement.

It is not realistic to disarm these groups, and of course the problem extends well beyond the ALP. In Afghanistan today, there exists a mass of other armed groups, all of which will remain armed, and this will continue to be the case while there is widespread insecurity, concerns about the future, and a lack of alternative forms of protection and sustenance. The long-term future of the ALP program at the time of writing remains uncertain. However, if the program continues, some practical measures can and should be pursued.

First, the program should not be expanded. President Karzai has made this clear, especially in his repeated requests to strengthen the regular forces, the ANA, and the ANP. U.S. and other foreign special forces are likely to remain engaged in Afghanistan after the transition, and it is important that they resist the temptation to form more local militias, whether within or outside the ALP program.



Second, stronger state oversight and support of the ALP program is needed. This may mean retrenching the program to areas where the ANA-ANP presence is strong, community support is substantial, and stability is sufficient to enable the ALP to hold ground. The incorporation of the ALP into the ANSF is key to its playing a state-supporting role and preventing further fragmentation of violence and the intensification of local power struggles. Strengthening the ANSF-ALP nexus is also critical, as is avoiding placing the ALP in an isolation ward. ISAF statements regarding cutting ANSF numbers in favor of the ALP because it is cheaper would be detrimental in the long run.

Third, in the medium to long term, plans should be developed to facilitate the ALP's absorption into the ANP. International donors must be willing to pay the additional costs for this to happen. In terms of centralization versus fragmentation of violence, much is tied to dependence on resource flows. Whilst ALP forces and other militias are part of the tashkil and salaries are paid through the center, ALP arguably acts as a centripetal force. In the absence of centralized patronage, however, it can rapidly change into a centrifugal force and contribute to the unraveling of centralizing efforts. Greater clarity is needed regarding long-term funding options for the ALP, as currently they are off budget and directly paid by the U.S. military. A multidonor funding source might be necessary to facilitate ALP-ANSF integration.

In the final analysis, the ALP is a second-order question. Dealing with it depends on whether international actors are prepared to deal with the first-order questions. This essentially boils down to two interrelated issues. First, will international actors accept and support a political process that involves negotiating a new political settlement in Afghanistan? This process would necessarily involve peace talks with the Taliban and negotiation of a post-Karzai political dispensation. It will not come about as a result of democratic elections but instead would involve backroom bargains and deal making that may be unpalatable to Western actors. The result would not be a government of reformers but a coalition of power holders with unsavory pasts and powerful patrons. Second, will donors continue to provide the resources to fund such a state? A sudden reduction in funding will not only create incentives for the ALP to go rogue but also and more significantly lead to the unraveling of the regular forces.

## Notes

1. The ANSF are composed of the Afghan National Army (ANA), Afghan National Police (ANP), and National Directorate of Security (NDS). The total project strength of the armed forces is currently at 352,000, but plans are to reduce it by 100,000 after 2014.
2. Research for this paper was funded by the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Kabul and the United States Institute of Peace. The authors would also like to acknowledge the invaluable feedback provided on an early draft of this paper by Antonio Giustozzi, Mark Sedra, Astri Suhrke, and Torunn Wimpelmann.
3. These findings are based on a structured, focused comparison of provincial case studies in Wardak, Baghlan, and Kunduz, complemented by interviews in Kabul and a review of the secondary literature. Provincial and Kabul-level field work was conducted from September 2011 through July 2012 by Aziz Hakimi. This was followed up by a field visit to Kabul in November 2012 by both authors. A total of 160 interviews were conducted with a range of key informants, including Afghan officials in Kabul; provincial governors and police chiefs; local elders; provincial council members; ANA, ANP, and NDS personnel; serving and former ministers; International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and U.S. special operations force (SOF) officers; journalists; and civil society activists. Research of this nature faces significant challenges in relation to security, ethics, and methodology. We have attempted to mitigate these challenges through a range of strategies including mixing methods, triangulation of data, careful deliberation over research ethics, collaborating closely with local partners, and drawing on long-standing relationships in the field.
4. The various stated goals of the interveners have included: counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, statebuilding, development, democratization, counternarcotics, human rights, and gender equity. Other factors that were less openly acknowledged include: reorienting the NATO alliance, strengthening diplomatic ties between Western allies, countering the influence of enemies, responding to pressures from domestic voters, and accessing resources or trying to protect existing policy investments.
5. For a critical account of international statebuilding and peacebuilding efforts during the post-Cold War period, see Mayall and de Oliveira (2011).
6. This contradiction essentially boils down to different conceptions of the police force as either a gendarmerie or a civilian police force (Rosenau 2008; Giustozzi and Isaqzadeh 2013).
7. So, for example, the United States resisted the expansion of ISAF forces beyond Kabul, wanting to maintain a light footprint and to prioritize the war on terror over peacekeeping (Maley 2006; Rubin 2005).
8. For a useful overview of the antecedents and emergence of the liberal peace, see Paris (2004). For a critique of the liberal peace as a policy paradigm, see Chandler (2010).
9. Interestingly, in the light of current debates on militias, it was Dostum's "army of the north," originally a militia which mostly retained its character for some time as a regular army.
10. The Bonn Agreement (officially the Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-Establishment of Permanent Government Institutions) was signed on December 22, 2001. Among its provisions were the establishment of an Afghan Interim Authority, an Afghan Constitution Commission, and a NATO-led ISAF.
11. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, use of private and irregular security forces has been extensive. In March 2011, roughly 174,000 contractors were active in Afghanistan and Iraq.
12. The Afghanistan Compact was adopted in January of 2006, when the transition process set out in the Bonn Agreement had been formally completed. The compact lay out a set of political, economic, and security benchmarks agreed between the international community and the Afghan government to be met in the succeeding five years.
13. The ANP is composed of the following sections: the Afghan Uniform Police, 90,500 members responsible for core policing functions; the Afghan National Civil Order Police, an elite constabulary of 14,400 personnel; the Afghan Border Police (ABP), 20,000 personnel responsible for security at airports, land entry points, and border security zones; and the Afghan Anti-Crime Police, 3,400 personnel responsible for the investigative and intelligence capacities of the ANP nationwide (Planty and Perito, 2013, 4).
14. One illustration of this bias is the content of the focused district development training program provided by U.S. police mentoring teams. The program included seven weeks of instruction in military tactics, weapons use, survival strategies, and counterinsurgency operations and one week of training in basic police skills.
15. "Creating paramilitary police forces is a relatively straightforward endeavour, as it requires little or no culturally specific instruction, and can be carried out by rapidly deployable military advisors. Establishing professional, accountable, public-safety oriented police is another matter altogether" (Rosenau 2008, 15).
16. The experience of how non-Western empires policed their unruly frontiers is also relevant. For example, the Ottomans relied on elaborate brokering arrangements to maintain control of the empire's peripheries: "No matter how strong an empire, it has to work with peripheries, local elites and frontier groups to maintain compliance, resources, tribute and military cooperation to ensure political coherence and durability" (Barkey 2008, 10).
17. The invention of native traditions was a precondition of indirect rule, colonial powers being concerned to establish the credentials of their native allies as "traditional" and "authentic" (Mamdani 2012). Unlike race,

- which was taken to mark a civilizational hierarchy, tribe was a marker of cultural diversity. Natives were said to be tribal by nature; the practice of governing them was called native administration.
18. For a discussion of the tribal security system of the arbaki, see Osman (2008). See also Porter (2009, 198), who in his excellent book *Military Orientalism* warns against the dangers of the cultural turn in Western militaries. As he notes, in “its more crass forms it recycles old bigotry in the language of political correctness.”
  19. For example, Giustozzi stated that by late 1989 or early 1990, a hundred thousand former mujahedin had joined the various types of irregular armed formations (2009b, 54). In Herat, the 17th infantry division numbered 3,400 regular troops and 14,000 militiamen.
  20. Geraint Hughes and Christian Tripodi (2009) further distinguish between different types of surrogate forces, namely, individual actors (trackers, interpreters, informers, and agents), home guards, militias, counter gangs, and pseudo gangs.
  21. For example, the Sri Lankan government created both types of organizations as part of its counterinsurgency campaign against the LTTE. Home guard units were created among the Sinhala settler communities in the borderland areas of the northeast, and Tamil militias were mobilized to control the Tamil population, generate intelligence, and fight the LTTE.
  22. The Afghan Military Forces were part of the formal Northern Alliance forces that had joined the American forces during the invasion. On the other hand, armed groups and militias that did not come under this formal structure were targeted through the DIAG program.
  23. On the emergence of the military-industrial-academic complex—comprised of warrior intellectuals and institutions like the RAND Corporation, the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at St. Andrews, Kings College London, and the Carr Center, Harvard University—see Miller and Mills (2010). COIN drew in particular from the experience of the late colonial wars of the 1950s and 1960s. Wars in Indochina and Algeria were quietly reframed not as national tragedies to avoid repeating at all costs but rather as helpful pilot studies in the Long War (Feichtinger, Malinowski, and Richards 2012, 45). For examples of this reframing of the colonial archive as a useful technical resource, see Kilcullen (2009) and Jones (2012). David Petraeus personified a new breed of “warrior intellectuals”; his PhD in history from Princeton University in 1987 was titled, “The American Military and Lesson of Vietnam.” Petraeus subsequently codified his insights in the Army’s official *Field Manual 3-24: Counterinsurgency*.
  24. For example, in December 2006, a joint report by the inspectors general of the state and defense departments found that U.S.-trained Afghan police were incapable of conducting routine law enforcement and that American program managers could not account for the number of ANP officers on duty or the whereabouts of vehicles, equipment, and weapons provided by the Afghan government (cited in Perito 2009, 5).
  25. Seth Jones (2012) provides a selective and in some cases misleading reading of previous counterinsurgency operations, including U.S. support to paramilitary forces in Vietnam, Philippines, and Latin America, as well as British colonial efforts in policing its former colonies in Asia and Africa and attempts to draw out their relevance to contemporary Afghan police and the U.S. efforts there to set up local militias.
  26. APPF was discussed in July 2010 at the same time that negotiations over the ALP were under way. It was only created in early 2011 to replace hundreds of private security companies. Karzai issued a decree in August 2010, ordering the disbanding of all PSCs by December 2010. However, following pressure from ISAF and development contractors and NGOs who depended on PSCs for their security, a one-year extension was negotiated until March 2013 (DOD 2011b; Aikins 2012).
  27. Atmar characterized this as an attempt to renationalize security, first, by ending the mandate of Private Security Companies, and second, by reviving the tribal tradition of local policing, known as arbaki. For analyses of arbaki, see Osman (2008).
  28. Interview, Haneef Atmar, former minister of interior, Kabul, August 5, 2012. For a discussion of Atmar’s thinking on the AP3, see the leaked 2009 U.S. Embassy cable “Unconventional Security Forces—What’s Out There?” (U.S. Embassy Kabul 2009c). The description of the AP3 here is also based on a 2009 MOI strategy paper on file with the author.
  29. At the time Seth Jones, the author of the report on which the narrative is based, was a RAND consultant to U.S. Special Forces Command.
  30. These additional districts were Arghandab, Kandahar; Chamkani, Paktia; Shindand, Herat; and Posht-e Rod, Farah.
  31. A 2010 strategy paper developed by the MOI and the United States stated that the district governor would work with the CDI or village shura to select, vet, and supervise LDI. Individual payments were set at 50 percent of the ANP. Defenders were expected to bring their own weapons (Lefevre 2012, 3).
  32. When Atmar was interviewed in August 2012, he criticized the approach SOFs took to LDI, implementing them as ad hoc experiments without government approval and outside its institutional framework.
  33. Interview, Rangin Dadfar Spanta, head of Afghan National Security Council, Kabul, April 10, 2012.
  34. Interview, Tonita Murray, adviser to ministry of interior, Kabul, November 6, 2012.

35. This was a particular concern of Karzai—and played well to domestic audiences—in his inaugural speech, during which he promised that “within the next two years, we want operations by all private national and international security firms to be ended and their duties delegated to Afghan security entities” (Lefèvre 2010).
36. Interview, U.S. military officers, Forward Operating Base, Maidanshahr, Wardak, December 12, 2011.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Interview, Rangin Dadfar Spanta, April 10, 2012.
40. Interview, Hamid Karzai, Kabul, May 7, 2013.
41. Interview, Rangin Dadfar Spanta, April 10, 2012.
42. Interview, Hamid Karzai, May 7, 2013; interview, Rangin Dadfar Spanta, May 5, 2013.
43. Thirty thousand ALP cost \$180 million. Per year, one ALP costs \$6,000 and one ANA soldier costs \$30,000. Telephone interview, Colonel Donald Bolduc, deputy commander of NATO Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan, London, November 15, 2012. During the Najibullah regime, militia members were paid twice as much as regular soldiers. They also received other incentives, including “enrolment prizes,” exemption from military service, provision of electricity and televisions, and offers of military hardware to militia leaders, including armored vehicles and tanks (Giustozzi 2009b).
44. Interview, European embassy official, Kabul, November 2012.
45. Interview, PTRO researcher, Kabul, September 21, 2011.
46. According to Afghanistan’s Central Statistics Office (CSO), the 2011–12 population estimate of Wardak is 558,000. The 2011 Provincial Development Plan (PDP) estimate of population was over 884,000. The Wardak districts include the provincial capital Maidanshahr, Nerkh, Jalrez, Sayedabad, Chak, Jaghatu, Daimirdad, Behsud-e-Markazi, and Hesa-e-Awal Behsud. No reliable figures on the division of population into ethnic groups are available. The PDP and the CSO do not provide breakdown of population according to ethnic groups, which is a politically sensitive topic in an ethnically mixed province with a history of conflict. In 2012, the CSO reportedly decided not to include ethnicity as a variable in its population survey because of political sensitivities. According to a 2004 Swedish Committee for Afghanistan report that relied on 2002 UNHCR figures, the population in Daimirdad is 63 percent Pashtun and 37 percent Hazara, and the population in Nerkh is 80 percent Pashtun, 15 percent Tajik, and 5 percent Hazara. According to the NGO Cooperation for Peace and Unity, 45 percent of the Jalrez population belong to the Kharooti subtribe and 65 percent of the Maidanshahr population are Pashtun (Merkova, Dennys, and Zaman 2009). According to 2011–12 CSO population estimates, one-fifth of the population live in the predominantly Pashtun district Sayedabad and slightly more than that number live in the predominately Hazara district of Behsud-e-Markazi. Hazaras almost exclusively inhabit the two Behsud districts. Tajiks constitute a minority and live mostly in the capital Maidanshahr and Nerkh districts.
47. The 2003 CSO–United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) socioeconomic survey indicates that only about 5 percent of the population has access to electricity, that Maidanshahr only recently received a power line from Kabul, and that the 3,300-kilowatt hydroelectric dam in Chak is producing at one-third of its capacity. The same survey indicates that 40 percent of the wheat produced in the province comes from the Behsud-e-Markazi district and that about 80 percent of all animal products come from Behsud-e-Markazi, Hesa-e-Awal Behsud, Chak, and Sayedabad.
49. The PDP for Wardak (2011–15) stated that most of these projects lacked a long-term vision of sustainability and were essentially ad hoc and experimental in nature designed to achieve short-term security. As a result, there was a lack of either local community or donor buy-in, and the projects fell victim to interministerial rivalries and exploitation by local power brokers. A widespread view in Wardak was that the local governance project, the AP3, suffered from similar problems.
50. Hizb-e-Islami, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (HIG), is a reformist Islamist movement modeled on the Muslim Brotherhood and was one of the seven mujahideen parties based in Peshawar, Pakistan during the 1980s anti-Soviet jihad. HIG was a favorite of the Pakistani spy agency, Inter-Services Intelligence, and the CIA and received the bulk of the U.S. military aid channeled through Pakistan’s military. After 2001, the party split into two factions. The political wing is legally operating from Kabul and is part of the Karzai government. The military wing is led by Hekmatyar, who is designated a terrorist by the U.S. government and is believed to be hiding in the eastern mountains of Afghanistan or the semiautonomous tribal areas of Pakistan. Harakat was led by Maulawi Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi, a conservative-traditionalist jihadi party of rural mullahs from whose ranks many of the Taliban movement’s leadership later emerged. After the death of Maulawi Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi, the party was and is (2013) led by Haji Mohammad Musa Hotak from the Jalrez district. Musa is a former Harakat commander and Taliban deputy minister, MP, and currently a senior adviser to Karzai. Itihad was founded by and is led by Abdul Rab-Rasoul Sayyaf, an MP and a senior jihadi leader frequently consulted by Karzai. Itihad enjoyed close relations to Saudi Wahabi groups during the 1980s’ jihad and is believed to have been instrumental in spreading Wahabism in Afghanistan. The extent of Itihad’s current ties with Saudi Wahabi groups is not easily apparent and may not be that significant considering the Taliban’s success in

attracting Saudi funding to its jihad against foreign forces. Hizb-e-Wahdat emerged as an umbrella organization to accommodate the half-dozen Shia and Hazara jihadi groups supported by Iran during the 1980s anti-Soviet jihad. Iran's assistance continued during the factional wars fought among mujahideen parties in the early 1990s and in resistance to the Taliban during the late 1990s. Its founder Abdul Ali Mazari was killed by the Taliban in 1995. After 2001, as rivalries for power intensified among the party leadership, Wahdat split into four groups. Two of the most prominent Hazara politicians, Vice President Karim Khalili and former planning minister and current MP Mohammad Mohaqiq, head two of the splinter groups.

51. Interview, Halim Fidai, governor of Wardak, Maidanshahr, Wardak, December 11, 2011. A similar version of events was narrated by a former Hizb-e-Islami commander currently serving as an ALP commander in Nerkh district. Interview, Commander Mohammad Gul Torakai, Maidanshahr, Wardak, September 13, 2011.
52. Shura-e-Nizar constituted the military wing of Jamait-e-Islami. It was led by Jamiat's military commander, Ahmad Shah Masoud, and was dominated by commanders from the Panjshir valley.
53. Interview, General Muzafaruddin, former provincial police chief, Kabul, December 29, 2011.
54. Musa was Harakat's main military commander in Jalrez district with an estimated force of more than five thousand armed men during the 1980s and early 1990s. He served as a Taliban deputy minister of planning. Like his brother Musa, Ghulam Mohammad is a former Harakat commander who fought alongside the Taliban in the 1990s. Interview, Halim Fidai, December 11, 2011.
55. Interview, commander Ghulam Mohammad Hotak, Kabul, August 9, 2012. A similar number was mentioned in an Afghanistan Analysts Network report (see Lefèvre 2010, 10).
56. The recurring conflict between nomadic and settled communities in Wardak often erupts during the seasonal migration of Pashtun nomads, starting in early spring, to the central highlands. These conflicts have a long history, and they developed new layers of complexity during the war years and after 2001. For example, according to an NGO activist from the Hazara community, the Taliban offered to prevent the return of Kuchis to Hazara areas in an attempt to prevent the conflict from further escalating and possibly drawing in American forces, as illustrated by the example of Jim Gant (2009) in "One Tribe at a Time" (see note 165). Interview, civil society activist, Kabul, April 8, 2013.
57. A range of factors has been mentioned to explain the reemergence of the Taliban in Wardak. They include the presence and behavior of foreign forces, a corrupt and predatory government, and persecution of former commanders and power holders who took to the mountains and began fighting. Others include religious motivation and anger over U.S. night time raids, detention in U.S. military prison in Bagram, and civilian casualties linked to air strikes (Ladbury 2009; Merkova, Dennys, and Zaman 2009). A large network of madrasa, mosques, and militant preachers in the central region where Wardak is located has made it easy for the Taliban to recruit men to their cause (ICG 2011). See also Tariq Osman on insurgency in Wardak and Logar (Giustozzi 2009a).
58. The power brokers include Haji Janan, member of provincial council; Abdul Ahmad, former provincial police chief and member of parliament; and Haji Musa Hotak, former member of parliament and adviser to Karzai and Ghulam Mohammad Hotak, former Taliban commander who also briefly commanded the AP3 in late 2009 and early 2010.
59. Interviews, Halim Fidai, December 11, 2011, November 3, 2012.
60. In December 2012, the U.S. Defense Department reported 576 ALP members in Wardak.
61. Interview, member of provincial council, Kabul, January 1, 2012. Another provincial council member mentioned a two-day meeting in Kabul in October 2008 where local elders in the presence of ministers of interior, defense, national intelligence and the governor of Wardak refused to ratify a government declaration meant to show support by local shuras to the AP3 program. Interview, provincial council member, Kabul, December 29, 2011.
62. Interview, Haji Mukhlis, former member of provincial council, Kabul, January 1, 2012; interview, Haji Janan, head of provincial council, Kabul, December 29, 2011.
63. Interview, Ghulam Mohammad Hotak, Kabul, May 9, 2012; interview, Halim Fidai, December 11, 2011.
64. Figures obtained in December 2011 show 350 ALP members in Jalrez district. The total strength of the ALP at the time in Wardak was around 800, down from 1,100 in 2010. This is about equal to the total number of regular police for the whole province. In March 2012, 260 ALP members were demobilized after failing ALP recruitment criteria, further reducing the number to 540. A December 2012 U.S. Defense Department report mentioned 576 ALP in Wardak.
65. Interview, Ghulam Mohammad Hotak, Kabul, May 9, 2012.
66. Interview, Mullah Aziz-ur-Rahman Siddiqi, former AP3 commander, Kabul, December 17, 2011.
67. Interview, commander Mohammad Gul Torakai, Maidanshahr, Wardak, September 13, 2011
68. Ibid.; this point repeatedly came up during conversations between the governor and SOFs during the winter of 2011–12 (author's observation during the meetings).
69. Interview, Halim Fidai, December 11, 2011.



70. Given that the Afghanistan NGO Safety Office (ANSO) relies on incident attacks, the presence of the AP3 likely provided more targets to insurgents and could explain the contradiction between statistical and narrative data (see Lefèvre 2010, 12).
71. Hizb-e-Islami affiliated factions in the president's office, notably Chief of Staff Abdul Karim Khurram, have been accused of supporting Hizb-e-Islami in Wardak.
72. Interview, U.S. Army Special Forces officer, Maidanshahr, Wardak, December 11, 2012.
73. On February 6, 2012, Fidai and U.S. military officials held an information operations ceremony in Sayedabad to introduce the ALP program in Sayedabad.
74. Interview, member of Wardak provincial council, Kabul, December 29, 2012.
75. In September 2012, Halim Fidai was replaced as governor of Wardak.
76. In his letter to Karzai, Fidai mentions a figure of 405 ANP personnel in Wardak, possibly referring to ANP soldiers, excluding support staff. Fidai's letter to Karzai, March 12, 2012, on file with the author.
77. Interview, senior government officials and local journalists, Wardak, Maidanshahr and Kabul, August 2012.
78. Ibid.
79. Fidai denied allegations that he had provided support to Hizb-e-Islami commanders in Nerkh against Taliban insurgents. He described his proposed solution to local security in the spring of 2012 in more grassroots terms, modeled on the Arab Spring social movements led by the youth and not by armed commanders. It was supposed to be a province-wide campaign, not just restricted to Nerkh. He claims his attempt to bring security to Wardak through popular participation has been misrepresented by his critics (interview, Halim Fidai, August 13, 2012). A similar uprising was to take place in the neighboring province of Ghazni, but was badly timed and, due to interference from the central government, backfired and only took off in Andar district. After almost a year, the uprising in Andar, originally led by a few Hizb-e-Islami commanders who broke ranks with their Taliban allies—and was described by U.S. military commanders as a game changer—petered out. Under intense pressure from the Taliban, who killed most of the original leaders and sixty members of the uprising, the rebels gave up the pretense of independence and accepted help from the government and the U.S. military by enrolling in the ALP program (on the Andar uprising, see Trofimov 2013).
80. The Taliban and Hizb-e-Islami in Nerkh district accuse each other of being someone else's puppets or spies in what seem like a competition over which group has greater legitimacy to wage jihad against foreign forces and the Western-supported Karzai government. In August 2011, the Taliban explained their military campaign against Hizb-e-Islami in Nerkh by noting that "the Emirate [Taliban] has decided to fight Hezb-e-Islami because they are pro-government and get provoked into action [against us] by the government," said Mullah Bashir, the Taliban's third-highest representative in the mainly Pashtun-populated Nerkh district. "We give priority to killing Hizb people over Americans because they are obstructing us and preventing us from waging jihad" (Tabee 2011). These internal struggles between Taliban and Hizb-e-Islami help shatter the myth of a unified insurgency.
81. Arming one group in this context can significantly upset the balance of power and lead to new rounds of clashes among rival groups, set off by a negative spiral of competitive rearmament or alternatively defection to the Taliban to secure protection and support.
82. Interview, provincial council member, Maidanshahr, Wardak, April 17, 2013.
83. Despite a number of investigations by government and ISAF/NATO command in Kabul as well as human rights organizations and media, it has not been possible to establish not so much what happened, which is well documented, but which force or forces perpetrated the abuses. The secretive nature of the forces responsible for these abuses, which happened over five months in the Nerkh and Maidanshahr districts, point to the involvement of CIA and what the Afghan government referred to as parallel security structures, meaning Afghan militias trained and financed by the CIA for counterterrorism operations which remained unaccountable to Afghan authorities. Interviews, human rights activists, journalists, government officials, security analysts, and local power brokers in Wardak and Kabul, April 2013.
84. Local power brokers affiliated with Hizb-e-Islami privately complained about the presence and aggressive targeting of Hizb-e-Islami fighters in Nerkh and Maidanshahr districts, areas that are under government control. Instead their preference was to have SOFs move into more remote areas of Wardak, such as upper Nerkh valley where the Taliban had a more prominent presence. In other words, Hizb-e-Islami tried to get SOFs off their backs and direct their firepower against their Taliban rivals. Interview, local analyst, Kabul, April 24, 2013.
85. The statement warned that "if the Americans once again do not honour their commitments and keep on disobeying, then this will be considered as an occupation, and they may expect to see a reaction to their action." What was more striking about the statement was the fact that "it referred to American forces in Afghanistan as 'infidels,' echoing language used by the Taliban" (Nordland 2013a).
86. For the first time, civilian casualties declined by 12 percent in 2012. However, this trend did not last for long. In April 2013, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported an upsurge

in conflict-related civilian casualties. Security data released by ANSO for the first quarter of 2013 also showed a dramatic increase in violence, up by 47 percent from 2012. With the transition of security responsibilities from NATO to Afghan forces, the casualty rates of ANSF increased by 40 percent during this period. Some 73 percent of all insurgent attacks were directed against Afghan forces versus 4 percent against foreign forces (Nordland 2013b).

87. In one incident, a local Pashtun villager and his university companion were shot and killed by the AP3 on the Maidenshahr-Nerkh road. Despite many attempts by the victim's father, a local farmer, the culprits have not been prosecuted for the crime. The commander of the AP3 whose unit shot the young man was released after the district governor of Jalrez intervened in the case. Despite receiving assurances from the governor, the father of the victim lost all hope of seeing his son's killers behind bars.
88. Author's observation during a meeting between Afghan officials and U.S. military officers in early February 2012 in Maidanshahr. Members of the Wardak Provincial Council expressed these views in conversation with General Ali Shah Ahmadzai, the head of the ALP in the Ministry of Interior in Kabul.
89. Interview, commander Mohammad Gul Torakai, September 13, 2011.
90. Interview, security analyst, Kabul, November 7, 2012.
91. Interviews, ISAF officials, Kabul, November 5, 2012.
92. Interviews, victims and members of their families, provincial council members, local journalists, human rights activists, and government officials in Kabul, Wardak and Kabul, April 19–25, 2013.
93. The districts are Puli Khumri, Baghlan-e-Jadid, Dahanan-e-Ghori, Dushi, Tala-wa-Barfak, Khenjan, Andarab, Khost-wa-Fereng, Burka, Nahrin, Puli Hesar, Jalga, Deh Saleh, Fereng-wa-Gharu, and Guzargah-e-Noor. During the 1980s, as the mujahideen increased pressure on the Soviet and Afghan forces in Baghlan's capital Baghlan-e-Jadid, the provincial capital was relocated to Puli Khumri where it has remained to the present day. Although Governor Juma Khan Hamdard tried to relocate it to Baghlan-e-Jadid, he faced stiff resistance from Andarabi strongmen who felt secure in Puli Khumri and did not want to relocate to a majority Pashtun district. The population figure of 741,690 is based on 2003 CSO/UNFPA statistics. According to Afghanistan Statistics Office, the population of Baghlan in 2011–12 was approximately 848,000. The population is believed to be composed of Tajik (52 percent), Pashtun (20 percent), Hazara (15 percent), Uzbek (9 percent). The Tajik affiliated with Jamiat-e-Islami dominate the mountainous south, east, and west of the province while Pashtuns mostly loyal to Hizb-e-Islami live in the agriculturally fertile valleys in central and northern Baghlan. The Ismaili community of Sayed Mansoor Naderi dominates the Doshi district, and Uzbeks loyal to Junbish-e-Mili are in northern Baghlan.
94. Two additional districts emerged from the southern Andarab district, Pul-e-Hisar and Deh Saleh in 2003. Commanders from Baghlan are mostly affiliated with Jamiat-e-Islami and include Mustafa and Rasoul Andarabi (also known as Rasoul Mohsini), Kabir Andarabi, and Haji Loqa. Commander Mustafa Andarabi, a key power broker and a close ally of then defense minister and current vice president Fahim Qasim, assumed military control in the province by taking over command of the army's 20th division, which was later disbanded under the DDR program. Mustafa subsequently joined the Ministry of Interior, where today, as a police general, he occupies a senior position as deputy head of operations. Another jihadi commander from Andarab, Haji Loqa, was made the provincial police chief.
95. Under Mir Alam, 75 percent of district police chiefs were followers of Jamiat and loyal to the Andarabi faction. According to U.S. Embassy estimates, the breakdown of senior leadership in the Baghlan police was 86 percent Tajik and 14 percent Pashtun (2005).
96. Alam Jan is a former Hizb-e-Islami commander and currently deputy of Provincial Council. He is a rival of Rasoul Mohsini in the council. The current tashkil of ANP in Baghlan is around twenty-five hundred policemen. Interview, Puli Khumri police officer, Baghlan, June 2012.
97. Interview, Alam Jan, provincial council member, May 18, 2012, Baghlan-e-Jadid, Baghlan. According to Alam Jan, of the total police tashkil of 1,800, only 30 were from the local Pashtun community; the rest were predominantly Tajiks of Northern Alliance faction. According to another account, 90 percent of the ANP were non-Pashtuns, mostly Andarabi Tajiks (Hewad 2012).
98. Former Northern Alliance defense minister and current vice president Fahim Qasim's close ally Mustafa Andarabi was himself disqualified from standing in 2005 parliamentary elections because of links to illegal armed groups; his brothers Rasoul and Azim Mohseni went on to win seats in provincial council and parliament respectively. Because of support from Northern Alliance power brokers in the central government and links to regional Jamiat strongmen such as Governor Atta of Balkh, Mustafa and Rasoul Mohsini have emerged as powerful figures in Baghlan's politics.
99. As noted by Alam Jan, provincial council member, the Pashtuns do not consider themselves represented in the local power structure and as a result feel that they had never before been reduced to such a pitiful position or treated so poorly (interview, Baghlan-e-Jadid, May 18, 2012).
100. Prominent Pashtun power brokers around Karzai have been accused of supporting local Hizb-e-Islami factions and treating them as natural allies against Jamiat factions from Andarab with links to Panjshiri strongman, Vice President Fahim Qasim, and regional heavyweight Governor Atta Mohammad Noor.

101. Karzai apparently supported Amir Gul and used him as a political tool to contain the power of the Andarabi clan. In 2006, Karzai made a personal intervention to get him released from U.S. detention in Bagram and reinstated him as district governor of Baghlan-e-Jadid. Amir Gul's roller coaster history illustrates the point that local power brokers ostensibly loyal to the central government can sometime turn rogue when their power is threatened. In October 2012, it was revealed that men belonging to Amir Gul and his district police chief, commander Mohammad Kamin, with strong affiliation to Jamiat and Fahim, had shot and killed three ANSF officers in Baghlan-e-Jadid. When the central government replaced the police chief and sent in a replacement, his convoy came under attack from Amir Gul's men. Although the Ministry of Interior issued arrest warrants against them, Kamin refused to surrender to the new district police chief, and Amir Gul reportedly stayed at a government guesthouse in Kabul under the protection of Fahim Qasim. Telephone interview, resident of Puli Khumri, April 29, 2013.
102. The relations between Andarabi strongmen and the governor were so strained, notably over the governor's plans to relocate the provincial capital to Baghlan-e-Jadid, that according to one witness present in a meeting held in the central mosque in Puli Khumri where Juma Khan was speaking, after some heated arguments, the Andarabi commanders present reached for their weapons and threatened him with forced removal. Only when the governor backed down was an armed clash avoided. He was soon ousted from power following mass demonstrations allegedly encouraged by local strongmen (interview, Baghlan journalist, Kabul, November 28, 2011).
103. In the 2005 parliamentary elections, none of the Baghlan members of parliament belonged to Hizb-e-Islami—an outcome that further boosted the power of Jamiat factions.
104. Weaker actors involved in contest for power at the local level have a tendency to reach out to and invite outside actors with superior military resources to undermine their rivals. Forming alliances with weaker factions against stronger ones as entry into local power struggles has allowed the Taliban to consolidate their position in the north.
105. The Taliban's military campaign is usually preceded by infiltration of new areas as "armed men initially came from outside," in particular from Pakistan and southern Afghanistan, to carry out "armed propaganda" and prepare the ground for recruiting local men into Taliban ranks before commencing military operations (Giustozzi and Reuter 2011).
106. Interview, Mullah Alam, Puli Khumri, Baghlan, October 18, 2011, and Kabul, May 28, 2012.
107. Ibid. Mullah Alam is a former Hizb-e-Islami commander from Dand-e-Ghori area of Puli Khumri. He took part in the initial struggle to remove Sayed Mansoor and Sayed Jaffar's Ismaili militias from Puli Khumri, an outcome that empowered the Andarabi clan. Mullah Alam's take on these events was corroborated by a local journalist. Interview, local journalist, Kabul, November 28, 2011.
108. Interview, Amir Gul, May 20, 2012. Amir Gul's entire police force numbered around seventy policemen with the task of securing 384 villages and a population of more than half a million.
109. According to the U.S. embassy in Kabul, the Hungarian troops were "looking to do their short stints in Afghanistan and get back home unscathed" (2009a). The UNAMA mission in Baghlan was so under-resourced that ISAF considered it a joke. International development assistance through the Hungarian PRT was minimal—annual developmental expenditure was around \$3 million.
110. However, the status quo changed with the arrival of SOFs in late 2010 as they intensified night raids and kill-capture operations. Therefore, the impression of ISAF being irrelevant changed as direct attacks against Taliban leadership increased, which considerably weakened them in both Baghlan and Kunduz.
111. Interview, General Abdul Rahman Rahimi, former police chief of Baghlan, Kabul, December 4, 2011.
112. It is important to differentiate here between the original use of the term *arbaki*, linked to notions of community defense in border regions, and the way the term has more recently been used, particularly in the north, to cover all militia-like armed groups. *Arbaki* in this second sense, which applies to its use here, has very negative connotations. As Tariq Osman (2008) notes, in the former sense being an *arbaki* member was an honor, but belonging to a militia was a source of shame.
113. The fighters initially denied they belonged to Hizb-e-Islami. General Rahimi also insisted they were local villagers fed up with Taliban abuse and eager to see the Taliban out of their villages, so they asked the government for weapons and supplies to confront the Taliban. Some locals considered them mere criminals out to access government resources. When their request for military assistance was denied, they decided to adopt the Hizb-e-Islami label in the hope of attracting resources from Hizb, which never materialized. Information extracted from a number of interviews between October 2011 and November 2012 with UNAMA, local commanders, local journalists, provincial council members, and General Rahimi.
114. Although the peace and reintegration program had been launched, at the time, no infrastructure in Baghlan to support insurgents surrendering to government existed. The surrendered Hizb fighters were accommodated under the peace and reintegration program, their weapons were taken from them, and for a few months they received food support from UNAMA and U.S. CERP fund.
115. Interview, UNAMA political affairs officer in Baghlan, Kabul, January 23, 2012. According to a *Spiegel* report, commander Sher asked the Germans for weapons: "We need more weapons," said Sher.... When Sher's men surrendered two months ago, they had to relinquish their weapons. But the government did not

return weapons to all of them. ‘If we don’t have weapons, the Taliban will slit our throats,’ said Sher” (Demmer 2010). Lack of adequate support from government was a common complaint heard from AP3 commanders in Wardak

116. Interview, UNAMA political affairs officer in Baghlan, January 23, 2012.
117. For a detailed account of the battle of Shahabuddin, see the *Spiegel* magazine coverage (Demmer 2010). A combined force of 250 German and Afghan regular troops were prevented by Taliban from coming to the assistance of the arbaki fighters after the Taliban had blown up a key river crossing point to Shahabuddin. Unable to reach the village, German forces called in a NATO air strike that killed Sher. In the concluding hours of the battle, the Taliban had called on Sher to surrender. Some locals believed the air strike was meant to prevent Sher’s surrender to the Taliban rather than to repulse it.
118. The incident is an indication of the way things in Baghlan might look after SOFs—the main military support to government-backed militias—withdraw and the local security force, because of conflictual relations with government-backed militias, decides to withhold military support when it is needed. Alongside regular pay, this will be the single most critical factor for the viability of government-backed militias in the future.
119. Sher’s brother, Nazar Gul, has been given a separate base in Shahabuddin.
120. Interview, Abdul Rahman Rahimi, December 4, 2011.
121. UNAMA, on the other hand, received positive reports about Sher. It is possible that accusation of human rights against him might have been politically motivated.
122. Interview, Abdul Rahman Rahimi, December 4, 2011.
123. A long-term local observer confirmed that the “SOFs did most of the job. They operated in small teams. They definitely managed to secure the area. In Baghlan-e-Jadid there was a series of joint military operations and then Afghan-led operations ... in February 2011 they established three check posts in Baghlan-e-Jadid ... which was a very positive step” and helped turn the security situation around (interview, UNAMA political affairs officer in Baghlan, January 23, 2012).
124. The point about election-related instability came up repeatedly in conversation with local respondents. It is an indication of the fragility of political stability at the local level, whilst diplomats and politicians in Kabul and Western capitals insist on holding elections in a contested environment where thousands of armed groups continue the struggle for power and resources.
125. The German commander in Baghlan referred to Sher “as an APRP, an insurgent who has surrendered and is now participating in the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program.... Sher and his men are holding the position in Shahabuddin.... It’s a pilot project” (Demmer 2010).
126. According to UNAMA estimates, the ALP numbered 147 in Dand-e-Shahabuddin, 153 in Dand-e-Ghori, and 25 in Chashmay-e-Sher (interview, UNAMA political affairs officer in Baghlan, January 23, 2012).
127. Interview, U.S. special forces commander Dahana-e-Ghori, Baghlan, May 17, 2012.
128. Interview, Nurul Haq, Puli Khumri, Baghlan, May 16, 2012. The widespread reporting of human rights abuses by HRW in 2011, combined with a hostile attitude from provincial police chief Assadullah Shirzad (who has registered more than seventy criminal cases against Nurul Haq) and the continued animosity Shirzad faces from the Andarabi faction led by provincial council chief Rasoul Mohsini, led to Nurul Haq’s being pushed to one side. The U.S. special operations forces also withdrew their protection. Nurul Haq remains on the scene in a state of uncertainty.
129. Interview, Rasoul Mohsini, head of provincial council, Puli Khumri, Baghlan, October 18, 2011.
130. An important factor in Nurul Haq’s continued hostility toward local government officials relates to rumors of a plan afoot to arrest him and try him for the crimes he is alleged to have perpetrated as arbaki and ALP commander, which were amply documented in a 2011 Human Rights Watch report.
131. The dispute involved a young boy, allegedly employed by the ALP member for sexual services. He was forcibly taken to the ANP base that day. When the ALP member demanded his return, he was shot by ANP guards.
132. Interviews, local journalist, Kabul, November 28, 2011, March 31, 2012.
133. When the ALP was first approved in August 2010 by the Afghan government, it was stipulated that the program would run from two to five years. In early 2012, the former commander of the ISAF, General John Allen, first indicated that the ISAF was considering making the ALP permanent. In February 2013, the Pentagon revealed plans to expand the program from thirty thousand to forty-five thousand and extend its mandate for another five years, possibly until 2024.
134. Interview, UNAMA political affairs officer in Baghlan, Kabul, January 23, 2012.
135. Interview, U.S. Special Forces commander, Dahana-e-Ghori, Baghlan, May 17, 2012.
136. Interview, Munshi Majid, governor of Baghlan, Puli Khumri, Baghlan, October 19, 2011.
137. Interview, Puli Khumri local elder, Baghlan, May 16, 2012.
138. Ibid.
139. The population is Pashtun (34 percent), Uzbek (27 percent), Tajiks (20 percent), Turkmen (9.4 percent), and Arab (4.6 percent and Hazara (3.5 percent), in addition to small groups of Baluch, Pahsai, and Nuristani

- (Wörmer 2012). The districts are Imam Sahib, Qala-e-Zal, Chahardara, Dasht-e-Archi, Aliabad, Khanabad, and central Kunduz.
140. Junbish-e-Mili under Abdul Rashid Dostum is an Uzbek political party mostly active in northern Afghanistan. Its military roots go back to the 1980s in Jawzjan province. The Uzbek militias under Dostum were set up as a self-defense unit to guard the Shiberghan gas fields. By early 1990, the small self-defense militia had grown into a formidable conventional force of thousands of fighters, making up one of the largest and most cohesive army divisions at the time. It was a remarkable journey for a small militia unit to assume the role and function of a full army division, at a time when the rest of the army was disintegrating into smaller ethnic militias. Dostum's influence in northern Afghanistan had grown so much that when in 1992 his militias defected to the mujahideen, it finally completed the slow disintegration of Najibullah's leftist government and opened the way for the 1990s civil war (on Junbish, see Giustozzi 2009b).
  141. For DDR and the subsequent DIAG program, see Stapleton 2010.
  142. The number is derived from Peavey 2011. A study done in 2011 by Max Planck Institute for the Netherlands embassy in Kabul mentions a figure of 1,810 ANP tashkil in Kunduz, based on information from EUPOL.
  143. The Taliban were pushed back from the districts of central Kunduz, Khanabad, Chahardara, Imam Sahib, and Qala-e-Zal.
  144. An anonymous international source in Kabul reported the alleged payoff. The information was extracted based on months of interviews by the organization in question in Kunduz and Kabul. Although the amount seems small, it was mainly used as a mobilization strategy, given that most commanders had arms and ammunition and did not need government support. Once constituted, the militias supplemented their income through local taxation and extortion, which has been widely reported and covered in detail by a 2011 Human Rights Watch report.
  145. On the role of U.S. special operations forces in Kunduz, see Giustozzi and Reuter 2011.
  146. In February 2013, UNAMA, in its 2012 annual report *Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, mentioned 230 CIP members in Qala-e-Zal, far outnumbering the number of ANP in the district, which was around twenty-five to thirty-five (UNAMA 2013, 50).
  147. Karzai included other local defense units set up by the ISAF in his order of December 25, 2011, regarding "the disbandment of ISAF/ISAF Special Forces-established local defense initiatives such as that of the Critical Infrastructure Project in 2011 in parts of Kunduz, Balkh, and Faryab provinces; of the Intermediate Security for Critical Infrastructure in Helmand; and of Community-Based Security Solutions in Kunar, Nangarhar, and Nuristan provinces. On January 24, 2012, ISAF Joint Command issued a directive ordering the removal and transition of all CBSS groups" (UNAMA 2013, 45). According to the ISAF, by December 31, all community-based defense groups, which operated outside the structure of the Afghan forces had been disbanded and most of its members then transitioned into the ALP.
  148. Interview with U.S. special operations officers in Nawabad, Chahardara district, Kunduz, June 11, 2012.
  149. Interview with member of parliament from Qala-e-Zal district, Kabul, April 16, 2013.
  150. Local commanders sought to include Khanabad in the ALP, but these efforts did not bear fruit, which might explain the extent of rent-seeking from farmers by arbaki militias in Khanabad. Qala-e-Zal and Aliabad and Chahardara were included in the CIP program, but only Chahardara was initially included in the ALP force structure.
  151. In February 2013, UNAMA stated that some time between April and September 2012, the CIP units in Chahardara and Aliabad were converted into ALP. In the north and northeast, five CIP groups were disbanded, and nine hundred of its members were converted into ALP in the absence of any vetting process (UNAMA 2013, 45–46).
  152. Interview, Hamdullah Danishi, deputy governor, Kunduz, January 11, 2012.
  153. Interview, provincial ALP commander, Kunduz, June 10, 2012.
  154. According to one police informant, some 120 ALP members are in Gore Tapa and the Telawka area of central Kunduz, divided into nine to twelve men units under a commander. The overall commander of ALP forces in central Kunduz is Hafiz Chirik, a former communist regime militia commander who joined Jamiat in 1992. Like other arbaki commanders, he fought against Taliban insurgents after being armed by NDS in 2009. He reportedly has strong links to Mir Alam. When U.S. special operations forces began implementing the ALP in Kunduz, his militias were incorporated into the force in central Kunduz.
  155. Interview, ANP officer responsible for ALP logistics in central Kunduz, June 14, 2012.
  156. Interview, Ala Nazar, ALP commander in Alchin, central Kunduz, Kunduz, June 14, 2012. Ala Nazar stated in an interview that his force is entirely Uzbek because he trusts only his family members and associates. He says he invited some Pashtuns to join his unit, but they refused because most of them have sympathy for the Taliban and would rather fight infidels than be in their service. His Uzbek unit operates in a village of a thousand families of which about a hundred are rich landed Pashtuns. The relative size of Uzbeks and their dominance of the ALP could explain why the relatively small number of local Pashtuns prefers to align with the Taliban, in that they may perceive the Uzbek ALP with suspicion and seek protection in Taliban



ranks. Most Uzbeks in the village, like Ala Nazar, were landless farmers. In their new role as ALP members, however, they were ruling over their former overlords.

157. Interview, Wazhma Frogh, women's rights activist, Kabul, November 8, 2012.
158. A traditional practice involving the exchange of money or young women to settle a dispute. Under the 2009 Elimination of Violence Against Women law, the practice of *baad* is illegal.
159. Under the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program, the government established a provincial peace council to facilitate the reintegration of insurgents.
160. Interview, Wazhma Frogh, November 8, 2012.
161. Interview, senior provincial council member, Kunduz, January 10, 2012.
162. This of course has a long provenance. Similar efforts can be found in the late colonial wars of the 1950s and 1960s: "With statistical inquiries into development efforts, mathematical calculations of enemy troop numbers, and multicolour diagrams, the leadership of colonial armies tried—above all when compelled to justify their exploding budgets—to persuasively 'prove' their progress, which naturally become apparent over longer time spans" (Feichtinger, Malinowski, and Richards 2012, 44).
163. As a deputy ISAF commander noted at the end of his tour of duty, it was necessary to "leave Afghanistan to the Afghans" (Rodriguez 2011, 45).
164. Even as late as 2011, the military was still talking about "turning the corner": "The summer of 2012 will see us move into the build-and-transition phase, when we should see significant gains in Afghan governance and the capabilities of the Afghan National Security Forces" (Bolduc 2011, 24). Clearly, the summer of 2012 did not see significant gains in Afghan governance.
165. For example, Jim Gant, in "One Tribe at a Time," recounts in glowing terms the Tribal Engagement Strategy. Unwittingly, however, his account also exposes the deficiencies of COIN strategy. For example, he explains how forging strong contacts with a particular community had yielded important intelligence, but at the same time, this close relationship had made the tribe a target for Hizb-e-Islami attacks. Gant's response had been to "give them as many weapons and as much ammo as I could get my hands on"—in other words the COIN strategy endangered the villagers and prompted a spiral of rearmament (2009, 22). Gant's account also shows how U.S. forces were drawn into local disputes, including a conflict over land between highland and lowland Pashtuns. This is one of the impacts of becoming "American tribesmen," or "bonding with the village, one tribe to another" (2009, 18). That McChrystal and Petraeus were impressed by and widely circulated this piece tells us something about how little the U.S. military have succeeded in breaking down the "mud curtain" to understand local politics and culture—in spite of the investment in infrastructure and analysis to extract data from the village level—including Human Terrain Teams, village stability coordination centers, district augmentation teams, and key leader engagements—to make Afghan society more legible and therefore governable.
166. "Without imposing a democratic government, we bring democratic principles that appeal to Afghan culture in the rural areas. The principles reflect traditional Afghan and Islamic values associated with the prosperity for their families" (Bolduc 2011, 27). In a similar vein, Gant argues that "tribes by nature are conservative. They hate change and don't change" (2009, 14); "the tribesmen is less concerned about 'country'—which for him is almost irrelevant—"and more concerned about protecting the domain of his family, his customs, his tribal leadership, his warrior pride" (Grant 2009, 23).
167. The exception is Hazaras in Jalrez district, where a clear incentive existed to arm against the marauding Kuchi (nomad) Pashtun seasonal migrants.
168. This phenomenon can be observed in Nerkh district, where villages remain divided between Hizb-e-Islami and Taliban, with frequent armed clashes between them. Joining a government-backed militia would simply inflame local power relations, which some Pashtuns have resisted, which explains why so few Pashtuns came forward to join the AP3 and ALP.
169. "In both Afghanistan and Iraq, regime protection, counterinsurgency, and counter terrorism are taking precedence over protection of the public" (Rosenau 2008, 12).
170. Although in another report it was stated that U.S. troop casualties hit a four-year low of only one casualty in the previous month, 1,100 Afghan troops were killed over the previous six months, an average of more than 180 a month. About 460 of those killed were national army soldiers, the rest primarily police forces (Arian 2013).
171. Interview, ISAF officials, Kabul, November 2012.
172. For example, seventeen Taliban commanders and dozens of fighters were killed between December 2009 and October 2010 in Kunduz province. Under McChrystal and later Petraeus, ISAF's kill-capture operations soared dramatically: from one hundred to five hundred a month in 2009 and to a thousand a month in June 2010. According to the ISAF, 365 insurgent leaders were killed between May and August 2010 (Giustozzi and Reuter 2011). In terms of security trends, the ANSO data from 2009 and 2010 in Wardak shows that insurgent attacks increased during this period but declined by 35 percent by the end of 2012. According to an interview in Kabul with a security analyst in November 2012, despite the decline in overall attacks, 90 percent of all insurgent attacks in Wardak were concentrated in Sayedabad on the

- Kabul-Kandahar highway. Insurgent attacks nationwide declined by more than a quarter in 2012, partly indicating the success of U.S. special operations forces against Taliban commanders.
173. Telephone interview with Colonel Donald Bolduc, deputy commander of NATO Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan, London, November 15, 2012.
174. Bolduc was one of the founders of the ALP: “We have been directed to operate in key rural areas, secure them, hold them, expand VSO and develop the ALP to facilitate the hold phase of the strategy so that we may progress into the build phase” (Bolduc 2011, 26).
175. Promoted to the rank of general in 2011, Abdul Raziq is the provincial police chief in Kandahar.

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Much international effort and funding have focused on building up and bureaucratizing the means of violence in Afghanistan. At the same time, a parallel set of government and NATO experiments have been undertaken in arming local defense forces under the Afghan Local Police (ALP) program to fight the insurgency and provide security at the local level. This report focuses on the role and impact of the ALP on security and political dynamics in the context of ongoing counterinsurgency and stabilization operations and the projected drawdown of international troops. Detailed case studies show the mixed and often perverse effects of the ALP program. In view of these findings, it is recommended that the program should not be expanded any further, that there be stronger state oversight and support, and that medium- to long-term plans should be developed to facilitate the ALP's absorption into the Afghan National Police.

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