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Carl Forsberg

AFGHANISTAN REPORT 7

COUNTERINSURGENCY IN KANDAHAR

EVALUATING THE 2010 HAMKARI CAMPAIGN

INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY of WAR

Military Analysis and Education for Civilian Leaders

Cover Photograph: Canadian soldiers of the 1st Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment, along with Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police, took part in a partnered dismounted patrol around the Panjwai'i District in Kandahar province, Oct. 7, 2010.

Photo Credit: Sgt. Richard Andrade, 16th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

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ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) is a non-partisan, non-profit, public policy research organization. ISW advances an informed understanding of military affairs through reliable research, trusted analysis, and innovative education. We are committed to improving the nation's ability to execute military operations and respond to emerging threats in order to achieve U.S. strategic objectives.

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KEY FINDINGS

- This paper describes the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) and Afghan counteroffensive in Kandahar province during the summer and fall of 2010. This counteroffensive was part of the broader Hamkari process, the term given to the combined civil-military campaign to weaken the insurgency by securing Kandahar and improving governance and development.

- Coalition military operations in the fall of 2010 resulted in a shift in battlefield momentum in Kandahar in favor of Afghan and ISAF forces.

- Kandahar is strategic terrain because it is the heart of the Pashtun south, the birthplace of the Taliban movement, the former *de facto* capital of the Taliban government, and the home of President Karzai. Contesting Kandahar is important for Taliban's attempts to appear a viable rival to the Afghan government.

- Three important districts surround Kandahar city to its north and west: Arghandab, Zhari, and Panjwai. These districts are key terrain for the Taliban.

  - Taliban control of these districts enabled the insurgency to operate effective attack networks, limit ISAF freedom of movement, and successfully control or influence the population.

- Insufficient troop strength from 2005 to 2009 limited ISAF's ability to target and destroy these enemy strongholds.

- In 2010, ISAF assigned a portion of the surge forces committed to Afghanistan in December 2009 to Kandahar and transferred several U.S. Army battalions to Kandahar from elsewhere in Afghanistan, enabling ISAF to conduct effective clearing operations.

- ISAF conducted extensive shaping operation in Kandahar prior to launching clearing operations. Special Forces raids in particular had an impact on the Taliban's command and control.

- Phase One of Hamkari involved military operations to increase security in Kandahar City. These included the construction of a ring of security checkpoints along major roads entering and leaving the city.

- Phase Two of Hamkari focused on clearing Arghandab district. Arghandab is key terrain for the enemy because of its location as the gateway into Kandahar City and because of thick vegetation and tree cover, and has been a center for IED production.

  - Afghan and ISAF operations in Arghandab began on July 25, 2010 and targeted the Taliban's strongholds in west-central Arghandab, near the towns of Khosrawe and Charqolba.

  - Coalition forces breached Taliban defensive positions and IED belts and cleared insurgent positions in west-central Arghandab at the beginning of October 2010. After the October assault the remaining Taliban forces withdrew from Arghandab.

- Coalition forces launched Operation Dragon Strike in September 2010 to dismantle the enemy system in Zhari. The operation seized enemy strongholds and weapons and supplies stockpiles.

  - By mid-October, U.S. and Afghan forces had taken key Taliban positions and movement corridors in eastern and central Zhari, neutralizing the enemy system and forcing insurgents to withdraw.

  - Coalition operations in Zhari also neutralized the enemy attack network along Highway One. In the first 28 days of October 2010 there were no kinetic incidents on the stretch of highway passing through Zhari, a change from early September when the Taliban were conducting five or more attacks a day.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The last phase of Hamkari seized the towns of Zangabad, Mushan, and Talukan in Panjwai district during October and November 2010. These towns were the final insurgent strongholds in central Kandahar, and served as command and control nodes and the hub of the Taliban's court system for Zhari and Panjwai.

- In Arghandab and eastern and central Zhari, Taliban control of the population began to decline shortly after the conclusion of ISAF clearing operations.

- Many of the fighters in Arghandab, Zhari, and Panjwai laid down their arms when it became clear the Taliban could not resist ISAF assaults. Some joined ISAF cash-for-work programs, which grew from several dozen workers to between 4,000 and 6,000 Afghans a day in Zhari.

- After Hamkari, the Taliban will likely attempt a counter-offensive in the spring of 2011, but will suffer from the destruction of infrastructure, defensive positions and IED factories, and loss of supply stockpiles.

    - As clearing operations concluded, ISAF built tactical infrastructure to control former lines of communication and secure the local population.

    - To counter insurgent re-infiltration, ISAF commanders in Arghandab and Zhari plan to build local community watch programs and Afghan Local Police (ALP) forces.

- In support of operations in Arghandab, Zhari, and Panjwai, ISAF and Afghan forces have conducted disruption operations and raids in Taliban support zones in outer Kandahar, including in Shah Wali Kot, Maiwand, and Spin Boldak districts and the Reg Desert.

    - If ISAF can disrupt enemy activity in these areas, it may further complicate the Taliban's attempts to regroup and to re-infiltrate key terrain around Kandahar City.

- Hamkari has involved the largest deployment of Afghan Security Forces in the current conflict. ANA effectiveness in Hamkari varied significantly based on unit experience.

- The Hamkari process is backed by a civil-military governance strategy supported by a civilian surge. This strategy focuses on building the capacity of the Afghan government and on delivery of development assistance.

- Restoring the Afghan government's legitimacy is ultimately an issue of altering public perception, and progress made in building government capacity will achieve little if overshadowed by perceptions of corruption and factional control over the Kandahar government.

    - Kandahar Governor Toryalai Wesa's outsider status and the public perception that he is weak and dependent limit his effectiveness as the coalition's chief governance partner.

    - Several powerbrokers seen as symbols of predatory and exclusive governance have become associated with the Hamkari operations. Chief among these is border police commander Abdul Raziq.

- The contracting economy in Kandahar undermines the Afghan government and creates perverse incentive structures that fuel instability.

MAP 1 | AFGHANISTAN POLITICAL MAP

COUNTERINSURGENCY IN KANDAHAR

EVALUATING THE 2010 HAMKARI CAMPAIGN

By Carl Forsberg

INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 2010, the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) launched Hamkari, a comprehensive military and political effort to secure Kandahar Province.[1] Hamkari, or "Cooperation" in Pashto and Dari, involved both a series of aggressive military operations to deny the Taliban control of key terrain around the city and a civil-military effort to improve governance and development.

Control of Kandahar is critical to the legitimacy of both the Taliban movement and the Karzai government. Kandahar is the political keystone of the Afghan South. It is the home of President Karzai, the birthplace of the Taliban movement, the former de facto capital of the Taliban government, and since 2002, the chief objective of the Taliban insurgency. Despite Kandahar's military and political importance, ISAF failed to prioritize the province from 2005 to 2009, allowing much of the population to fall under the Taliban's control or influence. After General Stanley McChrystal took command of ISAF in 2009, the coalition reoriented its focus, and Kandahar and neighboring Helmand were identified as the operational main effort in the ISAF Joint Command's campaign plan.

Hamkari marks a critical shift in battlefield momentum in Kandahar. The Taliban had long used safe-havens and strongholds in key terrain outside of Kandahar City to enable its fighters and Improvised Explosive Device (IED) and intimidation cells to successfully control or influence the population of Kandahar and to attack ISAF and limit its freedom of movement.

Beginning in late July 2010, a series of sequential mutually reinforcing operations enabled by a surge of U.S. forces cleared and took key terrain that the insurgents had long used to sustain their operations across Kandahar province and destroyed critical enemy infrastructure. ISAF has committed forces to holding the terrain it has seized and has implemented programs to win the support of the local population and prevent Taliban re-infiltration.

As of November 2010, Afghan and ISAF forces had neutralized the Taliban's ability to conduct operations and control the population in central Kandahar province. The Taliban will likely reconstitute in other provinces and in Pakistan and mount a counter-offensive in the spring of 2011. The success of coalition forces will depend on their ability to prevent insurgent re-infiltration, break the Taliban's control and influence over the population, and address the fundamental drivers of instability in the province.[2] If the coalition can prevent the Taliban from seriously contesting Kandahar in 2011, it will likely damage the insurgents' credibility as a rival to the Afghan government.

The Hamkari process is backed by a civilian strategy with increased resources to address governance and development challenges. The international coalition's governance efforts have focused on building the Afghan government's administrative and service delivery capacity. It is unclear, however, it this approach is sufficient for rehabilitating the Afghan government's legitimacy. Predatory and corrupt government and a culture of impunity are more fundamental causes of the government's loss of legitimacy in Kandahar than are its failure to provide services or fill manning rosters. To turn operational progress into strategic success, the Afghan government

MAP 2 | KANDAHAR PROVINCE

and international coalition must ensure that they identify and addresses the underlying issues that have undermined Kandahar's long-term stability.

This paper begins by summarizing the terrain and enemy system in Kandahar and briefly profiles the Taliban's summer 2010 campaign. It then narrates the progress of coalition military operations in Arghandab, Zhari, and Panjwai districts. The third section considers the Taliban's reaction to the loss of safe-havens in central Kandahar and examines the role Kandahar's outlying districts may play in the future. The report concludes by outlining and evaluating the coalition's governance strategy and analyzing Hamkari in its broader political context.

TERRAIN AND ENEMY SYSTEM

The Taliban in Kandahar have configured their activities according to the human and physical geography of the province. The majority of the population lives in central Kandahar, either in Kandahar City (the population of which is estimated at between 500,000 and 1,000,000) or in Arghandab, Zhari and Panjwai, the densely cultivated districts that lie along the Arghandab River.[3] Kandahar City itself has seen significant growth in the past five years, as displaced persons moved to the city to escape conflict in outlying districts.[4]

Zhari, Arghandab, and Panjwai form the agricultural basin that sustains Kandahar City. A belt of land in these districts, extending several miles north and south of the Arghandab River, has been intensely cultivated for centuries and is famous for its almonds, grapes, pomegranates, and more recently, poppy. These districts have also served as key terrain for insurgents, who have taken advantage of the cover provided by the canals that criss-cross the districts, small villages with fortified compounds, thick orchards, and fields of four-foot high mounds of earth used to grow grapes.[5] During the anti-Soviet Jihad in the 1980s, the *mujahideen* used Zhari, Panjwai, and Arghandab as bases from which they would infiltrate Kandahar City and launch attacks on the strategically important Highway One in Zhari. In recent years the Taliban have used these districts for similar purposes.[6]

Many of the Taliban's senior leaders come from Zhari and Panjwai, and insurgents there benefit from tribal and family ties. These districts are populated by pockets of different tribes, including some – the Eshaqzai and Noorzai tribes of the Durrani confederation and smaller pockets of non-Durrani tribes – which are more connected to the Taliban than to the Afghan government.[7] The tribes in which a higher proportion of members benefit from Kandahar's post-Taliban political economy - including the Barakzai and Popalzai - are less common in Zhari and Panjwai, and more likely to be found in Kandahar City or Dand and Daman districts.[8] Arghandab district has historically been the preserve of the Alokozai tribe, which saw its stake in the Kandahar government gradually decrease since 2002, but there are also pockets of Sayeeds, Kakar, and Ghilzai. These tribes are more receptive to the Taliban and helped the insurgents establish a foothold in the district.[9] (For a fuller description of Kandahar's tribal makeup, see "Power and Politics in Kandahar," pgs 11-17).

To the north of Kandahar are the southern foothills of the Hindu Kush. The valleys and basins of Shah Wali Kot, Mian Neshin, Khakrez, and Ghorak districts are interspersed with small villages and a patchwork of tribes, including Popalzai, Alizai, and Alokozai, along with pockets of Ghilzai and Ishaqzai.[10] The Taliban have long controlled and had freedom of movement across these northern districts.[11]

To the east of Kandahar City are Daman, Arghistan, and Spin Boldak districts, where the landscape is flatter and marked by scrub and intermittent cultivation. While the Taliban have a presence in these areas, the terrain has made them less permissive for insurgent operations, and the government has more connections to the Popalzai, Barakzai, and Achekzai tribes in these districts.[12] The southern half of the province is occupied by the immense Registan Desert. The desert is traversable and has long been used by

smugglers and, during the anti-Soviet Jihad and the past decade, for insurgents moving from safe-havens in Pakistan.[13]

From 2003 to 2009, the Taliban conducted a series of offensives to take terrain around Kandahar City. Control of this terrain has enabled the Taliban to influence the population and to attack coalition forces.[14] ISAF operations in 2010 revealed that the Taliban built a sophisticated physical and human infrastructure of IED factories, weapons and supply caches, and defensive positions in areas under their control. These facilitation networks supported and sustained Taliban operations across the province.

As early as 2003, Taliban fighters moved into Zabul province and the hills of Shah Wali Kot district north of Kandahar City.[15] The insurgents made important gains in 2005 and 2006, when, in addition to seizing much of neighboring Helmand province, the Taliban moved into Zhari and Panjwai districts.[16] These districts have since served as key terrain for the insurgency, which used the districts as bases from which to organize and conduct attacks close to Kandahar City.[17]

From 2006 to 2009, ISAF was never able to dislodge or seriously threaten the Taliban's safe-haven in Zhari and Panjwai. A number of military operations, rarely with more than a battalion's worth of troops, took specific objectives in these districts and sometimes briefly held them.[18] Yet the Taliban continued to hold the majority of the "green zone," an area of thick vegetation, orchards, vineyards and clusters of villages extending several miles north and south of the Arghandab River. The enemy used this terrain to conduct a devastating IED campaign against coalition forces, which made it difficult for ISAF to establish a more permanent presence.[19]

From 2007 to early 2009, the Taliban used their bases in Zhari and Panjwai to extend their influence into several key areas which controlled movement into and out of Kandahar City. In 2008, the Taliban took Arghandab district.[20] Situated along the Arghandab River to the north of Kandahar City, Arghandab is critical terrain. The canals, vegetation, and orchards are even more difficult to traverse than in Zhari or Panjwai, and the district directly borders Kandahar City. The Taliban subordinated the majority Alokozai tribe in Arghandab following an intense intimidation campaign that capitalized on the death of the tribal leader and famous mujahideen fighter Mullah Naqib.[21] Control over parts of Arghandab was achieved by the end of 2008 and gave the Taliban safe-havens that controlled the northern approach to the city.[22]

In Zhari, the Taliban extended their control to include the town of Senjaray, a key town the straddles the strategically important Highway One.[23] To the south of Kandahar City, the insurgents expanded into Dand district and the southern suburbs of Kandahar City.[24] ISAF relied on a small and overtaxed Afghan forces, a battalion of Canadian troops, and Special Forces support to defend these critical districts until the second half of 2009, and was unable to contest the Taliban's advance.[25]

The Taliban's capture of key terrain around Kandahar City allowed the insurgents to influence and intimidate the population of the city itself. Sanctuaries in Zhari, Panjwai, and Arghandab supported bomb-making and IED factories, allowed the basing of insurgent fighters and the organization of complex attacks, and were used for shadow courts to which the Taliban would summon Kandahar City residents.[26] Within the city, the Taliban conducted dramatic attacks on Afghan government targets and undertook an assassination and intimidation campaign to dissuade the population of Kandahar City from supporting or assisting the Afghan government.[27]

By the summer of 2009, the enemy system in Kandahar was thus deeply entrenched. It was resilient enough to withstand ISAF and coalition counter-terrorism operations designed to capture and kill its leadership. ISAF disruption operations similarly were unable to have serious or lasting effects on the enemy system, as the coalition could rarely hold ground and often avoided the areas of greatest importance to the Taliban. ISAF was also diverted from key enemy strongholds by the need to focus on

force protection and secure its own lines of communication (LOCs) against IED attacks.

Disruption operations continued to characterize ISAF's activity into early 2010. The 5th Stryker Brigade Combat Team (BCT) provided the first significant reinforcements for ISAF's presence in Kandahar when it deployed in August 2009; however, its efforts were not linked to a broader plan to dismantle the enemy system in Kandahar.[28] The 5th Stryker BCT devoted much of its efforts to disruption operations, route security, and civil affairs, missions that would help support the surge of U.S. forces into Kandahar in mid-2010, but which did not represent a fundamental departure from ISAF's previous strategy.[29]

Only in Dand did a shift in approach occur by mid-2009. Enabled to consolidate their forces by U.S. reinforcements, Canadian forces adopted a population-centric approach designed to secure and hold operationally important villages in Dand. The effort improved security in the district and thwarted Taliban attempts to make inroads in Dand. The Canadians were aided by local Popalzai and Barakzai leadership, which had closer ties to the ruling elite in Kandahar City and was emboldened to resist the Taliban by the Canadian presence.[30]

Enabled by a surge in U.S. force levels, Hamkari represents a fundamental and consistent shift in the ISAF approach to Kandahar, as ISAF has both directly targeted Taliban sanctuaries in the districts which gave sustenance to their network and prepared itself to hold the ground it seizes.

THE LEAD-UP TO HAMKARI: DEPLOYMENT, SHAPING OPERATIONS, AND THE TALIBAN'S SUMMER 2010 OFFENSIVE

In December 2009, U.S. President Barack Obama committed 30,000 additional U.S. troops to Afghanistan. ISAF committed a portion of the new forces to Kandahar, including the 2nd BCT of the 101st Airborne Division, the 525 Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, and a military police (MP) battalion. ISAF also transferred several U.S. army battalions to Kandahar from elsewhere in Afghanistan.[31] Regional Command (RC) South, a divisional headquarters under the command of British Major General Nick Carter, took primary responsibility for planning how the additional troops were used.

In April 2010, ISAF emphasized that Hamkari would be a comprehensive civil-military process to improve governance and increase security rather than only a military operation.[32] In early June 2010, ISAF commander General Stanley McChrystal announced that security operations in Kandahar City would unfold more slowly than initially expected.[33] General McChrystal stated that additional Afghan forces had not yet deployed to Kandahar, and that more time was required for political engagement, so that conditions could be "shaped politically with the local leaders, with the people."[34] The delay was driven partly by the deployment timelines for the additional U.S. and Afghan troops sent to Kandahar. Building the infrastructure to base and supply thousands of new American troops, as well as an unprecedented surge in Afghan National Army (ANA) forces to Kandahar Province, posed a significant logistics challenge and appears to have taken longer than expected.[35] The last of the new U.S. combat battalions assigned to Zhari finally moved into position with its partnered Afghan units in late August 2010, and major operations commenced shortly thereafter.[36]

The media attention given to the then upcoming operation in Kandahar throughout the spring of 2010 created a disconnect between public expectations and the actual timeline followed by the operation. Afghan and Western media outlets drew significant attention to pending operation in Kandahar in March and April 2010, after ISAF conducted clearing operations in Marjah.[37] When operations did not commence in June 2010, as had been widely expected, it prompted significant speculation, and some commentators questioned whether operations in Kandahar would materialize at all.[38]

Enemy Situation: The Taliban's Summer 2010 Campaign

While ISAF was preparing for Hamkari, the Taliban launched a violent summer campaign in Kandahar. The Taliban took seriously ISAF's announcement of an impending operation and devoted resources to maintaining their influence. In the spring and summer of 2010, the Taliban surged fighters into the province and attempted their own offensive. Insurgent attacks over the summer of 2010 reached an intensity unmatched in previous years.[39] This Taliban surge failed to have a marked effect on ISAF operations, though its effects on the Afghan population are harder to judge.

Propaganda by the Taliban's Pakistan-based leadership in 2010 demonstrates the priority the insurgents placed on countering the pending ISAF campaign. Throughout the summer and fall, Taliban propaganda claimed that the insurgents were "dominant in Helmand and Kandahar Provinces as they have always been," and boasted that they would maintain control over Kandahar City and the surrounding countryside.[40] Taliban rhetoric and operations suggest that the insurgents believed needed to demonstrate a continued capacity to conduct operations in order to retain influence over the population.

The Taliban's summer campaign had two elements. The first was escalated direct fire assaults on U.S. forces, combined with IED attacks, both designed to defend Taliban freedom of movement and to place ISAF on the defensive and prevent the coalition from attacking insurgent safe-havens and facilitation zones. The second was an intense intimidation campaign to maintain control over the population.

Taliban attacks on coalition forces were greatest in Zhari, Panjwai, and Arghandab districts. The particular dynamics of these districts are described in greater detail in subsequent sections, but there were some common elements to Taliban operations in central Kandahar. The Taliban attempted to use escalated small arms and mortar attacks in conjunction with sophisticated IED belts to pin ISAF in a defensive posture and to limit the coalition's freedom of movement.[41] By placing ISAF on the defensive, the Taliban could defend the key LOCs, IED making facilities, and fortified strongholds which the insurgents used to support their attacks across the province. Until 2010, these insurgent tactics were effective, causing ISAF to focus on securing its own LOCs and on force protection. Not until late August 2010 were coalition forces able to target and destroy key nodes in the enemy system.[42]

Perhaps the more important element of the Taliban's summer 2010 campaign was their effort to control the Afghan population in and around Kandahar City, in order to entrench their psychological influence in advance of coalition operations. The Taliban stepped up their assassination and intimidation campaigns around Kandahar City. Assassinations had long been a key element of the Taliban's campaign, but they reached their highest levels in August 2010.[43] A Kandahar media outlet counted 397 assassinations between mid-June and the beginning of September.[44] The Taliban may have begun prioritizing quantity of attacks, rather than aiming for the more precise selection of political targets which was a hallmark of their campaign from 2007-2009. According to the Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS), the Taliban hit list has expanded to include over 600 names in Kandahar alone.[45] While hit-and-run assassinations are preferred in Kandahar City, in Zhari district the Taliban had sufficient control to stage raids against family compounds. They have also murdered elders for missing meetings called by the insurgents or for speaking with the provincial government over development and irrigation projects.[46] In Arghandab, a Taliban suicide bomber attacked a wedding celebration attended by commanders of the Special Forces backed Afghan Local Police (ALP) program in June 2010. The blast, which left thirty-nine dead, was likely intended to convince locals not to support the program.[47] In Panjwai, the Taliban ordered a large number of local elders and others thought sympathetic to the coalition to leave the district or to appear before the Taliban court in

Zangabad.[48] The Taliban may have hoped that the specter of retaliation for cooperation with the government would persist despite battlefield setbacks. [49]

The Taliban's decision to devote significant resources to Kandahar following the announcement of pending ISAF operations suggests they viewed the fight for Kandahar in 2010 as a decisive engagement, and that the insurgents placed high priority in defending their strongholds and psychological control over the population.

It is difficult to ascertain Taliban force levels in Kandahar on the eve of Hamkari in the open source. Multiple reports point to a surge of foreign fighters during the summer. Villagers in Zhari reported a surge of foreign fighters into the district from Helmand and from areas of Pakistan, including Swat and Waziristan, and Afghan government officials pointed to a similar surge of foreign fighters in Panjwai.[50] ISAF estimated that in August some 800 fighters were based in Zhari and Panjwai, with another 150 to 200 in Arghandab. These numbers would be comparable to Taliban force levels in Kandahar in 2006.[51] But other estimates suggest higher numbers. The Afghanistan NGO Safety Office, for example, put the number of Taliban fighters in Kandahar at 4,000.[52] Taliban force levels are generally fluid, as the insurgents are able to surge fighters in and out of areas over several day periods, sometimes through local call-ups and recruitment of sympathetic young men on a temporary basis.[53]

Notably, the Taliban were not able to pull off the types of complex spectacular attacks over the summer of 2010 that they had conducted in previous years. These attacks, which often combined vehicle borne IEDs, suicide bombers, and small arms assaults designed for their psychological impact, occurred almost monthly during the fighting season in 2008 and 2009, and included incidents like the disastrous 2008 Sarapoza Prison break, during which 1,100 inmates, including 400 Taliban prisoners, escaped from Kandahar's main prison.[54] In 2010, the most complex attack conducted by the Taliban involved blowing up a wall of a Kandahar City security sub-station before launching a half-hour small arms assault on the post.[55] Taliban fighters attempted a coordinated assault on Kandahar Airfield with rocket attacks, direct fire, and suicide bombers in August 2010, but the attackers failed to get near the base or inflict casualties before being killed.[56]

The Taliban's limited ability to conduct spectacular attacks may be due to two factors. First, even before the beginning of Hamkari, ISAF force presence was increased along the main transit routes from Kandahar City into Taliban strongholds like Zhari and Panjwai. Elements of the Stryker Brigade were given a road security mission and ISAF increased its troop density at transit points like Senjaray and in Dand district. Individual Taliban fighters were free to move throughout the province, but the movement of large amounts of supplies, including ammonium nitrate, the Taliban's preferred bomb-making component, may have been impaired.

Shaping Operations: Kill or Capture Missions

The second factor may have been an uptick in targeted raids to kill or capture Taliban leadership and facilitators, which likely had an impact on the Taliban's capacity for operational planning and command and control. Even as they were launching a more kinetic offensive on the ground, the Taliban began to suffer unprecedented leadership losses during the summer. A number of high-level Taliban commanders were killed in June 2010. ISAF killed Taliban commander Hajji Amir, reported as both the Dand district commander and as one of the Taliban's top two leaders in Kandahar, on May 30, 2010, in the town of Zangabad in Panjwai.[57] Amir had rejoined the insurgency after escaping from Sarpoza prison in 2008.[58] Several days later the coalition killed Mullah Zergay, the top Taliban commander for the Kandahar City area, in Zhari.[59] Izzatullah, the Taliban commander for Panjwai and one of the orchestrators of the 2008 Sarapoza prison break, was killed in late

June.[60] ISAF and coalition Special Forces have maintained an aggressive operating tempo in subsequent months. In September, for example, twenty-one Taliban leaders were captured in Kandahar.[61]

Even before the coalition's summer campaign, reports suggested that the Taliban's senior Pakistan-based shuras were losing command and control over fighters in areas of the south.[62] Significant leadership losses may exacerbate these challenges, and make it difficult for the Taliban's Quetta Shura to direct a coherent campaign to reassert their influence in Kandahar in 2011.

MILITARY OPERATIONS IN CENTRAL KANDAHAR

The military element of Hamkari has progressed in three stages, starting in June 2010. Phase I was designed to increase security in the city itself, and included the construction of a ring of security posts around Kandahar City. Phase II, which began in late July, involved clearing and holding operations in Arghandab district. Phase III involved clearing operations in Zhari and Panjwai districts, which began in September and October 2010, respectively.[63]

Hamkari Phase I: Securing Kandahar City

Hamkari's phased military operations began with efforts to increase security in Kandahar City. These included the construction of a ring of security checkpoints along major roads entering and leaving the city. Sixteen checkpoints were finished by early July, and more built in subsequent months.[64] Police sub-stations at each of the checkpoints host a squad of U.S. Military Police with a partnered Afghan force, either from the Afghan National Police (ANP) or the paramilitary Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP).[65] Assigning a partnered U.S. force to provide full-time mentorship is a new tactic in Kandahar City, as previous mentoring teams only trained with, and did not live with, their mentees.[66] Full time mentoring is the most proven means of increasing police professionalism and preventing predatory behavior against the population.[67] The security checkpoints received mixed reviews when built: Afghans have generally grumbled about the interruption caused to traffic flows, but some also commented that they created an increased feeling of security.[68] U.S. commanders point out that the checkpoints have led to several detentions and seizures, including those of large explosives shipments.[69] Other measures taken to increase security in Kandahar City include a drive to encourage city residents to apply for ID cards and biometric registration of Kandaharis, with the objective of building a large database to allow troops at checkpoints to identify potential insurgents.[70] Biometric registrations were suspended by President Karzai in August, who claimed they violated Afghan sovereignty. As of November 2010 they do not appear to have resumed.[71] ISAF has also fortified government buildings in the city with blast walls and studied methods of protecting government workers, though it is unclear if measures have been taken to achieve this goal.[72]

By November 2010, ISAF officials recognized that the Kandahar security ring was not having a significant impact on Taliban movement in and out of the city. Security checkpoints have been used as bases for localized security patrols, but ISAF has yet to attempt to control territory inside the city.[73] This leaves responsibility for security inside Kandahar City to the NDS and to networks affiliated with Ahmed Wali Karzai and other powerbrokers, as well as to coalition Special Forces. U.S. Special Forces increased their activity in the city and conducted raids to target insurgent leadership almost nightly during the fall of 2010.[74] It may be ISAF's intention to leave Kandahar City primarily to counter-terrorism assets, as the population in the city is often perceived to be deeply hostile to any ISAF presence.[75] Kandahar City Chief of Police Fazl Sherzad claimed in late September that Taliban fighters and operatives in Kandahar City were being pressured to flee the city into surrounding districts, but it is hard to otherwise confirm this in the open source.[76] But as ISAF forces increased pressure on the Taliban and cleared major safe-

havens in October, some insurgents fled into Kandahar City and attempted to demonstrate their continued influence. Taliban activity in Kandahar City in October and November 2010 is discussed on pages 33-36.

The Battle for Arghandab: Problem Set, Enemy System, and Lead-up to Operations

Phase II of Hamkari focused on clearing Arghandab district.[77] Arghandab directly abuts Kandahar City and connects several key Taliban-controlled areas to the city's north and west. It is key terrain for the enemy and has been a center for IED production because of its location as the gateway into Kandahar City and because the terrain makes it a natural insurgent stronghold. Arghandab was slowly infiltrated by the Taliban from 2007 to 2009, and the dominant Alokozai tribe was undermined through an effective intimidation campaign.[78]

U.S. operations in the summer and fall of 2010 revealed the importance of the enemy system in Arghandab. The Taliban's sanctuary in the district was in an approximately six square mile pocket on the west bank of the Arghandab River, centered around the towns of Khusrawe Ulya and Khusrawe Sufla, and Charqolba Ulya and Charqolba Sufla.[79] When ISAF forces targeted these villages in force in the fall of 2010, they discovered a massive concentration of IED and homemade explosives (HME) production facilities.[80] The scale of the facilities led ISAF to conclude that the area served as a hub that supported Taliban operations across Arghandab and in Kandahar City, and exported explosives and IEDs throughout the province.[81]

Several factors make the area around Charqolba and Khosrawe an ideal insurgent safe-haven. It is marked by a series of canals that run parallel to the Arghandab River and by thick orchards that hinder ISAF movement and conceal insurgent activity. The town of Charqolba Ulya had been the stronghold of the famous mujahideen commander and Alokozai leader Mullah Naqib, and during the anti-Soviet resistance Naqib had beaten back multiple Soviet assaults from the town.[82] It had remained his armory until his death in 2007.[83] The Taliban took control of the area in 2008, and used the old bunkers and tunnel systems as a key stronghold, even setting up underground medical facilities.[84] This area also sat astride two major roads connecting to Taliban strongholds in northern Kandahar, one leading into Arghandab from Khakrez district, and the other running through the area from Shah Wali Kot into Kandahar City.[85] The area around Charqolba and Khosraw was also advantageous for the Taliban because, unlike the rest of Arghandab, it was populated by non-Alkozai tribes, including Sayeds, Kakars, Sadeno, Hotak, and other Ghilzai groups.[86] A number of these groups, especially the Sayeds, resented the Alokozai's historic control of Arghandab and aided and abetted the Taliban, who ran a campaign to suppress and intimidate Alokozai leadership.[87]

The east bank of the Arghandab River was less hospitable to the Taliban but still permissive to Taliban IED cells.[88] The southwest corner of the district, in the area around Nagahan village, has been the most secure, in part because Alokozai tribal leadership in the area maintained some organization and close links to the local police force, which sometimes helped resist Taliban encroachment.[89] The northern areas of Arghandab, where the terrain is hillier, were used by the Taliban for lines of communication into the district.[90]

In the nine months prior to Hamkari, ISAF encountered difficulties in securing Arghandab. These stemmed from an insufficient concentration of troops and from not targeting or holding the key nodes in the enemy system. ISAF first committed significant troops to Arghandab when the 1-17 Stryker Infantry was assigned to the district in September 2009.[91] The 1-17 Stryker found itself in an unexpectedly difficult fight and took high casualties as it encountered multiple enemy IED belts. The unit was ultimately spread too thin to disrupt Taliban IED cells in the district.[92]

The Taliban reduced their activity in Arghandab

during the winter lull from November 2009 to March 2010.[93] The scale of the Taliban's entrenchment in the summer of 2010 suggests the enemy continued to maintain positions and infrastructure throughout the winter, but were less willing to attack the coalition. A winter lull has long been a feature of the Taliban's battle rhythm. In Arghandab, a lack of thick foliage cover during the winter makes it difficult for insurgents to conceal their movement and makes attacks more dangerous.[94]

Responsibility for Arghandab was transferred to the 2-508 Parachute Infantry in January 2010.[95] From January to March, the 2-508 came under occasional IED or suicide attacks but had relative freedom to patrol throughout Arghandab district.[96] However, the 2-508 was similarly spread too thin. It had only three platoons stationed in the critical west-central area of the district, which had little effect on the enemy's ability to reoccupy their critical positions around Charqolba and Khorawe and surge forces back into Arghandab during the spring. By April, these platoons found their freedom of movement significantly limited due to Taliban attacks.[97]

By the early summer 2010, the Taliban had returned in force to Arghandab, and were utilizing the key terrain around Khosrawe to support attacks throughout the district and to sustain a high level of HME production.[98] Evidence suggests the Taliban's primary operational objective in Arghandab during the summer was to limit ISAF's freedom of movement and to fix ISAF in position to prevent it from infringing on its major area of sanctuary around Khosrawe.[99]

To accomplish this, the Taliban significantly escalated direct fire attacks against coalition forces. The brunt of these attacks was focused on the U.S. bases nearest the Charqolba-Khosrowe stronghold.[100] U.S. commanders believed that a unit of forty to fifty Taliban had been assigned to constantly harass Combat Outpost Post (COP) Nolan, the closest U.S. base to Khosrowe.[101] But the Taliban attempted to open up as many fronts

MAP 3 | ARGHANDAB DISTRICT

as possible, and regularly launced small arms fire attacks against U.S. units as far south as Kohak, five miles from COP Nolan.[102] In addition to regular direct-fire attacks on U.S. positions in west-central Arghandab, the Taliban pushed a few fighters, operatives, and IED cells into other areas of the district.[103] The Taliban not only defended critical objectives with extensive IED belts, but also placed IED belts around U.S. bases in an attempt to discourage and force back U.S. patrols.[104] The Taliban's thickest IED belts were around Khosrowe and Charqolba, but the Taliban also ran IED cells on the east bank of the Arghandab, near Charbagh and Rajan Kala.[105]

Clearing Arghandab

The Taliban's attempts to pin down U.S. forces ceased to be effective once additional U.S. and Afghan forces arrived in Arghandab in late July 2010 and targeted the enemy facilitation zone around Khosrowe and Charqolba. ISAF and ANSF force levels in Arghandab more than doubled in June and July 2010. A second U.S. battalion, the 1-320 Field Artillery Regiment, which is serving as a provisional infantry battalion, deployed in June 2010 and took responsibility for the area around Khosrowe and Charqolba.[106] The area of operations for the 2-508 was contracted to the more stable areas of Arghandab until it was relieved in August by 1-66 Armor Regiment, which was also deployed as a provisional infantry unit. Two of 1-66's companies were assigned to the southwest of the district and the rest of its force to the east bank of the Arghandab.[107] The strength of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) increased over the summer.[108] Afghan forces included some of the ANSF's better units, like the roughly 200-man 3rd battalion of the 3rd ANCOP brigade, which deployed to the district along with Special Forces mentors, and the First Kandak of the First Brigade of the Afghan Army's 205th Corps.[109] The First Kandak is the second oldest unit in by the current Afghan army, has long experience in Kandahar Province, and was highly-regarded by its U.S. partners.[110]

By late July 2010, when ISAF launched its clearing operations, the Minarah Canal formed the boundary beyond which ISAF and ANSF were unable to patrol.[111] The Minarah Canal is a key terrain feature running parallel to both the Arghandab River and the Shah Wali Kot Road, located about one-half mile south of the road.[112] The area north of the canal near Jelawar was under the influence of local commander Haji Amir Mohammad Agha, a Sayed tribal figure who maintained a tenuous relationship with U.S. forces.[113] The enemy was firmly entrenched with almost complete freedom of movement southeast of the canal.

Afghan and ISAF operations began on July 25, 2010 with a night-time airborne assault from the east on Khosrawe Sufla, the center of the Taliban's stronghold, by Afghan Commandos and their U.S. partners.[114] Backed by helicopter gunships, the assault inflicted "a large number" of Taliban casualties, but ISAF and Afghan forces encountered far greater resistance than expected and their progress towards Khosrawe Sufla was impeded by defensive IED belts.[115] Those involved in the operation described the IED belt around Khosrawe Sufla as the most sophisticated they had ever seen.[116] After thirty-six hours of combat, the assaulting force was blocked from their objective. Running low on demolition supplies, they were forced to withdraw.[117]

The U.S.-Afghan force then enacted a series of dismounted attacks to pressure the enemy from the west. 1-320 Field Artillery began by crossing the Minarah Canal to establish the first bridgehead on the southeast side of the canal on July 30, 2010.[118] The attack, named Operation Bakersfield, lasted four days and encountered fierce enemy resistance.[119] The advancing force ultimately leveled the half-dozen buildings it captured after discovering that they were all rigged with IEDs. After clearing the objective, 1-320 established COP Stout on the Taliban-controlled southeast side of the canal, which reduced Taliban freedom of movement in their facilitation zone.[120]

1-320 next moved to cut the enemy's LOCs in and out of the Khosrawe area by moving into the

town of Babur, a mile and a half to the north, in the first week of August 2010.[121] The attack faced light enemy resistance, suggesting the Taliban were not able to extend their defensive lines north to Babur.[122] 1-320 established COP Babur on the edge of the green zone and discovered that the Taliban ran HME factories near Babur.[123] The third and final move made by 1-320 during the initial weeks of its campaign was to take the town of Charqolba Ulya, an enemy sanctuary some 200 meters south of the Minarah Canal.[124] U.S. forces opposite the canal from Charqolba had taken daily fire from the town throughout June and July. The assault, conducted from August 10-11, 2010, revealed the extent of enemy entrenchment in the town. Formerly Mullah Naqib's armory, the Taliban had used the village and its system of trenches, bunkers, and tunnels as a base.[125] As 1-320 maneuvered on the town it faced significant resistance from enemy fighters moving to Charqolba from Khosrawe.[126] The enemy continued to resist even after their positions were attacked with 500-pound bombs and hellfire missiles.[127] The IED belt defending Charqolba was also particularly complex: U.S. forces dug up fifteen IEDs in the southwest corner of the village alone.[128] The patrol base established by 1-320 to hold the village came under constant harassing fire through September, demonstrating the enemy's defense in depth and resolution to hold its facilitation zone farther to the east.[129]

By mid-August, it was clear to coalition forces that nearly no civilians remained in Charqolba and Khosrawe. The extent to which the towns had been converted into an enemy stronghold also became clear, especially as ISAF intelligence began to reveal that dozens of HME and IED making factories were operating in the area and exporting explosives not only throughout Arghandab, but also to Kandahar City, Zhari and Panjwai.[130] The lack of a civilian presence around Khosrawe allowed the U.S. to use aerial bombing missions to reduce the Taliban's positions. To deter U.S. bombing raids, the Taliban would occasionally force children to play outside of HME factories as human shields when aircraft approached their positions. But U.S. forces found that the Taliban did not use the tactic at night, so it conducted its bombings and raids then.[131] Despite the use of heavy ordnance, there were no open source reports of civilian casualties in Arghandab between July and October 2010.

Throughout the second half of August and the month of September, 1-320 held its positions to pin down the enemy while bombing raids and Special Forces airborne assaults targeted enemy facilities and leadership around Khosrawe.[132] U.S. forces discovered that the enemy was able to dismantle and move HME facilities in response to ground assaults, and only airborne assaults were effective at destroying these targets.[133] They conducted a particularly intense series of raids and airstrikes to destroy IED factories and Taliban fortified positions from September 17 to September 20, in conjunction with the beginning of ISAF's major offensive into neighboring Zhari district. These assaults faced heavy enemy resistance including small arms and mortar fire, but also inflicted significant losses against the insurgents.[134]

As coalition and Afghan forces prepared for a final offensive to clear Khosrawe, responsibility for Arghandab was transferred to a new brigade headquarters, and 1-320 and 1-66 were reassigned from the command of Task Force (TF) Strike, led by the 2nd BCT, 101st Airborne Division, to the command of the 1st BCT, 4th Infantry Division.[135] The redrawn areas of operation allowed TF Strike to concentrate its efforts on operations in Zhari district.

Breaking Through

By the end of September constant raids and bombings weakened the Taliban's will and ability to hold the towns around Khosrawe and Charqolba. An uptick in the number of Taliban commanders and facilitators detained in other areas of Arghandab district in September 2010 suggests the Taliban were pressured to relocate important assets into less sympathetic villages, where they were easier targets.[136]

ANSF and ISAF launched an assault to seize and

hold the Khosrawe and Charqolba areas at the beginning of October 2010. The final assault involved 1-320 Field Artillery, elements of the 1-22 Infantry Regiment brought to Arghandab from Kandahar City, U.S. Special Forces, Afghan Commandos, Afghan Army and Police forces, and the Afghan Border Police (ABP).[137] U.S. Special Forces began the assault by pushing into the Taliban strongholds from the bridgehead on the southeast side of the Minarah Canal at COP Stout with the assistance of Mine Clearing Line Charges (MICLICs). MICLICs launch a line of explosive charges across a piece of terrain, detonating mines and IEDs in its path, and are used in combat operations to create a breach in minefields.[138] Not previously used in Kandahar, MICLICs proved an effective means of breaching sophisticated Taliban IED belts.

After exploiting the breach in the Taliban IED belts and seizing key objectives, U.S. Special Forces were followed by the ABP, under the command of General Abdul Raziq, which spent two days sweeping through Khosrawe and neighboring villages.[139] After the initial assault, the Taliban nearly vanished from the area, leaving only a few insurgents to man IEDs and conduct occasional attacks.[140] Once U.S. forces moved into these areas, they faced the immediate challenge of clearing the dozens, if not hundreds, of IEDs that remained in place.[141]

In late October, the challenge of residual IEDs was severe enough that as villagers began to return to towns like Khosrawe, the commander of the 1-320, LTC David Flynn, gave locals an ultimatum to reveal IED locations or to have much of Khosrawe bulldozed.[142] The villagers complied, and by the date of the ultimatum, large holes appeared around Khosrawe where villagers had dug out IEDs.[143] This suggested that the Taliban's control over the villagers was already in decline. As a further sign of possible decreased insurgent control over the population, shura attendance increased dramatically in the west-central area of the district in the month after the Taliban were forced out.[144]

Having taken the Taliban's chief stronghold, the challenge for Afghan and U.S. forces is holding the area against Taliban re-infiltration, which will likely begin in earnest in the spring, if not earlier. LTC Flynn detailed that his plan to hold involves completing the clearing of local villages, establishing tactical infrastructure and COPs in key locations in the captured territory, and building community watch programs.[145] The challenges involved in holding and building are more extensively laid out in later sections of this paper.

Eastern and Southwest Arghandab

The eastern bank of the Arghandab River and the southwest corner of the district have been less violent. The Taliban were never deeply entrenched in these areas, though they did move through, maintain a presence, and conduct attacks.

ISAF's success in destroying Taliban safe-havens in west-central Arghandab has corresponded with a reduction in Taliban capabilities across the district, suggesting that the Khosrawe-Charqolba area sustained insurgent presence elsewhere in Arghandab. Insurgent attacks outside the contested west-central area of the district declined dramatically from fifty a week in mid-August to fifteen a week in mid-October.[146] Beginning in August 2010, security for eastern and southern Arghandab has been the responsibility of 1-66 Armor Regiment and its Afghan partners, supplemented by a Special Forces village stability program.[147] The presence of this adequately-sized force has likely played a role in preventing the enemy from simply imposing itself elsewhere in Arghandab after it was forced out of Charqolba and Khusrawe.

Throughout September, as raids and airstrikes reduced the Taliban's strongholds around Khosrowe and Charqolba, 1-66 successfully detained a number of Taliban commanders and operatives.[148] The increase in detentions during September suggests that the intense pressure on Taliban strongholds in west-central Arghandab had forced commanders and insurgents into

areas where they were more vulnerable. On the east bank of the river, ISAF detained Taliban commanders and facilitators in August who had been operating IED cells in the vicinity of Chaharbagh and Rajan Kala.[149] In early October, ISAF captured a Taliban commander responsible for Dand district in the village of Mazra, just outside the Arghandab district center, suggesting the extent to which insurgent leaders move back and forth between districts around Kandahar City.[150] (Taliban commanders for Arghandab have in turn been captured in Zhari - ISAF forces pursued the Taliban district commander for Arghandab to Kudeza'i in Zhari district in August, for example.[151]) Facing less contact with enemy forces than the troops across the river, the 1-66 focused on development activity.[152]

One company from 1-66 was assigned to the sparsely populated northern area of Arghandab in August, providing a significant ISAF presence there for the first time. The detentions of multiple IED cell leaders and facilitators for weapons and supply movement in late August and early September 2010 suggest that northern Arghandab served as a Taliban transit route in and out of Shah Wali Kot district.[153] The U.S. company stationed in these towns reported that the local population had reacted well to their deployment, and that life had returned to local markets by October.[154] Taken together with the successful raids, these developments suggest that northern Arghandab is becoming less permissive as a Taliban LOC.

The southwest corner of the district is assigned to two U.S. companies from 1-66 and a Special Forces team, along with their Afghan partners. ISAF also captured multiple Taliban facilitators in this area through August and September, including enemy facilitators near Adirah and Dehe Sawzi.[155] Though the Taliban did not conduct frequent direct fire attacks in the southern areas of the district, Taliban facilitators were likely able to move around southwest Arghandab, though they found themselves more exposed there without the benefit of control over terrain or over the population.

The Nagahan Village Stability Program

Since late 2009, U.S. Special Forces have supported an Afghan Local Police (ALP) program in the southwest of the district around the town of Nagahan.[156] U.S. Special Forces identified Arghandab as a promising site for a Local Defense Initiative (LDI is the predecessor of the ALP program), in part because of the district's homogenous Alokozai population and its history of resistance to the Taliban before the assassination of Mullah Naqib in 2007.[157] The project has had some success in navigating the complexities of Arghandab tribal politics. Special Forces consulted with the key Kandahar City-linked figures who attempted to maintain control over Arghandab from afar, including Naqib's son Karimullah and District Governor Abdul Jabar in October 2009.[158] But the project found more local buy-in from leadership in twelve villages around Nagahan and recruited several dozen full time local defenders and supplemented by about twice as many auxilaries in consultation with local elders.[159] The defense force is headed by a group of four or five officers, the most prominent of which is Haji Mohammad Nabi, who comes from the minority Harati clan of the Alokozai. Some Alokozai have expressed dismay at giving a prominent role to a Harati Alokozai, but the move also brought a wider range of groups into the project.[160]

During the winter and spring of 2010, the program reported considerable security gains in the immediate vicinity of Nagahan.[161] The Taliban have subsequently intentionally targeted the program, which represents a serious threat to their inroads in Arghandab, and did so most visibly in a suicide bombing at a wedding party in June 2010 attended by many of the force's officers.[162] The program has seen success in its goal of limiting Taliban presence around Nagahan, and security incidents in the area have remained lower than elsewhere in Arghandab.[163] ISAF is considering expanding the ALP program to Zhari and Panjwai districts as a means of holding cleared territory. The success of ALP programs, however, will largely depend on local conditions. As discussed later, an ALP program

modeled on Nagahan has seen minimal success in Khakrez district, which neighbors Arghandab to the northwest.

Operation Dragon Strike and the Fight for Zhari

The third phase of Hamkari focused on clearing insurgent strongholds in Zhari and Panjwai districts. Most of Zhari had been under Taliban control since 2007.[164] By 2010, the Taliban had built a complex system of reinforcing defensive positions, concealed movement corridors, and a sophisticated IED assembly and distribution network. The Taliban took advantage of the thick cover provided by the Zhari green zone, an area similar to the green zone in Arghandab but with scarcer tree cover.[165] This system gave the Taliban a secure base for operations across Kandahar province.

The Taliban system in Zhari centered on several wadis – flat and dry streambeds - that run east to west, parallel to Highway One.[166] Some of these wadis were surrounded by overhanging trees and high walls, which provided cover from aerial surveillance and allowed free movement of fighters and supplies.[167] Taliban fighters, often mounted on motorbikes, could travel across the district using wadis, small paths, and roads far faster than ISAF or Afghan forces.[168] The Taliban's command and control centers were in the Siah Choy and Nalgham areas, both of which are deep in the green zone and just across the Arghandab River from Taliban strongholds in the horn of Panjwai.[169]

The Taliban's lines of communication and rat-lines connected a complex physical infrastructure, some of which was left from the mujahideen era.[170] The Taliban had large underground bunkers across Zhari, some of which showed sophisticated designs and had reinforced rebar roofs.[171] By November 2010, ISAF forces had discovered fifty of these underground bunkers in the central third of the district alone, along with tens of thousands of pounds of cached explosives.[172] The Taliban ran a complex distribution network which moved explosives from manufacturing and assembly points in western Zhari and Panjwai to forward safe houses along Highway One and near Kandahar City, where they stockpiled significant explosives, weapons, and other supplies.[173]

In Zhari itself, the enemy system enabled attacks on Highway One and on Route Summit, a three mile road built by Canadian forces in 2006 and 2007 that ran south from the highway through Pashmul to the Panjwai district center.[174] Taliban attacks on Highway One pinned down the coalition along its major LOC and further reinforced local perceptions of the Taliban's strength.

The Taliban's primary positions for attacks on Highway One were near Howz-e Madad in western Zhari, near Kholk in central Zhari, and between Senjaray and Makuan in eastern Zhari.[175] In each of these areas, the Taliban had advanced attack positions and bunkers approximately two hundred meters off the highway.[176] These positions allowed the Taliban to fire on convoys and to plant IEDs along Highway One. Forward positions were supported by rear facilitation zones with bed-down locations and weapons and explosives caches, which were supplied by a major artery that ran along a concealed wadi running parallel to the highway.[177] Taliban breezeways across Zhari also gave the insurgents a line of communication into the important town of Senjaray and the western suburbs of Kandahar City.[178]

To defend their freedom of movement and facilitation network from ISAF operations, the Taliban built a series of fortifications that allowed for a defense in depth, with tunnel systems, trenches, and bunkers. Taliban fighters in Zhari were armed with heavy weapons, including 82-mm mortar systems, recoilless rifles, and high-caliber machine guns, which the insurgents had tactically cached across the district to allow fighters to fire on coalition forces and then withdraw unarmed, passing themselves off as local villagers.[179] The Taliban also used complex IED belts to defend critical points.[180] Taliban fighters became tactically proficient at using IED belts during assaults, often using them to channel ISAF forces away from key objectives or to cover their

MAP 4 | ZHARI AND PANJWAI

withdrawal from attack zones.

The sophistication of the enemy system in Zhari was further evidenced by the Taliban's system for evacuating wounded fighters. ISAF forces operating in Zhari in 2010 reported that within minutes of taking battlefield casualties, Taliban teams on motorcycles would arrive to pick up wounded fighters, move them to mobile field hospitals deeper in Zhari, and sanitize the site by removing weapons and other traces of the wounded fighter.[181]

By the time ISAF moved into Zhari in September 2010, Taliban activity had forced much of the population of western and central Zhari out of their homes and villages. In areas like Pashmul in central Zhari, the population fell from an estimated 10,000 people to roughly 2,500 by 2010.[182] The Taliban used abandoned homes as safe-havens or weapons caches and booby-trapped others, while Taliban IED belts rendered some of the land in Zhari unsuitable for farming. Many of the dislocated moved to settlements north of Highway One in Zhari near Hawz-e Madad and Senjaray while others moved to Kandahar City.[183]

Taliban activity reached its zenith in the summer of 2010, when insurgent fighters surged into Zhari and utilized the established networks. The Taliban continued to focus on pinning down ISAF troops and launched bolder and more frequent attacks, much as they had in Arghandab district. Multiple attacks, often five or more, occurred daily against Afghan and ISAF forces and logistics convoys moving along Highway One.[184] U.S. COPs outside of Senjaray faced extended firefights throughout the summer, and in Senjaray itself the Taliban used the town's labyrinth of compounds for grenade attacks on the infantry company based there.[185] In central Zhari, the U.S. forces were confined to Route Summit, and any attempt to move off the road was met with enemy fire. U.S. COPs along Route Summit came under nearly daily attacks.[186] The Taliban also persistently attacked U.S. positions near Howz-e Madad on the western end of the district, and regularly hit U.S. bases there with accurate mortar fire.[187]

From 2007 through the beginning of 2010, the Taliban largely succeeded in limiting ISAF's freedom of movement to the confines of Highway

One and Route Summit. Focused on maintaining its own lines of communication, ISAF did not seriously contest the terrain that enabled the complex enemy system described above.[188] The coalition conducted disruption operations that targeted Taliban leadership, IED cells, or weapons and supply caches, but due to insufficient troop strength was never able to clear and hold critical terrain.[189]

Shaping Operations in Zhari

ISAF and ANSF were able to reverse this dynamic in 2010, when a surge in U.S. and Afghan forces allowed ISAF to take the initiative and dismantle the enemy system. From the summer of 2009 through mid-summer 2010, ISAF bases in Zhari had been held by a single battalion of U.S. forces, which had replaced an even smaller Canadian force. But Zhari had been prioritized by ISAF for a portion of the new U.S. surge troops committed in December 2009. The first of the supplemental U.S. Army battalions from the 2nd BCT 101st Airborne Division began to deploy to Zhari in May, and all three battalions were in the district by the end of August.[190] The 2nd BCT, 101st Airborne became the nucleus and command element for Task Force Strike, which took responsibility for Zhari during the summer of 2010, and for the Horn of Panjwai and for Maiwand district in the fall of 2010. The ANA presence in Zhari also increased significantly. Each of the U.S. battalions in Zhari was closely paired with a partner ANA kandak (the Afghan equivalent of a battalion) from the 3rd Brigade of the 205th Corps.[191]

The basic concept of the coalition operation, code-named Dragon Strike, was a series of sequential, mutually reinforcing attacks across the entire district to seize control of key nodes and movement corridors in the enemy system, and destroy enemy strongholds and IED and weapons facilitation networks. By advancing simultaneously across the district, ISAF and ANSF forced the Taliban to simultaneously defend multiple positions.[192] Most importantly, ISAF for the first time moved into Zhari with the intention and resources to hold key terrain and to work with the local population to prevent insurgent re-infiltration.

The three U.S. battalions that made up TF Strike in Zhari were, from east to west: the 1-502 Infantry Regiment, under the command of LTC Johnny Davis, with an area of responsibility stretching along highway One from Now Ruze in the east to route Summit; the 1-75 Cavalry Regiment under the command of LTC Thomas McFadyen with responsibility for central Zhari from Route Summit west to Siah Choy and Sangesar; and the 2-502 Infantry Regiment under the command of LTC Peter Benchoff in western Zhari, responsible for Sangesar and Nalgham west to the border of Zhari and Maiwand.[193]

The first in a series of decisive attacks across the entire district began in the early morning hours of September 15, 2010.[194] But in the months preceding Dragon Strike, Afghan and coalition special forces had conducted shaping operations in Zhari. Many of these were kill or capture operations against insurgent leadership in Zhari, which successfully removed numerous Taliban commanders, IED cell leaders, and facilitators.[195] Successful targeted missions continued while ISAF battle-space owners advanced through the district. In mid-October 2010, ISAF killed both of the Taliban's field commanders for Zhari, Kaka Abdul Khaliq and his deputy Kako.[196]

Clearing Eastern Zhari

This paper describes separately coalition operations in eastern, central, and western Zhari from September to November 2010, but it is important to note that these operations occurred simultaneously and kept the Taliban constantly engaged across the entire district, denying the insurgents the ability to shift troops from one front to another.

In eastern Zhari, the 1-502 Infantry had arrived in theater before the rest of its brigade and spent the summer months observing and mapping the enemy system.[197] Prior to the commencement of Operation Dragon Strike, the unit had probed

enemy positions to the south of Highway One, pushing several hundred meters past the point at which it made contact with the enemy, but not pursuing the insurgents into their facilitation zone.[198] By mapping the enemy's response, the 1-502 was able to determine the location of important nodes in the enemy system.[199]

In the September 15 assault, the 1-502 simultaneously attacked multiple Taliban strong points. The most critical objective was the town of Makuan. About three miles west of Senjaray, Makuan was the facilitation center for Taliban attacks on Highway One in eastern Zhari, and had not previously been targeted by ISAF.[200] Makuan was located south of the primary west-to-east wadi that ran through eastern Zhari and was defended by a 300-meter-deep IED belt.[201] U.S. and Afghan troops occupied the town after breaching the IED belt with the help of U.S. Marine Corps MICLICs and after combat engineers bridged the main wadi. U.S. forces discovered that the civilian population of Makuan had long fled, and the town had been converted into bunkers and fighting positions.[202] Nearly every compound in the village was booby-trapped with five or more IEDs.[203]

Taliban fighters counter-attacked on the first night after U.S. forces entered the town, but their resistance quickly faded as U.S. and Afghan forces exploited their breach of the Taliban's IED belt and occupied the remainder of the Taliban's facilitation zone in eastern Zhari.[204] After taking Makuan, U.S. and Afghan forces moved east towards Senjaray along the Taliban's former LOCs. The 1-502 uncovered numerous weapons caches and IED distribution facilities. Nearly every grape hut in the Taliban's former facilitation zone had been converted to a weapons cache or IED storage facility.[205] South of Senjaray, the 1-502 took control of the Old Highway One, a small road running parallel to Highway One, about a mile to its south, which the Taliban had used for direct access to the Kandahar City suburbs.[206]

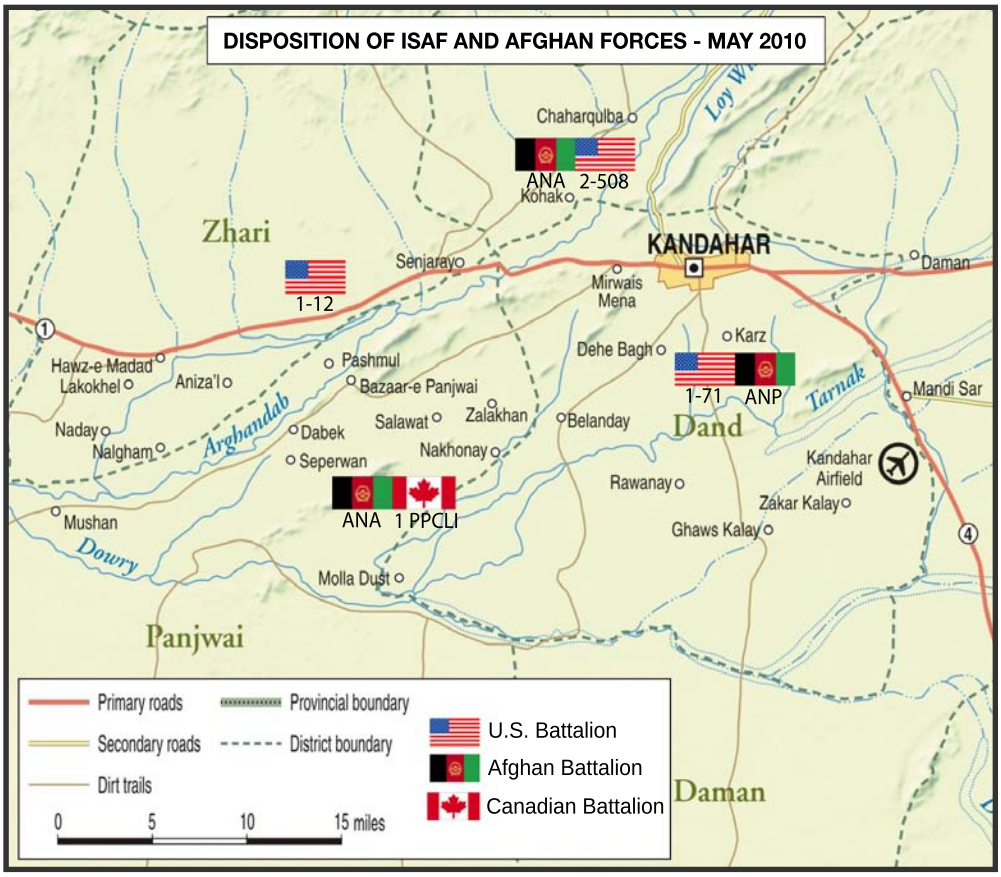
By early October, the 1-502 and its Afghan partners had completed clearing operations in eastern Zhari.[207] As the coalition advanced through the Taliban's former facilitation zone, it established a series of COPs, checkpoints, and watchtowers to hold key transit points and deny the enemy use of its former bases and transit routes. As the 1-502 transitioned from clearing to preparing tactical infrastructure for holding against insurgent attempts to re-infiltrate, it removed some of the thick vegetation along roads and canals that had long concealed enemy movement.[208]

Clearing Central Zhari

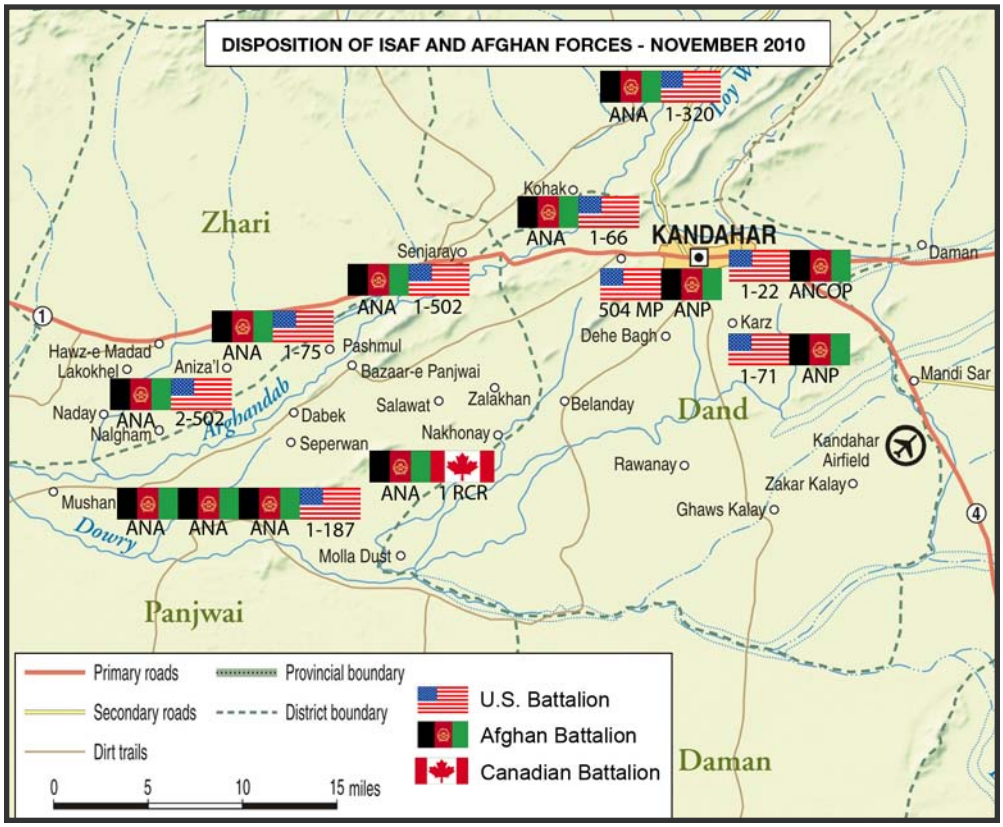
The 1-75 Cavalry and its partnered Afghan unit, the 2nd Kandak of the 3rd Brigade, began operations to take and hold key nodes in the enemy system in central Zhari on August 28 2010.[209] Rather than cutting the terrain into battle sections and placing a company in each of these sections, the 1-75 Cavalry identified key nodes in the enemy system, including command and control points, lines of communication, infrastructure, and weapons caches by probing the enemy's defenses in a series of shaping operations.[210] These shaping operations were often highly kinetic, as U.S. forces engaged the Taliban's defensive lines. Once the unit had mapped out the enemy system, it prioritized targets, breached Taliban defenses, and seized key nodes.[211]

Operations conducted by the 1-75 Cavalry progressed in roughly three stages. The unit focused first on the Pashmul area along the Arghandab River, next on the Kholk sub-district and surrounding areas bordering Highway One, and finally on the western portion of the area of operations (AO), which included the Taliban command and control hub of Siah Choy and the eastern areas of Sangesar.[212]

Pashmul, a cluster of settlements along the Arghandab River opposite from the Panjwai district center, had been the Taliban's initial strongpoint when the insurgents moved into Zhari in 2006.[213] But given the proximity of Route Summit to Pashmul, the Taliban appear to have shifted their command and control centers deeper into Zhari in subsequent years, and the 1-75 made relatively quick progress as the Taliban withdrew deeper into Zhari.[214]



MAP 5 | DISPOSITION OF ISAF AND AFGHAN FORCES - MAY 2010



MAP 6 | DISPOSITION OF ISAF AND AFGHAN FORCES - NOVEMBER 2010

As the battalion pushed through Pashmul it began shaping operations against enemy positions to the north near Highway One. The area around the Kolk sub-district and especially the village of Pasab had been one of several key areas for Taliban attacks on Highway One and Route Summit.[215] Coalition forces began their assaults in this area with a September 8-10, 2010, attack on the town of Ghariban, a Taliban stronghold in central Zhari about a mile and a half south of Highway One.[216] U.S. forces once again discovered complex Taliban IED belts running south of Highway One. Once the battalion had identified its targets, it used MICLICs to breach the enemy's IED belts.[217]

Taliban resistance was more sustained in parts of central Zhari than in eastern Zhari. This is likely because Taliban positions in central and western Zhari were contiguous with each other and with western Panjwai, while Taliban positions in eastern Zhari had been cut off from the rest of the enemy system. Until mid-October 2010, U.S. forces maintained daily contact with enemy forces. The enemy maintained a defense in depth in central and western Zhari, and withdrew to new defensive positions as old ones were overrun. The Taliban also benefited from extensive weapons and supplies caches across the district.[218] Constant contact with ISAF forces, however, led to substantial Taliban battlefield casualties, and the Taliban began to suffer supply restraints as ISAF seized weapons caches and supply points. By mid-October, the 1-75 Cavalry took its final objectives in the Taliban's former command and control hub around Siah Choy and east of Sangesar, and Taliban resistance had noticeably declined.[219] By the end of October, the Taliban force was limited to three cells of fighters and the 1-75 had essential freedom of movement across its entire AO, limited only by residual Taliban IEDs along paths and roads.[220]

Clearing Western Zhari

The western section of Zhari is the responsibility of the 2-502 Infantry Regiment and its partnered ANA kandak.[221] Both units are headquartered in Howz-e Medad, a major town on Highway One about seven miles west of Forward Operating Base (FOB) Wilson. In mid-September, several companies of U.S. and Afghan troops began to advance east into Zhari from positions on the western edge of the district, near FOB Terminator, located in the scrubland on the border between Zhari and Maiwand districts[222] Advancing from the west, these units moved through an area with thinner vegetation and less natural terrain for Taliban fortifications. The Taliban appeared to have harassed this advance, but continued to focus on holding their positions near Howz-e Medad and attacking ISAF along Highway One even as the 2-502 advanced on their flank from the west.[223] The Taliban's attacks on Highway One included relatively effective mortar fire on the U.S. FOB at Howz-e, which caused several casualties.[224]

On September 26, 2010, the 2-502 directly assaulted Taliban strongholds around Sangesar, moving south from Howz-e Medad.[225] Sangesar is of both symbolic and practical importance for the insurgents. It was the site of Mullah Omar's madrasa in the early 1990s, and the launching point for the Taliban movement in 1994.[226] More recently, it was the seat of the Taliban's shadow court for Zhari and a significant base for foreign fighters.[227] The assault force consisted of some 600 soldiers, including a company from the 2-502, ANA units, and U.S. and British engineers, and had constant air support from A10 Warthogs and Kiowa helicopters.[228] The advancing coalition force encountered some of the fiercest resistance faced in Kandahar as it advanced against a thick concentration of enemy fortifications and fighters just south of Highway One.[229] ISAF and Afghan forces moved over extremely difficult terrain under constant fire from an enemy entrenched in reinforcing systems of bunkers and tunnels. Sustained Taliban resistance persisted for the first two days of the attack, but faded on the third, as the insurgents were attrited by ISAF's suppressing fire and withdrew deeper into the district.[230] After three days, the assaulting force had completed the first stage of their advance, moving a kilometer inside the Taliban's heavily fortified green zone.[231]

After ISAF and Afghan forces cleared the area south of Howz-e Madad, the Taliban was denied their last foothold for launching attacks on Highway One. During the month of October there was not a single kinetic incident on the highway in Zhari district, a change from early September when the Taliban were conducting five or more attacks daily.[232]

U.S. forces continued to face sustained resistance as they moved south to take the town of Sangesar. As was the case in central Zhari, Taliban positions in western Zhari, especially in the vicinity of Sangesar, were heavily defended by IED belts and by reinforcing tunnel and bunker systems. The Taliban sustained their resistance longer in western Zhari than they had in eastern or central Zhari. By mid-October, when U.S. forces has cleared most areas of the district further to the east, U.S. and Afghan forces in western Zhari had taken Sangesar, but the Taliban continued to retain a foothold to the south along the Arghandab River, where they were surrounded by ISAF forces to their east, north, and west.[233] Until late October, when U.S. and Afghan forces assaulted into the Horn of Panjwai, Taliban fighters in western Zhari benefited from a rear support zone in Panjwai on the southern bank of the Arghandab River. The Taliban had long moved freely between the two areas over the easily traversed river bed.[234]

As of November 2010, operations in southwestern Zhari remained ongoing, as U.S. and Afghan forces sought to clear remaining Taliban strongholds.

Holding Zhari: Early Indications of Progress and Efforts to Win the Population

Achieving strategic effects from ISAF's battlefield success in Zhari will depend on the coalition's ability to break the insurgents' control of the population, hold the district against insurgent re-infiltration, reconcile the district's population with the Afghan government, and transition security gains to the Afghan Security Forces.

The population in Zhari had been under Taliban control since at least 2007, and because of family and tribal ties, elements of the population likely harbor deep sympathies towards the Taliban, especially in the western areas of the district.[235] Yet in eastern and central Zhari, Taliban control of the population began to collapse shortly after ISAF cleared these areas. In eastern Zhari, the most significant sign of the Taliban's declining control over the population was a massive surge of young Afghans willing to participate in ISAF's cash-for-work program. Starting with only a dozen villagers in late September, participation in the cash-for-work program in eastern Zhari skyrocketed in early October, only weeks after Taliban were cleared from the area. By mid-November, the program employed between 4,000 to 6,000 Afghans per week in eastern Zhari.[236] In Pashmul, where the local population was smaller, 400 Afghans were employed daily by the program by early November.[237]

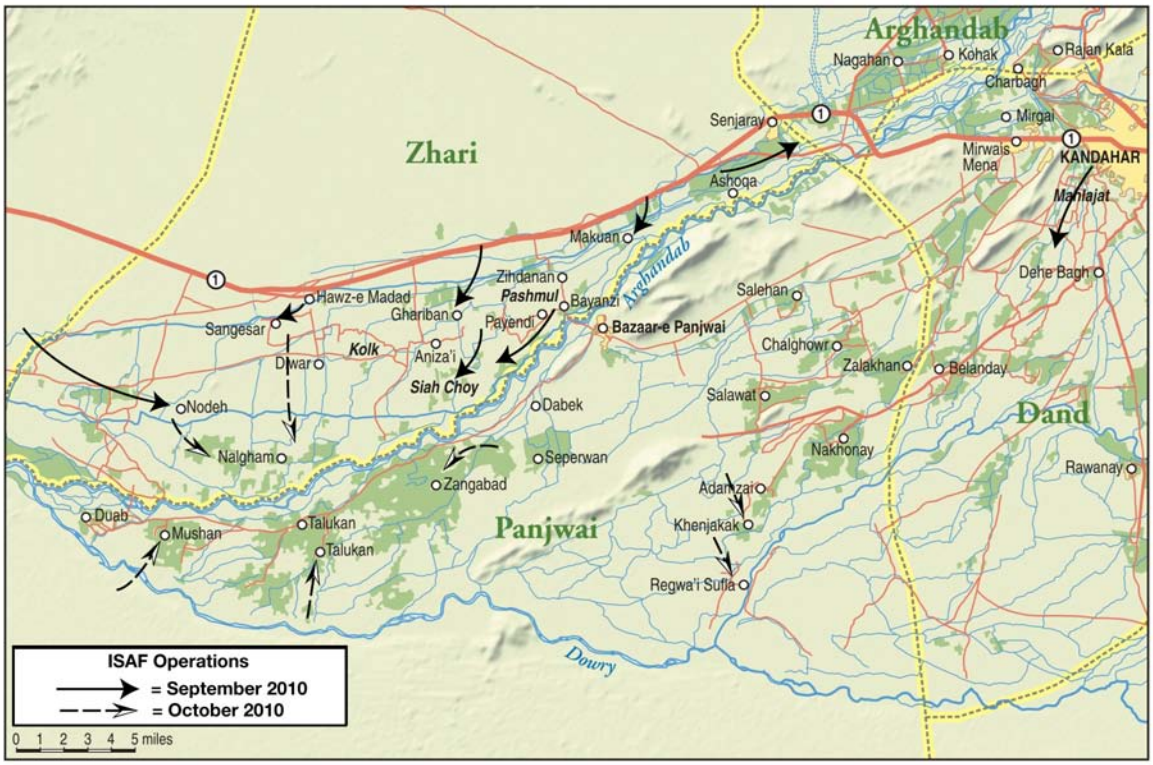
There are other preliminary signs that Taliban control over the population has declined in Zhari. While intelligence from the local population on insurgent activities is still limited, it increased from being essentially non-existent during the summer to between five and nine tips a week.[238] Local residents have also been increasingly willing to locate IEDs for the coalition.[239] Attendance at shuras sponsored by ISAF forces or the district government has also increased. Hundreds of tribal leaders have come to shuras in Siah Choy and Pashmul in October and November 2010, for example, areas which were both Taliban strongholds only months earlier.[240]

To counter possible Taliban re-infiltration, ISAF commanders in Zhari have plans to form both a local community watch program called "Sons of the Shura" and formal Afghan Local Police (ALP) programs.[241] These may be the most risky elements of ISAF's efforts. If organized carefully, they could yield large dividends and serve as an effective means of preventing Taliban re-infiltration. But ISAF must carefully manage both programs to ensure that they do not exacerbate local rivalries. Local powerbrokers have shown an uncanny ability to use coalition

support to settle local scores.[242] And in the years after 2001, the relentless harassment conducted by these powerbrokers against former Taliban supporters who had peacefully reintegrated into society and accepted the new government was a significant factor that drove the population to support the Taliban's return.[243] If the "Sons of the Shura" program or the ALP is used by local actors to harass or intimidate the population or their tribal rivals with impunity, they may galvanize local support for the Taliban and discourage former fighters from reintegrating.

ANP and ANCOP presence has also increased in Zhari as clearing operations were completed. In October 2010, a battalion of ANCOP with U.S. Special Forces mentors deployed to Zhari district to operate checkpoints and perform patrols.[244] The ANP have also begun establishing bases and checkpoints in areas of Zhari taken from the Taliban.[245] ANP professionalism varies widely, and many ANP units in southern Afghanistan have had a net negative impact on security because of predatory behavior, affiliation with local strongmen, and illegal activity at checkpoints. The quality and affiliations of ANP units in Zhari is not clear from the open source.

Taliban activities and coalition operations caused significant damage to the physical infrastructure of Zhari. Taliban forces had occupied and booby-trapped the homes, compounds and grape-drying huts of local villagers and planted IED belts in the district's rich farmland. ISAF operations thus destroyed a significant number of buildings and added further damage to farms in Zhari.[246] Many Afghans have been angered by the destruction as they return to Zhari after months or years away. To address the issue, ISAF runs a compensation program to reimburse villagers for destruction to their homes and fields. U.S. officers can issue claims cards to villagers, and a U.S. civil-affairs team based at the Zhari district governor's office has been processing over one hundred claims a week.[247] LTC Thomas McFadyen, the commander of the 1-75 Cavalry in central Zhari, said that while villagers were unhappy about the damage, some assigned responsibility to the Taliban and thanked U.S. forces for clearing their villages and working to remove IED belts, which had rendered many fields unusable.[248]



MAP 7 | ISAF OPERATIONS - SEPTEMBER & OCTOBER 2010

A number of political and tribal issues, including the relationship between the Afghan government in Kandahar City and local communities in Zhari, also have ramifications for the coalition's success in holding Zhari. Several of these issues are addressed in the final section of this paper.

Panjwai

In Panjwai district two different dynamics have emerged in the eastern and western portions of the district. In the eastern two-thirds of the district, a Canadian battalion has been conducting continuous operation against the Taliban since 2009, and a smaller Canadian force had been in the area since 2006.[249] Villages in western Panjwai are spread farther apart than in Zhari or Arghandab and the vegetation provides less cover. A long-term Canadian presence and a higher concentration of tribes like the Barakzai and the Alokozai, which are less hospitable for the Taliban, have prevented the Taliban from establishing an entrenched presence in parts of eastern Panjwai.[250] A strip of land called the Horn of Panjwai in the western third of the district, which forms a peninsula between the Arghandab and Dowry Rivers, meanwhile, has long been a critical insurgent stronghold, and was targeted by a massive influx of U.S. and Afghan troops in October 2010.

Eastern Panjwai is part of the Canadian-commanded Task Force Kandahar. Responsibility for the area was held by a Canadian Battalion, the 1st Royal Canadian Regiment, which was replaced in November 2010 by the francophone 1st Battalion, Royal 22e Regiment.[251] Canadian forces have been in eastern Panjwai since 2006, but pulled out of the southwest areas of the district in early 2009 because their force was too small to hold the area.[252] Canadian forces renewed their efforts in eastern Panjwai in the fall of 2009, when they handed over other areas of Kandahar to U.S. forces and concentrated on a village-by-village counterinsurgency approach in Dand and Panjwai.[253] In eastern Panjwai, the coalition campaign is thus in a more advanced stage than in Zhari, and the Taliban were denied a firm foothold in the area. The Panjwai district center and bazaar, located in the north-central area of the district, have been protected by Canadian forces and relatively tranquil since 2007, and business in the bazaar has remained lively.[254]

As was the case in Arghandab and Zhari, the Taliban surged troops into Panjwai during the summer 2010 fighting season and launched a campaign to reassert influence in eastern Panjwai.[255] Canadian forces found themselves on the defensive and faced daily contact with Taliban fighters in areas from which the Taliban were pushed out half a year earlier.[256] Canadian Expeditionary Force Commander Lieutenant General Marc Lessard stated in September 2010 that "there was a lot more enemy presence and a lot more activity… over the course of the summer than was expected."[257] The Taliban's ability to conduct attacks in eastern Panjwai was probably enabled by the Taliban's entrenched control over western Panjwai and central Zhari.

Much of the Taliban's activity in eastern Panjwai focused on maintaining or re-opening a critical LOC that connected Taliban positions in southern and western Panjwai to the Kandahar suburbs, and particularly to the Malajat area. This LOC originated along the Dowry River in southern Afghanistan near towns like Regwa'i Sufla. The Taliban could move supplies to this area either from the Horn of Panjwai or across the desert from Pakistan. From Regwa'i Sufla, Taliban supply lines ran north through Khenjakak and Adamzai to Nakhoney.[258] Nakhoney and surrounding towns like Chalghowr and Belanday had been Taliban strongholds since 2007.[259] Tribal makeup was likely a factor in the Taliban's selection of facilitation routes and strongholds in eastern Panjwai. Nakhoney and several of the towns around it formed a sympathetic Ishaqzai and Noorzai pocket in an area where the Barakzai, Popalzai, and Alokozai were otherwise more predominant.[260]

The towns of Belanday and Bala Dehe Sufla, both northeast of Nakhoney, are only five miles from the Kandahar City suburb of Malajat, which had been a key facilitation zone for Taliban operations in the city until coalition forces entered Malajat

in August and September 2010.[261] ISAF has detained weapons and IED facilitators responsible for moving supplies into Malajat in several of the towns between Malajat and Belanday. [262] Several of these detained facilitators coordinate the movement of supplies from Pakistan, suggesting that the Taliban moved supplies and fighters directly from Pakistan across the desert to Panjwai, where they connected to the Nakhoney and Malajat system, which funneled resources into Kandahar City.[263]

A small Canadian force moved into the town of Nakhoney in November 2009, but the Taliban continued to contest the town, likely because of its significance for their transit routes into Malajat, and waged an IED and intimidation campaign.[264] Afghan and Canadian troops conducted Operation Sher II in April 2010 to clear Khenjakak and Adamzai, two towns on the Taliban transit routes that led into Nakhoney.[265] The Taliban continued to move supplies through the two villages, however, and the Canadians conducted further operations there in October 2010.[266] In November, the coalition extended its operations further south to the town of Regwa'i Sufla.[267] It is unclear whether recent operations have succeeded in denying the insurgents the use of their historic transit route in eastern Panjwai.

Malajat itself had long been a staging area for Taliban activities in Kandahar City. It served as the terminus for the Taliban lines of communication which ran through eastern Panjwai, and since at least 2008 was the site of a series of Taliban safe houses and bases.[268] Taliban control over the area gave assassination and IED cells a staging ground several miles from the city center. Afghan and Canadian forces swept through Malajat in July 2010, but by August as many as 250 insurgents had returned to the town and boldly asserted their presence, walking openly through the streets and flying their iconic white flag.[269] A second operation to clear Malajat was launched in late August at the initiative of the Kandahar government (the political context of the Malajat operation is discussed in greater depth below). The initial assault was led by border police commander Abdul Raziq and the NDS and planned without consultation with ISAF.[270] On the first day of the attack the ABP were stymied by Taliban IED belts, but were subsequently supplemented by three companies of the 504th MP battalion and after a five day operation succeeded in taking their objectives. [271] The NDS detained over one hundred Afghans during the operation, though only twenty-one were later confirmed as insurgents.[272] U.S. MP Companies and the ANP have subsequently established police sub-stations in the area, but October 2010 reporting suggests the Taliban have retained a presence both in Malajat and in neighboring parts of Kandahar City.[273]

In addition to contesting eastern Panjwai in order to secure a LOC into Kandahar City, the Taliban attempted to re-infiltrate Dand district, from where they had been mostly pushed out by Canadian troops and local Barakzai and Popalzai militia commanders during the summer and fall of 2009.[274] Responsibility for Dand was transferred to an American battalion, the 1-71 Cavalry Regiment, which was part of the Canadian-led Task Force Kandahar. This freed Canadian forces to concentrate to the west in Panjwai.[275] There were few firefights in Dand and ISAF forces regularly walked around the district center without body armor throughout 2010, but during the summer the district did see a brief increase in IED attacks, as well as eight assassination attempts on the district governor and the assassinations of a dozen maliks, or village elders.[276] Taliban attacks in Dand may have been an attempt to prevent ISAF from focusing on their safe-havens in the Malajat suburb of Kandahar City or an attempt to counter ISAF's claims of progress in the district.

In addition to operating against insurgent LOCs in eastern Panjwai, the Canadians established a backfill to seal insurgents in western Panjwai and block Taliban fighters fleeing the U.S. offensive into Zhari in September 2010.[277] Canadian forces built a series of checkpoints throughout central Panjwai.[278] Canadian commanders argued the checkpoints were effective, but it is not otherwise clear from the open source whether Taliban fighters might have fled through or taken

cover in eastern Panjwai once forced out of Zhari and the Horn of Panjwai.

The Horn of Panjwai

The final major ISAF and Afghan offensive launched to date targeted the Horn of Panjwai. The towns of Zangabad, Mushan, and Talukan in this area have been critical logistics hubs supporting Taliban operations in Zhari, eastern Panjwai, and Kandahar City. These towns were also command and control nodes, bases for Taliban senior leadership and foreign fighters, and the hub of the Taliban's court system for Zhari and Panjwai.[279]

The actual attack was preceded by a month of Special Forces raids and precision strikes by high accuracy HIMAR rockets against Taliban leadership in the area.[280] These operations, which were conducted in September and the first half of October, were simultaneous with ISAF operations in Zhari, and suggest that much of the Taliban leadership in Zhari had relocated to command and control hubs in the horn of Panjwai to escape the intense combat to the north. The tempo of ISAF strikes during this period was reported to have significantly weakened Taliban command and control and operation coordination.[281]

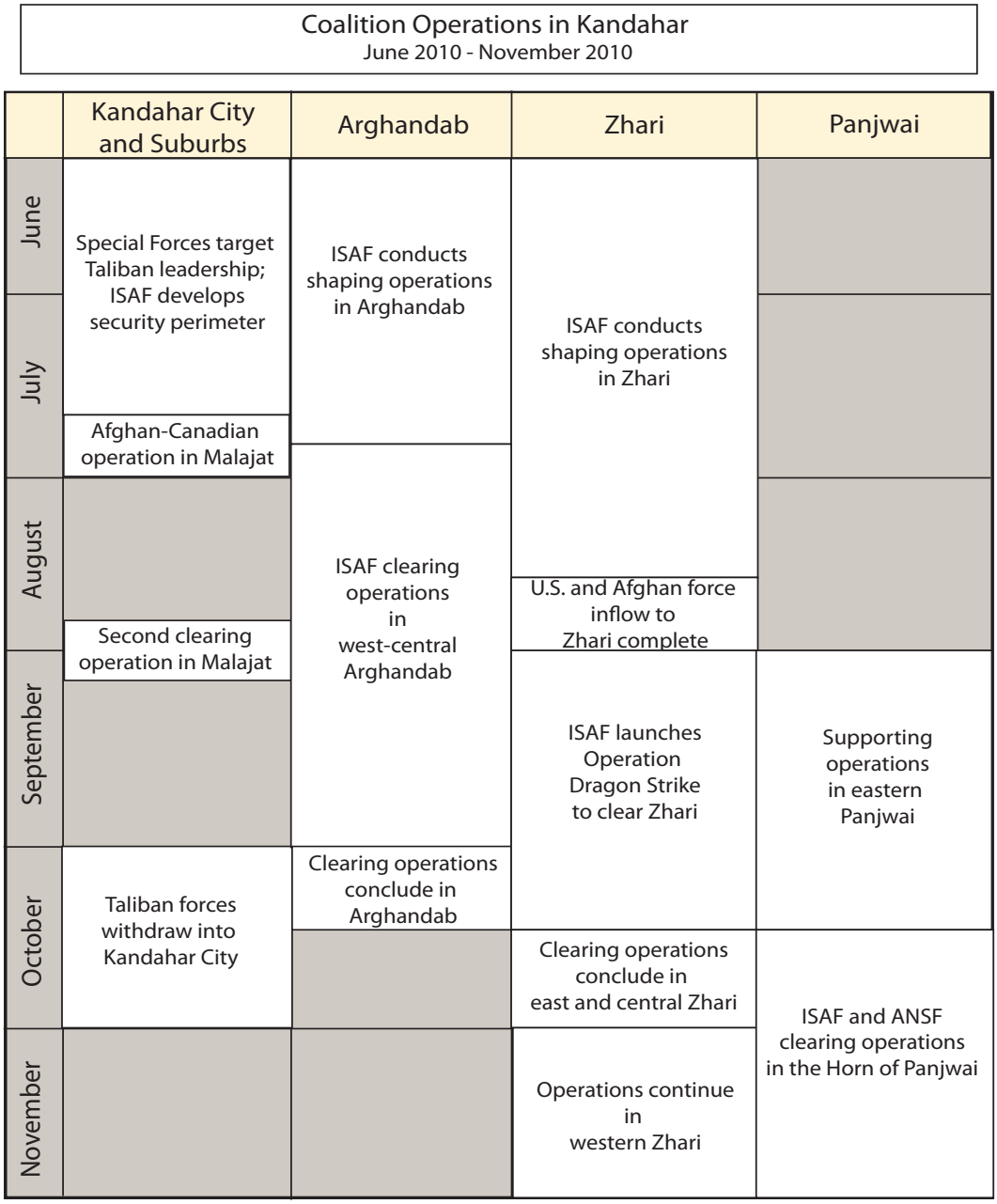
ISAF reassigned the Horn of Panjwai from the Canadian-commanded Task Force Kandahar to Task Force Strike, which had responsibility for Zhari, as it prepared for an assault into the area.[282] Responsibility for the area was given to the 1-187 Infantry Regiment, which had been transferred from Paktika province and detached from its parent unit, the 3rd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, in September 2010. Operations in the Horn of Panjwai also involved three ANA kandaks.[283] The ratio of three ANA kandaks to one U.S. army battalion is much higher than elsewhere in Kandahar, and may test the ANA's ability to operate with a smaller mentoring presence.

U.S. Special Forces, elements of the 1-187 Infantry, and ANA forces launched their assaults into the Horn of Panjwai on October 15-16, 2010, conducting airborne insertions into the village of Mushan in the west and Zangabad in the east.[284] The objective was to take both towns and drive Taliban fighters into Talukan, the third insurgent stronghold, which was located between Mushan and Zangabad.[285] Coalition forces then conducted an airborne assault into Talukan on October 25, 2010.[286] Within days, U.S. and Afghan troops had set up a series of COPs in each of the villages taken from the Taliban.[287] Although ISAF expected heavy resistance as it assaulted the final enemy stronghold outside Kandahar City, all of the attacks faced minimal resistance.[288] Taliban fighters abandoned their IED production facilities and supply depots, and resistance was less organized than it had been in Zhari or Arghandab and limited to sporadic firefights in the days after coalition forces had seized their objectives.[289] The Taliban's failure to contest the Horn of Panjwai suggests that after months of constant ISAF offensives across Kandahar province, the Taliban had lost their will to hold key terrain and that the insurgents' loss of leadership, manpower and supplies had severely attrited the enemy force. It also indicates that by late October most Taliban fighters had already abandoned the battlefield, fleeing to other areas of the province or to Pakistan, or laying down their arms and slipping back into the population.[290]

ENEMY REACTION AND SUPPORT ZONES IN OUTER KANDAHAR

Taliban Withdrawal into Kandahar City

The Taliban fighters in Arghandab, Zhari, and Panjwai that were not killed or captured in ISAF's clearing operations found a variety of ways to leave the battlefield. Some more senior insurgents have returned to sanctuaries in Pakistan.[291] Taliban commanders there are able to regroup, rest, and recruit new fighters in safety, but the Taliban risks losing influence in Kandahar if it cannot keep some commanders on the front lines. Many of the fighters in Arghandab, Zhari, and Panjwai were local, and laid down their arms and melted into the population when it became clear the Taliban could not resist ISAF assaults. Many of these fighters are likely involved in the coalition's



cash-for-work program which, as mentioned above, gained thousands of new employees after the Taliban were militarily defeated in Zhari.[292] In some cases, cash-for-work may functionally serve as a de facto mass reintegration program for former insurgent fighters.

Finally, some Taliban fighters and commanders have fled into Kandahar City, where they have attempted to increase their visibility and activity. Having suffered significant battlefield setbacks in Arghandab, Zhari, and Panjwai, Taliban forces in Kandahar City have sought to project an image of strength in order to retain psychological influence over the population and to prevent popular perceptions that the Taliban have suffered important losses from becoming widespread. The actual level of Taliban violence does not appear to have increased significantly in October and November, and Taliban cells had been active in the city before fighters from surrounding districts withdrew into the city. U.S. military officers and

civilian officials have reported that Taliban fighters who fled to Kandahar City from Arghandab, Zhari, and Panjwai arrived in the city without a plan and with severely degraded command and control capabilities.[293] The loss of critical facilitation zones in Arghandab, Zhari, Panjwai, and Malajat has left insurgents in Kandahar City without the infrastructure, supplies, and support networks that long sustained their activity. The Taliban's efforts in Kandahar in October and November have been marked by several daring but unsophisticated attempts to demonstrate power.

The most dramatic Taliban display occurred in late October 2010, when insurgents conducted a nighttime demonstration near the center of Kandahar City.[294] A group of about thirty Taliban fighters on motorbikes slowly paraded down one of Kandahar's main streets in a visible display of continued Taliban influence.[295]

Other similar visible incidents were planned by the Taliban but could not be executed. According to NDS chief Major General Momin, the Taliban had a plan to seize the offices of a Kandahar television station and broadcast a message that Kandahar City had fallen to the insurgents. [296] Major General Momin stated that ANSF and U.S. operations in Malajat had disrupted this scheme.[297] The Taliban's focus on maintaining psychological influence is further suggested by the Quetta Shura's website, the Voice of Jihad, which has claimed exaggerated attack levels in Kandahar City beyond the website's norm.[298]

The Taliban also escalated IED and suicide attacks against prominent targets in October and November 2010. On October 5 and 6, 2010, the Taliban caused several explosions, including a coordinated attack in which an initial IED attack against a police vehicle was followed by several IED incidents and small arms fire against security reinforcements.[299] On October 16, the Taliban conducted a spate of attacks across the city, detonating a rickshaw packed with explosives near police headquarters, attacking an oil tanker in the city, and firing a rocket at the Sarpoza prison.[300] Several days later, a suicide bomber blew himself up in the Madad Khan Square, injuring several civilians. [301] In the last two weeks of October, there were a total of eighteen IED attacks in Kandahar City, still a low figure in comparison to incident numbers in earlier months in Arghandab, Zhari, or Panjwai.[302] The pattern of attacks in October and November suggests that elements of the Taliban force in the city retain some command and control and limited coordination. But the vast majority of attacks were relatively simplistic, and the Taliban was not able to display the organization and complexity demonstrated by dramatic attacks in 2008 or 2009. Insurgents also avoided attacking ISAF forces in the city in October and November, instead targeting the Afghan government and security forces.[303] This was likely a calculation by the Taliban network of how it could achieve maximum effects given limited resources and the increased risk of attacking ISAF forces. Several reports suggest that Taliban have co-opted elements of the police force in Kandahar City, which they use for intelligence, protection, and to facilitate attacks.[304]

Anecdotal reporting by western journalists suggests that the Taliban have had moderate success in creating a perception of power within the city and in limiting the psychological impact of coalition gains in Arghandab, Zhari and Panjwai. But the Taliban fighters and cells forced into Kandahar City are also vulnerable, especially given degraded command and control, and the loss of the IED networks, safehouses, and facilitation networks that sustained and supplied Taliban activities in Kandahar City.

The fight inside Kandahar City has historically been a counterterrorism fight rather than a counterinsurgency fight. The most effective security organs in Kandahar City remain the NDS and U.S. Special Forces. Further increasing Special Forces activity and better supporting the NDS are means of addressing the Taliban's presence in the city. But ISAF should also evaluate whether ANSF and ISAF battle space owners are being used effectively. U.S. commanders have conceded that the Kandahar security ring has been inadequate, and are considering means of improving it.[305] The security ring may be a flawed concept,

however, given the near impossibility of achieving a meaningful degree of control over movement in and out of the city. Other types of operations, including presence patrols and mobile checkpoints may be more effective.

Disruption Operations against Taliban Lines of Communication in Outer Kandahar

To support their commanders and operations in central Kandahar, the Taliban have used their lines of communication and sanctuaries in Kandahar province's outlying districts. These districts are essential for the Taliban's movement of fighters and supplies, and will likely be even more important as the Taliban reconstitute their system and attempt to re-infiltrate central Kandahar.

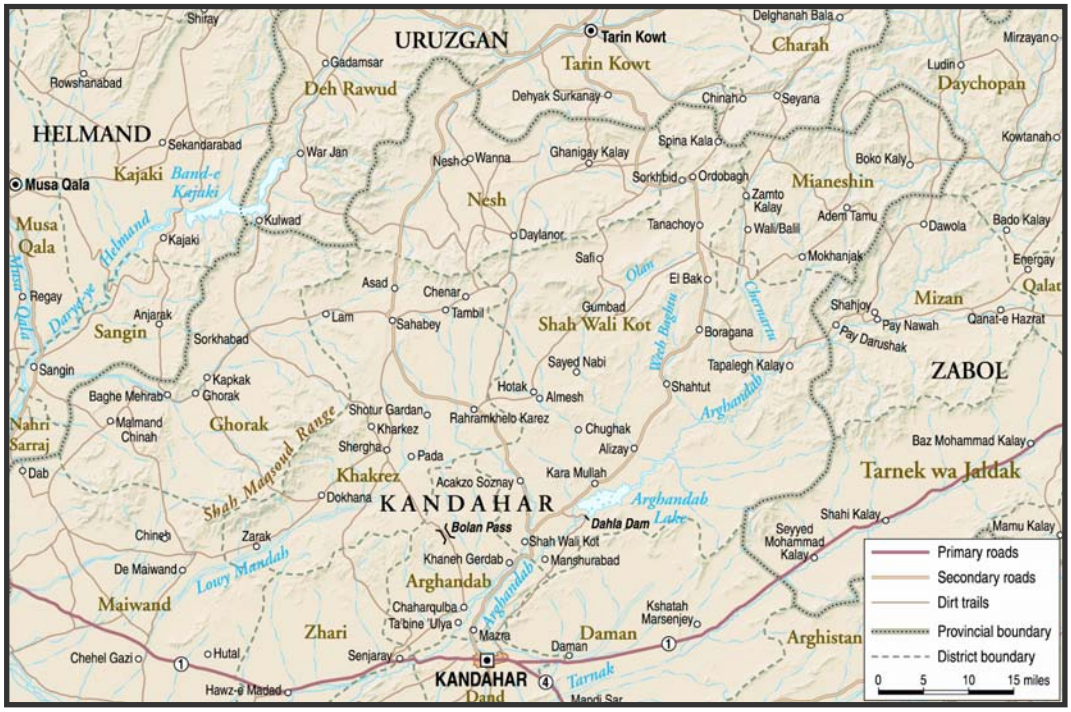
While the majority of the Taliban's rank-and-file fighters are local recruits who rarely leave their home district, the Taliban are sustained and led by a group of trained commanders, facilitators, and hard-core fighters. This group moves across the battlefield and back and forth between central Kandahar and sanctuaries in Pakistan or within Afghanistan. The Taliban also rely on the importation of supplies from Pakistan. Enemy dislocation from central Kandahar will likely make LOCs and support zones in outer Kandahar more important. The Taliban had stockpiled massive amounts of explosive material and weapons across Panjwai, Zhari, and Arghandab, such that the enemy system in those districts was likely largely self-sustaining. The loss of strongholds, stockpiles, and IED-making facilities in September and October 2010 will increase the importance of the Taliban's lines of communication.

In support of operations in Arghandab, Zhari, and Panjwai, ISAF and Afghan forces have conducted disruption operations and targeted raids in several but not all of the Taliban support zones in outer Kandahar. If ISAF can disrupt enemy activity in these areas, it may further complicate the Taliban's attempts to regroup and to re-infiltrate key terrain around Kandahar City.

Taliban support networks outside of central Zhari can be divided into roughly two systems. One is a series of routes that run directly from the Pakistan border into central Kandahar, and the other is a more complex system of LOCs and safe-havens that arch around Kandahar to the north, running from Zabul to Helmand.

Insurgents had long moved men and material into Kandahar from safe-havens in Balochistan province of Pakistan across smuggling trails through the hard-packed desert.[306] These routes lead through Shorabak and Reg districts into Panjwai and Dand. The desert offers less cover and few bed-down positions compared to routes into Kandahar from the north, but it is also a far more direct route from Pakistan. ISAF has devoted significant resources to blocking the movement of Taliban fighters and material into Kandahar. The last of the incoming units for Kandahar, the 525 Battlefield Surveillance Brigade, deployed to border areas southeast of Kandahar City in the fall of 2010 to interdict the flow of insurgent fighters and supplies across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.[307] An additional U.S. battalion, the 4-2 Stryker Cavalry, is already operating out of Spin Boldak district with a similar border security mission.[308]

The ABP, under the de facto command of the controversial regional ABP chief of staff Abdul Raziq, has significant control over Spin Boldak and Takta Pul districts, making this route into Kandahar particularly difficult for the insurgents.[309] This is true despite the fact that the town of Chaman, just opposite the border from Spin Boldak in Pakistan, is a major command and control hub for the Taliban's senior leadership.[310] In the fall of 2010, the ABP along with their Special Forces partners also conducted a series of operations to disrupt Taliban networks in Arghestan and Maruf districts. Operations on October 28 and November 7, 2010, resulted in the deaths of nearly forty insurgents and uncovered dozens of pressure plate IEDs and IED-making components.[311] The Taliban activity revealed by these operations suggests Arghestan has remained permissive to the transit of IED components, but that the Taliban are more vulnerable here than in their former strongholds



MAP 8 | NORTHERN KANDAHAR

along the Arghandab River Valley.

To the north and west of Kandahar, the Taliban operate a far more complex system. A broad view of Taliban activities across southern Afghanistan suggests that the enemy's operations are supported by a mostly uncontested belt of territory and LOCs that run from Zabul through northern Kandahar to northern Helmand. The safest areas for insurgents in the south remain in Zabul province, a rugged backwater that the Taliban have controlled since 2003. Zabul connects insurgents in southern Afghanistan not only to Pakistan, but also to southern Ghazni and southern Paktika, which are also largely under Taliban control.[312] Insurgents in Zabul have easy access to Shah Wali Kot, which in turn connects with Arghandab and Khakrez districts and where the Taliban find a number of sympathetic tribes.[313] From Khakrez, roads lead to Arghandab and Zhari and to Taliban controlled Ghorak and Maiwand districts. Ghorak and Maiwand have long been key Taliban LOCs connecting Kandahar, Helmand and Uruzgan, and roads lead directly from these areas to Sangin, which has became the main battleground between ISAF and the Taliban in Helmand in the second half of 2010.[314] The Taliban are reported to have long maintained a stronghold in Garamabak, a town in northern Maiwand along key routes connecting Maiwand, Ghorak, Khakrez and Sangin. Garamabak has hosted foreign fighters and a prominent Taliban court, suggesting its importance.[315] Maiwand is also notable as an important area for trafficking and processing opium poppy produced in both Kandahar and Helmand.[316] In northern districts like Shah Wali Kot, Khakrez, and Ghorak, the Taliban have won over much of the local population either through longstanding family ties or because they have exploited discontent over the interference of Kandahar City powerbrokers, who have given power almost exclusively to their allies among the Popalzai tribe.[317]

Of these sanctuaries, ISAF has put meaningful pressure on the Taliban in Shah Wali Kot and Maiwand districts, but Taliban fighters forced out of Arghandab, Zhari, and Panjwai still have relatively free reign across much of northern Kandahar. Australian Special Forces previously based in Uruzgan province north of Kandahar extended their operations into Shah Wali Kot and the remote Mian Neshin district.[318] The Australians encountered significant insurgent activity in both districts, during the summer and fall of 2010.[319] The Taliban used the valleys of

Shah Wali Kot district to mass troops during their summer 2010 offensive. In June, the Australians, supported by U.S. forces, pinned down a large number of Taliban fighters in the valleys of Shah Wali Kot and inflicted over one hundred casualties.[320] Coalition forces continued to encounter and disrupt Taliban forces in Shah Wali Kot in September and October 2010, as ISAF operations forced Taliban out of Arghandab and Zhari.[321] On October 18, 2010, a patrol in Shah Wali Kot targeted a large gathering of insurgent fighters and leaders, and in the resulting fight killed ten insurgents and detained more.[322] Operations have also extended to Mian Neshin, a remote district north of Shah Wali Kot at the head of several capillary valleys. On October 22, 2010, coalition troops raided an insurgent hideout in the district, capturing two Taliban commanders and killing a number of fighters.[323] Several days later, coalition forces in Mian Neshin killed Mullah Jamalulddin, an important Taliban commander known to be close to the Taliban's Amir Mullah Omar.[324] The presence of a large number of Taliban commanders in Shah Wali Kot and Mian Neshin suggests that Taliban fighters have been congregating in these areas as they are pushed out of the districts around Kandahar City.

Khakrez district is equally important as the Taliban reconstitute. Khakrez, which lies to the west of Shah Wali Kot in a bowl surrounded by hills and dotted with small villages, has been used by insurgents as a key LOC, safe-haven and staging ground since at least 2005.[325] In 2007 and 2008, the Taliban launched multiple attacks on Arghandab from Khakrez, which is connected to Arghandab by several important roads.[326] In October 2010, some of the Taliban commanders forced out of Arghandab had reportedly gathered in Khakrez and were conducting a recruiting campaign among the local tribes.[327] Special Forces activity in Khakrez has been much less successful than in Shah Wali Kot. The U.S. deployed a small Special Forces team partnered with Afghan Special Forces to Khakrez in February 2010.[328] The team's mission was to start an ALP program modeled on the successful Nagahan program in Arghandab; however, the Khakrez program has had minimal success.[329] The tribes in Khakrez continue to side with the Taliban, largely because they are alienated by the district government, which is dominated by a small group of Popalzai.[330] This same dynamic exists in Shah Wali Kot, but Australian Special Forces there have focused more exclusively on targeting insurgents. Australian forces have historically worked closely with the Popalzai warlord Matiullah Khan, who controls southern Uruzgan and the major roads through northern Kandahar, though it is unclear if Matiullah is supporting Australian operations in Shah Wali Kot.[331] Using Matiullah for intelligence and manpower in northern Kandahar presents a tradeoff between operational advantages in central Kandahar and long-term stability in Uruzgan and northern Kandahar, where Matiullah and his uncle, former governor Jan Mohammad, have antagonized most of the non-Popalzai population and driven many local tribes to the Taliban.[332]

To the west of Zhari, Maiwand district has served as the main insurgent infiltration route into Zhari and Panjwai. Given its strategic location connecting Zhari and Panjwai with Helmand and northern Kandahar, Maiwand has long been a key Taliban infiltration route and a line of communication.[333] The vegetation in Maiwand is less dense than in Zhari, but insurgents have established numerous safe-houses across the distrtict, where the local Noorzai and Ishaqzai tribes are particularly loyal to the insurgents. Insurgents make use of both the strip of farmland that extends along the Arghandab River as it flows into Helmand province and a series of small towns five to ten miles north of Highway One, centered on the Taliban stronghold of Garambak. To cut off insurgent movement into and out of Zhari through Maiwand, the 3rd Squadron of the 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, based in Maiwand district, constructed a mile long wall of Hesco barriers across the cultivated strip of land north of the Arghandab River in September 2010.[334] Controlled access points allow the population to move through the province while straining out insurgent fighters, who are forced to travel instead through the open desert to the north or south.[335] The insurgents have targeted the wall by laying dozens of IEDs in the vicinity, and have resorted to employing women and children to emplace

the IEDs along the wall.[336] The Taliban decision to target the barrier suggests how important the roads between Maiwand, Zhari and Panjwai are as an insurgent LOC. ISAF increased pressure on insurgent positions in Maiwand in late November 2010 when it targeted facilitation networks and detained twenty-five insurgents in Band-e Timor, a cluster of villages near the Maiwand-Zhari border. Band-e Timor has long been a major narcotics processing center, but coalition raids seized large quantities of bomb-making materials, IEDs, and fifteen motorcycles, suggesting the area had become a hub for fighters operating on the border of Zhari district.[337]

These sanctuaries in northern Kandahar may give the Taliban a zone in which to regroup and prepare for future offensives and provide the enemy internal lines of operation between their fronts in Kandahar and Helmand provinces. ISAF should attempt to disrupt the enemy system in these areas, in part because the coalition has a much greater advantage fighting the insurgents in these areas than it does in the densely cultivated Arghandab River Valley. The terrain in Khakrez and Ghorak is wide open and offers minimal concealment for insurgent bases or movement. In Shah Wali Kot, a company-sized U.S. force succeeded in halting a large Taliban force from advancing on Kandahar in 2003 and 2004.[338] Canadian troops in Khakrez found large patches of flat and open terrain well-suited to the use of heavy armor during operations in 2007.[339] Given that RC South has limited resources available, especially with the need to counter the Taliban's increased presence in Kandahar City, operations areas like Ghorak and northern Maiwand might be assigned to U.S. Marines in RC Southwest. Ghorak and northern Maiwand are, after all, as closely connected to Sangin as they are to Kandahar, and the terrain in these areas may be well-suited to the contingent of M1 Abrams tanks which will be deployed to northern Helmand.[340]

ANSF PARTNERING AND EFFECTIVENESS

Hamkari has involved one of the largest deployments of Afghan Security Forces in the post-Taliban conflict. Hamkari has involved two oversized brigades of ANA forces, in addition to Afghan commandoes, ANCOP, ANP, ABP, and the NDS.

Hamkari has focused on partnering ISAF and Afghan troops in all of the operations conducted in Kandahar. At the Kandahar City checkpoints, ISAF has moved from a mentoring model that involved occasional visits from U.S. forces in the spring of 2010 to constant partnering, whereby squads of the U.S. 504th MP Battalion live and work full-time with ANP and ANCOP units at police substations.[341] The U.S. battalions operating in Arghandab and Zhari are partnered with ANA kandaks at a 1:1 ratio. The partnering involves combined headquarters and operational planning and extends down to the platoon and section levels.[342] Other Afghan units, including several battalions of the ANCOP and the ABP, are partnered with U.S. Special Forces.[343]

The ANA deployment in Kandahar consists of the 1st and 3rd Brigades of the 205th Corps as well as a contingent of the elite Afghan Commandos. The 1st Brigade of the 205th Corps has long been based in Kandahar. Several of its kandaks, including the 1st and 2nd Kandaks, have served in Zhari and Panjwai since 2006, and are judged as proficient combat units and capable of conducting operations with relative independence.[344] In contrast to the 1st Brigade, the 3rd Brigade of the ANA 205th Corps is a recently generated unit. Several of its kandaks were briefly deployed in Helmand, while others traveled from basic training in Kabul immediately to Kandahar in the summer of 2010. The 3rd Brigade, which consists of several kandaks of approximately 600 men each, has been closely partnered with the 2nd BCT, 101st Airborne, and has been operating in Zhari and Arghandab.[345] Elements of the brigade had traveled directly from basic training in Kabul to link up with their partnered units in Kandahar, where they trained together for sixty days before

moving directly into intense combat in August 2010.[346]

The 3rd Brigade has received consistently negative evaluations in media accounts by U.S. journalists. Reports suggest that some companies of the brigade are extremely raw and lack even basic professionalism. Anecdotal reports suggest that in some instances entire platoons refused to fight, went into shock, and could not fire their weapons.[347] There are also reports of narcotics use while in combat.[348] NATO-Training Mission – Afghanistan (NTM-A) has acknowledged problems with the 3rd Brigade, 205th Corps.[349] The Ministry of Defense replaced the brigade commander during Hamkari in an attempt to improve its leadership.[350] In response to feedback from the problems posed by units like the 3-205th, NTM-A also built increased training into the partnering process and added an additional week to ANA pre-deployment training.[351]

In theory, close partnering can serve as its own, more effective form of training and compensate for the inexperience of units like the 3rd Brigade. An important measurement of the success of the current strategy for the ANSF will be whether units like the 3rd Brigade, 205th Corps improve during their time in the field, or whether attrition is severe enough to prevent progress. Attrition rates appear to vary based on the experience of the unit, with fresh units often suffering an initial wave of desertions. Reports suggest that some 800 strong kandaks faced a twenty-five percent desertion rate after the unit learned it would deploy to Kandahar, with similar desertions after the unit deployed.[352] Some units manage to stabilize as they gain combat experience. While a number of ANCOP units had significant problems with attrition during the Marja campaign in February 2010, and ANCOP forces reached a national annual attrition rate as high as seventy percent at one point in early 2010, the 3rd Kandak of the 3rd ANCOP Brigade, which is a veteran unit, reported only a single desertion while in Arghandab in July and August 2010.[353]

Several significant changes in the ANSF leadership in Kandahar occurred during Hamkari. In November, Provincial Chief of Police Sardar Mohammad Zazai was replaced by General Khan Mohammad.[354] The population in Kandahar had been expecting a replacement for Sardar Mohammad Zazai for some time, seeing him as a weak figure largely overshadowed by Mirwais Noorzai, the ANP zone commander for southern Afghanistan, and by Fazl Ahmad Sherzad, the Kandahar City security chief.[355] Khan Mohammad is a Kandahar native from the Alokozai tribe, and served as the deputy to Mullah Naqib during the anti-Soviet jihad and then as Kandahar Chief of Police from 2004 to 2005.[356] He was marginalized by the Karzai government and transferred out of Kandahar in an attempt to limit the influence in the Kandahar police force of strong figures with independent powerbases who were not aligned with Ahmed Wali Karzai.[357] Given Khan Mohammad's long absence from the province and the decline of the cohesion of the Alokozai tribe, he has less of a powerbase today than he did in 2005. His appointment, nevertheless, is politically significant. It may signal willingness by the Karzai administration to bring potential rivals of Ahmed Wali Karzai into the provincial government, but may also signal that the two men had reached a mutually beneficial political arrangement.

The 205th Corps, which is the ANA commander responsible for Kandahar, Uruzgan and Zabul, also saw a change in command. General Sher Mohammad Zazai was replaced in early September 2010 by General Abdul Hamid, who had previously commanded the 4th Brigade of the 205th Corps in Uruzgan Province.[358]

THE END STATE: BUILDING A LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT

Building Political Consensus and Gaining Local Support

Stabilizing Kandahar province ultimately requires the formation of a government that is accepted as legitimate by the local population and that is strong enough to secure Kandahar from insurgents and reign in internal criminal networks.

Problems of government legitimacy exist in Kandahar at multiple levels. At the local and district level, the Afghan government has alienated many communities by condoning or encouraging corruption and abuses of power by government officials and by marginalizing much of the population from the post-Taliban order. Some communities in areas recently retaken by ISAF had welcomed Taliban rule, while most of the population would simply not brave intimidation to put themselves at risk for a government viewed as illegitimate.

The population in the districts wants good governance, justice, freedom from predatory officials, and some level of autonomy from Kabul and the ruling elite in Kandahar City.[359] Prerequisites for winning the active support of the population include convincing the people that the Afghan government is accountable to them, and the reinstitution of traditional governance structures, including representative shuras and the mechanisms for administering justice. In recent years, the government of Kandahar has often propped up shuras of local elites who do not speak for the population, which has weakened local leadership, crippled any attempts to mobilize the population, and sometimes enabled insurgent activity.

At the provincial level, the governance challenge involves both short term questions of public perception of the government's legitimacy and a longer term question of whether Kandahar's governance structures can secure the province and endure as ISAF eventually begins to thin out its presence. A number of powerbrokers in the government, including Ahmed Wali Karzai, have become symbols representing a culture of impunity and an exclusive and unworkable political arrangement. Government legitimacy is a matter of public perception, and ISAF's governance strategy may not have the desired effects if Hamkari and the Afghan government continue to be tainted by their associations with powerbrokers who are symbols of corruption and abuse.

Security gains will not persist over the long run if the Afghan government in Kandahar remains unwilling to discipline predatory officials and criminal powerbrokers. If Afghan government officials, contracting elites, and powerbrokers associated with the international coalition continue to benefit from a culture of impunity, Kandahar's governance structures and security forces may revert to the control of factional actors more interested in short-term gain than in stability as ISAF draws down its presence.

ISAF's military successes in 2010 and its overwhelming show of force provide a window of opportunity to work towards a more stable political consensus across Kandahar province. The scale of ISAF's operations during the fall of 2010 has had an impression on the population, which subsequently has been far more willing to engage with the coalition. Recent gains in security also grant the coalition and the Afghan government the breathing room to consider issues of long term stability.

Whether or not intended, the international coalition's actions inevitably have political consequences in Kandahar. Given its immense military and financial resources, the coalition's actions and omissions determine the allocation of power in ways that are not always initially evident. Recognizing this, local officials and powerbrokers have long attempted to manipulate the coalition for their own ends, and the coalition must ensure it is not inadvertently supporting forces that undermine government legitimacy. The massive surge in coalition spending in Kandahar may carry the greatest risk of negative unintended consequences. Deluging Kandahar with foreign money and projects carries some benefits, but also risks creating perverse incentive structures for local actors, fueling instability and violent competition over resources, and strengthening malign powerbrokers in Kandahar. International actors must carefully monitor the political implications of their spending to ensure the negative consequences do not outweigh the benefits.

The Kandahar Civilian Stabilization Plan

To address the issue of government legitimacy, a civilian-led stabilization plan is a key element of Hamkari. The stabilization plan has focused on building the capacity of the Afghan government and on delivery of development assistance. The effort has been guided and planned by both the joint Canadian-American Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) and RC South in conjunction with Kandahar Governor Toryalai Wesa.[360] Strengthening the governor's office was a key objective of Hamkari. ISAF perceived in early 2010 that the Afghan government was unwilling to take direct action against powerbrokers and officials who encouraged or protected criminal actors in Kandahar and undermined the rule of law. Thus, the PRT and ISAF focused on increasing the influence of Governor Wesa and other officials, hoping that building the relative strength of institutional government would render powerbrokers less relevant.[361] The PRT and ISAF both believed that it would be a sign of success if "the line that's outside [Governor Wesa's] office is bigger than the line outside anybody else's office."[362]

Governor Wesa's governance objectives for Hamkari were to build a "Present, Representative and Responsive" government.[363] ISAF, the coalition civilian effort, and the governor's office planned to achieve this by ensuring that its lines of operation consistently connected the government of Kandahar to the people.[364] This guidance was developed through an iterative process between the PRT and Governor Wesa. Over the course of 2010, the Kandahar PRT and RC South saw signs that Governor Wesa was more willing to engage local communities.[365] With the PRT's support, Wesa has conducted frequent shuras across Kandahar and traveled to former Taliban strongholds in Arghandab and Zhari only days after they were cleared to hold shuras with local elders. [366] He has also confronted shuras that do not represent the local population. In March 2010, Governor Wesa told a meeting of the Arghandab district council that he would not meet with the group again until it included a wider range of local constituencies, and he proposed a plan to base representation in the Arghandab District Council not on tribe, but on ensuring the participation of each of Arghandab's seventy-two main villages.[367] In another instance, Wesa vetoed the selection of several representatives from Shah Wali Kot district to the June Peace Jirga. The two representatives selected were both Popalzai living in Kandahar City who had the support of the Ahmed Wali Karzai network, but had little active connection to Shah Wali Kot.[368]

One of the primary innovations in the civilian-led approach to Kandahar has been District Stability Teams (DSTs), which deploy small teams of U.S. or Canadian civilians to live at the district center and work with and mentor district leadership in order to address local grievances.[369] The first district stability team was a Canadian effort in Dand district set up in 2009. DSTs have subsequently been established in Arghandab, Zhari, Panjwai, Spin Boldak, and Maiwand districts.[370]

As part of the Hamkari process, the Kandahar PRT developed district stability plans in coordination with the DSTs.[371] The plans adopted a grievance-driven approach, aiming to identify and address issues of concern to the population. Consultations were held with the district councils, tribal leaders and the local district governors, along with the ISAF battlespace owners.[372] The population frequently expressed concerns with security, intimidation, and assassinations, and also expressed a desire for development projects like schools and health clinics. Once consultations were conducted, the Kandahar PRT worked to link the district stability plans with Governor Wesa's stabilization plan.[373]

The concept behind the DSTs was replicated in Kandahar City beginning in late summer 2010 with the creation of Sub-District Targeting Teams (SDTTs).[374] The SDTT concept plans to place a civilian in each sub-district to coordinate between various coalition and Afghan government actors. The SDTTs are designed to help increase the authority of the local sub-district manager and connect him with provincial line ministries, the U.S. Agency for International Development

(USAID) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The teams also encourage the formation of local shuras and work to link them to the sub-district manager and to the Kandahar government.[375]

This stabilization architecture will play a major role in coordinating and dispensing an unprecedented level of development funding. The United States, through the U.S military, State Department, and USAID, has an estimated budget of between $400 million and $1 billion to spend in Kandahar over the next year, supplemented by funds from other donors, including the Canadian Government.[376] This development funding will be dispersed in a wide range of projects, some of it through U.S. military Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) funding, much of it through contractors, and some of it through major landmark development programs. One of the largest and most significant development programs in Kandahar is the Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture, or AVIPA, a program offering agricultural assistance, with the objective of building local support of the Afghan government and providing employment for men who might otherwise join the insurgency.[377] The program is administered by a USAID contractor and runs on a $360 million budget.[378] In Kandahar, the program has aimed to increase the importance of district governors by channeling aid through them. Total AVIPA funding for Kandahar is not clear, but in Arghandab alone, AVIPA is spending $23 million on local agriculture.[379]

After overcoming some U.S. inter-government disputes in early 2010, ISAF has also authorized an ambitious project to provide electricity for Kandahar City through the use of generators, a project that will cost an estimated $225 million.[380] The first set of eight generators was installed in late October 2010 to provide the Kandahar Industrial Park with ten megawatts of electricity. The industrial park had been largely abandoned due to electrical difficulties, and Governor Wesa has expressed the hope that the generators will mobilize inactive factories and provide employment for Kandaharis.[381]

Limits of Governance as Capacity Building

The Kandahar PRT and RC South have established a civilian infrastructure in Kandahar that is a valuable platform for coordinating and implementing governance and development efforts. Yet while progress has been made in building the government's technical capacity, this is only one element of government legitimacy in Kandahar. Legitimacy is ultimately an issue of altering public perception, and the technical focus of civilian programs will suffer if it fails to account for political realities and the perceptions of Afghans. Technical programs, even if they can deliver services, may in some cases alienate the population further if the population perceives them as closely linked to tainted government figures and to corruption. They are also unlikely to offer a solution to the prevalent culture of impunity that enables and encourages criminal activity among Kandahar's elites, which is the single greatest governance challenge in Kandahar City itself.

Afghan politics continue to be personality driven, and institution building must account for this reality. The case of Governor Wesa offers an example of the importance of perception and the limits of over-prioritization of capacity building. The coalition's attempt to build the governor's authority in Kandahar is hindered by Wesa's irreversible limitations in the eyes of the population. Governor Wesa emigrated from Kandahar to Canada in the early 1990s, where he was a professor of agriculture. Karzai named Wesa governor in December 2008 after his predecessor was removed for challenging Ahmed Wali Karzai's interests.[382] ISAF values Wesa's willingness to work closely with the coalition and has confidence in the governor's abilities.[383] This, however, does not mitigate Kandahari perceptions that Wesa is an imposed outsider without the necessary character for his job.[384] In the weeks after his appointment, demonstrations protesting the selection of the Canadian émigré were only averted by the intervention of members of the provincial council.[385] Many Kandaharis see him as a puppet either of the Karzai family or of the international community; Wesa, after all, was a

childhood friend of President Karzai.[386] Wesa's decision to turn to Abdul Raziq for support and to publicly elevate Raziq as the hero of operations in both Malajat and Arghandab is unlikely to have done much to restore his image.[387] Wesa is also seen as chronically weak and unsuited for a war-time governorship.[388] One widespread story in Kandahar is that as a university professor in the early 1990s, Wesa could hardly control a classroom of students.[389] While the story may be untrue, it suggests popular perceptions of the governor. Many Kandaharis are simply waiting for him to leave. Wesa's removal has been widely expected since late 2009, and some Kandaharis see his presence as an obstacle to real progress in strengthening the government of Kandahar.[390] It is, of course, still possible to achieve progress on restoring government legitimacy while Wesa is in the governor's office (Wesa, at least, is not tainted by corruption), and working with Governor Wesa is likely the most practical available means of improving the government's capacity. But channeling ISAF's governance efforts through the governor is unlikely to either rehabilitate government legitimacy or cause powerbrokers to cede influence to the Afghan government.

Failure to calibrate coalition development efforts and contracting to the realities and conditions of local politics could have far more severe consequences. With the exception of provision of justice, which is a key determinate of legitimacy in the Pashtun South, the delivery of goods and services is not historically expected from the government, and cannot by itself increase the government's legitimacy. Instead, provision of goods and services is valuable insofar as it signals a broader willingness of the Afghan government to be responsive and accountable to the needs of the population. Some development spending may have this effect, depending on the transparency of aid spending and the way in which goods and services are distributed.

But the scale of development assistance devoted to Kandahar raises questions not only about absorption potential and corruption, but about a massive reallocation of political power that could seriously undermine long-term stability in Kandahar.[391] While no estimate exists of Kandahar's Gross Domestic Product, the $400 million to $1 billion that the coalition may spend is almost certainly larger than the rest of the province's economy.[392] Local powerbrokers in Kandahar have long configured their networks around key revenue streams, and coalition spending will undoubtedly become the target not only of corruption, but of criminal syndicates. Historically, a limited number of networks and powerful families in Kandahar have succeeded in making immense profits from coalition assistance and contracting, which has led to significant political problems.[393]

This trend continues. The 2010 parliamentary election offers just one demonstration of the extent to which contracting fortunes, rather than political connections or reputation, have became the primary determinate of political power in Kandahar. At least three of Kandahar's eleven successful candidates were supported by Ahmed Wali Karzai, who presides over Kandahar's most powerful contracting networks.[394] Two candidates supported by the Gul Agha Sherzai network, the major business rival of Ahmed Wali Karzai, won election.[395] The Sherzai-backed candidates included Mullah Sayed Mohammad Akhund, a brother of Kandahar Airfield contractor Gulalai.[396] Three other successful candidates, Hashmat Karzai, Mohammad Omar Nagyalai, and Abdul Rahim Ayubi, run semi-independent contracting conglomerates and appear to have won election by virtue of their own wealth, though they have varying degrees of connection to Ahmed Wali Karzai.[397] Only three of the eleven successful candidates have no demonstrable ties to contracting fortunes (though connections may exist), and several prominent candidates who were not involved in the contracting business, including the Noor-ul Haq Ulomi, the head of Parliament's Military Affairs Committee, failed to win re-election.[398] Like Kandahar's Parliamentary delegation, the Kandahar Provincial Council is a combination of members hand-picked by Ahmed Wali Karzai or elected by virtue of their contracting wealth, and the Provincial Council is heavily invested in taking kickbacks from development projects.[399] While Kandahar's

contracting networks have often succeeded in co-opting the Afghan government, they are also willing to take violent action against government officials who oppose their interests. Arghandab District Governor Abdul Jabar was assassinated in June 2010, for example, by a local contracting mafia that felt it was not receiving a large enough cut of the U.S. development assistance channeled through his office.[400]

The contracting economy in Kandahar seriously undermines the legitimacy and durability of the Afghan government. The incentive structure created by contracting has discouraged investment in long-term stability and in some cases encouraged collaboration with the insurgency.[401] It drives talented Afghans from the security forces or government service into contracting, and has predictable inflationary pressures that severely weaken the purchasing power of ordinary Kandaharis not benefiting from contracting and reduces the value of the fixed salaries paid by the Afghan government.[402] ISAF has stated its intentions to review and reform its contracting practice, including its contracting for private security.[403] But ISAF contracting is only a portion of the increased international funding devoted to Kandahar. Given the real possibility that coalition spending in Kandahar will undermine the coalition's military and governance gains, it is imperative that spending is critically reviewed to determine whether oversight is sufficiently stringent and whether the positive effects of a project demonstrably outweigh its negative consequences.

District Level Governance

Some turn-over and potential improvements did occur in district-level leadership in the summer and fall of 2010, as several ineffective or problematic leaders were replaced. Zhari and Arghandab districts received new district governors in June and July 2010, respectively. In both instances, the new district governor was selected with input from local shuras, which, though they represented only part of the district's population, did signal increased community input. In Zhari, District Governor Sarhadi, who had gained a reputation for corruption and extortion, was replaced by Karim Jan, a former militia commander from the Alizai tribe in Senjaray.[404] Karim Jan was selected with the support of a small Alizai shura.[405] He has been willing, at the prompting of the U.S. military, to take an active role in demanding that villagers in Senjaray actively resist the Taliban infiltration of the town.[406]

In Arghandab, the old district governor, Haji Abdul Jabar, was assassinated in June 2010. His replacement, Haji Shah Mohammad Ahmadi, was selected by two-dozen Arghandab elders, though it is not clear how the group of elders was selected or who it represented.[407] Ahmadi is a former mujahideen commander, fruit trader, and wealthy landowner in Arghandab. RC South has been pleased by his willingness to travel to meet with constituencies in Arghandab and his efforts to reach out to the Ghilzai and Taraki tribes in Arghandab, though the effectiveness of his efforts is less clear.[408]

Of clearer benefit was the sacking of Arghandab Chief of Police Zmari Khan. Zmari was replaced by Nayaz Mohammad, brother of the senior Alokozai leader Khan Mohammad, a former deputy to Mullah Naqib who was appointed Kandahar Chief of Police in November 2010.[409] RC South expressed the hope that Nayaz Mohammad's appointment would draw another segment of the Alokozai into Arghandab's defense.[410]

In Panjwai, Mohammad Azim replaced Haji Mohammad Alokozai as chief of police.[411] Governor Wesa had considered replacing Alokozai earlier in 2010, but the move was blocked at the time, U.S. officials believed, because of interference from Ahmed Wali Karzai.[412] By the fall of 2010, Wesa was able to remove Alokozai. The new chief impressed the Canadian contingent in the district by signing an additional 140 officers onto his force after arriving at his post.[413] Panjwai District Governor Haji Baran, meanwhile, is viewed as corrupt by Canadian forces in the area, and assessed to have antagonized local communities, which have little respect for the

illiterate official.[414] Baran earned notoriety in a July 2010 incident in which he attacked Panjwai chief of police Mohammad Alokozai with a tea kettle.[415]

Kandahar's district officials are, in short, of uneven or unproven quality. This, along with the frequent rotation of these officials, cautions against the tendency of civilian District Stabilization Teams and U.S. military commanders to place unjustified importance to the role of the district governor, who is historically only one of many elements of a district's politics.

In Arghandab, for example, Alokozai tribal leaders, police officials, and mujahideen commanders dominated district politics from 2001, while district governors played a minor role. Still, coalition officials in 2009 and 2010 made District Governor Abdul Jabar the central focus of their governance efforts, channeling spending through him and thus giving him extraordinary authority and control.[416] The close relationships may have led to an overlooking of Jabar's flaws as well. While coalition officials who were working to build Jabar's influence always expressed complete confidence in the District Governor, U.S. officials later discovered that Jabar contributed to his own assassination by a rival contracting network by taking too large a cut of U.S. development aid.[417] ISAF commanders and coalition civilian officials may consider a more pragmatic approach towards district governors, using them when they are effective and popular, but not giving them unconditional backing.

Powerbrokers and Perception Problems

The danger that negative public perceptions will overshadow the other forms of progress that have been made on governance is discussed above in the context of Governor Wesa. The problem of public perception, however, is an even greater challenge with Kandahar's powerbrokers. For Kandaharis, several figures have come to symbolize the post-Taliban political order and the prevalent culture of impunity. Two of these figures, President Karzai's half-brother and the Chairman of the Kandahar Provincial Council Ahmed Wali Karzai and Border Police Commander General Abdul Raziq, have succeeded in associating themselves with Hamkari.[418]

Both Ahmed Wali Karzai and Raziq have been eager to present themselves as useful or indispensible to ISAF in order to secure a role in the operation. And while they have not actually controlled Hamkari, they have succeeded in publicly associating themselves with the operation and convincing the public and their political rivals that they have ISAF's support, and control the government in Kandahar. In a society where perception is often more important than reality, the Afghan government's inability to signal a decisive break from these figures is a key challenge to restoring government legitimacy.

Ahmed Wali Karzai has continued to shadow Hamkari as the most visible sign of the old political order. Ahmed Wali's position briefly appeared weak in late 2009 and early 2010, as it was publicly announced that ISAF was considering action against him and the Western press published multiple accounts of his links to criminal activity.[419] In Kandahar, rumors circulated in December 2009 that the U.S. troop surge would be accompanied by Ahmed Wali Karzai's removal.[420] Ahmed Wali had reason to worry that political rivals might be less compliant and more willing to challenge him if they believed his relationship with ISAF was weakening. In February 2010, when Gul Agha Sherzai sensed that ISAF might distance itself from Ahmed Wali, he returned to Kandahar with a delegation of Nangarhar elders in an unsuccessful attempt to establish himself as the leading figure driving reconciliation with Pashtun tribes.[421] The 205th Corps of the ANA was likewise emboldened to confront Ahmed Wali Karzai's influence in May 2010, when it filed a legal complaint against several of Ahmed Wali Karzai's private security commanders for illegal seizure of ANA land.[422] In response, Ahmed Wali closed down the provincial council and eventually forced military prosecutors to retract the case.[423] Karzai's ability to withstand these challenges without a visible loss of standing only increased public perception of his influence. Similarly, in the minds of Kandaharis, press

accounts in the Western media of Ahmed Wali Karzai's influence, combined with a lack of visible action by ISAF, only confirmed popular notions about Ahmed Wali Karzai's all-encompassing influence.[424]

By July 2010, Ahmed Wali Karzai was making public statements encouraging ISAF to launch major operations, a reversal from his stance in 2009.[425] In a press conference that month Ahmed Wali Karzai stated that the people of Kandahar wanted an operation to clear Taliban fighters from the province, and he called for development assistance and a build-up of district administration.[426] Coalition civilian officials report that Ahmed Wali Karzai was consistently eager to be useful.[427] He volunteered gunmen from private security companies affiliated with him for use in Hamkari, an offer which ISAF accepted.[428]

The powerbroker who has gained the most from Hamkari, however, has been Abdul Raziq, the leader of the Adozai subtribe of the Achekzai in Spin Boldak and the de facto head of the Kandahar Border Police.[429] Raziq had long made alliances in which he acted as the enforcer for Kandahar's most prominent powerbrokers. He had first played the role for Governor Sherzai, and once Sherzai was pushed out of Kandahar, for Ahmed Wali Karzai and his allies.[430] His association with Ahmed Wali Karzai is exemplified by credible allegations that Raziq's border police stuffed ballot boxes and detained election observers in the 2009 and 2010 elections on behalf of parliamentary candidates backed by President Karzai and Ahmed Wali Karzai.[431]

Raziq and the network of Ahmed Wali Karzai most visibly connected themselves with Hamkari in a late August 2010 Afghan-led operation in Malajat, a suburb to the southwest of Kandahar City in Dand district. Malajat had long been a problem area, supporting Taliban networks in Kandahar City, and clearing the suburb was an important operational achievement with positive implications for security in Kandahar City. The orchestrated theater of the operation, however, was carefully calculated to show the hand of the Ahmed Wali Karzai network, and suggests the extent to which Ahmed Wali Karzai, Governor Wesa, and Abdul Raziq are capable of operating as a team. The Malajat operation had its origins in the August 18 assassination of Muhammad Rasol Popalzai, the Daman District Police Chief.[432] Popalzai had a reputation as an ally of Ahmed Wali Karzai, and was particularly despised by the population for his involvement in land grabs and arbitrary detentions.[433] Furious at the killing of a key leader in his network, Ahmed Wali Karzai called President Karzai, according to American officials quoted in the *New York Times*.[434] After speaking with his brother, President Karzai granted Governor Wesa unprecedented power to act as commander-in-chief in Kandahar, and ordered him "to convene an urgent 'military shura'" to formulate retaliatory actions.[435] An operation led by Raziq was launched by August 27, 2010, in Malajat.[436] ISAF backed the offensive with three companies of the 504th MP battalion, which was mentoring ANSF in Kandahar City.[437] Despite initial setbacks which occurred when Raziq's men stumbled into IED belts, ABP and NDS forces detained over a hundred suspects in a visible demonstration of power.[438]

The operation gave a clear impression that Ahmed Wali Karzai and his allies continued to own Kandahar province. The *New York Times* narrative that the Malajat operation was calculated as retribution for the assassination of Rasul Popalzai is particularly troubling.[439] In Pashtun society, the promise of retribution is a strategy for guarding against assassinations: hence the logic of the often discussed Pashtun blood-feud. If a given tribe or network demonstrates that it is able to inflict massive punishment on a perpetrator, it may be able to dissuade that enemy from future attacks. While in ISAF's eyes the operation was a positive signal of the growing initiative and capacity of the Afghan security forces, the units deployed in Malajat were strongly attached to a set of personalities. The message to a politically aware Kandahar audience may have been that Ahmed Wali Karzai and Raziq still controlled the province, had ISAF's support, and would not tolerate interference in their interests.

PRESIDENT KARZAI ATTENDS A SHURA, JUNE 2010 (DOD PHOTO)

The coalition continued to rely upon Abdul Raziq to conduct critical operations in the months following Malajat, including operations in Arghandab in both September and October 2010, increasing the commander's association with Hamkari. The Karzai network has intentionally played up Raziq's involvement in Hamkari, presenting him as the face of its operations. On September 16, 2010, for example, Governor Wesa held a press conference broadcast on Afghan national television to discuss clearing operations in Arghandab.[440] In addition to the Provincial Chief of Police and NDS head, Wesa was joined by Raziq. Wesa made a point of explicitly comparing the Arghandab operation to the Malajat operation led by Raziq, which he praised as a success.[441]

Raziq offers a series of tradeoffs. He is viewed negatively by much of the population of Kandahar. Raziq, for example, had been deployed in the vicinity of Kandahar City once before, in the summer of 2006, when his men were sent to expel a Taliban force from Panjwai. At that time, the presence of Raziq's predatory and mostly Achekzai force had deeply antagonized the population, leading hundreds of locals to take up arms and join the Taliban in expelling Raziq.[442] Noorzai tribesmen in Kandahar also recount another 2006 incident, in which Raziq ordered the murder of sixteen Noorzai political rivals in Spin Boldak, later to be absolved by Kandahar Governor Asadullah Khalid.

But, Raziq does have a certain military and political brilliance, and rose to his current position through his own skill, rather than with U.S. backing. In addition to having demonstrated his ability to maintain security in Spin Boldak for the past several years, Raziq appears to prudently distribute patronage among the local population, to an extent that he has accommodated some of the local Noorzai in Spin Boldak to an extent that has prevented widespread destabilization of the district.[443] If ISAF is going to use Raziq, it must carefully calculate how it can prevent his negative reputation outside of Spin Boldak from tainting Hamkari. This almost certainly requires keeping his influence contained to Spin Boldak and the border, and not using his forces in operations around Kandahar City.

Unjustified association of ISAF and coalition forces with unsavory powerbrokers is a concern at the local level as well. There is a popular perception, for example, that the Arghandab ALP program relies on the forces of the local commander Hajji Mohammad Anwar Pahlawan.[444] Pahlawan is the son of a widely despised mujahideen commander notorious for raping young boys in the 1990s, and Pahlawan himself has earned a reputation as predatory.[445] He is connected to Karimullah Naqibi, son of the late Mullah Naqib, and is one of a number of figures who has appointed himself a tribal leader.[446] But sources familiar with the Arghandab ALP program suggest that Pahlawan is not in fact involved in the program, though he has benefited from contracts and development projects in Arghandab and has attempted to infiltrate the ALP.[447] The incident of Hajji Pahlawan further suggests the extent to which ISAF can become associated with powerbrokers simply though a lack of clear messaging or through the inability to provide oversight over contracting and development spending.

As long as Ahmed Wali Karzai and Abdul Raziq are seen as the face of the Afghan government and of coalition operations, it will be difficult for

Kandaharis to believe that meaningful progress on governance and a redress of Kandahar's culture of impunity are possible. Kandahar's corruption problems must ultimately be solved by Afghans willing to take strong and decisive stands against the most flagrant violations of the rule of law. And there are certainly strong impulses for reform in Kandahari society, as well as weaker impulses in the Afghan government itself. But as long as Kandaharis believe that actors like Ahmed Wali Karzai, Abdul Raziq, and the criminal elements they protect are backed by ISAF, it is unlikely that they will be willing to take the significant risks involved in challenging Kandahar's ruling elites.

President Karzai and Hamkari

The Karzai government has assigned considerable importance to Kandahar, which, as President Karzai's birthplace and the heartland of the Pashtun South, is also envisioned as an important political base by the regime. President Karzai has carefully managed his own public appearances in Kandahar, preferring, as has historically been the case, to cast himself as a benevolent and aloof figure in his home province, while the less flattering work of managing the administration's interests in Kandahar has been left to Ahmed Wali Karzai and several figures in the Presidential Palace.

Hamkari was preceded by several carefully orchestrated shuras, which ISAF believed were important for building the full participation of the Afghan government and attempting to win local support. General McChrystal hoped to persuade President Karzai to publicly endorse Hamkari and provide firm leadership. President Karzai tried to meet General McChrystal's minimal requirements, but to not become too closely associated with the operations in Afghan public perception, probably as a hedge in case the operations did not go well.[448] In early April 2010, President Karzai, General McChrystal, and others met with a group of some 2,000 Kandahar elders, a crowd carefully vetted by Ahmed Wali Karzai and his network.[449] General McChrystal traveled with President Karzai to Kandahar again on June 13, 2010, where the President denounced corruption and called for the population to support the establishment of security. Karzai's statements were vague, and gave few signs of concrete or pending action. McChrystal stated that delays in Hamkari announced in June were arranged to build political consensus: "we want to make sure we've got conditions shaped politically with local leaders, with the people."[450] It is possible that neither Karzai nor General McChrystal understand the other's intentions, and were stepping timidly to avoid damaging their relationship.

In retrospect it is not clear if the April and June shuras were particularly important for the eventual operation. They were an orchestrated balancing act for President Karzai, perhaps calculated to protect his administration's image in advance of Hamkari, and do not appear to have achieved significant political effects.

President Karzai cancelled a visit of Arghandab district on September 19, 2010, citing security concerns.[451] The cancelled September shura was held weeks later, on October 9, when the President met with some 200 elders in Arghandab district. If the President had been reluctant to appear engaged earlier in 2010, he displayed a new willingness to be associated with Hamkari in his October visit, in which he urged locals to cooperate with ISAF and Afghan forces.[452]

But a month after his October visit, President Karzai once again made a public demonstration of his concerns about Hamkari and dispatched a commission comprised of representatives from the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Defense, and NDS to work with the Kandahar governor and the Kandahar provincial council to prepare a report on the damage inflicted on the Afghan population during military operations in Kandahar. [453] The commission, along with President Karzai's November calls for an end to night raids, is one of several public measures taken by President Karzai in early November 2010 to criticize the coalition's counterinsurgency strategy.[454]

The Uses of Kandahar for Kabul: The Peace Council and Parliamentary Elections

As ISAF increasingly drives the course of events in Kandahar, the Karzai government has made some concessions on political issues like district governors. But it has continued to try to ensure that Kandahar is useful and can be leveraged to its advantage in Kabul. The Karzai government's prioritization in Kandahar suggests that for the administration in Kabul, Kandahar's chief value is as a support base that can back the administration's attempt to control political dynamics in Kabul. Two of the administration's major objectives in Kandahar in 2010 were to bring a desired group of representatives from Kandahar for both the 2009 Peace Jirga and the 2010-2015 Wolesi Jirga, or lower house of Parliament.

Kandahar's delegation to the June Peace Council, for example, was vetted by Ahmed Wali Karzai to ensure the group's adherence to the government's platform.[455] The selection of delegates nominally involved a consultative process, with tribal shuras providing lists of possible delegates. Though interference in the selection of peace jirga delegates was a red-line drawn by ISAF which Ahmed Wali Karzai was not to cross, the President's brother still intervened in the process to ensure that Kandahar's representatives were Karzai loyalists.[456] With the support of hand-picked delegations and careful orchestration, the Karzai administration was able to use the Peace Jirga to ensure the administration had near complete control over the reconciliation process.[457]

Ensuring the election of a large number of Karzai loyalists in the September 2010 parliamentary elections was another priority for the Karzai administration, with key administration figures like Faruq Wardak managing the parliamentary campaigns of Karzai allies in an attempt to ensure the new Parliament would not be overly hostile to the administration.[458] In Kandahar, Ahmed Wali Karzai once again served to secure the Kabul administration's objectives. Ensuring sympathetic parliamentarians from Kandahar also served Ahmed Wali Karzai's interests, as parliamentary seats have been a major source of patronage and influence, and have been highly sought after by Afghan political figures. Winning seats would increase the Ahmed Wali Karzai network's influence in Kandahar and prevent its local rivals from holding secure platforms from which to oppose his influence.

Ahmed Wali Karzai reportedly drew up a slate of fifteen parliamentary candidates for Kandahar's fourteen seats in advance of the election and heavily backed the list.[459] Ahmed Wali Karzai kept a visible media profile, holding press conferences and speaking with reporters in the weeks before the election, perhaps to shape the dialogue given ongoing concerns of fraud.[460] He publicly acknowledged he was supporting a list of candidates and defended his actions, telling a *Guardian* reporter that he wanted to see people who backed the Karzai administration as Kandahar's Members of Parliament.[461]

Allegations of fraud surfaced within a day of the election and were primarily directed against Ahmed Wali Karzai and Abdul Raziq, further suggesting the extent to which the two men had become figureheads of corruption and abuse of power in Kandahar, even if corruption went much deeper.[462] Allegations suggested that Raziq's border police detained election observers from remote Maruf district.[463] Despite some credible allegations of abuse of power by entities connected with Ahmed Wali Karzai and Raziq, the final results showed that financial resources, rather than political connections, were the main determinate of electoral success. As discussed above, three of Kandahar's eight non-reserved places in Parliament were won by independent business figures who have made a significant fortune through servicing coalition contracts. Most of the other successful candidates were backed by Ahmed Wali Karzai or by Gul Agha Sherzai.[464] Ultimately, five of eleven successful candidates were linked or associated with Ahmed Wali Karzai, enough to demonstrate Ahmed Wali Karzai's significant influence, but also to suggest that he faces active rivals in the province and that Kandahar's contracting elite may be growing in independence.[465]

CONCLUSION

ISAF reversed the security situation in Kandahar during the fall of 2010. Within the space of several months, coalition operations cleared Taliban forces from their strongholds in Arghandab, Zhari, Panjwai, and denied the insurgents the terrain, infrastructure, and supplies needed to seriously contest central Kandahar. These operations were the culmination of months of planning and shaping operations, and were enabled by a significant increase in U.S. and Afghan combat power in Kandahar.

The Taliban retains a presence in Kandahar City, but otherwise has been reduced to the military positions they held in 2005. Taliban control over the population in parts of central Kandahar began to disintegrate within weeks of the coalition's military successes. The Taliban will attempt to re-infiltrate Kandahar in 2011 and to re-exert influence over the population, but will likely meet resistance. Coalition forces are committed to holding the territory they have taken, and have a sufficient force density to make Taliban re-infiltration difficult. Failure to regain the momentum in Kandahar in 2011 will be a significant blow to the Taliban's prestige.

Key remaining questions concern how the Afghan government and ISAF will capitalize on their military victories in Kandahar. Security gains in Kandahar, combined with recent ISAF progress in Helmand, deny the Taliban a presence in the key population centers in southern Afghanistan. This loss will relegate the Taliban to areas of southern and southeastern Afghanistan that are of secondary strategic importance. To maintain the momentum, ISAF will need to aggressively pursue the Taliban, deny the enemy the ability to reconstitute in outer Kandahar or in neighboring provinces, and deepen its hold in central Kandahar.

The coalition's military gains also present an opportunity to make meaningful progress in restoring the Afghan government's legitimacy. To prevent insurgents from making in-roads when international forces eventually thin-out their presence, Kandahar needs a functioning government that is strong enough to maintain security gains and is acceptable to the population. In order to achieve this, the coalition should broaden the focus of its governance efforts beyond capacity building and address the culture of impunity that enables and encourages corrupt and predatory behavior and undermines the population's confidence in its government. The coalition should also re-evaluate its spending in Kandahar to ensure that it is not undermining its efforts by creating perverse incentive structures for local actors. Kandahar's political problems, though severe, can be solved, and the military gains made in 2010 finally provide the degree of security needed to address governance issues.

The coalition's military successes in Kandahar in the last half of 2010, combined with steady progress in neighboring Helmand, have given it the momentum in southern Afghanistan. 2011 presents opportunities for the Afghan government and coalition forces to sustain that momentum, further degrade the Taliban, and make the reforms necessary to ensure a viable Afghan government.

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