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Winning Hearts and Minds?
Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan's Helmand Province

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Cover photo

US military personnel treats Afghan girl for burns during
Civil Affairs Group patrol
Photo: U.S. Marine Corps photo by Staff Sgt. William Greeson/
Released

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GLOSSARY OF NON-ENGLISH TERMS

khan or malek	Head of community or tribe
jihad	Holy war to defend Islam, in Afghanistan usually referring to the 1978–92 war against the Soviet occupation
jihadi	Commander or political leader who gained his strength during the *jihad* years (1979–92)
jirga	An assembly or meeting of elders or leaders, typically to resolve a conflict or take a decision
kuchis	Nomads
mujahidin	Those who engage in *jihad*

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACBAR	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghanistan Relief
ADZ	Afghan Development Zones
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
ANP	Afghan National Police
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
ARTF	Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund
BAAG	British Agencies Afghanistan Group
BRAC	Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee
CDC	Community Development Council
CIMIC	Civil-Military Cooperation
COIN	Counterinsurgency
CWA	Consent winning activity
DFID	Department for International Development, UK
DFID-A	DFID-Afghanistan
DoD	Department of Defense, US
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK
FIC	Feinstein International Center
GCPP	Global Conflict Prevention Pool
HAFO	Helping Afghan Farmers Organization

HARDP	Helmand Agriculture and Rural Development Program
HAVA	Helmand–Arghandab Valley Authority
IDP	Internally displaced person
IED	Improvised explosive device
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MISFA	Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDS	National Directorate of Security
NSP	National Solidarity Program
PCRU	Post-Conflict Reconstruction Unit
PDC	Provincial Development Committee
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
PVCP	Permanent Vehicle Check Point
QIP	Quick Impact Project
SU	Stabilization Unit
TCAP	Transitional Country Assistance Plan
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Within the practitioner and policy making communities there is a powerful assumption that development and reconstruction assistance is a critical instrument for promoting stability within fragile and conflict states. This assumption has had a significant impact on resource flows and strategies, leading to sharp increases in foreign assistance budgets, stronger linkages between development and security strategies, and a shift of development activities from the aid agencies to the military. In this light, it is essential that policy makers understand whether and how aid projects actually contribute to security.

This paper explores the relationship between Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT)- and military-delivered aid projects and security in Helmand Province during the period from 2006 to early 2008. Afghanistan provided an opportunity to examine one of the most concerted recent efforts to use "hearts and minds" projects to achieve security objectives, as it has been the testing ground for new approaches to using reconstruction assistance to promote stability, which in some cases (e.g., Provincial Reconstruction Teams) were then exported to Iraq.

The Helmand case study is part of a larger Afghanistan country study composed of five provinces: Balkh, Faryab, Helmand, Paktia, and Uruzgan. Due to conditions in Helmand, a different methodology was used there. The Helmand methodology involved synthesizing and analyzing data drawn from focus group discussions, polls, and key informant interviews. The country study looks at the assumption that humanitarian and development assistance projects can help to bring or maintain security in strategically important environments, and can help "win hearts and minds," thereby undermining support within the local populace for radical, insurgent, or terrorist groups. In addition to the Afghanistan country study, the Feinstein International Center has conducted similar research in the Horn of Africa.

Drivers of Conflict

The drivers of conflict in Helmand are largely a poisonous admixture of long-running tribal vendettas, competition between narco-mafias or criminal groups, and violent dissatisfaction with a notoriously predatory local administration and police service.

Compared with other provinces, the tribal structure in Helmand lost much of its integrity during thirty years of conflict. Traditional landed elites lost much of their power and the tribes progressively saw the erosion of mechanisms for enforcement of tribal *jirgas*, decision making, or conflict resolution—ironically at a time when the loss of state capacity increased the necessity for tribal affiliation.

The proximate roots of Helmand's conflict lie in how the post-Taliban carve-up of institutions, power, and resources favored certain tribal groups at the expense of others, often due to the power exerted by key former *jihadi* commanders. Those who secured positions in the provincial administration and subsequently gained access to development funding distributed it as patronage to consolidate political power among tribal allies and to control narcotics and other criminal networks. In the process they alienated other groups through predatory taxation, political influence, and violence. In effect, Helmand's post-Taliban political settlement created a system of feudal robber barons, with the roots of their power in the remains of the tribal system, but fueled by profits from the narcotics trade and the distribution of governmental patronage. During the 1990s, a number of these powerful individuals had been neutralized by the Taliban due to their predatory behavior, and their reinstatement led to further alienation of the population from the government and the international community, the latter proving either unable or unwilling to stop the predatory behavior. Losers in the carve-up lost resources while accumulating grievances, and therefore were made vulnerable to Taliban infiltration and offers of protection, especially when members of their tribal groups had members who were senior leaders in the Taliban movement.

In the same vein, uneven eradication of opium poppy further undermined support for the state; fields belonging to the politically favored were

left alone while those of the weaker, less well-connected groups were eradicated.

Civilian casualties, night raids, population displacement, and destruction of productive infrastructure through NATO air attacks were additional drivers of conflict. While in other study provinces poverty was cited by respondents as the primary driver of conflict, in Helmand political and other types of grievances were named as most significant, although poverty was reported as making people more vulnerable to becoming involved in insurgent activity.

Respondents indicated that the motivating factors for young men to join the Taliban were diverse, frequently highly complex, and not amenable to resolution through the application of reconstruction money. Young men joined the Taliban because they were mobilized through kinship groups, wanted self-protection in a dangerous environment, could not attain status through traditional tribal mechanisms, wanted support for claims to disputed land or resources, and for religious reasons. Religion appeared to play a role in mobilizing some young men, but largely because it legitimized other grievances, such as the lack of support for and from the government and negative perceptions of the actions and presence of foreign forces.

Stabilization and Development Models and Assumptions

Broad consensus existed within the UK government that Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) could help to provide security and kick-start public service delivery in the short term and in advance of the consolidation of Afghan state institutions in the longer term. However, each of the three main UK government departments had its own views on the utility, underlying purpose, and benefits of the QIPs program. While the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) saw them as instruments of political engagement or strategic communication, the Ministry of Defense (MOD) wanted them to consolidate tactical military successes (i.e., the "consent winning approach" or CWA), and the Department for International Development (DFID) saw them as a bridge to more sustainable development initiatives. From the military perspective, the

chief benefit of CWA was "force protection," but it also signaled the military's expectations that civilian development and stabilization officials and projects would follow rapidly behind the frontline troops. The principal argument against QIPs was that projects were not sustainable, particularly where a project was delivered outside of government institutions and processes. The differences of opinion on the role of QIPs in generating consent and "force protection benefits" resulted in powerful controversies within the PRT, not least because the assumption of these benefits had organizational and tactical implications.

Aid Implementation and Perceptions of Stability

The Helmand QIPs program clearly underwent changes in priorities during the 2006–08 period. Initially the QIPs were to demonstrate visible "quick wins." According to the "ink spot" plan, they focused on the Lashkar Gah and Gereshk areas to build confidence in the capacity of the Afghan government. The strategy evolved through three phases: security infrastructure, civil infrastructure, and more complex interventions, including engaging the institutions of local governance in a debate with the provincial authorities over development priorities and community needs. The dominant areas of expenditure were infrastructure, security, transport, and agriculture. Projects were intended to have quick impact, not undermine longer-term development objectives, and not aim primarily at winning consent. In the event, many of the projects were not particularly small nor were they particularly visible.

The role of QIPs in "consent winning" was perhaps the most contested and problematic in terms of the relationship between UK government departments. The differences generally matched departmental boundaries, with the MOD and elements of the FCO advocating that QIPs could build consent *directly*, while DFID staff argued that the process of economic and political transition itself drew people to the government. The consequence of this sometimes-acrimonious debate was that the PRT struggled to determine precisely how CWA fit within the QIPs and stabilization frameworks. The author

was unable to collect any evidence from the PRT that demonstrated reasonable proof of a direct link between QIPs and consent generation.

Given Helmand's poor security, project identification and implementation were constrained by weak local administration, limited access by aid workers, restrictions on PRT civilian staff, poverty of baseline data, and limited penetration of Helmandi communities—which all led to greater reliance on the military to identify and manage projects and to the absence of effective targeting. As in other study provinces, the slow pace of reconstruction, poor project design, exclusion of particular groups, perceptions of corruption, lack of local ownership or inclusion in identifying projects, and inappropriate or contested design and implementation were mentioned as undermining the positive effect of QIPs.

While QIPs appear to have begun as simple, small-scale, low-cost, rapidly implemented projects intended as "down payments" on promises, their linkage with sustainable development, strategic communication objectives, and support for longer-term transition strategies complicated their purpose. The projects were identified with little recognition of the impact that the fragmented nature of Afghan tribal networks would exert on perceptions. Finally, mechanisms within the PRT were inadequate for monitoring their impact or the risks inherent in particular projects.

Community Perceptions of International Aid

As in other study provinces, the focus groups and key informant interviews unearthed consistently negative perceptions of international development assistance, particularly that provided by the PRT. Allegations of corruption included irregularities in procurement (e.g., fake construction companies, collusion among contractors to inflate prices, flipping of contracts, payments by contractors to criminally-affiliated militia). That appropriate community structures had apparently been bypassed further fueled accusations of corruption and the consolidation of power by noxious criminal or tribal elites. Some communities and groups felt particularly excluded by the government and the PRT. A sense of "zero sum" results persisted, with gains by communities or individuals perceived as losses by others.

Focus group discussions reflected strong sentiments that little had been done, and produced clear calls for the types of projects that were remembered as historically financed by the US and even the Soviets; e.g., factories and irrigation infrastructure projects to deliver mass employment. These memories appeared to have created an appetite for different types of projects and a benchmark against which the PRT's development interventions were judged, often critically. The sense that the reconstruction process had stalled, combined with confusion at how the once-defeated Taliban had come back, generated wild and negative speculation about the underlying motives of both the British and the Americans.

Descriptions of corruption in development projects naturally expanded into a predictable range of much broader narratives: corruption and the failure of governance mechanisms, police brutality, and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the government's failure to respond to the needs of the people while imposing personal, economic, and cultural costs of the conflict.

Attitudes towards Governmental Authorities

The polling results suggest that attitudes towards governmental authorities bifurcated geographically, with relatively strong confidence in government in the large towns of Lashkar Gah and Gereshk and an overwhelming lack of confidence in Nad-e Ali, Nawa, Kajaki and Sangin—places where the post-2001 elites had consolidated their grip and frequently behaved in a predatory manner. The conflict drivers in outlying areas remained sufficiently powerful to crowd out any broader strategic messages generated by the stabilization program. In effect, the "ink spot" strategy adopted between 2006 and 2008 relied upon a stabilization program that appeared to have little or no traction in the outlying areas.

Attitudes towards ISAF

The survey results were not particularly positive towards ISAF, although the provincial capital, Lashkar Gah, produced significantly better results than other areas. This may be because it was subjected to more "stabilization activities" and fewer visible "destabilizing factors" than other

parts of Helmand, or responses may have reflected two distorting factors: compared with other parts of the province, Lashkar Gah had a significantly better starting position, and the attitudes of respondents were likely to be more "cosmopolitan." The remainder of the province, however, strongly perceived that the situation was deteriorating—the inference being that ISAF was responsible for this trend. Responses conveyed a widespread perception that ISAF's presence was generally seen as negative, with the places of heaviest fighting predictably being the most negative. Focus group discussions were consistent with the polling results, stressing collateral damage to civilians and civilian property by ISAF.

Conclusions

The research highlights the challenges inherent in using aid, including QIPS, as an instrument of security policy. In Helmand Province, the UK's ability to project a sense of security and development was clearly insufficient to match the threat posed by the Taliban throughout 2006, when the UK's slowly growing military forces were only able to control limited territory around the key district centers. In contrast, the Taliban were able to build substantial networks on the back of grievances towards the old *jihadi* commanders, many of whom were brought into positions of power within the provincial administration. The Taliban strategy proved to be extremely effective: it exploited the grievances of the marginalized tribes, fragmented communities, and the poor; took advantage of controversies unleashed by the poppy eradication process; and increasingly marshaled financial and military resources from the narcotics networks. When the government removed the previous warlords (at the behest of the UK) before developing the ability to contain the warlords' impact as spoilers or to fill the security vacuum left by their militias, this created more opportunities for exploitation by the Taliban. All of this suggests that the stabilization model employed during this period focused on the wrong drivers of conflict—on the lack of development and government presence rather than on poor governance and insecurity.

Not surprisingly, security appears to be the most pressing and consistent concern of residents of Helmand—more so than reconstruction projects.

ISAF's difficulties in providing security sufficient to deter Taliban incursion reduced the population's willingness to co-operate with government outreach and the reconstruction process. For instance, the apparent lack of governmental "control" of and commitment to remain in territory beyond Lashkar Gah reduced incentives for the population to engage; interviewees suggested that until the government was able to deter Taliban intimidation, people were reluctant to co-operate. Lack of security also contributed to the PRT's chronic difficulties in identifying and delivering projects. Nevertheless, practitioners within the PRT clearly recognized and sought to ameliorate these challenges. Many argued that projects did not extend the reach of government unless they were delivered through credible and responsive sub-national governance structures that were engaged with representative cross-sections of communities—and this was only possible where security was sufficient to enable contact between beneficiaries and government structures. While considerable effort was invested in efforts to deliver programs through representative and consultative mechanisms, respondents and interviewees did not appear to recognize this.

Because reconstruction money was viewed as an important component of existing Helmandi patronage politics, the reconstruction program left winners and losers. This appeared to damage perceptions of PRT-delivered aid and created political opportunities for the Taliban. In fact, the distribution of aid was seen as reflecting the post-2001 tribal carve-up of institutions, power, and resources, and access to development funding was seen as an avenue for consolidating wealth and political power. Evidence from focus groups suggested that "development" was viewed by individuals from non-beneficiary communities as evidence of elite capture of aid processes rather than a demonstration that aid was a public good that could be extended to all. Without adequate analysis of social fault lines, the distribution of aid in such a fragmented and polarized polity often marginalized groups and increased the sense of alienation rather than giving hope of potential change. These challenges appear to have been compounded by inevitable weaknesses in oversight and program-management structures within the PRT.

On the positive side, as was the case in the other case study provinces, beneficiary responses to the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development's (MRRD) National Solidarity Program (NSP) were more positive. While there were still significant criticisms, overall respondents appreciated the extent to which they were consulted and involved in identifying, prioritizing, implementing, and monitoring the projects, and that a relationship was built between communities and the NSP implementing partners. Similarly, DFID's Helmand Agriculture and Rural Development Programme (delivered via MRRD) was more positively viewed.

The positives implied by the extension of aid and reconstruction were routinely eclipsed by Taliban infiltration of communities, significant levels of intimidation, and ISAF's largely ineffective counter to this. Equally, governance mechanisms generally, and aid disbursement processes in particular, appear to have been severely discredited, which reinforced the narrative of the predatory, self-interested government.

The initial "ink spot" model failed to deliver the hoped-for results during this period. The UK-led, multinational PRT was not able to make Lashkar Gah and Gereshk into "beacons of development" (or "ink spots"), or convince the population of outlying districts of the benefits of connecting to the formal institutions of the state and thereby enticing these areas into a political settlement with the government authorities. Furthermore, the fragmented and competitive nature of Helmandi society may even have precluded the "ink spot" strategy from delivering the types of results predicted.

The most significant sources of conflict appear to be fighting between ISAF and the Taliban and perceptions of ISAF's disrespect for Pashtun culture and religion. However, strong evidence exists of conflicts being driven by struggles over resources and personal disagreements between power brokers (tribal leaders and criminals) and by rejection of the government because of its predatory behavior.

Consent winning projects appear to have had some value in the early stages—building a relationship with a community and facilitating initial dialogue—but the evidence is largely anecdotal and at times self-serving, reflecting narratives of "success" rather than the reality. In the timeframe of this research, there was scant evidence of CWA delivering either "consent" or "legitimacy," and the popularity ratings of ISAF reflected the negative aspects of their interactions with the civilian population. In particular, at a provincial level the reconstruction program appears not to have countered negative perceptions resulting from collateral damage, civilian casualties, house searches, etc.

From early 2008, the PRT adapted its approach, abandoning its scattershot strategy and instead seeking to use stabilization programs to extend sub-national governance arrangements through engaging communities with provincial and district authorities—the intention being to create a responsive and accountable state that is visible at district level.

Arguably, this demonstrated a creditable capacity to adapt the strategy to unforeseen tactical difficulties, and progress from 2010 suggests many of these lessons have been learned. However, the experience between 2006 and 2008 reveals significant challenges in developing and delivering an approach that identifies and mitigates conflict drivers and harmonizes military plans with political outreach and development processes. It also highlights the severe information gaps inherent in working within complex conflict environments. However, perhaps the most striking conclusions relate to the complex way in which perceptions of "stability" and government legitimacy can be derailed where security and controls on "development" processes are insufficient. In such situations "aid" may have as many negative, unintended effects as positive ones and, at the very least, is not a panacea.

1. Introduction

Government building under construction

Within the practitioner and policy making communities a powerful assumption exists that development and reconstruction assistance is a critical instrument in promoting stability within fragile and conflict-affected states. Counter-insurgency doctrines have also leaned heavily upon development—characterizing it as a means for promoting both a social contract between beneficiaries and governments and as an entry point for state building in contested and conflict-affected environments. These assumptions have had a significant impact on resource flows and strategies, leading to sharp increases in foreign assistance budgets and much stronger linkages between development and security strategies. Afghanistan provided an opportunity to examine one of the most concerted recent efforts to use "hearts and minds" projects to achieve security objectives, especially as it has been the testing ground for new approaches to using reconstruction assistance to promote stability, which in some cases (e.g., Provincial Reconstruction Teams) were then exported to Iraq.

Despite having such a profound impact on policy and the allocation of resources, surprisingly little empirical evidence underpins the assumptions. The Afghanistan country study was conducted to cast some light on whether development assistance was able to exert a stabilizing effect and if so under what conditions. The Helmand Province case study looks specifically at the British effort during a discrete period, 2006–08, prior to the redrafting of the UK approach in 2008.[1] The Helmand case study is part of a larger Afghanistan country study of five provinces: Balkh, Faryab, Helmand, Paktia, and Uruzgan. In addition to the Afghanistan country study, Feinstein International Center has conducted similar research in the Horn of Africa.[2]

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[1] The effects of the post-2008 strategy in Helmand will be the subject of a follow-on study.

[2] For information on the overall aid and security research program, see **https://wikis.uit.tufts.edu/confluence/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=19270958**.

2. Research Methodology

Helmand is one of five provincial case studies that make up the overall Afghanistan aid and security study. The other four are Balkh, Faryab, Paktia, and Uruzgan; all represent areas in which the international community is making conscious efforts to use development assistance to achieve security objectives, albeit to greater or lesser extents. The relatively secure provinces of Balkh and Faryab in northern Afghanistan were included in the study to provide something of a counterpoint to the more insecure provinces of Helmand, Paktia, and Uruzgan in southeastern and southern Afghanistan. The two northern provinces are also Pashtun-minority provinces, unlike the other three. In addition, the models employed by the respective Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) differ greatly.

The Helmand case study focuses specifically on the UK's stabilization program in Helmand between 2006 and 2008. The focus is largely on the impact of the UK strategy, although other actors (e.g., the US and Denmark) operated within the same and proximate geographical spaces. The aim of the study was to explore

- Whether aid projects help "win hearts and minds" and increase public support for the Afghan government and international military forces and
- Whether the PRT objective of extending the reach of the central government is having a stabilizing effect.

The case study sought to identify evidence that the stabilization program, some two years into its life, was beginning to deliver results and demonstrate impact. The stabilization model adopted by the UK implied that changes in a number of dimensions would take place, in particular that the "key" stabilization categories would improve—the protection of people, the construction of key institutions, and preparations for longer-term development generating confidence in the government and the

reconstruction process. Hence, in the course of the research, questions were asked about attitudes towards, and perceptions of, governmental and provincial authorities, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and the reconstruction process, and questions were asked about the nature of the conflict drivers and trends in their impact.

While the other four provincial case studies used roughly the same methodology, due to the conditions in Helmand, the methodology adopted for the Helmand Province case study differed significantly. The Helmand methodology involved synthesizing and analyzing data drawn from several sources, including focus group discussions, polls, and key informant interviews. First, fifteen focus group interviews (each with between eight and twelve members, largely drawn from existing community structures) conducted during February and March 2008 produced qualitative information on attitudes towards ISAF, Afghan political authorities, community priorities, aid projects, and security. In some cases, follow-up discussions were held with individuals. Second, quantitative information on the same issues was drawn from polling data (collected in November 2007 by Regional Command-South and provided by the Task Force Helmand[3]) and analyzed. The polling data were collected from six areas, with sample sizes of between 300 and 500, in communities within the Afghan Development Zones (ADZ) and communities that were proximate to these areas. Third, key informant interviews with Task Force Helmand[4] members, PRT staff, Afghan government officials (including district and provincial governors), and key power brokers were held to identify their understanding of stabilization and the ways in which their activities, particularly the reconstruction program, were intended to support these goals. Finally, extensive secondary sources were drawn upon for background information and analysis.

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[3] Data were used with the kind permission of Major General Andrew Mackay.

[4] Task Force Helmand is mainly composed of British forces in Helmand Province, but also includes personnel from Denmark, Estonia, and the Czech Republic.

2.1 Caveats

Any research in Afghanistan, and particularly research that looks at the types of sensitive issues raised in this study, requires a number of caveats. The difficulty of doing such research is compounded by the insecure context, and few places in Afghanistan are less secure than Helmand at the time of the research. First, the Helmand case study represents a "snapshot" of perceptions rather than a longitudinal study that could identify long-term trends.

In addition, the data sets from both the focus groups and the polling contain potential bias, some of which are inherent in an environment such as Afghanistan. With respect to focus groups, in an insecure environment where the loyalties and attitudes of fellow participants are unknown, participants may be reluctant to be critical or frank in expressing their views. That the focus groups were conducted in the context of the Lashkar Gah PRT may have raised some concerns in the minds of participants, which could have inhibited frankness. Aside from fears for personal safety, in a group setting Afghan social hierarchy will often result in the voices of the elders and the powerful being heard, while others lower down on the social scale may be expected to keep quiet and defer.

A number of caveats connected with public opinion polling in Afghanistan likewise should be kept in mind. First and foremost, as interviews often take place in public, the caveat about reluctance to give a frank response out of fear for personal safety applies to polling as well. Social desirability bias may encourage respondents to provide answers in accord with standard social norms. Although perhaps less likely in an insecure environment such as Helmand, respondents may provide what they feel are "correct" responses in hope that their area will receive aid (or will not). While the direction of systematic bias (i.e., negative or positive) may be hard to predict, in an environment where outsiders are often seen as threats or opportunities, such bias is highly likely.

In addition, some of the questions asked in the course of the survey lacked specificity, potentially creating a degree of ambiguity in the minds of some respondents. In general, translation of key terms into Pashtu or Dari from English can be highly problematic, especially because language is so nuanced and because many of the terms have acquired connotative meanings. Respondents in rural areas are also rarely familiar with scales and categories of response. While significant efforts were made to gather representative samples, the conflict environment made this extremely challenging. Finally, the individuals employed to collect data did not always do so effectively, which was especially problematic given the difficulty of supervision in such an insecure context.

Challenges clearly existed in measuring perceptions of the issues being studied, particularly as they had both an objective and subjective dimension. Some perceptions had the potential to be strongly counterfactual. For example, focus group and polling results had the potential to describe perceptions of profound decreases in individual security, and corresponding decreases in confidence in the government or ISAF, even where the objectively observed trend appeared to be moving in the opposite direction. This was controlled for by asking respondents specific questions about the broader dimensions of the intervention, particularly the extension of government services and reconstruction activity. In such cases one might reasonably expect to witness both a *perception* of deteriorating security and an *underlying* narrative that the ISAF presence and government of Afghanistan activities were improving other elements of the situation. In other words, the reconstruction and governance narratives were simultaneously building a degree of confidence in the government.

One reasonable prediction was that in geographical areas where ISAF was already delivering the full range of security and stabilization benefits (the "focus areas" of Lashkar Gah and Gereshk), results would be

better—although this was likely exaggerated somewhat by the relatively "cosmopolitan" cultures and better socio-economic positions of Lashkar Gah and Gereshk. An additional prediction implicit in ISAF's "ink spot" strategy[5] was that improvement in perceptions of governance and service delivery within these focus areas (i.e., those areas subject to the full range of stabilization activities) might spill over into neighboring districts and exert a positive effect on attitudes towards government.

Some of the interviews were originally collected as part of a programmatic intervention in part to assess the extent to which the intervention was achieving desired results. However, the bulk of the material was collected during separate subsequent visits in 2006 and early 2007.

Despite the above important caveats, the researcher is confident that using multiple sources of information (which allowed some triangulation of responses) plus having access to a number of the important players in Helmand over time has produced reliable findings. It is encouraging that many of the observations and findings were consistent across different informant groups, as well as with responses in the other four study provinces.

Additional information on the research methodology employed for the larger study and related issues is contained in Annex A.

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[5] The "ink spot" strategy is most closely associated with the Malayan Emergency and the Vietnam War where it was employed by numerically small forces seeking to control large regions. The intention was for troops to occupy small areas and gradually extend their influence until these pockets became linked, leaving only small and isolated pockets of resistance. See Greg Mills, "Calibrating Inkspots: Filling Afghanistan's Ungoverned Spaces," *RUSI Journal* (August 2006). See also Andrew Krepinevich, "How to Win in Iraq," *Foreign Affairs* 85 (5) (September/October 2005); Wade Markel, "Draining the Swamp: The British Strategy of Population Control," *Parameters* (Spring 2006), pp. 35–48, at **http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/06spring/markel.htm**; John A. Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (New York: Praeger, 2002).

3. Provincial Background

Helmand River and Darwishan Canal

This section presents an introduction to the complex demographics and economics of Helmand Province. As is discussed in subsequent sections, much of the conflict in Helmand has its roots in the complex history of tribal relations in the province.

Helmand is physically the largest of Afghanistan's provinces, occupying some 38,419 square miles, or 9 percent of the country's total land area. It is located in the southwest of the country and bordered to the east by the provinces of Dai Kundi, Uruzgan, and Kandahar; to the west by Nimroz and Farah; and to the north by Ghor.[6] It shares a 100-mile international boundary with Pakistan's Baluchistan Province in the south. Some 29 percent of the total area, largely in the north and south of the province, is mountainous or semi-mountainous. The remaining 61 percent comprises a flat clay desert plateau with drifting sand to the south and east and bisected for approximately half of its length by the Helmand River. The river runs south from Baghran in the north to the "fish hook" (nicknamed for its physical appearance and located some 109 miles south of the provincial center Lashkar Gah), where it turns west, passing through the province of Nimroz and thence into Iran. The river contains approximately 40 percent of Afghanistan's surface water and is generally fed by snow melt from the central mountain belt. Despite this, most of the province has an annual rainfall of under four inches and only some 3 percent of the land area is irrigated.[7]

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[6] "Helmand." *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Sixth Edition (2008), accessed Dec. 31, 2010 at http://www.encyclopedia.com.

[7] For reviews of Helmand's geography see "Helmand River Basin Soil and Water Survey Study Report," USAID/SCS Afghanistan (1976) and Richard B. Scott "Opium Cultivation in Central Helmand, Afghanistan: A Case Study in Bad Program Management" (paper presented to The Society for Applied Anthropology's 67th Annual Meeting, March 30, 2007) pp. 1–3 available at **http://easterncampaign.files.wordpress.com/2009/08/2007.pdf**. See also NABDP/MRRD, "Provincial Development Plan, Helmand: Provincial Profile," accessed Dec. 20, 2008, from MRRD Provincial Profile at **www.mrrd.gov.af/nabdp/Provincial Profiles/Helmand PDP Provincial profile.pdf**.

Figure 1. Tribal Helmand

Colors represent only tribal/ethnic majorities in a given area; names represent districts

Legend:
- Alizai Durani Pashtun
- Barakzai Durani Pashtun
- Barechi Pashtun
- Baluch
- Dai Kundi Hazara
- Durani Pashtun
- Hazara
- Nurzai Durani Pashtun
- Tajik
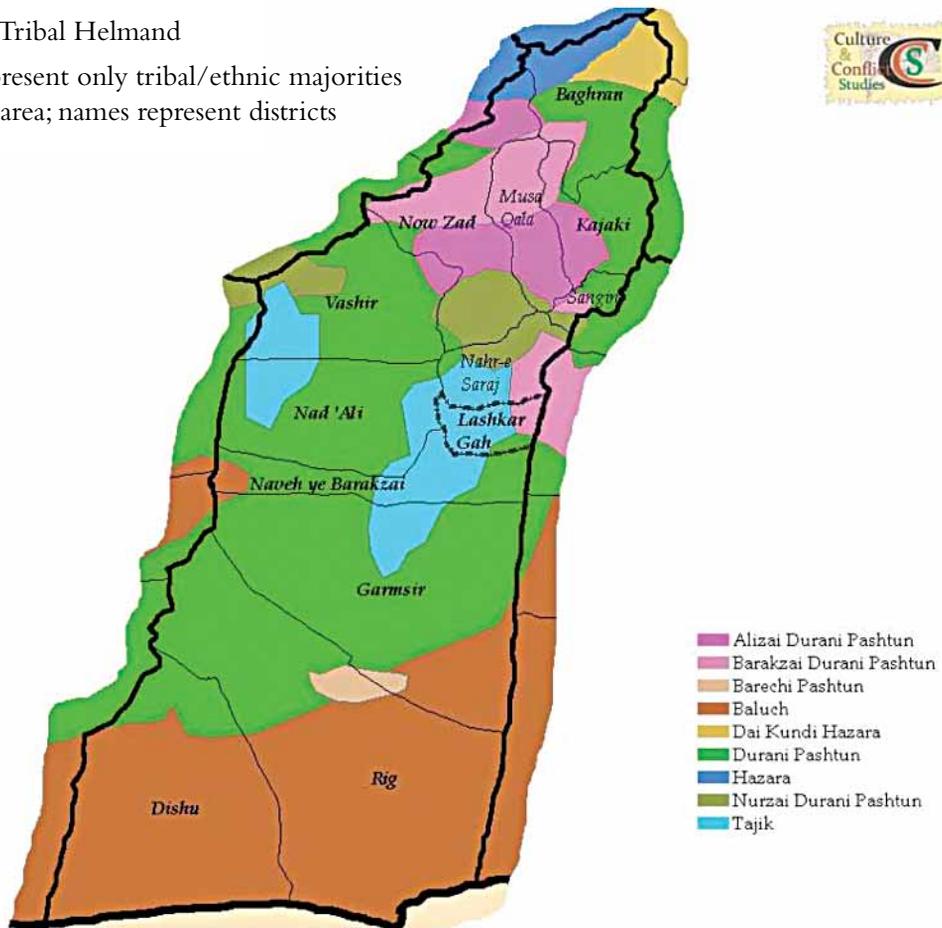
Source: Drawn from the Naval Postgraduate School website at **http://www.nps.edu/programs/ccs/Docs/PDF%20Maps/NewTribal/Helmand.pdf**

According to Afghanistan Central Statistical Office data, the province is Afghanistan's third most populous with a total population of 1,441,769, 51 percent of whom are male.[8] It is made up of thirteen districts: Dishu, Garmsir, Reg, Nad-e Ali, Nawa-i Barakzai, Lashkar Gah, Nahrisarraj, Sangin, Washir, Naw Zad, Musa Qala, Kajaki, and Baghran. The provincial center is Lashkar Gah, which has an estimated population of 201,546. An overwhelming proportion of the total population, some 94 percent, lives in rural districts with only 6 percent living in urban areas. Most of the population is settled along the very narrow Helmand River flood plain.[9]

The population is largely Pashtun (nearly 95 percent), living alongside much smaller numbers of Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Baluch, and a very small Sikh population in the south. The four most numerous Pashtun tribes are the Barakzai (32 percent), the Noorzai (16 percent), the Alikozai (9 percent), and the Ishakzai (5.2 percent). The northern part of the province is ethnically and tribally comparatively homogeneous, comprising mainly Alizai, Ishakzai, and Alikozai. These sub-tribal groupings were historically considered largely indigenous to the region.[10] Figure 1 shows tribal distribution in Helmand.

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8   Central Statistics Office, **http://www.cso.gov.af/demography/population.html**. See also NABDP/MRRD "Provincial Development Plan, Helmand." Afghanistan has never had a complete census, and statistics, especially those relating to population, are wildly discrepant depending on sources.

9   Central Statistics Office and UNFPA, "A Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile" (2007).

10   Richard B. Scott, "Tribal and Ethnic Groups in the Helmand Valley," Occasional Paper No. 21 (The Afghanistan Council, The Asia Society, New York, 1980), p. 36, accessed at **http://easterncampaign.files.wordpress.com/2009/08/scott1980.pdf**.

Legend

RIVERS
- MAIN
- STREAM
- ENTERMETANT DRAINAGE

ROADS
- MAIN
- SECONDARY
- MINOR
- SETTLEMENTS
- HILMAND PROVICE
- HILMAND DISTRICTS
- PROVICE BOUNDARY

N

G H O R   P R O V I N C E

DAIKUNDI

URUZGAN PROVINCE

F A R A H   P R O V I N C E

K A N D A H A R   P R O V I N C E

N I M R O Z   P R O V I N C E

Naw Zad

Washer

Musa Qala

Nad Ali

Lashkar Gah

Nawa-I- Barak Zayi

Hilmand

Garm

Regi (Khanshin)

Dishu

Source: AGCHO & AIMS

0   12.5   25   50   75   100
Kilometers

Date: 19-May-2010

TURKMANISTAN UZBEKISTAN TAJIKISTAN CHINA
IRAN PAKISTAN
Kabul

The Barakzai, one of the most prestigious tribal groupings due to their historical links with Dost Mohammad Khan,[11] occupy the easternmost parts of Helmand, including the Lashkar Gah and the districts of Nawa–i Barakzai and Nahrisarraj. The Noorzai are widely dispersed from Spin Boldak (on the border with Pakistan in Kandahar Province) in the east to Herat in the west— although the Helmandi Noorzai tend to be concentrated loosely around Garmsir and Washir Districts in the southeast and northwest respectively. The Ishakzai are also widely dispersed, stretching from Kandahar through Helmand, Farah, and Ghor as far as Badghis on Afghanistan's northern border with Turkmenistan. Within Helmand they are predominantly in the northeast, including Now Zad, Musa Qala, and Sangin Districts. The Alizai are divided into a number of sub-tribes and tend to dominate the north of the province. They are the strongest of the group of Panjpai tribes in Helmand and can be found in Nad-e Ali, Kajaki, Baghran, Garmsir, and Naw Zad Districts. The Hasanzai sub-tribe, perhaps the most significant, is led by former governor Sher Mohammad Akhundzada (SMA). The Pirzai sub-tribe is led by Mullah Salam, a Taliban leader who reconciled with the government of Afghanistan in 2007 and who, until 2010, was the Musa Qala district governor. (Pirzais are approximately one third of the Alizai in Musa Qala District.) The Baluch are located largely within the Dishu and Garmsir Districts and are generally considered a more cohesive group than the majority of Helmand's Pashtuns.[12] Afghan Baluch number as many as a million, with significant populations over the border in Pakistan and smaller numbers in Iran.[13]

While indigenous Pashtun tribes tend to dominate the northern regions of the province, the south is far more heterogeneous, reflecting the settlement of significant numbers of people

Aerial view of Helmand Valley

Photo: Major Paul Smyth

from minority ethnic and tribal groups. These groups generally moved to Helmand in response to the pull of the major US investment in the Helmand River Valley irrigation infrastructure, including land distribution schemes, from the 1950s, or they came due to population displacements during the period of the Soviet occupation and the civil war that followed its withdrawal. The more-recently settled areas contain as many as forty different tribal groups, including small numbers of Hazara and Turkmen.[14]

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11   Dost Mohammad Khan ruled Afghanistan from 1826–1839 and from 1843–1863.

12   Interview with former Helmand Governor Assadullah Wafa.

13   Baluch groups in Pakistan have been involved in an on-going, periodically violent, conflict with the state since the 1970s, in part over claims that benefits from Balochistan Province's natural resources have not returned to the province and that Baluch are becoming a minority in the province.

14   For an analysis of the composition and origins of Helmand's population, see Scott, "Tribal and Ethnic Groups." For a description of the impact on land use and tribal distribution of the US-funded Helmand irrigation program see Cynthia Clapp-Wicek with Emily Baldwin, "A.I.D. Evaluation Special Study No. 18" (U.S. Agency for International Development, December 1983), accessed from The Helmand Valley Project in Afghanistan at **http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc. pdf&AD=ADA518306**.

Modern investments in the Helmand Valley go back to the 1910–14 period, when the Afghans constructed the first new canal. Minor levels of assistance provided by the Germans (early 1930s) and Japanese (1937–41) supplemented the Afghans' own efforts, until US assistance began in earnest after World War II. Initially funded by Afghan government revenues, subsequent investments were financed by loans from multilateral development banks and by foreign assistance, mainly US. Until 1979, the Helmand-Arghandab Valley irrigation program was, often controversially, called the "cornerstone of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan,"[15] and focused to a large extent on competing with the Soviet Union. In addition to the significant investment of US government resources during this period ($80 million of the approximately $125 million total), the Afghan government itself invested major resources into developing the area. During the 1950s and early 1960s, roughly one-fifth of the government's expenditures went into the Helmand Valley. The area under cultivation in Helmand nearly doubled (from 77,000 to 145,000 hectares), but this was less than a quarter of what had been projected.[16] The acrimony over who was responsible for the failures of many facets of the Helmand program has continued to this day, although sufficient responsibility can be shared among all parties. Nevertheless, the program had a dramatic impact on the tribal demography of central Helmand. Prior to the US-funded construction of a network of canals in Nad-e Ali and Marjah, these areas were sparsely populated and uncultivated areas of flat clay desert

escarpment.[17] The irrigation program made possible land settlement aimed originally at settling nomads as well as other groups; as a result, the Kharoti tribe became the largest tribal grouping in Nad-e Ali and the Noorzai became the majority in Marjah.

From 1973 until 1978,

just over 4,000 families were settled in the province under an accelerated program. The apparent policy for many of the families was that they were to be settled in tribally and ethnically heterogeneous units in a given area. This was perhaps a move to break up the strong tribal group and political unity found among some of the previously settled groups and the indigenous population. But it left some of these new groups at a political disadvantage vis-a-vis the government and the other groups. The recent settlers received about two hectares of land per household and very limited services. And the land where they have been settled is of poorer quality than that received by previous groups.[18]

The tribal composition of Nawa has also changed significantly with time. Originally labeled Nawa-i Barakzai, reflecting the dominance of the Barakzai tribe, land settlement in the early 1970s resulted in significant populations drawn from over a dozen non–indigenous Pashtun tribes.[19] Tom Coghlan, echoing this theme and quoting a Danish Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) survey conducted in the summer of 2007, notes that "the area between Gereshk and Sangin, an area of historic settlement by the Barakzai tribe, found some 20 different tribal identities (Barakzai 62 percent, Asakzai 8 percent, Khugiani

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[15]   Clapp-Wicek, "A.I.D. Evaluation."

[16]   Ibid. See also James Wolf, Richard English, and Barry Haack, "Rehabilitation Assessment of the Helmand-Arghandab Valley Irrigation Scheme in Afghanistan," *Water International* 19 (3) (September 1994), pp. 121–128.

[17]   For a description of the emergence of the HAVA, see Aloys Arthur Michel, "The Kabul, Kunduz and Helmand Valleys and the National Economy of Afghanistan: A Study of Regional Resources and the Comparative Advantages of Development," (National Academy of Sciences–National Research Council Washington DC, 1959), pp 139—207, available at **http://books.google.com/books/download/ The_Kabul_Kunduz_and_Helmand_Valleys_and.pdf?id=yk0rAAAAYAAJ&hl=en&capid=AFLRE73da3qaXVDo0dRwYC n9PvjlM6ECLx1i8GzNWIXkn5Ry5KJxbtNZMkToCWcny_kBQTMQ2uiUpqeNFLLoJl16BXms9ZCzkziXSSONGYDkplx FmDNWufM&continue=http://books.google.com/books/download/The_Kabul_Kunduz_and_Helmand_Valleys_and.pd f%3Fid%3Dyk0rAAAAYAAJ%26output%3Dpdf%26hl%3**. For an analysis of the politics of modernization as they impact on the HAVA irrigation project, see Nick Cullather "From New Deal to New Frontier in Afghanistan: Modernization in a Buffer State," Working Paper No 6, August 2002 (International Center for Advanced Studies New York University) at **http://easterncampaign.files. wordpress.com/2009/08/cullather2002.pdf**.

[18]   Richard B. Scott "Tribal and Ethnic Groups in the Helmand Valley," Occasional Paper No. 21 (The Afghanistan Council, The Asia Society, New York, 1980), p. 3, at **http://easterncampaign.files.wordpress.com/2009/08/scott1980.pdf**.

[19]   Louis Dupree, "Settlement and Migration Patterns in Afghanistan: A Tentative Statement," *Modern Asian Studies* 9 (3) (1975), p. 397.

7 percent, Khundi 6 percent, Kakar 5 percent, etc.)."[20] Consequently both Nawa and Nad-e Ali contain significant populations of Pashtuns from a wide variety of smaller tribes, including non-indigenous (to Helmand) Kharoti, Andar, and Dotani as well as further waves of people driven out of northern Faryab Province by Uzbeks during the 1992–96 civil war. These smaller groupings tend to be far less subject to traditional tribal influences and often have a more tenuous hold on the land as a result of the government's failure to establish and record land titles in the second wave of immigration. This theme of the fragmentation of tribal influences can also be seen in the significant numbers of displaced persons living in the semi-permanent displaced persons camps in Lashkar Gah's Mukhtar and Safwan areas. These groups have largely been excluded from service provision by the Lashkar Gah authorities and the Taliban have sought, with some success, to woo them.

Helmand also has a significant population of *kuchis* (nomads) with numbers that vary considerably with the season. In winter as many as 100,000 (some 4 percent of the overall Kuchi population) stay within Helmand's provincial borders. In summer, perhaps as much as 80 percent of the community travels to the provinces of Zabul, Ghor, and Ghazni.

3.1 Economy, Infrastructure, and Development Indicators

According to UNHCR figures, some 69 percent of households have agriculture as a major source of income although a quarter of households in rural areas also derive income from trade, transport, and services and 20 percent from other non-farm related labor. Small industry is essentially absent from the province.

The Helmandi agricultural sector produces wheat, corn, maize, vegetables, orchard crops, and opium, and engages in animal husbandry. The region is also well known for producing

British soldiers in poppy field, Babaji

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watermelons, pomegranates, and small quantities of cash crops including cotton, tobacco, sesame, and sugar. Agricultural production is dependent on the Helmand River and the Helmand-Arghandab Valley irrigation system that branches out from it. As described in the previous section, this system was substantially developed in the 1950s, with large quantities of US financial and technical support and contributed significantly to increasing the land available for farming and habitation. The Helmand-Arghandab Valley Authority (HAVA) was established to manage the program and became a major employer in the province as well as a semi-independent government agency with considerable authority. Thirty years of conflict have, however, seriously degraded the irrigation infrastructure and the reach and capabilities of HAVA.

Helmand has become synonymous with opium production. In December 2008, senior PRT staff estimated that the narcotics industry was responsible for over 50 percent of the wealth generated in the Helmandi economy, has strong links with government, and is a significant destabilizing influence. Despite eradication efforts and alternative livelihoods work (focused on the production of licit crops), opium production has flourished—reflecting the barriers to licit crop production resulting from chronic insecurity and corruption.[21] David Mansfield draws attention to the pressures on farmers that lead them to plant poppy rather than licit crops, arguing that in highly volatile security environments where the threat of eradication is low, opium

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[20] Tom Coghlan, "The Taliban in Helmand: An Oral History," in Antonio Giustozzi (ed.), *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field* (London, 2009), p. 121.

[21] For an analysis of the emergence of Helmand's opium economy, see Scott "Opium Cultivation in Central Helmand, Afghanistan." For more detail see David Mansfield, "Beyond the Metrics: Understanding the Nature of Change in the Rural Livelihoods of Opium Poppy Growing Households in the 2006/07 Growing Season" (UK Afghan Drugs Interdepartmental Unit, 2007) at **http://www.davidmansfield.org/data/Field_Work/UK/FinalDrivers0607.pdf**.

remains a low risk crop in a high-risk environment. It produces a non-perishable, high value low weight product suitable for transporting on poor roads where transport costs are high and damage to more fragile products is extensive. It has a relatively guaranteed market where traders will purchase at the farmgate and thereby absorb the transport costs and "facilitation fees" associated with the trade in legitimate crops in rural Afghanistan. These traders and indeed neighbors will also offer advance payments on the future opium crop prior to its harvest, allowing households to meet their living expenses during times of food insecurity or illness. In many areas growing opium also denotes a capacity to repay debts and will facilitate loans in both cash and in-kind.[22]

While Helmand is not a poor province by Afghan standards (in 2005 the NRVA ranked it six out of thirty-four), like much of the country it generally scores badly on most development indicators and disparities in wealth are marked. Only 28 percent of households have access to safe drinking water and 5 percent have access to safe toilet facilities. Only 21 percent of the population has access to electricity, although the province scores reasonably well on road infrastructure, with 62 percent of existing roads able to take car traffic in all seasons. Even by Afghan standards, Helmand has poor literacy rates. Overall literacy in the province was only 5 percent in 2005, with figures for men and women 8 percent and 1 percent respectively. For the 15–24 age group the figures were marginally better for men, at 9.1 percent, but for women the figure remained low at only 0.9 percent. The figures for the *kuchi* population were worse: 0.1 percent for men and 0 percent for women. Of children between 6 and 13, only 6 percent were enrolled in school, while for boys the figure was slightly higher at 11 percent. Overall, boys account for nearly 94 percent of all students, and 99 percent of total school provision is for boys only.[23]

By 2005, nearly a quarter of the population were reporting having difficulties satisfying basic food needs between three and six times per year with an additional third experiencing this problem up to three times annually (Table 1). Estimates suggest that as many as 49 percent of the Helmandi population received less than the minimum necessary calorific intake and 64 percent had low dietary diversity (Table 2). According to UNHCR figures, in 2005,
30% of the population of Helmand province received allocations of food aid, which reached a total of 428,608 beneficiaries. In addition, of the 23% of households who reported taking out loans, 58% said that the main use of their largest loan was to buy

Table 1. Problems satisfying food need of the household during last year

	Never	Rarely (1–3 times)	Sometimes (3–6 times)	Often (a few times a month)	Mostly (happens a lot)
Households (%)	38	31	25	5	1

Source: NRVA 2005, quoted in MRRD, "National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2005." See also NABDP/MRRD "Provincial development Plan, Helmand."

Table 2. Food consumption for all households

Households (%)	Low dietary diversity		Better dietary diversity	
	Very poor food consumption	Poor food consumption	Slightly better food consumption	Better food consumption
Rural	21	43	35	1
Total	20	44	34	2

Source: NRVA 2005, quoted in MRRD, "National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2005." See also NABDP/MRRD "Provincial Development Plan, Helmand."

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[22] Mansfield, "Beyond the Metrics." See also, Adam Pain, "Opium Trading Systems in Helmand and Ghor Provinces," in World Bank, "*Afghanistan: Poverty, Vulnerability and Social Protection: An Initial Assessment*," chapter 4, (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2005), at **http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SOUTHASIAEXT/Resources/Publications/448813-1164651372704/UNDC_Ch4.pdf**.

[23] See NABDP/MRRD, "Provincial Development Plan, Helmand."

food. A further 14% used the money to cover expenses for health emergencies. In the same year, nearly a quarter of the households in the province (23%) reported feeling that their economic situation had got worse compared to a year ago, and a third (34%) felt that it had remained the same.[24]

At the end of 2005 UNHCR reported that *two in five of all households in the province (40%) report having been negatively affected by some unexpected event in the last year, which was beyond their control. Households were most vulnerable to shocks related to agriculture, followed by problems related to drinking water, natural disasters and insecurity.[25]* (see Table 3 below)

Of those households affected, over a third reported that they had not recovered at all from shocks experienced in the last twelve months (37 percent), and three in five said they had recovered only partially (61 percent). These figures obviously suggest an extremely vulnerable population.

3.2 Provincial Administration

Helmand's administrative arrangements suffer from many of the challenges that affect other provinces throughout Afghanistan.[26] The complex coexistence of tribal, communal, and patronage relationships; segmented tribal identities; persistent insecurity; informal power relations;

Students watch visit of U.S. Marines, Now Zad

corruption; and inadequate state capacity – all pose significant obstacles to reviving or creating the structures of governance, particularly at the local level.[27] Furthermore, the piecemeal reform of state institutions, particularly at the sub-national level, since the fall of the Taliban, made little impact on the coherence or effectiveness of sub-national governance arrangements in the province.[28]

During the period of research, Helmand's provincial governors were Mohammad Daoud followed by Assadullah Wafa. Afghanistan's provincial governors have undoubtedly been of

Table 3. Rural households experiencing shocks in the province

Type of shock	Rural (%)
Drinking water	27
Agricultural	86
Natural disaster	24
Insecurity	22
Financial	3
Health related	3

Source: NRVA 2005, quoted in MRRD, "National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2005." The NRVA collected data on rural households only.

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[24] MRRD, "National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2005" (June 2007), author's copy.

[25] Quoted in MRRD, "National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2005."

[26] For an overview of these problems see World Bank "Service Delivery and Governance at the Sub-National Level in Afghanistan," July 2007, at **http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SOUTHASIAEXT/Resources/Publicatio ns/448813-1185293547967/4024814-1185293572457/report.pdf**.

[27] See Pain, "Opium Trading Systems."

[28] World Bank "Service Delivery and Governance," pp. 1–34.

varying quality, but Daoud was a reform-minded technocrat who spent much of his time in office politically besieged by Helmand's strongmen and had little traction among the tribes and warlords. He was systematically undermined throughout his tenure by his predecessor, Sher Mohammad Akhundzada (or "SMA"), whose time had been characterized by corruption, intimidation, and shady dealings, and who had been removed after ten metric tons of opium was found in his house. President Hamid Karzai finally removed Daoud in December 2006, replacing him with Assadullah Wafa, a former governor of Kunar Province and Karzai's distant relative. Administratively incompetent and surrounded by allegations of corruption, he also had an extremely poor relationship with the British-led PRT, where he was widely viewed as the principal obstacle to the extension of governance and service provision.[29] In March 2008, President Karzai removed Wafa and replaced him with Gulab Mangal, who was seen by the international community as one of Afghanistan's most capable governors.[30]

The governance arrangements at provincial level suffered from duplication and a lack of clarity. The election of the National Assembly and provincial councils in 2005 created in Helmand a body with an unclear mandate, a lack of clarity over the resources available to it, difficulties in defining its role in relation to members' own constituencies, and a degree of confusion as to relationships with both the provincial governor and provincial planning bodies and processes.[31]

Similarly the Provincial Development Committee (PDC), introduced with a standard structure across Afghanistan by presidential decree in November 2005, represented a rather ad hoc response to the challenge of bringing together a disparate range of coordinating and planning tasks that had emerged since 2003.[32] Nevertheless, by the end of 2007 the Helmand PDC was meeting about once a month, chaired by the provincial governor, and comprised representatives from each of the principal line ministries. Formally at least, it was further subdivided into a range of working groups chaired by the relevant director of the line ministry.[33] (See Figure 2 for the standard structure of the PDC.)

While intended to facilitate more systematic local-level input into national planning processes (such as the Afghanistan National Development Strategy or ANDS[34]) the PDC's powers and responsibilities remained unclear even to its own membership. Formally under supervision of the Ministry of Economy, it was in fact chaired by the provincial governor who, certainly in the case of Governor Wafa, exercised a profoundly limiting role over its function and deliberations in his efforts to retain control over patronage resources. Furthermore, even its own members were unclear as to their relationship with the provincial or national budgeting processes, how the body was meant to relate to the Provincial Council, the Provincial Administrative Assembly[35] or even the provincial governor. The overlap of responsibility and lack of definition in these

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[29] Interviews with unnamed senior PRT staff, November 2008.

[30] Governor Gulab Mangal had significant experience as governor of Paktika and Laghman and was generally viewed by the international community as one of the most effective and honest of Afghanistan's provincial governors. Although he enjoyed significant support from the international community, like Daoud he was undermined by Sher Mohammed Akhundzada and Abdul Rahman Khan. The constant politicking necessary to maintain his post was a significant distraction.

[31] Interviews with unnamed senior PRT staff, November 2008. See also Andrew Wilder, "A House Divided? Analyzing the 2005 Afghan Elections," (Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Kabul, December 2005).

[32] Hamish Nixon, "Subnational State–Building in Afghanistan," (Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Kabul, 2008), p. 6. See also Sarah Lister and Hamish Nixon, "Provincial Governance Structures in Afghanistan: From Confusion to Vision?" (Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Kabul, 2006); and Sarah Lister, "Understanding State-Building and Local Government in Afghanistan," (Crisis States Research Centre, London, 2007).

[33] Interview with former Helmand Governor Assadullah Wafa. See also NABDP/MRRD, "Provincial Development Plan, Helmand."

[34] The Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) is the Afghan government's consolidated development plan, intended to define a policy framework, strategic priorities, and "road-map" for implementation. Developed through an elaborate process with the support of the international community, ANDS contains strategies for 17 sectors, which fall under three pillars (security; governance, rule of law, and human rights; economic and social development) and eight sub-pillars, as well as six cross-cutting issues. ANDS also functions as a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for the purpose of qualifying Afghanistan for debt relief.

[35] The Provincial Administrative Assembly exists in some provinces as the coordinating mechanism between the governor and the provincial heads of line ministries. While in theory, the latter report to their respective ministries in Kabul, in practice governors have significant influence.

Governor/Deputy Governor

Secretariat — Department of Economy

PDC Central Office — Ministry of Economy

Economic Governance & Private Sector Development	Social Protection	Agriculture & Rural Development	Health & Nutrition	Education	Infrastructure & Natural Resources	Governance, Rule of Law, & Human Rights	Security
Economy (DEc)	Labour & Social Affairs	Agriculture (DoAIL) (DoLSAMD)	Public Health (DoPH)	Education (DoE)	Public Works (DPW)	Courts	National Security Council
- Dept of Finance - Chamber of commerce - Banks - Youth & culture - Donors - AISA - UN agencies - Private sector - Provincial Council	- Women's affairs - Rural rehab & devt - Refugees & repatriates - Border affairs - Tribal & kuchi affairs - Red Crescent - Provincial Council - UN agencies - PRT - NGOs (natl & intl)	- Rural rehab & devt - Counter narcotics - Environmental protection - Provincial Council - PRT - UN agencies - NGOs (natl & intl)	- Urban devt - Municipality - Red Crescent - Water supply - Private sector - Environmental protection - Provincial Council - UN agencies - NGOs (natl & intl)	- Higher ed - Women's affairs - Labour and social affairs - Martyrs & disabled - Youth & culture - Border affairs - Tribal & kuchi affairs - Provincial Council - UN agencies - PRT - NGOs (natl & intl)	- Urban dev't. - Transport - Rural rehab & devt - Municipality communications - Mines & industries - Water & power - Agriculture - Environmental protection - Provincial Council - Private sector - Banks - PRT - UN agencies - NGOs (natl & intl)	- Attorney general - Dept of Justice - Women's affairs - Civil Service Commission - Human Rights Commission - Audit & Control Office - Anti-corruption (GIACC) - Provincial Council - PRT UN agencies - NGOs (natl & intl)	- National police - National army - National security - Border affairs - Demining - Counter narcotics - Foreign affairs - Provincial Council - UN agencies - PRT

Source: Ministry of Economy

structures created a sense of paralysis among several of the members, reinforcing reliance on centers of informal and formal power and what has been described as the "government of relationships."[36]

3.3 Provincial Development Actors

Due to the challenging security situation in Helmand, a limited range of development actors operate in the province. The most significant development initiative was the National Solidarity Program (NSP),[37] which, theoretically at least, had a significant footprint in Helmand. By April 2007 fourteen district and municipal development assemblies existed, alongside about 487 Community Development Councils (CDCs) (see Table 4).

At the time of the research, BRAC was the principal implementing partner for both the National Solidarity Program (NSP) and the Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan (MISFA).[38] The UN had also established a very light presence in Helmand which, according to UNAMA, included eight different programs (see Table 5). During the period of research, the UN had no international staff permanently present in Helmand.

At the time of research, a small number of NGOs, contractors, and high-profile government-run programs were present, including Ibn Sina (the Ministry of Public Health's principal implementing partner) and Emergency in the health sector; Mercy Corps, the Central Asian Development Group, and Helping Afghan Farmers Organization (HAFO) in the agriculture sector; Chemonics in alternative livelihoods; BRAC in the microfinance sector and as facilitating partner of the NSP; and the Poppy Elimination Program.[39] In terms of donors, USAID funded a range of infrastructure and

Table 4. Community Development Councils by district

District	Number of CDCs
Lashkar Gah	80
Nahrisarraj	152
Musa Qala	32
Baghran	1
Nawzad	72
Nawa	38
Garmsir	112
TOTAL	487

Source: MRRD, National Solidarity Program at http://www.mrrd.gov.af/NSP/

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[36] Nixon, "SubNational State Building in Afghanistan," p. 2. See also Lister and Nixon, "Provincial Governance Structures in Afghanistan," pp. 1–8.

[37] The NSP is a national program that uses a community development approach to build minor infrastructure (e.g., roads, small irrigation structures, hydro and solar power, community buildings) and in the process promotes village-level governance. Communities elect councils which identify community needs, develop proposals, and oversee small grants under which work is done. The NSP is a collaboration between the international community, which provides funding and technical guidance, the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, which provides general oversight, and Afghan and international NGOs, which as the "facilitating partners" interact with communities.

[38] See The Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan at **http://www.misfa.org.af/**.

[39] The Poppy Elimination Program is a US- and UK-funded initiative that supports a range of activities (e.g., public information, support to Afghan government officials at provincial and central levels, monitoring and requesting eradication) intended to reduce cultivation of opium poppy.

alternative livelihoods programs while the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Danish Foreign Ministry had a permanent presence within the Lashkar Gah PRT and contributed funding for projects. The reach of donor programs was significantly constrained by chronic insecurity.

Agency	Activities	Location
Table 5. UN operations in Helmand		
UNAMA	Governance; follow up on Disarmament of Illegally Armed Groups (DIAG), human rights, and capacity building in government	Lashkar Gah
WHO	Health and vaccination programs	Nominally present in most districts
WFP	Work for food, school feeding, and emergencies	All districts
UNICEF	Education, health, Water/Sanitation	All districts
UNOPS	Infrastructure development	All districts
UNDP	Support to MRRD	All districts
UNHCR	Mukhtar IDP Camp	Mukhtar IDP Camp
UN Habitat	City profile	Lashkar Gah

Source: UNDSS Provincial Profile provided by UNAMA[40]

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[40] Also quoted in NABDP/MRRD "Provincial development Plan, Helmand."

4. Drivers of Conflict and Insurgency

Aerial view of Helmand Valley

This section draws attention to the complexity of conflict drivers working at individual and group levels. The drivers of conflict in Helmand are a poisonous admixture of tribal vendettas (originating during or before the Soviet occupation), competition between narco–mafias or criminal groups, and violent dissatisfaction with a notoriously predatory local administration and police service personnel. This section explores in detail some of the conflict dynamics.

The broad outlines of conflict are set by the differential privileges of the various tribes. The Tribal Analysis Center notes that the

> *larger Zirak tribes, the Barakzai, Popalzai, Achakzai, and Alikozai, tend to have the best land and good positions within both national and provincial governments from which patronage and development is steered to their own tribesmen. The Panjpai tribes, the*

Alizai, Noorzai, and Ishaqzai, are smaller in size, scattered widely across southern Afghanistan, and do not have senior leaders in positions within the national or provincial governments.[41]

This has resulted in an unequal distribution of patronage positions and development money, and consequently the Panjpai resent the Zirak tribes. The Taliban have proven particularly adept at exploiting this structural rift. Carter Malkasian introduces another dimension, emphasizing the distortions introduced by the opium industry:

> *The Noorzai and Itzakzai also played a large role in the drug trade, which put them at odds with the drug interests of the Achekzai-Barakzai-Popalzai-Alizai ruling class. Most of the tribes in Kandahar and Helmand were part of the Durrani tribal confederation, though some had links to the Ghilzai tribal confederation as well. The Ghilzai tribal confederation*

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[41] Tribal Analysis Center, *The Quetta Shura: A Tribal Analysis* (Williamsburg, VA: Tribal Analysis Center, October 2009), p. 14. at **http://www.tribalanalysiscenter.com/PDF-TAC/Quetta%20Shura.pdf**.

had been in conflict with the Durranis for centuries. Like the Noorzai and Itzakzai (who are Durrani), Ghilzai tribes received little assistance from the new leaders of southern Afghanistan.[42]

While intertribal fault lines partially explain conflict, Malkasian warns against framing the issue as one of "marginalized tribes versus empowered tribes," suggesting instead that the southern tribes have become "fragmented and laid on top of one another across different districts and villages. A large number of elders wielding varying degrees of power exist in every tribe. No one elder controls an entire tribe."[43]

Undoubtedly the Helmandi tribal system has lost much of its integrity. Traditional landed elites have lost much of their power and the tribes tend to lack mechanisms for enforcing tribal *jirgas*, decision making, or conflict resolution. Nevertheless, tribes remain important solidarity groups, and play a role in forming political loyalties, regulating elements of social relationships, and resolving disputes. In some ways the anarchy of the post-Taliban period and the loss of contact between the state and the tribe that resulted from thirty years of conflict have even strengthened the necessity for tribal affiliations. As a consequence, the tribal system has both been degraded and become even more significant as well as being manipulated both by *jihadi* commanders and the Taliban. As a result of these conflicting centripetal and centrifugal forces, tribes that are associated with the government can easily contain elements that support the Taliban and *vice versa*. While supporting tribalism in some ways has become a feature of the Taliban appeal, the degradation of tribal structures following thirty years of conflict has left many tribes fundamentally fragmented, leaving individuals subject to competing pressures and very different interests. For example, south of Sangin the Taliban comprise individuals drawn from the Ishakzai, Noorzai, and Kakar but also from the Barakzai and Alizai, groups that perhaps have had more to gain from the Karzai administration—suggesting a mixture of ideological and economic motivations plus alienation or marginalization *within* tribes.

The Durrani Alizai are a particularly good example of how intertribal conflict has emerged. Located mainly in the northernmost parts of Helmand, particularly in Musa Qala, Naw Zad, Baghran and Kajaki, the Alizai comprise a number of conflicting sub-tribes. Clashes between two of these, the Jalozai and the Hasanzai, have been a significant feature of Helmandi conflict, stemming back at least as far as a feud during *jihadi* times between the father and uncles of former Provincial Governor Sher Mohammad Akhundzada (Jalozai) and Abdul Wahid, a significant figure in Baghran. The conflict originated from tensions between the Hasanzai sub-tribe's traditional *khan* or *malek* forms of leadership and the rise of leaders drawn from the religious Akhundzada family. The ascendance of the Akhundzadas followed the toppling of the last Durrani ruler of Afghanistan, Mohammad Daud Khan in 1978, when the new People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan regime sought to pressurize the land-owning classes, the *khans* and *maleks*, forcing them to leave the region and creating a power vacuum for the opportunistic Akhundzadas. As the communists lost control of the countryside, the *mujahidin* of Mohammad Nasim Ahkundzada (SMA's uncle) extended authority and control over the sub-tribe, displacing or killing the remnants of the Hasanzai *khan* or *malek* leadership and obtaining control of the opium crop and the non-tribal Pashtuns to the south. The expansion of the Hasanzai powerbase threatened the remaining traditional Alizai sub-tribal leaders and created a complex of conflicts both against the Soviets and with other Alizai sub-tribes. Antonio Giustozzi and Noor Ullah argue that

> over the following years, three families from among the Alizais of northern Helmand led the jihad. *Apart from the Akhundzadas, the two other families were that of Abdul Rahman Khan and of Abdul Wahid, with the one important survivor among the* khans *being Abdul Rahman, whose family of well-established traditional* khans *was locked in a conflict with the Akhundzadas leading Abdul Wahid and Abdul Rahman Khan to join forces against the rising star of the Akhundzadas. . . .[44]*

[42] Carter Malkasian and Jerry Meyerle, *A Brief History of the War in Southern Afghanistan* (Quantico, VA: U.S. Marine Corps Intelligence Activity, 2008), p. 8.

[43] Ibid, p.14.

[44] Antonio Giustozzi and Noor Ullah, *Tribes and Warlords in Southern Afghanistan, 1980–2005* (Crisis States Research Centre), p. 10.

Aerial view of houses, Lashkar Gah

The conflict between Ahkundzada's Hasanzai and Abdul Wahid's Khalozai sub-tribe also entailed an additional dimension. The Khalozai were the leading sub-tribe, or "*Khan Khel*," of the Alizai. Therefore, the rise of the Akhundzada represented both a personal challenge to Abdul Wahid al-Baghrani and a threat to the pre-eminence of the Khalozai as a whole. Ahkundzada's rise also affected the way in which the Alizais supported the *jihadist* parties in the war against the Soviets and the communist regime in Kabul.[45] The Akhundzadas joined Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi's Harakat-i Inqilab[46] while Abdul Rahman Khan and the Pirzais allied with Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) and Abdul Wahid joined Rabbani's Jamiat-i Islami party. Today, few of the Pirzai Alizai hold positions of power due to the large number of Pirzai elders killed by SMA during the factional battles of the 1980s and 1990s. Even during the Soviet occupation this arrangement spilled over into infighting between Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi's Harakat and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's HIG, culminating in the defeat of Abdul Rahman Khan's forces outside Gereshk. Local Alizai leaders from both sides finally succeeded in arranging a truce in the early post-Taliban period, partly in order to enable the Alizai to consolidate their power over Helmand as a whole. Sher Mohammad is now generally allied with the government of Afghanistan, but the Harakat party his father and uncles supported is also the source of significant Taliban leadership—including Mullah Omar. Former HIG members are now found occupying government positions, possibly in an effort to seek Kabul's protection as a hedge against their Harakat enemies.[47]

The Alizai conflicts can therefore be seen as a product both of the rise of religious competition to the traditionally secular authority within the tribe and by the attraction of control of the profits from Helmand's opium industry.

The more proximate roots of much of Helmand's contemporary conflict are found in the way in which the post-Taliban carve-up of Helmand's institutions and positions left clear winners and losers—undermining any prospect of a sustainable inter-tribal political settlement within the province. The Popolzai, Barakzai, and Alikozai (the Zirak) tribes were systemically favored at the expense of the Ishakzai—principally as a

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[45] Tribal Analysis Center, *Putting it Together in Southern Afghanistan* (Williamsburg, VA: Tribal Analysis Center, May 2008), at **http://www.tribalanalysiscenter.com/PDF-TAC/Putting%20It%20All%20Together.pdf**. See also Tribal Analysis Center, *Alikozai Tribal Dynamics: A Very Unusual Durrani Tribe* (Williamsburg, VA: Tribal Analysis Center, May 2008), at **http://www.tribalanalysiscenter.com**.

[46] Harakat-i Inqilab was one of the seven major Sunni political parties during the war against the Soviets. For a discussion of Afghan political parties, see Gilles Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending: Afghanistan, 1979 to the Present*, translated from the French by John King (New York: Columbia University Press in association with the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales, Paris, 2005).

[47] Tribal Analysis Center, *Alikozai Tribal Dynamics*.

consequence of four powerful former *jihadi* commanders consolidating their grip over Helmand's formal and criminal institutions. These leaders had largely been driven out by the Taliban regime, but re-emerged as Karzai's allies in 2001, and systematically excluded and marginalized their tribal rivals. Sher Mohammad Akhundzada, an Alizai, assumed the role of provincial governor and took control of the appointment of district governors as well as the finance department. Dad Mohammad Khan, an Alikozai, headed up the provincial branch of the National Directorate of Security (the NDS, or intelligence directorate). Abdul Rahman Jan, a Noorzai, became police chief and Mir Wali, a Barakzai, had his militia incorporated into the Ministry of Defense. The smaller tribes and ethnic groups tended to gain control of the lesser departments: the Ghilzais for example assumed control of the Culture and Information Departments and the Hazaras the Education Department and key positions within Public Health.

The four Helmandi powerbrokers ran their departments as self-interested patronage networks, siphoning off government and, increasingly, PRT funding. Sher Mohammed used his position to empower his tribal allies and relatives, appointing his brother, Amir Mohammed Akhundzada, as district governor of Musa Qala (northern Helmand) while distributing land, including government land, and the profits from the rapidly growing opium industry in order to extend his control of northern Helmand. While SMA's militia was brutal and predatory, it was matched in every sense by the activities of Abdul Rahman Jan, whose militia ran illegal checkpoints—known euphemistically by ISAF as "taxation points." In Sangin, Dad Mohammed Khan, the tribal leader of the Alikozai (killed by the Taliban in June 2006), used his militia and the NDS to marginalize and tax the majority Ishakzai tribe while seeking to wrest control of poppy production in the area. While the four warlords behaved in an abusive and predatory manner, Helmandi communities were singularly unable to gain protection from Kabul. SMA's powerful connections in Kabul short-circuited redress

while their US allies saw them as simply too useful in the struggle against the Taliban.

While Helmand's fragmented tribalism gave these warlords their power, it also established the way in which government would be run, and it set clear and severe limits on the extent to which alliances across tribes could be established. In effect, Helmand's post–Taliban political settlement created a system of feudal robber barons, with the roots of their power in the remains of the tribal system, but fuelled by the profits from the narcotics trade and the distribution of governmental patronage.

The principal losers in this arrangement were the Ishakzai. Formerly powerful under the Taliban regime, the post-2001 arrangements saw them replaced in Helmand's hierarchy, particularly by SMA's sub-tribe of the Alizai, and also subjected to a sustained attempt to reduce their control of the opium trade. The combination of grievances, the assault on their networks of resources and patronage, the presence of powerful Ishakzai within the upper reaches of the Taliban movement (such as Mawlawi Akhtar Mohammed Osmani, who was second to Mullah Omar and who was killed by US forces in December 2006), and the appointment of an Ishakzai in the Taliban's shadow Helmandi government (the Taliban's first shadow provincial governor in Helmand was Mullah Mohammad Rahim) made the Ishakzai particularly vulnerable to Taliban infiltration.

The Taliban have proved adept at taking advantage of other local grievances. Initially infiltrating communities that had been abused by the former *jihadi* commanders, they offered protection against their rapacious militias and often provided financial compensation[48] while slowly removing pro-government elements and offering swift and cheap justice and a less corrupted form of governance. In addition to attracting leadership elements from the Ishakzai, the Taliban were adept at attracting other marginalized groups. For example, exploiting the split between the two principle sub-tribes of the

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48 Giustozzi argues that Sher Mohammed's "thuggery opened the door for the Taliban to return to Helmand in force. The Taliban, in fact, attributed their success in the province to Sher Mohammed and his militias. The Taliban approached the victims of abuse and offered their support, sometimes paying them thousands of dollars. Their allegiance was not hard to win." Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (London: Hurst, 2007), p. 60.

Alizai, the Jalozai and the Hasanzai, they were able to infiltrate the Hasanzai supporters of Abdul Wahid, a significant figure in Baghran. Other tribes, particularly the smaller ones or those whose leadership structures had been fragmented, were similarly vulnerable: the Hotak (Ghilzai and the tribe from which Mullah Omar originated) and the small Kakar tribe concentrated around Garmsir (from which the Helmandi military commander Mullah Dadullah Akhund, who was killed by Coalition Forces in May 2007, originated), and the Helmandi Noorzai, particularly the loose concentrations in Garmsir and Washir districts in the southeast and northwest respectively. Many of the latter had arrived from Uruzgan during the expansion of agricultural land that followed the Helmand River Valley irrigation project, taking advantage of land vacated due to conflict or protracted drought. The Taliban appealed to them, claiming that only under a Taliban regime would they be able to retain their rights to disputed land in these areas.

There was also an Alizai–Barakzai dimension to the conflict in the early days of the post–Taliban period, particularly in terms of the clash between SMA and Mualim Mir Wali, the Barakzai commander of the 93rd Division in Gereshk. This was essentially a conflict over control of opium and land and the re-emergence of an old rivalry between SMA and Mualim Mir Wali. SMA was supported by other strongmen; both Abdur Rahman Jan and Amir Dado (former chief of NDS and, by this stage, a member of the Afghan parliament) provided overt support while the spiraling conflict drew in strongmen from Kandahar, principally Ahmed Wali Karzai (Popolzai) and Gul Agha Sherzai (Barakzai). Karzai supported SMA and was keen to install a Popolzai District chief of police in Gereshk while Sherzai supported Mualim Mir Wali. After open conflict in which dozens were killed on both sides, Karzai and SMA were able to utilize the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process to disarm Mualim Mir Wali and strengthen their own power bases. This simmering conflict continues.

The Taliban were also able to exploit the poppy eradication program, particularly from 2006, undermining support for then Governor Daoud at a critical juncture. The central government's Poppy Eradication Force, created in 2005, proved to be inefficient and corrupt, easily bribed by wealthier landowners and government officials.[49] The Noorzai and Ishakzai were disproportionately targeted and fields belonging to Sher Mohammad Akhundzada and his senior supporters were largely left alone. While the program itself was weak and poorly organized, the Taliban exploited its weaknesses, offering protection of crops, the cancellation of debts, and compensation for communities subject to eradication. The combination of Taliban manipulation and reasonable grievance was sufficient to antagonize much of the rural population, turning many of the Helmandi fence sitters against the new British presence and the Karzai administration.

In many ways the Taliban's success was unsurprising. The grievances of the Ishakzai and elements of the Hasanzai and smaller tribes were sufficient to precipitate what amounted to an armed rebellion that, by the middle of 2006, destabilized much of the north particularly in Musa Qala, Naw Zad, Baghran, Kajaki, Sangin, and parts of Gereshk. Subsequently the "collateral damage" from NATO air attacks, causing civilian casualties, displacing Helmandis, and destroying productive infrastructure, also provided a driver of conflict, especially after the British deployment in 2006. In focus group discussions, a significant number of people said that they know extended family members or friends who had experienced ISAF attacks or night-raids.

4.1 Poverty as a conflict driver?

Helmand's obvious poverty made it potentially suitable for a development-based stabilization strategy. Within academic and practitioner circles the assumption that a reciprocal causal relationship exists between chronic poverty and armed violence at a societal level is a strong one,

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[49] Confirmed in interviews with senior PRT officials and Governor Wafa.

and this is reflected in the significant literature exploring the relationship.[50] The Berkeley economist Edward Miguel argues that "the poverty-violence link is arguably the most robust finding in the growing research literature investigating the causes of civil wars"[51] while the World Bank[52] argues that the empirical evidence demonstrates that "poorer countries are more likely to experience violent conflict, while conflict affected countries tend to experience higher levels of poverty."[53] Undoubtedly poverty makes an impact at the level of an individual's security through increasing hunger, malnutrition, and disease.[54] The mechanisms through which conflict increases levels of societal poverty are also generally well understood—with conflict destroying human and economic capital and physical infrastructure, reducing foreign investment and opportunities for licit employment as well as increasing capital flight. However, the reverse mechanism, through which chronic poverty has an impact on domestic upheaval and conflict, is less well known or perhaps more complex in its causality—constituting what Brainard and Chollet[55] describe as a

"tangled web," with overlapping threads of intervening variables and strands of reverse causality. Poverty and violence reinforce one another, but their specific relationship is mediated by context-specific drivers ranging from resource scarcity to weak institutions to malignant political leadership to demographic trends. Like spiders' webs, each country is unique; there is no single route to prosperity (or penury), no single pathway to peace (or war).

Some authors have sought to narrow down this complexity. Jonathan Goodhand, for example, argues that *greed* and *grievance* are perhaps the two most significant motivating factors in conflict causation.[56] Nevertheless, the complex and elusive correlation between poverty and conflict increases the appeal of elegant and simple explanations—particularly those theories that minimize the number of causal variables and simplify the relationship between these and systemic changes. In such an intellectual marketplace the effect is often to inflate the attractiveness of economic explanations of the poverty-conflict nexus and increase the seductive power of economically determinist theories of how stability can be achieved and the role that economic development may play in this. However, this risks neglecting the role of other complex social processes—factors causing the mobilization of kinship groups and networks, the impact of nationalistic and religious ideologies in generating violent behavior or motivating young men to join potentially violent groups. This has obvious risks for stabilization strategies, potentially increasing the risk that development assistance will be seen as a panacea. Certainly in 2006 and 2007 the combination of the extension of governance, the extension of Afghan security force presence and the application of development assistance were viewed as both necessary and sufficient for stabilization to occur.

However, the complexity of Helmand's tribal and conflict dynamics raised significant questions on the issue of how external aid strategies were likely

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[50] See Paul Collier, V. L. Elliott, Havard Hegre, Anke Hoeffler, Marta Reynal-Querol, and Nicholas Sambanis, *Breaking the Conflict Trap* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2003); Lael Brainard and Derek Chollet (eds.), *Too Poor for Peace? Global Poverty, Conflict, and Security in the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2007); Susan Rice, "Poverty and Civil War: What Policymakers Need to Know" (Brookings Global Economy and Development Working Paper, December 2006); and Susan Rice, "Global Poverty, Weak States, and Insecurity" (Brookings Institution, August 2006). For an overview of the impact of conflict on chronic poverty see Max Baldwin Orero, Charlotte Heime, Suzanne Jarvis Cutler, and Sarah Mohaupt, "The impact of conflict on the intergenerational transmission of chronic poverty: An Overview and Annotated Bibliography," CPRC Working Paper 71 (March 2007) at **http://www. chronicpoverty.org/uploads/publication_files/CPRC_Annotated_Bibliographies_No_4.pdf**. See also World Bank, "Toward a Conflict-Sensitive Poverty Reduction Strategy: Lessons from a Retrospective Analysis" World Bank Report No. 32587 (The World Bank, Washington, DC, June 30, 2005) at **http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/2005/wb-gen-30jun.pdf**.

[51] Brainard and Chollet, *Too Poor for Peace?* p. 51.

[52] World Bank, "Toward a Conflict-Sensitive Poverty Reduction Strategy."

[53] See also E. W. Nafziger and J. Auvinen, *Economic Development, Inequality and War: Humanitarian Emergencies in Developing Countries* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

[54] Brainard and Chollet, *Too Poor for Peace?* p. 3.

[55] Ibid.

[56] J. Goodhand, "Enduring Disorder and Persistent Poverty: A Review of the Linkages between War and Chronic Poverty." *World Development* 31 (2003), 629–46.

to influence the conflict dynamic. At the very least the fragmentation of identity groups and allegiances complicated the process of ensuring equity in aid distributions between identity groups. It also added to the challenge of deciphering the nature of the conflict eco-system and, subsequently, in identifying entry and leverage points for external actors. Consequently, development interventions risk seriously aggravating existing conflict drivers and are potentially a conflict driver in their own right.

Unlike the other provincial case studies, poverty was not cited by respondents in focus groups and interviews as a major factor in creating insecurity. Rather, political and other grievances were given as the most significant factors, although poverty was seen as exposing one and making one more vulnerable.

5. Stabilization and Development Models and Assumptions

Camouflage tanks and soldiers in PRT compound

This section discusses the background to the international military presence in Helmand, and focuses on the stabilization model adopted by the UK in the province between 2006 and 2008.

5.1 The US and UK's Military Presence

Neither the US, nor more recently the UK, established a particularly significant military presence in Helmand until 2008, and certainly nothing that was designed or sufficient to arrest the drivers of conflict discussed in the previous section. The US established a Special Forces and PRT presence in October 2004, but this could best be described as an "economy of force" operation and never numbered more than 300 troops. The US-led PRT spent approximately $9.5 million in the two years prior to the UK deployment (2006) while USAID funded a $130 million Chemonics contract dealing with rural livelihoods and infrastructure, but these activities were largely suspended following the killing of five of their employees in 2005.

In 2005, ISAF slowly extended its military footprint into southern Afghanistan while the international community placed increasing pressure on Karzai to tackle abusive warlords. The UK accepted responsibility for Helmand and lobbied hard for the removal of SMA, making

this a precondition for the deployment of their troops. In 2006, Karzai acceded, replacing him with Daoud. However, SMA's removal had significant unintended and perhaps unanticipated consequences. SMA himself claims that he was no longer able to distribute patronage to some 3,000 of his militia and encouraged them to look elsewhere for financial support. Not only did SMA's militia withdraw from the fight against the Taliban, but evidence existed that many militia members switched their allegiance to the Taliban; UK officials privately speculated that this was a part of SMA's strategy to cynically strengthen his chances of returning and replacing Daoud. British officials became increasingly concerned about the way in which the former *jihadis*, with SMA's support, were undermining reform efforts. Finally, in 2009 the *London Times* gave voice to their concerns, noting that a

cabal of former provincial officials, many of them figures sacked at British insistence because of their alleged links to the Helmand opium trade, [were] aiding the Taliban efforts. Their aim, apparently, is to create anarchy and present their own return to power as the only solution. The accused include the former governor of Helmand, Sher Mohammad Akhundzada; the former police chief, Abdul Rahman Jan; and the latter's son, Wali Jan, an MP in the Afghan parliament.[57]

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[57] Quoted in Tom Coghlan, "Weak Government Allows Taliban to Prosper in Afghanistan," *The Times*, September 29, 2008, at **http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article4842499.ece**.

Senior British military officers blamed the cabal for contributing to the "loss of Nad Ali and Marja to the Taliban. It was members of Abdul Rahman Jan's Noorzai tribal militia who occupied six key checkpoints that fell to the Taliban apparently without a fight." The article goes on to argue, quoting an unnamed Afghan government official, that since "they were sacked, they have not let one governor, chief of police or government official do their job."[58]

The stabilization model originally utilized by the UK represented a combination of three departments' efforts, spanning Ministry of Defense (MOD), DFID, and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) contributions wrapped up in a plan known as the Joint UK Plan for Helmand. This envisioned deploying to a triangle of territory encompassing the provincial political capital Lashkar Gah and the economic hub of Gereshk and providing a framework of security that was sufficient to enable a wave of reconstruction and development to convince the population in outlying districts of the benefits of central government. This was intended to create a demand for the extension of or connection to the formal institutions of the state and government service delivery. This logic, although not the limited geographical focus on Lashkar Gah and Gereshk, remained in place until early 2008 when it was replaced by the Helmand Road Map. The latter plan substituted an approach that focused intently on establishing a more adequate framework of security and the structures of local-level governance, but an analysis of this falls outside the scope of this paper.

The original Joint UK Plan for Helmand established a set of interdepartmental strategic objectives (no mean feat), but was criticized by interviewees on two grounds. Firstly, while it bundled together the three departments' individual plans, it left unanswered the question of whether this was a politically led counter-insurgency (COIN) strategy or a form of armed development and state building. Secondly, it identified the strategic objectives with a degree of precision but it did not deliver a detailed implementation plan (in fact this remained missing until early 2008), making it difficult to

synchronize and prioritize daily activities within the PRT and with the military task force.

The division of labor between the three UK ministries was also somewhat unusual. From 2006 until 2008 the role of the Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit (PCRU; renamed the Stabilization Unit, or SU, in 2007) was limited to providing stabilization advisers, and only upon invitation from its parent departments did it provide periodic planning support or facilitation (largely provided by London-based staff). The FCO retained control of the *delivery* of the civilian aspects of stabilization but also assumed responsibility for aspects such as governance and the rule of law which, under more normal circumstances, perhaps would have sat more comfortably within the DFID portfolio. The UK military contribution was understandably focused largely on the security environment and within that on reforming and mentoring the Afghan National Army (ANA) and defeating the Taliban's formed units. It also demonstrated significant "autonomy" with respect to the civilian elements of the UK strategy and, for a variety of reasons that are beyond the scope of this paper, tended to lack an adequate political framework for operations. This manifested itself in disagreements between senior civilian and military staff over whether the extension of UK military operations to the Upper Gereshk and Sangin valleys represented a significant diversion from the original plan or at the least a critical over-extension of limited military resources.

The original UK focus on Lashkar Gah and Gereshk ran into difficulties almost with the arrival of the British military in April 2006. The Ishakzai leadership, backed by the Taliban, sensed that the international community had finally turned against the warlords and rebelled against the Helmandi provincial leadership. In June, the Taliban orchestrated concerted attacks against the district centers in Musa Qala, Naw Zad, Sangin, Garmsir, and around the hydroelectric power plant in Kajaki, forcing the UK to abandon the "ink spot" strategy and deploy small "penny packets" of forces into the increasingly beleaguered district centers. With less than 1,000 combat troops spread thinly across Helmand,

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58   Quoted in Coghlan, "Weak Government Allows Taliban to Prosper."

the British were forced to rely on defensive air strikes to stem the Taliban attacks. This resulted in the use of large, air-delivered munitions in the urban centers, displacing significant numbers of Helmandis and causing collateral damage to the urban infrastructure, significantly weakening support for the British presence. Ultimately the British tactics were militarily unsustainable, forcing them to abandon Musa Qala following a controversial deal with the local elders in which both the Taliban and the UK agreed to withdraw from the town. This rapidly broke down and the Taliban returned within months, remaining in control for the next two years.

The British tactics adapted slowly over the next two years. A steadily growing number of troops enabled commanders to hold more territory in the Sangin and Gereshk valleys while also retaining a greater element of "maneuver." The PRT's civilian staff also grew and, critically, the rules limiting their presence outside of the PRT were relaxed. However, only towards the end of 2007 was the PRT able to sustain the presence of civilian stabilization advisers in the key districts. However, the fundamental strategy did not change radically until the middle of 2008 with the adoption of the Helmand Road Map. Even then the strategy remained painfully under-resourced, particularly in terms of troop numbers and helicopters, and it was not until mid-2008 that the US began to deploy significant numbers of its own troops in the province. By the end of 2008, the UK had deployed some 10,000 soldiers; this was matched by an even larger, and significantly more capable, US military force—Task Force Leatherneck—by the end of 2009. However, as noted above, an evaluation of this later strategy is beyond this paper.

5.2 DFID's Contribution

At the country level, the DFID contribution to the stabilization approach was shaped throughout the period under study by the assumption that Afghanistan was essentially a post-conflict state with an emerging government that required international support in developing the institutional architecture of a viable state.[59] Arguably this led DFID to a country program that focused heavily on reforming the central institutions of the state. According to Bennett et al., the DFID Transitional Country Assistance Plan (TCAP) and indeed the subsequent Interim Strategy for Afghanistan 2005/6 (extended out to the end of 2008 and the publication of the ANDS) were predicated on an optimistic view of the Afghan peace process: An expectation existed that the UN would manage a process of political transition that would develop an increasingly *stabilizing* political settlement that extended throughout Afghanistan and that would be *sufficient* to legitimize Karzai's administration, contain the drivers of conflict, contain the "spoilers," and underpin its relationship with the Pashtun south and southeast. In other words, Karzai could engineer a political settlement that provided for a sustainable vision of national unity and a relatively cohesive and increasingly durable social contract.[60] Furthermore, Bennett et al. argue that it was presumed that the most appropriate role for key donors in supporting the growth of the legitimacy of the Afghan state was to develop the capacity of Kabul's central institutions first and gradually extend their reach to the provincial and district levels. This was seen as best augmented by a program of rebuilding the legislative and judicial institutions alongside the banking and private sectors of the economy—viewed as the key frameworks necessary for encouraging the social and economic change that was necessary to underpin the political settlement.[61] A final assumption underpinning this approach was that there would be sufficient human capacity and political will—both within the Karzai administration and the international community—to pursue this model within a timeframe that met popular aspirations.[62]

The independent evaluation of the DFID program argued that this approach conformed well to the key policy prescriptions of DFID's

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[59] J. Bennett, J. Alexander, D. Saltmarshe, R. Phillipson, and P. Marsden, *DFID Afghanistan Evaluation Report*, Ev696 (DFID, London, 2009) at **http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications1/evaluation/afghan_eval.pdf**.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

approach to state building in fragile states—long term engagement, support to capacity building of the host state as a central objective, donor coordination, and the use of a mix of traditional and innovative aid instruments such as its livelihoods program and the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF).[63] It also reflected a somewhat unusual division of labor within other ministries and departments—with the FCO assuming a significant role in the delivery of governance and the reform of security institutions and the PCRU/SU playing a key role in the delivery of "stabilization" activities, albeit under FCO direction and alongside the UK Army within Helmand.[64]

These assumptions had an obvious impact on DFID's Afghanistan strategy, underpinning the development of a portfolio of programs and projects that focused on the technical reform of line ministries and development of the capacity of the central government, especially the executive branch, through supporting a mixture of reform programs and judicious forms of direct budgetary support. In terms of the former, DFID clearly had a wealth of experience in the areas of public administration and civil service reform. This led to an overall approach that was coherent with its organizational experience and preferences but paradoxically appeared to other parts of Whitehall as somewhat technocratic and removed from the dynamics of a growing southern insurgency in Helmand. Notwithstanding this perception, direct budget support through instruments such as the ARTF, while questioned lately on the grounds of the poor performance of the Kabul institutions and line ministries, made much more sense at that time (2005), when the British Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG) estimated that as little as a third of the Afghan government budget

(approximately $1.03 billion) was managed by the Ministry of Finance[65] and significant parts of USAID and the US Department of Defense (DoD) reconstruction efforts were off the budget sheet and delivered largely through contractors, international organizations, and NGOs.

In financial year (FY) 2006–07, DFID spent nearly £16 million of its total Afghan budget of £102 million in Helmand—or nearly 16 percent. This included a £4 million allocation to a Quick Impact Project (QIP) fund alongside smaller contributions from the MOD and the tri-departmental Global Conflict Prevention Pool (GCPP) (bringing the total of the fund up to just under £6.2 million for that FY). Most of the rest of DFID's funding went through an agricultural livelihoods program, the Helmand Agriculture and Rural Development Program (HARDP), with the money being spent through the Ministry of Reconstruction and Rural Development (MRRD) but earmarked for Helmand.[66] The following year DFID contributed a further £8.1 million, with over £3 million each directed through the QIP fund[67] and the HARDP program.[68] Despite the scale of these financial investments, the level of insecurity and the resulting poor environment for development activity led DFID to deploy few staff to Helmand for much of the period under study. As a consequence, DFID was frequently accused, particularly by the UK military, of not providing sufficient staff and financial resources to support what some MOD and FCO staff considered to be the flagship UK mission within the country.

Notwithstanding the argument over whether DFID's staff and financial resources were sufficient, Peter Marsden suggests that it is possible to criticize the resulting nature of

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[63] The Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) was established in April 2002 as the primary way of channeling funds to the Afghan government for recurrent expenditures. The ARTF funds the Afghan government's core operating budget and priority development programs.

[64] Interviews with unnamed DFID and PRT staff 2007 and 2008.

[65] 2005–06 figures from Agency Coordinating Body for Afghanistan Relief, May 2006.

[66] Bennett et al., *DFID Afghanistan Evaluation Report*.

[67] This eventually rose to a total of £9 million.

[68] While the UK's stabilization model was rooted in the Afghan Development Zone concept, the "development" contribution was based on the DFID Helmand Agriculture and Rural Development Programme (HARDP) program—a £30 million (between 2006 and 2009) rural-livelihoods program delivered via the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and therefore largely outside of the PRT framework—and the creation of an interdepartmental Quick Impact Project (QIP) fund—initially approximately £6 million, rising to £9 million the following year.

the DFID Afghanistan program as essentially too technocratic and apolitical. Arguably this distortion resulted from both a procedural omission on the part of DFID and the way in which the division of labor within the UK government's institutions worked. In terms of the former, the absence of an effective strategic conflict analysis that cast light on the distorting effects of the political economy of conflict, particularly within Afghanistan's Pashtun provinces, reduced the imperative to focus more on issues of political legitimacy and governance at the sub-national level.[69]

Similarly, the FCO assumed a prominent role in delivering a number of key activities—particularly the rule of law, justice, and governance aspects of the UK portfolio, especially within Helmand.[70] As a result, DFID-Afghanistan (DFID-A) responded less to the dynamics of the demand side of governance at the local level. Equally, the perception of the greater relevance of the PCRU/SU's stabilization efforts, particularly in conditions that were widely seen as incompatible with traditionally defined "development," may have contributed to DFID-A becoming somewhat removed from issues of political legitimacy and the political economy of aid at the provincial and district levels. While DFID, with good reason, could argue that these were issues for the Afghan government and the other UK government agencies engaged more fully in Helmand and, in any case, were not amenable to resolution through development programs, this argument failed to gain traction among the other Whitehall bodies. In effect DFID-A's partial exclusion and its perceived reluctance to "do development in conflict" made it less responsive to the types of governance issues at a local level that lead to state fragility and led to criticism from the other UK government departments.

5.3 The Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) Program

While the consolidation of Afghan state institutions was viewed as the key to ultimate "stability," it was recognized that this would take time and would need to be augmented by international support to provide security and kick-start at least some service delivery. Consequently QIPs were seen as rapidly implementable projects that might "serve as down payments on promises of political and economic progress."[71] Notwithstanding this consensus on their role in stabilization, each of the UK government departments had differing views of the utility, underlying purpose, and benefits of the QIPs program.

The FCO tended to view QIPs more as instruments of political engagement or strategic communication while the military tended to place great emphasis on the role of development and QIPs in particular in consolidating tactical military successes. Most military interviewees argued that reconstruction projects would deliver a more cooperative civilian population that would be more willing to share intelligence information such as the location of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and the movement of Taliban fighters. This was often labeled as the "consent winning" approach.[72] Its principal benefit was often described in terms of short-term "force protection." A particular implication of this view of QIPS was that it raised the military's expectations that civilian development and stabilization officials would follow rapidly behind the front line troops and immediately begin highly visible reconstruction or infrastructure projects. The focus was clearly on the quick delivery of *visible* projects in quantities sufficient to signal a commitment to a community by ISAF

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[69]   Author interview with Peter Marsden, adviser to British Agencies Afghanistan Group, Longmoor, Nov. 2007.

[70]   Ibid.

[71]   Bennett et al., *DFID Afghanistan Evaluation Report*. p. 15.

[72]   According to the UK Ministry of Defense, consent winning activities are "simple projects that gain consent of the local populace … to create a permissive environment... These activities are rarely a long term solution but must be part of the overall strategic development. They are intended to gain the goodwill of the community in order to initiate the engagement required to identify, plan and implement longer term programmes. Examples of consent winning activities include the provision of electricity and water, the removal of litter, the opening of markets and the repairing of roads." Army Field Manual: Countering Insurgency; Volume 1 – Part 10; United Kingdom, Ministry of Defense; January 2010.

and the government of Afghanistan. A particular emphasis was placed on the immediate delivery of tangible, often infrastructure-based projects. In addition, the Army was palpably frustrated with inclusive and participatory processes that involved community participation in project identification, decision making, and delivery. There was also an expectation that projects would provide something physical such as a road, well, or checkpoint, and that security priorities would be reflected in the reconstruction program—enabling the upgrading of police stations and vehicle check points, and the construction of roads that would limit the IED threat.

For DFID, QIPs offered somewhat different benefits. They were frequently described as mechanisms for ensuring rapid delivery of community-based programs that could serve as a bridge to future and more sustainable development initiatives. Furthermore, the contributions from the GCPP provided greater flexibility than core DFID funding, enabling non–official development assistance security related spending to be funded. The independent evaluation of DFID's overall program argued that in this respect, "it protected DFID's bilateral program budget from the wider security demands of the UK government, while opening possibilities for innovative, pro–development, approaches to stabilization."[73] As an aid instrument, QIP-type "projects" were generally recognized as having their place, potentially offering a range of benefits: enabling donors to target their effects more specifically than they could using only budgetary support measures; permitting work through a wider variety of implementing partners; allowing work in situations of poor government capacity; providing an opportunity to work outside of government institutions; and limiting elements of fiduciary risk.[74] However, even within DFID-A, QIPs had powerful detractors. The principal

arguments against their use were that projects were not sustainable, particularly where the project was delivered outside of government institutions and processes (or only aligned in a limited way) and tended to result in only very limited "effects" beyond a very limited locality, issue, or "time." Furthermore, off-government balance sheet budgets were viewed as vulnerable to considerably greater levels of corruption—with potentially corrosive effects.[75]

5.4 The "Stabilization" debate

The differences of opinion on the role of QIPs in generating consent and "force protection benefits" resulted in powerful controversies within the PRT, not least because the assumption of these benefits had organizational and tactical implications. The debate resulted in clear institutional preferences. DFID staff, reflecting a general trend away from small, bilaterally delivered projects towards more "programmatic approaches" or co-financing and pooled funding arrangements,[76] were deeply uncomfortable with the project-ized approach of the QIP program. However, being subject to many of the same political pressures affecting other government departments, particularly on the need to align itself behind a UK strategy increasingly focused on Helmand, DFID somewhat uncomfortably supported the QIP program. The QIPs fund could therefore be viewed as a compromise measure through which DFID was able to apply a mixture of instruments including its contributions to the QIPs fund (in the first two years), a form of budgetary support to the MRRD's National Solidarity Program,[77] with other traditional development funding earmarked for Helmand or allocated to national programs but likely to have an impact in Helmand.

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[73] Bennett et al., DFID Afghanistan Evaluation Report. p. xiii.

[74] N. Leader and P. Colenso, *Working Effectively in Conflict-Affected and Fragile Situations*, Briefing Paper E: Aligning with Local Priorities. DFID Practice Paper (DFID, London, March 2010), p. 5.

[75] Interviews with unnamed DFID and PRT staff 2007 and 2008.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Bennett et al., *DFID Afghanistan Evaluation Report*, p. 5.

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Joint PRT/Afghan National Police patrol, Lashkar Gah

The following section identifies the way in which QIPs were used as a component of the stabilization strategy, then, taking into consideration the models described in the previous section, unpacks local perceptions of "stability" and the legitimacy of the ISAF and government presence.

6.1 QIPs Implementation

Despite the differences of opinion described above between staff from the three government departments (MOD, FCO and DFID) charged with delivering a stabilization strategy, the initial raft of QIPs followed what could best be described as a "scattershot" approach, with projects focused on the Lashkar Gah and Gereshk

areas and intended to provide a general sense of confidence in the capacity of the Afghan government. Gradually, by mid 2007, the strategy evolved as follows:

- The first phase has focused mainly on security infrastructure, such as the upgrading of police stations and vehicle check points.
- The second phase has incorporated civil infrastructure, such as work on the sewage system and access roads to schools and clinics.
- Later phases include projects at the softer end, including support to schools and clinics, and more complex interventions—to strengthen the media, build up local NGOs and provincial government capacity, including strategic communication capacity.[78]

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[78] Stabilisation Unit, *Stabilisation QIPs Guide* (2008), p.20, at **www.stabilisationunit.gov.uk/attachments/article/520/QIPs%20 handbook%5B1%5D.pdf**.

By November 2007, the program was also being employed, albeit in a very limited way, to stimulate a dialogue on community needs and security through *ad hoc* planning groups (such as the Lashkar Gah Municipal Action Group) attached to the Provincial Development Committee—the intention being to establish the provincial administration's legitimacy and presence through visible service delivery.[79] The dominant areas of expenditure were in infrastructure, security, transport, and agriculture.

By September 2007, some eighteen months into the program, QIP money had been spent as presented in Table 6.

Individual projects varied considerably in size, with the largest single project expenditure being $2.3 million on heavy plant machinery for the provincial office of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and the smallest amounting to only $150 on a GPS set for a government official. However, between them the six largest projects involved one third of the overall funding.

In terms of project size, a number of interviewees described the philosophy behind QIPs as being to focus on small, visible projects in the grain of Helmandi society, intended to have a quick impact, not undermine longer-term development objectives, and not primarily aimed at consent winning. The official frameworks of guidance on QIPs did not, however, actually impose even these constraints. Projects such as the Women's Park (costing over $800,000) and the purchase of $2 million of agricultural equipment for MRRD suggest that "small" was not an overriding concern when it came to "signature" projects. Similarly, a significant number of projects *were* small (the purchase of laptops, an armored car for the governor, etc.), but many were essentially filling gaps in the capacity of institutions and were unlikely to be "visible."

Table 6. Quick Impact Projects approximated to sector-based categories, as of September 2007

Project Sector	% of Total Expenditure	Number of Projects
Infrastructure	26	15
Security	18	39
Transport	13	9
Agriculture	10	7
Women's related	7	9
Information	6	6
Education	4	15
Health	4	9
Governance	4	9
Recreation	2	8
Religious	2	6
Aid/Gifts/Hospitality	1	10
Research for PRT	1	3
Training	1	2
Miscellaneous	< 1	6
Prisons	< 1	3
TOTAL ($12,543,323)	100%	156

Source: PRT records made available to author

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[79]   Interviews with unnamed DFID and PRT staff 2007 and 2008.

In accordance with the "ink spot" plan (see footnote 5), an obvious effort was made to focus the delivery of projects in a limited geographical area, principally Lashkar Gah, Gereshk, and Sangin. As of August 10, 2007, the distribution of the QIP program projects and expenditures in the three major towns was as described in Table 7.

Across the province, the PRT's implementing partners were limited in type and number due to the weakness of Afghan provincial- and district-level government and the hostile security environment, which limited access by aid workers. Few NGOs or UN bodies operated in Helmand—with the exception of Ibn Sina, the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee (BRAC), Helping Afghan Farmers Organization (HAFO), and UN Habitat—and most were uncomfortable collaborating with the PRT. Furthermore, the restrictions placed on civilian PRT staff led to greater reliance on the UK military to identify and then manage projects. The projects, particularly construction, were generally contracted out to Afghan commercial companies. This resulted in a tendency for stabilization QIPs to be portrayed by the humanitarian community as part of the purposeful militarization or securitization of assistance in pursuit of the "hearts and minds" agenda as opposed to what was in reality largely gap-filling on the part of the military. Nevertheless, the military role was significant both in terms of identifying projects and supervising the delivery, particularly of construction projects by businesses.

6.2 The Evolution of Helmand's QIPs

As noted above, the Helmand QIPs program clearly underwent changes in priorities during the first two years (2006–08). In its early stages the priority appeared to be to demonstrate visible "quick wins" through a "scattershot approach" to project identification. Later it evolved into a two-stage process, focusing initially on security infrastructure as a prelude to more complex and diverse interventions. By the end of 2007, the program had begun to look more carefully at how the institutions of local governance could be engaged in a debate with the provincial authorities over development priorities and community needs. This approach was taken forward through the Helmand Road Map, which replaced the infrastructure focus of 2006 with what became labeled a "governance-led" approach. In part this evolution reflected the process of learning and adaptation that the PRT went through, but it also demonstrated significant discomfort with what progress was made between 2006 and 2008.

The initial focus on "quick wins" was challenging, not least because defining the characteristics of a "win" was difficult: what constituted an appropriate balance between sustainable outcomes and project visibility? Thus, projects varied from those which were unsustainable (such as small-scale cash-for-work programs expected to have little or no long-term benefits that would gradually be eclipsed by the rollout of national programs) to those in which sustainability and development best practice were critical attributes, even for QIPs (such as Lashkar Gah's infrastructure and road building program).

Several senior FCO interviewees at the British Embassy in Kabul and many soldiers tended to favor projects that would have highly visible effects and could be delivered rapidly, whereas DFID staff tended to have nuanced positions arguing that QIPs should rapidly produce visible impact while also meeting pressing needs that were defined by the communities themselves in consultation with sub-national governance

Table 7. Quick Impact Projects and funds committed by major towns, as of September 2007

Town	Number of Projects	Funds Committed
Lashkar Gah	105	$14.2 million
Gereshk	17	$1.1 million
Sangin	6	$368,000

Construction of new mosque at Nad-e Ali

structures. This was intended to stimulate broader development processes as well as demonstrating that the UK and the government of Afghanistan could deliver against their various promises. In effect DFID staff tended to focus on the process of defining needs as well as project *outputs*, and were far less enamored of projects with outputs defined in terms of "visibility," particularly where this could be interpreted as backing particular political figures in Helmand such as the provincial governor. Towards the end of 2008, DFID thinking tended to suggest that QIPs and the stabilization program generally should more closely align with ANDS and governmental priorities particularly as they related to the rollout of sub-national governance structures.

Several QIPs, particularly those that focused on market places and the refurbishment of mosques, involved quite nuanced theories of change.[80] The former were expected to contribute directly to economic growth and to associate the government directly with public service delivery. The refurbishment of mosques was viewed as both a form of government service delivery and a vehicle for strategic communication through influencing clerics, by implying that ISAF respected local customs and religion. No evidence exists that these clerics were singled out as being

particularly positive to ISAF, were especially amenable to influence in some way, or belonged to communities that were a particular priority and were therefore targeted for other benefits. The core idea of the general approach was, however, that if *sufficient* numbers of projects were initiated and if they were seen by Afghans to be generally beneficial, then they would communicate a positive message and buy time for the longer-term and more traditional development projects to gain traction. Little evidence exists that this communication strategy involved any particularly sophisticated targeting of communities or groups, but even if this were an aspiration, the PRT's limited knowledge of Helmand would almost certainly have precluded it.

While few projects were *inherently* poor in concept (or sat particularly uncomfortably within the framework of the Helmand Plan), targeting and prioritizing particular beneficiaries and sequencing the delivery of activities does not appear to have occurred often. Rather, many of the projects, particularly in the first six months of the program, seemed to be selected on the basis of opportunities identified by CIMIC patrols, usually conducted in the more benign areas, rather than by a more specific political or security objective.

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80   Ibid.

Bolan Bridge into Lashkar Gah

The absence of targeting reflected the poverty of baseline data, the PRT's limited penetration of Helmandi communities, the weakness of their knowledge of key leaders, and certainly (but not exclusively) in the earlier stages, inadequate targeting by CIMIC patrols. While such programs might be characterized as responsive to local needs, they were also viewed by several members of the PRT as *ad hoc*, following a path of least resistance. The heavy reliance on CIMIC patrols introduced significant risks as the patrols, in turn, relied on a limited range of interlocutors defined largely by their willingness to be seen dealing with the PRT and the military. It also raised questions about the adequacy of geographic and tribal "coverage."

Some evidence exists of inadvertent project *clustering* (for example, in the immediate vicinity of Lashkar Gah's Bolan Bridge) that may have accentuated the effectiveness of the communication strategy. This area was subject to a range of highly visible projects—the refurbishment of a Permanent Vehicle Check Point (PVCP), the construction of a "Friday" market, the creation of a large gabion retaining wall alongside the Helmand River, work on the bridge itself (although this appears to have been cancelled or delayed), and the construction of a very large "Women's Park."[81]

It is not clear from the PRT's own records or the interviews whether this clustering was intentional; more likely the projects were proposed by NGOs because they were close to a police checkpoint—representing a convenient marriage of *security* and development *opportunity*. The choice of location was, however, a good one—the area is astride a major arterial route into Lashkar Gah while the communities to the west are largely Pashtun and conservative. The market place, the bridge, and even potentially the park represent "functions" that are significant to the beneficiary communities and the projects are on a scale sufficient to be impressive, at least superficially. Furthermore, they were delivered almost sequentially—giving the impression of a significant and sustained reconstruction effort while the projects themselves, perhaps with the exception of the park, are associated with activities that are potentially important to the sustainability and growth of the communities to the west of the bridge. In principle the sequencing of a security project and then the broader infrastructure interventions may have sent a "communicative" message about the

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81   Stabilisation Unit, *Stabilisation QIPs Guide*, p. 31.

broad benefits of the government's presence and provided an environment in which other activities could develop.[82]

In Sangin, where project clustering was more apparent, one cluster was located in the district center and appears to have been largely inaccessible to the bulk of the population. This reflected the PRT's understandable reluctance to accept projects in *chronically* insecure areas. The resulting failure of several of the projects in Sangin suggests that more work had to be done with the military to create the conditions in which even limited QIPs could gain traction. Otherwise the risk is significant that failing QIPs will undermine "consent" through demonstrating either a lack of commitment or ineffective security and control.

Similarly some of the projects (such as the market place refurbishments, repairs to the Bolan Bridge river bank, the construction of ANA/ANP outposts, the repair of the electricity supply to Sangin Bazaar, the refurbishment of the various governor's compounds, etc.) appear to have had a clear communicative logic and could potentially have influenced a range of communities apart from the direct beneficiaries. Such projects' anticipated value derived from the direct support they gave to one or more of the three legs of the stabilization model: the protection of the civilian population (i.e., through providing physical security); the protection of vital institutions or processes (i.e., through refurbishing vital market places and ensuring freedom of movement along critical arterial routes); and the creation of conditions under which longer-term development can take place (i.e., making a direct contribution towards the creation of conditions in which a dialogue between government authorities and communities could take place). Arguably the targeting issue (i.e., identifying communities that the PRT wished to influence) is more significant when considering the strategic "signature" and "consent winning" projects than those smaller projects with more limited groups of beneficiaries (i.e., where the "soft" effects of *perception* and *attitude management* were the *primary* intended outcomes).
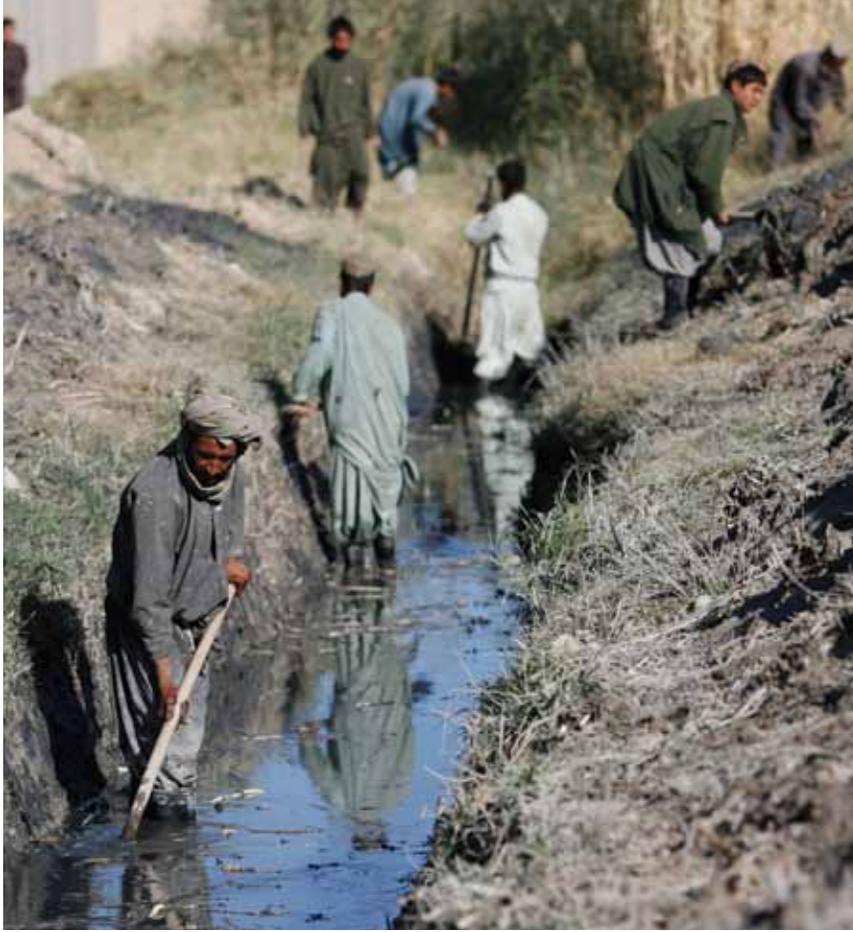
Nevertheless, while one can be critical of the opportunity-led approach to project identification, one must have a degree of sympathy for the practitioners who, due to decreasing levels of security and restrictive duty of care procedures, were unable to develop a more rounded view of Helmandi society and, in any case, did not have the benefit of a detailed implementation plan to guide them at the level of "activities.". Equally, the PRT was under growing pressure to deliver "outputs" defined largely in terms of "projects started" and money committed.

6.3 Consent Winning Activity (CWA) and QIPs

The role of QIPs in "consent winning" was perhaps the most contested area of the program and the most problematic in terms of its impact on the relationship between UK government departments. The differences generally matched departmental boundaries with the MOD and elements of the FCO advocating the idea that QIPs could build consent *directly*, whereas DFID staff argued that the process of economic and political transition itself drew people to the government.

On the military side, the initial view of QIPs was largely stereotypical on the subject of consent winning—the projects were assumed capable of "buying" Afghan loyalty. This view was underpinned by unrealistically optimistic expectations as to the conditions that would allow development to gain traction and the capacity to buy off populations with relatively small numbers of superficial projects. However, the consequence of this sometimes-acrimonious debate was that the PRT struggled to determine precisely how CWA fit within the QIPs and stabilization frameworks. Even the MOD's own CWA projects did not seem to follow precisely an obvious CWA formula. Projects were extremely diverse, including peace offerings, hospitality and goodwill payments, and small-scale rapidly-implemented construction. Some of the expenditures resembled those from a hospitality fund—buying space at a table in a process of initial engagement with communities

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[82] Ibid, p. 31.

Cash for work project

The PRT also funded several food distribution projects as part of its consent winning approach. These were said to be plagued by corruption among Afghan organizers (including provincial government staff) and poor implementation.[83] This criticism extended to the military-delivered cash-for-work schemes, particularly in places such as Sangin.[84] The approaches were at times flawed—involving cash payments to individuals to clear irrigation ditches that were beyond the reach of British patrols to supervise, making it difficult to demonstrate that people had in fact been employed.

The PRT's internal debate on consent appeared to miss important areas—such as the potential for poorly implemented QIPs to actually undermine "consent." A provincial hospital official in Lashkar Gah, for example, argued that "the PRT has done nothing for us. They have bought us machinery which does not work and the wall to the building had to be knocked down to get the machinery inside." Equally the slow pace of reconstruction, poor project design, the exclusion of particular groups, perceptions of corruption, the lack of local ownership or inclusion in identifying projects, and inappropriate or contested design and implementation were all mentioned within focus groups as undermining the positive effect of QIPs. However, no systematic mechanism existed within the PRT for managing these risks, or even for assessing the veracity of the complaints which did reach them. The QIP-funded construction of the Babaji Road

and key leaders. However, many expenditures were united by their intended indirect effect of "community penetration." The "tangible" objective in each case proved not to be intangible "consent" but the establishment of channels for dialogue to facilitate the flow of intelligence and for the military to use to signal their control of an area and communicate a range of positive messages. However, there is little evidence to suggest that the benefits of these programs were capitalized upon in any systematic way. Furthermore, the emotiveness created within the PRT by the debate over consent winning activity generally clouded judgments and slowed the identification of what worked and under what conditions. Perhaps surprisingly, the author was unable to collect any evidence from the PRT that demonstrated reasonable proof of a direct link between QIPs and consent generation.

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83   Interviews with unnamed members of the Helmand Provincial Council.

84   Some evidence exists that the MOD has responded to the weakness of its early efforts in this area through employing an NGO to manage the cash-for-work program in Musa Qala. This took place after the fieldwork for this report was completed.

Laborers near Shamalan Canal and Bolan Park

was perhaps a good example of the consequences of this: while several groups of Babaji elders appeared content with the route, design, and construction contracts, several large communities contested all three and expressed severe discontent with the PRT and ISAF as a consequence.

What is clear from the preceding analysis is that QIPs were harnessed to a range of evolving objectives. While they appear to have begun as simple, small-scale, low-cost, rapidly implemented projects that were intended as down payments on promises, the linkage with sustainable development, strategic communication objectives, and support for longer-term transition strategies complicated their purpose. Equally, the projects were identified in ways that could be seen as politically naïve, with little recognition of the impact that the fragmented nature of Afghan tribal networks would exert on perceptions. Furthermore, mechanisms within the PRT were inadequate for monitoring the impact of the program or the risks inherent in particular projects.

6.4 Community Perceptions of International Aid: Corruption, Project Types, and Community Participation

The focus groups and key informant interviews unearthed consistently negative perceptions of international development assistance and particularly that provided by the PRT.[85 86] Allegations of corruption characterized perceptions of several of the projects—the Women's Park in Lashkar Gah, the Eid Celebration Park in Gereshk, and the purchase of machinery for MRRD being subject to the most allegations, including from several government officials and individuals drawn from supposed-beneficiary communities.[87] The allegations suggested a number of irregularities in the procurement processes. These included the involvement of PRT interpreters in acquiring and reselling PRT contracts, the existence of fake construction companies, collusion among contractors to inflate prices (particularly those relating to the larger construction contracts in both Gereshk and Lashkar Gah), multiple

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[85] Many of these observations are consistent with findings in the four other provinces that make up the Afghanistan country study. For Balkh Province, see **https://wikis.uit.tufts.edu/confluence/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=38966405.** For Faryab, see **https://wikis.uit.tufts.edu/confluence/x/SgKBAg**.

[86] All of the quotes in this section are taken from the focus group discussions held in Lashkar Gah in February and March 2008.

[87] This research has not explored the validity or otherwise of the allegations, only the impact that these *perceptions* appear to have had on attitudes towards ISAF and the government.

"flipping" (selling to another contractor) of contracts (with money skimmed at each "flip") until the final contractor was unable to complete the project to an acceptable level of quality (in Sangin and Lashkar Gah), and suggestions that militia associated with criminal groups had received security guarantee payments. The school in Sangin was particularly controversial. A Ministry of Education official complained, "The school was made of the wrong material and not to our designs. It will have to be knocked down." He also argued that the contract to paint the school "was resold many times and then one of the workmen was killed by the Taliban on his way from Lashkar Gah."

Several (unsubstantiated) allegations were made against Governor Wafa related to perceptions of kickbacks on land deals and the purchase of capital items related to the Women's Park. An unnamed line ministry official claimed that the "land by the [Helmand] river was owned by the government and was poor quality. Development money paid for the banks to be built up. It become more valuable and was sold at a large profit by the governor."

The PRT was frequently accused of complicity in the corruption. "Either they are stupid or they are part of the deal," said one line ministry representative, a sentiment reflected by other beneficiary groups. One individual argued, "They only deal with the powerful groups and not with us. Why is this? Are they making money? Why do they only do small projects? They do not want to leave anything behind for us when they go." Echoing the theme that the PRT focused on the wrong types of projects, an elderly Barakzai man in Lashkar Gah argued, "We want projects like the Americans used to make." He argued that "Our young men have no chance of a job and the projects don't help. The money goes to the wrong people and we see no result."

Furthermore, a sense of a stalled reconstruction process pervaded, and this appeared to combine with confusion at how the Taliban, toppled so easily in 2001, were now resurgent. This generated occasionally wild and negative speculation about the underlying motives of both the British and the Americans. This narrative was reinforced by the frequent criticism of the military's tactics—particularly in generating civilian casualties, in how house searches were conducted, and in widespread perception that elders and women were treated poorly. This was set in the context of a government seen as chronically corrupt at all levels and, furthermore, having little interest in responding to the needs of the Helmandi population. Equally, several respondents were critical of the way in which powerful individuals at provincial and district levels had manipulated ISAF in their disputes with other power brokers—although others suggested that the Taliban had also been manipulated in the same way—and how ISAF had consequently inadvertently and wrongly labeled individuals and communities (in both Sangin and Babaji areas) as Taliban. Similarly, several focus groups suggested alternative motives underlying the interventions, including revenge for British defeats in the nineteenth century or punishment for harboring al Qaeda. Others argued that the West was set upon exploiting Afghan's natural resources or seeking to extend a strategic lodgment into the Islamic world.

Focus group discussions often reflected strong sentiments that little had been done and that more community engagement in defining development priorities was required, all this despite the PRT's apparent attempts to consult with potential beneficiary populations. The discussions echoed recurring complaints: PRT projects had not met community needs; they lacked participation and consultation—even where proof existed that the PRT had actively sought Afghan partners and community representation. Furthermore, the sense that appropriate community structures had been bypassed appeared to fuel accusations of corruption and the consolidation of noxious criminal or tribal elites. In Lashkar Gah, for example, a sense pervaded that the PRT funded companies that shored up powerful interests linked to Karzai and SMA, among others. In effect, the PRT's need to mobilize appropriate and sufficient community representation that frequently fell outside of the recognizable frameworks of community and sub-national governance (or in situations where this was perceived to be co-opted or degraded by powerful and exclusive elites) appeared to generate unintended and negative consequences and complicate efforts to give development aid

Construction work on district governor's center, Nawa District

a positively perceived state-building or peace-building function.

The belief that little development had been done was due to perceptions both of insufficient numbers of projects and that the slow delivery of benefits contributed to a belief that reconstruction was failing to transform or to bring a peace dividend. Some communities felt particularly excluded—predictably, both Ishakzai and Noorzai respondents, but also those from the smaller and non-indigenous (to Helmand) tribes especially in the area of the Babaji road construction project. Similarly, the focus group narratives in Lashkar Gah's Mukhtar area and in Safwan district, resonated with the idea that they had been neglected by the government and ignored by the ISAF PRT. Some had heard that they were to be forcibly displaced by the government and relocated to an area between Lashkar Gah and Gereshk, reinforcing a sense of their own marginalization from most aspects of the routine municipal service delivery plan but also a much deeper sense of political and economic alienation. One English-speaking former teacher suggested that Lashkar Gah had "many places where people had moved because of the fighting. These people are angry and blame ISAF." He claimed that Mukhtar and Safwan had become a "little Mogadishu" with "many angry people."

The focus group narratives produced clear calls for the types of projects that were perceived as historically financed by the US and even the Soviets. There were recurring calls for development funding for factories and irrigation infrastructure projects perceived as delivering mass employment in more sustainable ways. The

historical memory of these approaches appeared to have created an appetite for different types of projects and a benchmark against which the PRT's development interventions were judged—often critically. The UK approach, focused on community-identified development of small-scale infrastructure projects and clean-up tasks (e.g., irrigation canals) and supporting state survival functions (often relating to police infrastructure) did not, at a level between that of the beneficiary community and the provincial authorities, match popular expectations even where some communities had been involved in defining projects. A sense of "zero sum" results persisted, with gains by other communities or individuals seen as losses by non-beneficiaries (particularly in Sangin and parts of Lashkar Gah such as Safwan). In Sangin, the prospect of one community being linked to the district center through a new footbridge even elicited veiled threats from a tribal rival. These factors suggest that the impact of development aid on communities' attitude change is strongly conditioned by societal and historical factors that have the potential to undermine the growth of positive perceptions of government and ISAF.

The narrative of pervasive corruption was reinforced by similar perceptions of governance failures in other areas, particularly in how the justice sector operated. Helmand's (now former) chief justice was accused of corruption by eleven separate people in interviews. They argued that he was taking bribes and spending most of his time in Saudi Arabia. This was contrasted with justice provision under the Taliban or in areas beyond the government's reach. Here, the swift and relatively uncorrupted forms of informal justice were described in positive terms that contrasted strongly with the situation in government-controlled areas.

The most striking feature of focus group discussions and interviews was how descriptions of corruption in development projects naturally expanded into a predictable range of much broader narratives: corruption and the failure of governance mechanisms, police brutality, and ISAF and the government's failure to respond to the needs of the people, while imposing personal, economic, and cultural costs of the conflict. A sense pervaded that the net benefits of ISAF were strongly outweighed by the perception that their presence exacerbated inter-communal conflict as well as with the Taliban.

Respondents in focus groups were frequently (and understandably) reluctant to discuss what motivates young men to join the Taliban, but in subsequent private discussions indicated that the causes were diverse, frequently highly complex, and not amenable to resolution through the provision of reconstruction money. Mobilization through kinship groups, for reasons of self-protection in a dangerous environment in which communities were often polarized, for status (and an inability to obtain status through traditional tribal mechanisms), for support for reinforcing their claims to disputed land or resources, for religious reasons, etc.—all featured in discussions. Religion appeared to play a role in mobilizing some young men, but largely because it legitimized other grievances—the lack of support for the government, and negative perceptions of the actions and presence of foreign forces on Afghan soil. In addition, some men apparently joined the Taliban as a way of registering broader grievances in the absence of any other means of doing so. The lack of references to al Qaeda was striking. While several individuals mentioned "Pakistani foreigners," Afghans from other areas, and limited numbers of Chechens and Uzbeks, the Taliban were seen as having a strong local component—in strong contrast with ISAF perceptions of the movement in early 2007. However, the principal finding from the focus groups was the suggestion that without adequate provision of the right types of security, Lashkar Gah's reconstruction progress would remain unable to make an impact on the credibility of the government elsewhere.

6.5 Attitudes towards governmental authorities

The study sought to identify whether attitudes towards the Helmand and national authorities

differed in any meaningful way or varied by location, and it tried to draw conclusions about the drivers of conflict and interventions described above. The polling results suggest that attitudes towards governmental authorities bifurcated geographically, with relatively strong confidence in government in the towns of Lashkar Gah and Gereshk and an overwhelming lack of confidence in Nad-e Ali, Nawa, Kajaki and Sangin—places where the post–2001 elites had consolidated their grip over diverse populations and frequently behaved in a predatory manner (Table 8). Furthermore, attitudes towards the Helmandi and national authorities were broadly similar and surprisingly seemed to differ (in the cases of Gereshk and Lashkar Gah) markedly from the narratives that emerged from the focus group discussions—where comments tended to demonstrate a very low level of confidence in all levels of government. The apparent polarization of opinion in Gereshk and Lashkar Gah offers a partial explanation of the differences between polling and focus group results and suggests that creating representative samples is difficult. Differences were marked in levels of confidence across both Lashkar Gah and Gereshk, with some communities clearly far less positive than others. The researchers explained this in terms of the impact of respondents drawn from the populations of Safwan and Mukhtar in Lashkar Gah and the presence of a significant group of Ishakzai within the data set for Gereshk. The alienation of these communities was offered as a partial explanation of the polarization in respondents' views.

Elsewhere, the results were strikingly consistent, demonstrating a considerable lack of faith in the governance provided by the Helmandi and national authorities and suggesting that

Table 8. Degree of confidence expressed in the government of Afghanistan

	Very Confident (%)	Confident (%)	No Confidence (%)	Sample size
Nad-e Ali	4	22	74	300
Lashkar Gah	40	47	13	500
Nawa	2	20	78	300
Kajaki	1	5	94	300
Sangin	0	4	96	300
Gereshk	27	50	23	500

Road building between Lashkar Gah and Gereshk

the populations of outlying districts had not responded positively to improvements in public services in the two major urban centers (a key component of the original stabilization model) despite surprisingly high levels of confidence in government in those (focus) areas. Rather, the conflict drivers in the outlying areas remained sufficiently powerful that they were able to crowd out any broader strategic messages generated by the stabilization program. In effect, the "ink spot" strategy relied upon a stabilization program that appeared to have little or no traction in the outlying areas.

6.6 Attitudes towards ISAF

In terms of attitudes towards ISAF, the survey results were not particularly positive, although there was marked variation across the province (Table 9). The provincial center, Lashkar Gah, produced significantly more positive results than other areas. Setting aside questions about how "support" can be interpreted, differences in response across areas were notable.

By the end of September 2007, Lashkar Gah had received more QIP and development money through NSP and HARDP than other parts of Helmand and had enjoyed the fewest instances of direct fighting between Taliban and ISAF forces. A reasonable conclusion therefore is that it has been subjected to more "stabilization activities" and fewer visible "destabilizing factors" than other parts of Helmand. However, responses may have reflected two distorting factors: the town had a significantly better starting position than elsewhere in terms of security, development indicators, and public service provision; and the

Table 9. Attitudes expressed towards ISAF: "How do you feel toward ISAF?"

	I support them a lot (%)	I support them a little (%)	I don't support them much (%)	I don't support them at all (%)	Don't know/ Won't Say (%)
Nad-e Ali	0	0	6	11	83
Lashkar Gah	12	27	28	5	28
Nawa	0	1	8	15	76
Kajaki	0	0	7	8	85
Sangin	0	0	11	9	80
Gereshk	0	12	18	32	38

attitudes of respondents were likely to be more "cosmopolitan" than in other parts of Helmand.

Within Lashkar Gah, just under 40 percent of respondents expressed support for ISAF, another 28 percent gave a lukewarm positive, and only 5 percent a negative. Elsewhere the figures showed a very different composition, with overwhelming proportions of respondents in Nad-e Ali, Nawa, Kajaki, and Sangin in effect refusing to participate in the polling. This likely reflects both higher levels of antipathy towards ISAF in these areas and typical "fence sitting behavior" common in militarily disputed areas where the eventual winner is unclear to respondents.

In perceptions of how much ISAF contributed to improving security in various towns, the figures showed a similar variation (Table 10). Seventy-three percent of Lashkar Gah's poll responded that the security situation had not worsened or had in fact improved (although a methodological problem was the absence of a baseline reference point). Gereshk followed suit to a lesser degree, with 56 percent believing the situation had remained the same or improved. However, the remainder of the province returned results that suggested a strong perception of a deteriorating situation: 78 percent in Nad-e Ali, 79 percent in Nawa, 83 percent in Kajaki, and 86 percent in Sangin concluded that the situation had become "worse" or "a lot worse" and, given the nature of the question to which they responded, inferred ISAF was responsible for this trend.

To obtain a sense of whether the decline in perceptions of security could be offset by a strategic narrative of development and the extension of positive forms of governance, the poll sought to identify whether respondents thought "overall" ISAF's presence was a positive or negative phenomenon (Table 11). This time the trend was clearer, suggesting a widespread perception that ISAF's presence was generally seen in negative terms. In the places

Table 10. Extent to which ISAF's presence has changed the security situation in Helmand

	Improved a lot (%)	Improved a little (%)	Stayed the same (%)	Become worse (%)	Become a lot worse (%)
Nad-e Ali	2	11	9	35	43
Lashkar Gah	11	23	39	3	24
Nawa	1	10	10	41	38
Kajaki	1	11	5	39	44
Sangin	1	9	5	34	51
Gereshk	1	18	37	34	10

Table 11. Overall, ISAF's presence is positive for my town.

	Agree strongly (%)	Agree slightly (%)	Disagree Slightly (%)	Disagree Strongly (%)
Nad-e Ali	2	28	15	55
Lashkar Gah	14	33	45	8
Nawa	1	24	12	63
Kajaki	0	34	9	57
Sangin	0	19	11	70
Gereshk	2	15	35	48

of heaviest fighting, figures were predictably negative with Nad-e Ali (70 percent), Nawa (75 percent), Kajaki (66 percent), and Sangin (81 percent) returning strongly negative results. Perhaps most surprising was Gereshk—producing the highest overall negative perception of the net benefits of ISAF's presence and almost certainly reflecting the perceptions of the large Ishakzai population in the town. Lashkar Gah produced a relatively even split between positive and negative results, reflecting the views and experiences of the IDP populations in Mukhtar or Safwan as well as those who have benefited from the reconstruction programs.

The focus group discussions in both Lashkar Gah and Gereshk produced results that supported the thrust of the statistical results. In all of the groups, individuals stressed collateral damage to civilians and civilian property—particularly during the 2006–07 period. Significant numbers of participants claimed to know extended family members or friends who had been caught in attacks by ISAF forces or experienced nighttime raids by ISAF troops (although, surprisingly, very few participants claimed to have direct personal experience). Several respondents became emotive once the subject had been raised, suggesting both that this strategic narrative traveled significant distances through kinship groups and was able to resonate and amplify powerfully and negatively through these networks, crowding out other messages and contributing to the calculation that on balance ISAF's presence was negative.

The focus groups reflected a similar correlation between perceptions of government legitimacy and changes in the levels of security—suggesting that one of the most effective ways of building state legitimacy in such an environment was, initially at least, to clearly improve the levels of security experienced by the population.

Royal Marine Commando on operations in Helmand province

7. Conclusions

Within the broader Afghanistan country study on the relationship between aid projects and security, the purpose of the Helmand Province case study was to explore

- whether aid projects help "win hearts and minds" and increase public support for the Afghan government and international military forces, and
- whether the PRT objective of extending the reach of the central government was having a stabilizing effect.

The period from 2001 until early 2008 was one in which the US and UK deployed relatively few troops to Helmand. The UK stabilization model transformed rapidly in 2006–08, but not in an entirely planned way. In the early model, focused on Lashkar Gah and Gereshk, a limited number of UK troops were to enhance security sufficiently to start a process of social and economic change to deliver a range of political benefits. Subsequent larger-scale development was predicated on slowly developing capability within the central government; QIPs and HARDP were to deliver a range of short-term benefits as a down payment on this broader systemic change. The anticipated transformations of Lashkar Gah and Gereshk were to serve as beacons for other areas, drawing them into a relationship with the government. However, the UK's ability to project a sense of security was clearly insufficient to match the threat posed by the Taliban throughout 2006, and the UK's slowly growing military forces were only able to control limited territory around the key district centers.

In contrast, the Taliban were able to build substantial networks on the back of grievances brought about by the old *jihadi* commanders, many of whom were brought into positions of power within the government. The international community's policy of backing Helmand's warlords from 2001 until the end of 2005 proved counterproductive, further reinforcing the sense that the provincial authorities represented a national government incapable of responding to even the minimal aspirations of Helmandis. This strategic error was then compounded when the

warlords were hastily removed from power before developing the ability to contain the warlords' impact as spoilers or to fill the security vacuum left by their militias. This created more opportunities for exploitation by the Taliban. Notwithstanding these errors on the part of the Karzai government and the international community, the Taliban strategy proved to be extremely effective: it exploited the grievances of the marginalized tribes, fragmented communities, and the poor; took advantage of the controversies unleashed by the poppy eradication process; and increasingly marshaled financial and military resources from the narcotics networks. This combination enabled the Taliban to challenge the more powerful tribal leaders and the government itself by the middle of 2006, suggesting that the stabilization model employed during this period focused on the wrong drivers of conflict—on the lack of development and government presence rather than on poor governance and insecurity.

The research shed some light on the impact of reconstruction-based approaches to stabilization in this context. The polling data, focus group results, and extensive individual interviews clearly show that the reconstruction program in Helmand left winners and losers—due largely to the way in which reconstruction money was viewed as an important component of existing Helmandi patronage politics. This appeared to have a negative impact on perceptions of PRT-delivered aid and created political opportunities for the Taliban. Arguably this process has been pronounced in Helmand due to the fragmentation of the tribal groups and the way in which elites and certain tribes were perceived to have "captured" aid disbursement processes. The absence of effective and relatively transparent sub-national governance structures and the belief that the PRT was unable or unwilling to effectively monitor infrastructure projects reinforced these perceptions and reduced confidence in the idea that aid was available to all.

The "ink spot" model adopted by the international community did not succeed within the timeframe under study—as evidenced by the very negative perceptions of government and

ISAF in areas outside of Lashkar Gah. In effect the PRT has been unable to make Lashkar Gah and Gereshk into "beacons of development" ("ink spots") enticing other areas into a political settlement with the government authorities. This is likely due to a range of factors. Mainly, security appears to be the most pressing and consistent concern of residents of Helmand—more so than individual reconstruction projects. The most significant sources of conflict appear to be fighting between ISAF and the Taliban and perceptions of ISAF's disrespect for Pashtun culture and religion. However, there is strong evidence of conflicts being driven by struggles over resources and personal disagreements between power brokers (tribal leaders and criminals) and by rejection of the government as a consequence of its predatory behavior. The initial diversion of ISAF military from the ADZ or "ink spot" concept and the inability to secure areas from Taliban incursion also appear to have elevated concerns relating to security among many respondents. Interviewees from communities outside of Lashkar Gah suggested that until the government was able to deter Taliban intimidation, people were reluctant to co-operate with government outreach and the reconstruction process. Arguably, government "control" of and commitment to remaining in a territory changes the rules by which a society interacts and broadens the range and quality of interlocutors (leadership groups, civil society representatives, commercial partners, etc). Several respondents suggested that in situations where the risks of collaboration were great, beneficiaries would only engage in supporting the reconstruction process if they could buy Taliban security or were sufficiently powerful that they could mitigate threats themselves (e.g., through control of their own militia)—implying that the QIPs program had the potential to reinforce state-building spoilers or be perceived as doing this.

"Ink spot" strategies may take a considerable period of time to demonstrate benefits to more-distant communities, are difficult to "scale up," and may not work at all in some contexts—requiring enormous flexibility in the model and its local application. Interviewees in the PRT (i.e., the practitioners themselves) tended to argue that projects did not extend the reach of government unless they were delivered through credible and responsive formal sub-national governance structures that were engaged with more representative cross sections of beneficiary communities—and this was only possible where security was sufficient to enable contact between beneficiaries and government structures. Furthermore, the fragmented and competitive nature of present-day Helmandi society may preclude the "ink spot" strategy from delivering the types of results predicted. In particular, "development" (even in parts of Lashkar Gah) was viewed by some individuals from non-beneficiary communities as evidence of elite capture of aid processes rather than a demonstration that aid was a public good that could be extended to all. In effect, without adequate analysis of social fault lines, the distribution of aid in such a fragmented and polarized polity has the potential to marginalize further and increase the sense of alienation rather than giving hope of potential change. Furthermore, geographical (distance or physical obstacles) or social barriers (different kinship or tribal groups) may impede the spread of positive narratives from Lashkar Gah or these messages may simply be too mixed or weak to change perceptions elsewhere. In particular, other conflict drivers appear to have overwhelmed many of the potentially "positive" political effects of the reconstruction process as evidenced by responses to questions that sought to capture "overall" perceptions of the government or ISAF's delivery of benefits. Furthermore, the aid message is likely to be eclipsed by Taliban infiltration of communities, significant levels of intimidation, and largely ineffective ISAF counters to these. Equally, governance mechanisms in general, and aid disbursement processes in particular, appear to have been severely discredited and therefore reinforce the narrative of the predatory, self-interested government.

The difficulties in producing a level of security sufficient to deter Taliban incursion or intimidation and to ensure civilian freedom of movement have also contributed to the chronic problems of identifying and delivering projects. The resulting slow disbursement of aid and the absence of effective consultative mechanisms were generally seen by practitioners to be products of the lack of security, and they have reduced the

legitimacy of the reconstruction process. These challenges appear to have been compounded by weaknesses in oversight and program management structures within the PRT and a strong pressure to deliver projects and spend money even in the absence of interlocutors or effective political analysis. This severely disrupted the PRT's ability to effectively address issues of local political legitimacy.

As was the case in other provinces, beneficiary responses to the Ministry of Rural Reconstruction and Development's National Solidarity Program (NSP) tended to be more positive. Responses to DFID's Helmand-specific HARDP were likewise more positive. While significant criticisms were leveled against the NSP, overall respondents appreciated the extent to which they were consulted and involved in the process of identifying, prioritizing, implementing, and monitoring the projects, and that a relationship was built between communities and the NSP implementing partners. The UK MOD CWA funds were managed in a way that made it difficult to identify the nature of the expected outcomes. It was also unclear from interviews what was meant by the term "consent"—rarely was it obvious what beneficiaries were thought to be consenting to. In contrast, measuring the negative effects of reconstruction was easier—"controversy" being much easier to identify than "consent." In the timeframe of this research, the PRT was unable to produce evidence of CWA delivering either "consent" or "legitimacy," and the popularity ratings of ISAF instead reflect the negative aspects of their interactions with the civilian population. In particular, at a provincial level the reconstruction program appears not to have countered negative perceptions resulting from collateral damage, civilian casualties, house searches, etc.

As was the case in other provinces, beneficiary responses to the Ministry of Rural Reconstruction and Development's National Solidarity Program (NSP) tended to be more positive. While significant criticisms were leveled against it, overall respondents appreciated the extent to which they were consulted and involved in the process of identifying, prioritizing, implementing, and monitoring the projects, and that a relationship was built between communities

and the NSP implementing partners. In other words, the process—not just the product—seemed to play a key role in contributing to the relatively positive impressions of NSP. The process of relationship building was facilitated by the relatively small amounts of money involved in NSP projects ($27,000 on average for community block grants). In contrast, the larger PRT contracts appeared to get lost in opaque sub-contracting processes in which forming relationships with local communities was not prioritized or possible.

7.1 Active organizational learning?

The PRT adapted its approach from early 2008, abandoning its scattershot strategy and instead seeking to use stabilization programs to extend sub-national governance arrangements through engaging communities with provincial and district authorities—the intention being to create a responsive and accountable state that is visible at district level. The British military's geographical diffusion of its effort also showed signs of being addressed, particularly from December 2008. Operation Sond Chara in Nad-e-Ali, then Operation Panchai Palang in Babaji (in July 2009), and finally Operation Moshtarak (in 2010) have seen the UK military finally concentrating their forces in the vicinity of central Helmand—although the obvious exception of Sangin remains. It has suffered from insufficient troops and stabilization advisers and has made no meaningful progress. The civilian stabilization effort has also reconfigured itself around facilitating improvements in sub-national governance arrangements and, by November 2009, the Helmand PRT had the largest civilian component and the most expansive governance outreach program of all the Afghanistan PRTs.

Nevertheless, shortcomings remain both with the UK's resources and the scale of its commanders' ambitions. The effectiveness of Operation Panchai Palang was diluted by the incomplete clearance of the "green zone"(the irrigated areas on either side of the Helmand River) and the subsequent re-infiltration by the Taliban, and the poor election turnout in 2009 was almost certainly a product of the returning Taliban's intimidation of the civilian population. The US Marines have faced similar challenges in Marjah

in 2010 (as part of Operation Moshtarak), where the local population has been skeptical as to whether the US will remain and where the Taliban have successfully re-infiltrated, hindering progress on security, freedom of movement, sub-national governance reforms, and the delivery of public services.

Arguably, the British experience in Helmand highlights a creditable capacity to adapt the strategy to unforeseen tactical difficulties. It also reveals significant challenges in developing and delivering an approach that identifies and mitigates conflict drivers and is able to harmonize military plans with political outreach and development processes. It highlights the severe information gaps inherent in working within complex conflict environments. However, perhaps the most striking conclusions relate to the complex way in which perceptions of "stability" and government legitimacy can be derailed where security and controls on "development" processes are insufficient. In such situations "aid" may have as many negative, unintended effects as positive ones and, at the very least, is not a panacea.

Annex A. Research Methodology for the Overall Afghanistan Study

The objective of the overall Afghanistan aid and security research project has been to better understand the effectiveness of aid in "winning hearts and minds" and promoting stabilization and security objectives. The following section describes the definitions and research methodology used to achieve this objective.

Stabilization doctrine and definitions

This study has largely used U.S. military definitions for terms such as "stabilization," "stability operations," and "winning hearts and minds." This was done because the U.S. is deploying the vast majority of military and non-military aid intended to promote stability objectives in Afghanistan, and it is U.S. military doctrine (especially COIN doctrine) that is driving the stabilization agenda in Afghanistan. It therefore seemed most appropriate to use the U.S. military's own definitions to determine the effectiveness of efforts to use aid to promote stability objectives.

The strong U.S. policy interest in stabilization emerged in the aftermath of the U.S.-led interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. The political instability, insecurity, and growth of violent insurgent movements that ensued in both countries, as well as the concern that safe havens for terrorist groups were emerging in other unstable regions of the world, convinced many analysts and policymakers that, compared with strong states, "weak and fragile states" and "ungoverned spaces" threatened U.S. security interests more.[88] This belief soon influenced policies and resulted in large increases in both financial and human resources directed towards promoting stability in unstable regions deemed to be of strategic interest. In 2005, for example, the U.S. Department of Defense issued a directive (DoDD 3000.05) that formally recognized

stability operations as a core U.S. military mission equal in importance to combat operations, and the U.S. Department of State established the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization.[89] While foreign aid had always been perceived as an instrument of foreign policy in the U.S., not since the Vietnam War was it viewed so explicitly as a "weapons system." This was particularly true in Afghanistan, Iraq, and more recently Pakistan, where foreign aid became inextricably linked to the stabilization, counter-insurgency (COIN), and counter-terrorism objectives of Western governments led by the U.S.

The U.S. Army's *Tactics in Counterinsurgency* manual states that "at its heart, a counterinsurgency is an armed struggle for the support of the population."[90] Central to this "population-centric" COIN strategy is the assumption that poverty, illiteracy, and the unmet needs of the population are important factors fuelling instability and insurgencies, and that the provision of humanitarian, reconstruction, and development assistance therefore plays a critical role in winning the support—or the hearts and minds—of the population. This assumption is illustrated in the foreword to the U.S. Army's *Stability Operations* manual (FM 3-07), which states that "the greatest threat to our national security comes not in the form of terrorism or ambitious powers, but from fragile states either unable or unwilling to provide for the most basic needs of their people."[91] Money is viewed as a key component of hearts and minds operations. In April 2009, the U.S. Army's Center for Army Lessons Learned published the *Commander's Guide to Money as a Weapons System*, which highlights on the first page the importance of using "money as a weapons system (MAAWS)" in order "to win the hearts and minds of

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88 The 2002 National Security Strategy of the administration of then U.S. President George W. Bush stated that: 'The events of September 11, 2001, taught us that weak states, like Afghanistan, can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states', and that 'America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones' (The White House, 2002).

89 Other donors created similar structures to focus on stabilization, including the United Kingdom Government's Stabilisation Unit (originally named the Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit), and the World Bank's Fragile and Conflict-Affected Countries Group.

90 U.S. Department of the Army, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*; FM 3-24.2; p. ix; April 2009.

91 Department of the Army, *Stability Operations*, FM 3-07 (October 2008), p. vi.

indigenous population to facilitate defeating the insurgents."[92]

The U.S. Army's *Stability Operations* manual defines "stability operations" and "stabilization" as follows:

> *Stability Operations.* Various military missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside the United States in coordination with other instruments of national power to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment, provide essential governmental services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief.[93]

> *Stabilization.* The process by which underlying tensions that might lead to resurgence in violence and a breakdown in law and order are managed and reduced, while efforts are made to support preconditions for successful long-term development.[94]

The concept of "winning hearts and minds" is more difficult to define precisely as, even within the U.S. military, different actors use the term differently. Unlike "stability operations" or "stabilization," no one precise definition of the term "hearts and minds" exists. Rather, it has been used as a sort of shorthand and, in the translation from doctrine to field-level vernacular, has been much abused. The U.S. Army's *Counterinsurgency* manual (FM 3-24) explains the phrase as follows:

> Once the unit settles into the AO [area of operations], its next task is to build trusted networks. This is the true meaning of the phrase "hearts and minds," which comprises two separate components. "Hearts" means persuading people that their best interests are served by COIN success. "Minds" means

convincing them that the force can protect them and that resisting it is pointless. Note that neither concerns whether people like Soldiers and Marines. Calculated self-interest, not emotion, is what counts. Over time, successful trusted networks grow like roots into the populace. They displace enemy networks, which forces enemies into the open, letting military forces seize the initiative and destroy the insurgents.[95]

Despite the cautionary note that winning hearts and minds is not about getting people to like military forces, many of the international military personnel interviewed for this study did perceive this to be an important objective of their aid efforts.[96] Even more common, however, was the view that the primary objective of aid projects was to make the population like and support the Afghan government. It is not surprising that this was the view of many of the military and civilian Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) officials who were interviewed given that the primary objective of NATO/ISAF PRTs is to "assist the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to extend its authority."[97] This study does not adopt any one definition for the phrase "winning hearts and minds," but rather tries to explore how different actors understand and use the term, and to understand its effectiveness—whether in terms of building trusted networks, generating consent and support for the presence of foreign troops, or legitimizing the Afghan government.

Field Research Methodology

The research team conducted field research in Kabul and five provinces—Balkh, Faryab, Helmand, Paktia, and Urozgan. In these provinces, as in nearly all of Afghanistan's thirty-

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[92] U.S. Army Center for Lessons Learned, *Commander's Guide to Money as a Weapons System: Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures*, Handbook 09-27 (April 2009), p. 1. The MAAWS doctrine was renamed "Integrated Financial Operations" in 2010.

[93] Department of the Army, *Stability* Operations, p. vi.

[94] Ibid, Glossary-10.

[95] Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24/MCWP (2006), p. A-5.

[96] Press accounts from Afghanistan often quote military forces suggesting that their aid projects are intended to generate good will among local populations for their presence. For example, "If [soldiers] can spread the message that, 'Hey, coalition forces built new toilets,' it makes us seem that much more legitimate, and makes them more willing to work with us," said Zambarda, of the 2-12 Infantry, Dagger Company, as quoted by Bradley Blackburn in, "'Warrior-Diplomats' on the Front Lines in Afghanistan: U.S. Forces on a Dual Mission to Fight the Enemy and Reach Out to Him," ABC News, May 12, 2010.

[97] ISAF, ISAF PRT *Handbook*, Edition 3 (2007), p. 2.

four provinces, international civilian and military actors are making efforts to use humanitarian, reconstruction, and development aid to promote greater stability and security. However, notable differences between the five provinces provided opportunities to examine the development-security nexus in very different contexts. For example, Balkh and Faryab Provinces in the north were much more secure than Helmand, Urozgan, and Paktia Provinces in the south and southeast where the Taliban-led insurgency was much more active. In the two northern provinces the Pashtun were a minority ethnic group, whereas in the south and southeast they comprised the overwhelming majority. Another significant difference was the variations in approach, budgetary resources, and character of the different NATO/ISAF nations heading the PRTs in each province.

The study team used a relatively consistent methodology in four of the five provincial study areas (Helmand being the exception[98]), bearing in mind that the varied security and other conditions allowed or required somewhat different approaches in different areas. Field-based interviews with Afghan and international respondents provided the primary data source for this study. These were conducted between June 2008 and February 2010 during multiple visits to Balkh, Faryab, Paktia and Urozgan Provinces. As detailed in Table 1 at the end of this annex, a total of 574 respondents were interviewed, including 340 Afghan and 234 international respondents. These primary data were supplemented by information from secondary sources, including existing databases (e.g., the Ministry of Rural Reconstruction and Development's National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, the NATO/ISAF Afghanistan Country Stability Picture, donor project lists), surveys, public opinion polls, media articles, and a wide variety of published and unpublished reports.

Approval from the Tufts University Institutional Review Board was obtained in advance of the community-level fieldwork. In accordance with standard procedures for informed consent, respondents were told orally that their participation was voluntary, that their responses would be confidential, and that they could terminate the interview at any point. In some cases (i.e., with staff of international agencies and aid contractors) this information, along with background material on the study, was provided by email in advance of the interview.

The original plan had been to gather qualitative data through focus group discussions with community members and semi-structured key informant interviews with Afghan and international officials. However, during the first round of field research in Paktia and Balkh Provinces in June and July 2008, it became clear that semi-structured interviews with individuals (or on occasion small groups) at the community level generated more fine-grained and nuanced information than focus group discussions. Afghan social hierarchy may discourage willingness to talk openly or express ideas that violate social norms, or may encourage a sort of groupthink. This is likely to be especially true for sensitive topics such as the influence of local power holders or the characteristics of the government. At the same time, while the research teams tried to obtain individual interviews, social protocols (i.e., that it is considered rude to ask people to leave a room) sometimes required that interviews take place in a group setting.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted using two different questionnaires—one for Afghan and international officials and one for community-based respondents. The questionnaires were developed by the principal investigator (PI) and field tested during a June-July 2008 visit to Paktia and Balkh Provinces. The semi-structured nature of the interviews meant that all questions were not asked of all

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[98] The Helmand case study focused specifically on whether the UK government's Quick Impact Projects in Helmand between 2006 and 2008 were demonstrating impact. The methodology consisted of analysis of qualitative data from focus groups, quantitative data taken from polling data drawn from communities and provided by the PRT, and interviews with key informants (e.g., PRT staff, Afghan government officials). These primary data were supplemented by extensive review of secondary sources. See Section Two of the main text for additional information.

respondents, and issues were discussed in differing levels of detail depending on the backgrounds of the respondents and the time available for interviewing. The interviews with key informants included current and former government officials, donors, diplomats, military officials, PRT personnel, journalists, and UN and aid agency staff. The community-level research included interviews with tribal and religious leaders, local government officials, members of civil society organizations, traders and shopkeepers, beneficiaries of specific reconstruction and development projects, and community members more generally.

The semi-structured interviews followed a strategic structure of clusters linked to specific themes such as actors, aid effectiveness, and security. The order reflected the degree of potential sensitivity, from an initial request for straightforward information progressing to personal views. The structuring strategy was used to develop trust before more potentially sensitive questions about security were asked. To initiate trust and rapport prior to each interview, a uniform method was employed to briefly and informally introduce the reasons for the research and how the information would be used while stressing and demonstrating confidentiality. Each interview concluded by asking for further comments and questions.

Most of the interviews with Afghans were conducted in Dari or Pashtu, although some interviews with senior government and NGO officials were conducted in English. In northern Afghanistan nearly all the interviews with Afghans were conducted in Dari. The two international researchers leading the field research in Balkh and Faryab Provinces were excellent Dari speakers, and could directly interview Afghan respondents. They were assisted in setting up and conducting interviews, as well as in note taking and analysis, by Afghan research assistants. In Faryab, a small number of interviews were conducted in Uzbeki, which was immediately translated orally to the researcher and research assistant. As respondents were able to understand Dari, they were able to intervene if their answers had been incorrectly translated. In Paktia Province most interviews were conducted in Pashtu, with the help of a research assistant translator, although some of the

interviews with government and aid agency officials were conducted in Dari or English. In Urozgan Province one of the international researchers could conduct some interviews directly in Dari, although a translator was used for interviews where respondents only spoke Pashto. The interviews varied in length depending on circumstances, but generally they lasted between one to two hours (although some went on for more than four hours).

The field research initially was designed to be implemented in partnership with the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), an independent policy research organization based in Kabul, which would take primary responsibility for conducting the community-based field research. However, following the deterioration in the security environment—which made conducting community-based research in the south and southeast increasingly difficult and dangerous for both researchers and research subjects—and the difficulty in finding and retaining qualified researchers to lead the community research, it was decided that the community research would be scaled back and that the Feinstein International Center (FIC) PI, research consultants and research assistants would conduct all the field research. The most negative consequence of this decision was that without AREU's male and female research teams the ability to interview women in the culturally conservative and gender segregated contexts at the community level was greatly constrained. While the FIC researchers were able to interview a number of women, these were mostly the Afghan staff of NGOs and international agencies and some government officials; they included very few women at the community level.

Caveats

Any research in Afghanistan, and particularly research that looks at the types of sensitive issues raised in this study, requires a number of caveats. Specific to the present study, the relationship between aid and security and the notion of "winning hearts and minds" are hard to define, much less measure. This difficulty is compounded by the insecure context in which much of the field research was conducted, which demands that special consideration be given to ensuring that

both researchers and research subjects are not put at risk.

In general, field research benefits a great deal from establishing trust and proper understanding among respondents, especially before posing questions about the role of the international military and other powerful actors. While the concept of objective research is fairly obscure in rural and even urban Afghanistan, the concept of the meddling outsider is not, and visitors asking sensitive questions may raise suspicions and inhibit responses. Likewise, the phenomenon of the "survey" has become common in recent years, and community members may interpret visits to ask questions about aid projects as yet another "survey." This can both raise hopes and generate frustration, and respondents may try to outdo each other (and the nearby communities) in describing the devastation and neglect of their area in order to attract development projects. Aside from the hope of getting something out of the transaction, people like to highlight their problems and, given the opportunity to do so, may overstate negative attitudes. On the other hand, the Afghan notion of hospitality towards guests may inhibit some respondents from telling truths that they perceive will offend a (foreign) visitor, including those about what people really feel about the foreign military and the international community.

Afghan social hierarchy, especially in a group setting, will often result in the voices of the elders and the powerful being heard, while others lower down on the social scale are expected to keep quiet and defer. Moreover, given the separation of home and public spaces, most interactions with outsiders occur in the public space, and because it is considered rude to ask people to leave a room, the lack of privacy means that unless carefully organized, planned private interviews can easily become public focus groups. Finally, even in the relatively peaceful northern areas, security and mobility limitations constrain researchers from moving about at will, restricting their choice of fieldwork areas and even with whom they can interact. As respondents' perceptions depend largely on where they sit and whether or not they have benefited from aid projects and processes, restrictions on mobility obviously affect the ability to triangulate information provided by

respondents and to find the "truth" about what actually happened in certain projects.

Despite the above caveats, the methodology offered a number of advantages: repeat visits to follow-up on observations, flexible semi-structured interviews which allowed spontaneous responses, and triangulation of responses among experienced team members who had all spent significant amounts of time in the field. Confidence in the methodology was borne out by the remarkably consistent core findings across all five provinces as well as across informants (so that, for example, international military personnel would corroborate findings from community members and vice versa).

Table 12
Comprehensive List of Respondents by Province and Type

Respondent Category	Afghan	International	Total
Balkh			
Government (civilians)	15	24	39
Military	1	27	28
UN Agencies	2	13	15
Aid Agencies (NGOs, contractors)	15	14	29
Community Members	57	0	57
Others (journalists, analysts, etc.)	3	0	3
Balkh Sub–total	**93**	**78**	**171**
Faryab			
Government (civilians)	26	0	26
Military	0	7	7
UN Agencies	5	8	13
Aid Agencies (NGOs, contractors)	8	6	14
Community Members	79	0	79
Others (journalists, analysts, etc.)	0	0	0
Faryab Sub–total	**118**	**21**	**139**
Paktia			
Government (civilians)	21	6	27
Military	0	16	16
UN Agencies	3	8	11
Aid Agencies (NGOs, contractors)	5	4	9
Community Members	35	0	35
Others (journalists, analysts, etc.)	1	1	2
Paktia Sub–total	**65**	**35**	**100**
Urozgan			
Government (civilians)	11	29	40
Military	11	26	37
UN Agencies	5	1	6
Aid Agencies (NGOs, contractors)	11	7	18
Community Members	14	0	14
Others (journalists, analysts, etc.)	2	3	5
Urozgan Sub–total	**54**	**66**	**120**
Kabul			
Government (civilians)	1	7	8
Military	1	9	10
UN Agencies	1	5	6
Aid Agencies (NGOs, contractors)	5	10	15
Community Members	0	0	0
Others (journalists, analysts, etc.)	2	3	5
Kabul Sub–total	**10**	**34**	**44**
TOTAL			
Government (civilians)	74	66	140
Military	13	85	98
UN Agencies	16	35	51
Aid Agencies (NGOs, contractors)	44	41	85
Community Members	185	0	185
Others (journalists, analysts, etc.)	8	7	15
TOTAL	**340**	**234**	**574**

Notes: 1. Kabul interviews were conducted by research team members as input to all provincial case studies.
2. As the Helmand case study used a different methodology, the number of respondents is not given here.

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