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

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Cover photo

Children in Sar-i Howz, Pashtun Kot District. Photo: Author

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GLOSSARY OF NON-ENGLISH TERMS

<i>arbab/khan</i>	Head of community or tribe
<i>jihad</i>	Holy war to defend Islam, in Afghanistan usually referring to the 1978–92 war against the Soviet occupation
<i>mantiqa</i>	A social and territorial unit of rural Afghanistan, composed of several villages or cluster settlements/hamlets where solidarity is shaped amongst the local population
<i>maulawi</i>	Religious leader or teacher
<i>mawqawmat</i>	Resistance period against the Taliban
<i>mujahidin</i>	Those who engage in <i>jihad</i>
<i>qawm</i>	A group of affiliated individuals, mainly a tribe, clan, or community group
<i>sharia</i>	Islamic law
<i>shura</i>	Council, often a community council of elders
<i>tanzim</i>	Organization or political party
<i>tashkil</i>	List of approved posts in government offices and institutions
<i>ulama</i>	Muslim religious scholars
<i>uzhr</i>	Religious tax
<i>woleswal</i>	District administrator or governor; i.e., one who administers a <i>woleswali</i>
<i>woleswali</i>	Government administrative division below the level of province
<i>wakil</i>	Member of parliament
<i>zakaat</i>	An annual donation to poor people or a charity, one of the five pillars of Islam

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABP	Afghan Border Police
ACBAR	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief
AGE	Anti-government elements
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANBP	Afghanistan's New Beginnings Program
ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
AOG	Armed opposition group
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
ARSIC	Afghan Regional Security Integration Command
ASOP	Afghan Social Outreach Program
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CDC	Community Development Council
CERP	Commander's Emergency Response Program

CFW	Cash-for-work
CIMIC	Civil-Military Cooperation
CMI	Christian Michelson Institute
COAR	Coordination of Afghan Relief
CoP	Chief of police
CPAU	Cooperation for Peace and Unity
DACAAR	Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
DIAG	Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups
EQUIP	Education Quality Improvement Program
ERP	Emergency Recovery Program
FFW	Food-for-work
FIC	Feinstein International Center
FP	Facilitating partner
GoA	Government of Afghanistan
IA	Integrated Approach
IAG	Illegal armed groups
IDLG	Independent Directorate of Local Governance
IDP	Internally displaced person
IEC	Independent Election Commission
IED	Improvised explosive device
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NABDP	National Area-Based Development Program
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NRAP	National Rural Access Program
NSP	National Solidarity Program
PC	Provincial Council
PDPA	People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan
PRA	Peace and Reconciliation Association
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
RRD	Rural Rehabilitation and Development
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The case study of Faryab Province is part of a larger comparative study that looks into the assumed causal relationship between development aid and stabilization in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Horn of Africa. The assumptions that development aid can help win “hearts and minds,” help increase the legitimacy of the Afghan government, and reduce the levels of violence have become key parts of the international effort in Afghanistan. Globally, the assumption that aid projects lead to improved security has resulted in a sharp increase in overall development funding, an increase in the percentage of activities based on strategic considerations, and an increased involvement of military actors in development activities. Little evidence exists, however, that such programming has been successful at achieving stabilization or security objectives. The present study therefore seeks to question some of the assumptions by looking at evidence from the field. Faryab is one of five provincial case studies that make up the overall Afghanistan aid and security study. The other four are Balkh, Helmand, Paktia, and Uruzgan.

Because most projects with stated stabilization objectives are implemented in the more insecure southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan, Faryab makes for an interesting case study for a number of reasons. Compared to other parts of Afghanistan, Faryab has been relatively stable, although it has several pockets of insecurity. The legacy of factional fighting, to a significant extent, runs along ethnic lines. Faryab is also one of two provinces in the country with an Uzbek majority and therefore does not have a Pashtun majority. Finally, unlike most other Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), the Norwegian-led PRT does not have a civil-military coordination function, nor does it directly implement projects, partly as a consequence of negative experience, most notably the reconstruction work on the provincial hospital. The “Norwegian model” is to support the Afghan government to ensure stability, security, and development through increased “Afghanization” rather than through direct implementation. The “Norwegian model” aims to channel aid through national programs, the central government, multi-lateral institutions, and

non-governmental organizations. It adheres to a clear distinction between civilian and military actors. Therefore, Faryab provides a comparison to other provinces in the south and southeast where PRTs, mostly U.S.-led, have used large quantities of aid to pursue stabilization objectives.

The Faryab case study also includes neighboring Ghormach District, a Pashtun-dominated area located in Badghis Province but temporarily administered from Faryab. As Taliban infiltration has come through Ghormach, it has been the center of attention of two approaches which have explicit stabilization objectives: the Norwegian PRT’s Emergency Recovery Program and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan’s (UNAMA) “Integrated Approach,” which tries to increase coordination among government, military, and civilian actors due to the belief that stability cannot be achieved through military means alone.

Through interviews and focus group discussions with a range of respondents in key institutions and in communities, views were elicited on the drivers of insecurity, characteristics of aid projects and aid implementers (including the military), and effects of aid projects on the popularity of aid actors and on security.

Drivers of insecurity

Much of the history of conflict in Faryab revolves around ethnicity, a factor cited by most respondents as a driver of insecurity. However, ethnic and political factors are often interconnected and hard to separate. Power in the province is seen as residing with Uzbek supporters and sympathizers of General Abdul Rashid Dostum. Many Pashtuns were forced out of the province after the fall of the Taliban, in retaliation for the heavy-handed approach that the Taliban took with Uzbeks and Tajiks during Taliban rule. Their return from internally displaced persons (IDP) camps has caused considerable tension, and Pashtun areas are said to be under-represented and under-served. This in turn fosters distrust towards the central government, which is perceived by many non-Pashtuns as Pashtun-dominated. As in other provinces, Taliban elements are seen to be drawing on the support of

Pashtun communities for freedom of movement and shelter, sometimes under the condition that violent activities are not carried out nearby.

The factor most Afghan respondents considered to cause insecurity was poverty, with the expressed notion that the rank and file has joined the insurgency primarily due to economic necessity. This is consistent with responses provided in other study provinces, although as is the case elsewhere, it should be carefully examined since poverty is widespread in Afghanistan.

Factional or party (*tanzim*) politics were cited as another important driver of insecurity in Faryab, with the major fault lines falling between the predominantly Uzbek Jumbish-i Milli of General Dostum and the predominantly Tajik Jamiat-i Islami political parties. The major disarmament programs have been largely unsuccessful in Faryab, and commanders and militias linked to political parties reportedly still have weapons caches and are re-arming as a result (or under the excuse) of an increased Taliban threat. The immediate post-Taliban government and international forces were unable to curb the power of local commanders with several results; some of them were emboldened to continue to levy illegal taxes, carry out criminal activities, and otherwise disrupt security, in turn weakening the government's legitimacy in the eyes of the population. Because of the increasingly potent insurgency and the weakness of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), the government has become more and more dependent on these same commanders.

As in other provinces in the study, the poor quality of governance, especially the corruption of local officials, was widely reported as a significant driver of insecurity. The current government is seen as largely composed of the same predatory individuals who played a role in previous unpopular regimes, which has led to a perception of impunity. By and large, respondents agreed that the expansion of the insurgency is not so much due to the strength and appeal of the Taliban but to the lack of good governance and justice and the extent of corruption. These have

led to a widespread sense of disillusionment and provided the insurgency with increased opportunity to gain a foothold in Faryab.

A common criticism was that the provincial administration relied on factional networks, *wasita* (connections), nepotism, cronyism, and bribery in making provincial and district appointments. Appointments were seen as particularly destabilizing, with past governor appointments being interpreted as undermining the dominant Jumbish party, which in turn has led to political turmoil. As elsewhere in Afghanistan, the justice sector is seen as the weakest and most corrupt. On the positive side, the current governor, Abdul Haq Shafaq, is seen as a relatively impartial and "clean" technocrat who has brought more aid to the province.

As is the case elsewhere, competition for scarce resources such as grazing land and water for both drinking and irrigation purposes regularly causes local conflicts.

Ideology and religion were also cited as drivers of insecurity, and as factors in mobilizing fighters and legitimizing violence. Many government and international staff expressed concern about the influx of Pakistani-educated mullahs in Faryab who bring a new style of preaching and practicing Islam, but can also potentially become military leaders. A recurring theme in these mullahs' preaching is the un-Islamic nature of the current democratic (as opposed to Islamic) government. This theme rouses anti-government sentiment, and fuels the negative perceptions of democracy as practiced in post-2001 Afghanistan.

While Faryab has never been a significant producer of opium poppy, the province is a transit point for drug trafficking, and some security incidents are said to be a result of smuggling and drug-related rivalries between local commanders rather than of the Taliban. Narcotics cultivation and trafficking are said to be more significant in Ghormach, where criminal elements have joined forces with insurgents due to their shared interest in keeping the central government out of the area.

Aid projects and aid actors

While respondents' expressed perceptions of aid projects and aid actors differed, some clear patterns and areas of agreement emerged among aid agencies, communities, and government officials, as well as between Afghan and international respondents. In general, expressed perceptions of aid and development projects were negative, and projects and organizations were said to be performing poorly. Most respondents did not distinguish between the various actors and referred to the sector as a homogenous entity, although nuances were drawn by some respondents who had direct interactions with specific aid actors.

A large number of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the gap between promises made since 2002 by the Afghan government and the international community and the lack of tangible progress in improving the standard of living.

Almost all Afghan respondents said that the distribution of aid was inequitable. Respondents from Maimana, the provincial center, said Faryab was receiving less assistance than Mazar-e Sharif or Kabul, whereas respondents in rural areas said their districts had received less assistance than Maimana or other districts. In fact, the consistent refrain—that others had all received more—raises questions about whether the distribution of aid is a zero-sum game.

As was the case in Balkh Province, many respondents referred to the “peace penalty”: the idea that assistance is channeled to areas that are insecure or that cultivate opium poppy. The insecure south is (accurately) perceived as receiving much more aid than the relatively peaceful north. This pattern is seen as punishing the peaceful areas and disheartening for people in those areas. This was described as inherently unjust and counter-productive—as “rewarding troublemakers for causing problems.” Because the insecure areas of the country as a whole and of Faryab Province are primarily Pashtun, this took on an ethnic dimension. Other respondents claimed that the Pashtun-dominated central government was allocating the bulk of aid to fellow Pashtuns. At the same time, a number of Pashtun respondents claimed that, within the province, they have been deliberately left out on the basis of ethnicity.

Respondents were overwhelmingly critical of what was described as vast corruption in the aid sector, and they largely attributed the lack of aid in their areas to this. With the possible exception of particular NGOs that had been working with communities for many years, no aid actor was seen as clean. Rather, stories and complaints consistently pointed to short-term contracts awarded to “briefcase” NGOs, which disappeared at the end of the project (or before); corruption encouraged by the short-term nature of contracts, which didn't allow time for proper community mobilization and selection of beneficiaries; and reliance on middle-men and intermediaries, which allowed local commanders or leaders to appropriate part of the resources or otherwise personally benefit from a project. Emergency distributions and cash-for-work (CFW) or food-for-work (FFW) projects were singled out for criticism because they were said to be used for political gain rather than to meet humanitarian needs, they encouraged dependency, and by their nature they were especially prone to corruption. Corruption was described as most rampant in the construction sector, with the widespread observation that a small group of construction companies gain successive contracts through personal connections and then siphon off most of the benefits.

Respondents' personal experiences of corruption are consistent with the national narrative about a corrupt government and aid system. Whereas in government discourse aid distributions are often touted as hearts-and-minds initiatives, based on respondents' reported experiences, they apparently often achieve the exact opposite.

Many respondents complained that the majority of aid projects were not addressing Afghanistan's fundamental problems of unemployment and poor living conditions, as most interventions were short-term, stopgap solutions. In the meantime, any “real” investments in the country, such as factories, hydropower dams, and other major infrastructure projects were not being implemented. Many said that the perceived lack of investment to exploit Afghanistan's natural resources (such as gas, coal, water, and uranium) has led to conspiracy theories that international actors are not interested in development but rather have ulterior motives for staying in Afghanistan.

The main exceptions to all these negative perceptions of aid were the positive comments on the construction of the ring road (connecting Maimana to Mazar-e Sharif to the east, and, in the future, Herat to the west) and the installation of electrical power lines running from Turkmenistan through Maimana to Almar. These two “bricks and mortar” infrastructure projects were described as improving the quality of life by halving travel time between Maimana and Mazar-e Sharif and by encouraging economic activity. Consistent with responses in other provinces, respondents were also relatively positive about the National Solidarity Program (NSP), especially about its process of community consultation and its transparency.

Military aid projects

Similar to the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Balkh Province, the Norwegian-led PRT in Faryab Province limits its aid activities. As is the case in Balkh in relation to the Swedes and Finns, in Faryab the population seems relatively unaware of the role the Norwegian government plays in supporting development projects, although beneficiaries who were aware of the Norwegian presence in Faryab reported feeling generally positive about the PRT—despite (or perhaps because of) its method of indirect implementation.

Respondents voiced a positive view of the Norwegian PRT, especially when compared with their statements on the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) as a whole. Respondents pointed to the positive interaction of the Norwegians with communities, the absence of civilian casualties, and the amount of investment the Norwegians have made in the province. This positive perception of the PRT seems to differ markedly from perceptions of most other PRTs in the country, especially the ones led by the U.S. and UK.

Respondents’ positive attitude towards the PRT and the Norwegian engagement is interesting, as the Norwegians have achieved it without resorting to direct implementation by the PRT. National and international respondents alike attributed this positive attitude mainly to the Norwegian military’s culturally sensitive approach and to its level of assistance. National respondents, however, were mostly unaware of programs

funded by the Norwegians. This indicates that the Norwegian approach in itself is well adjusted to the local context, but that its effectiveness at improving attitudes towards the international community is being hampered by Faryabis’ lack of awareness about the Norwegian presence and particulars of their engagement.

On the other hand, it is important to note that the main point of criticism from Faryabis was that the international military forces failed to stop the deterioration of security in the province, which Faryabis considered to be its primary responsibility.

The projects of the U.S. Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP) in Faryab, however, have reportedly suffered from a lack of coordination with local authorities, and respondents both at the PRT and within the provincial administration were unaware of what the US command is doing.

Winning hearts and minds?

The fieldwork and analysis done for this case study have provided no evidence that aid projects contribute to stabilization in the short term. Similarly, it is extremely difficult to make any generalizations about the impact of the NSP on stability and security in Faryab. If poverty is a major cause of insecurity, then large development initiatives such as those being implemented in Ghormach and Faryab would potentially increase stability in the area. Such an effect could not be observed, and in fact security in Faryab has markedly deteriorated while the number and scope of development projects increased. Fieldwork identified a number of cases where poorly designed or implemented projects had actually resulted in instability.

On the positive side, the initiatives in Ghormach have led to positive changes in perceptions towards aid in general and attitudes towards outsiders such as aid actors and the government. Also, discussions about potential aid can provide opportunities to engage with communities and local leadership. In Ghormach, for example, dialogue about potential aid fostered relations between tribal leaders and actors such as UNAMA, the PRT, and the provincial administration.

The Peace and Reconciliation Association (PRA) established in September 2007 has had a significant (though geographically limited), positive impact on stability and therefore offers a number of relevant insights. The PRA is made up of a wide array of influential persons, including political party officials, members of the Provincial Council, religious leaders, former government officials, intellectuals, elders, and commanders. A number of factors contributed to the PRA's success. It works closely with the government, yet it is a voluntary (civil society) organization that operates outside of the state structure and is therefore untainted by corruption or cumbersome bureaucracy. Its members can use a variety of political, ethnic, and religious networks; it is seen as being ethnically diverse, and not biased towards any one group. It has functioned as a mediator between the administration and the population. It relies on customary modes of dispute resolution, which emphasize community harmony rather than winners and losers. On the whole it enjoys a good working relationship with the provincial administration, although there have been strains, and differing agendas and anxieties have the potential to undermine that relationship. The PRA was relatively more successful in addressing security problems caused by (low- and mid-level) commanders and illegal armed groups and resolving disputes such as those over pastureland. It has been less successful at decreasing drug cultivation and trafficking and reducing the infiltration of the Taliban.

Aid provided through the government does not seem to have increased faith in and legitimacy of the provincial administration. Indeed, most of the complaints of misappropriation of aid by government officials, local powerbrokers, and elites; nepotism in the selection of beneficiaries; and a general lack of control were directed at government-led CFW and FFW projects.

Allocating aid money to insecure areas for stabilization purposes may be creating perverse incentives. Insecurity may be seen to pay off in that insecure areas receive more aid than secure areas do. This benefits local power holders who have an interest in the status quo (conflict) and who profit from the aid flows to their area through misappropriation and corruption. Also,

respondents living in secure areas feel punished, or at least not rewarded, for maintaining security. The extent to which this resentment influences behavior is unclear, but the current use of aid money is widely characterized as discriminatory. This discrimination takes on an important ethnic dimension that fuels divisions between different ethnic groups. This perceived injustice in the distribution of aid, coupled with corruption throughout the system, has decreased trust in both the Afghan government and the international community.

Policy implications

Based on the findings of this case study, the following policy implications can be drawn:

- If scaling back local projects implemented by the military did not affect communities' views of the PRT, and in fact improved the Norwegians' reputation, this suggests that massive amounts of aid money do not have to be disbursed. On the other hand, the PRT is now being blamed for not doing more to stop the slide in security. This suggests that by their very presence the PRT will be assigned responsibility.
- The observation made in the four other study provinces that the quality of aid is more important than the quantity is confirmed.
- Because communities find it difficult to differentiate between, for instance, the Norwegians and the Americans, it may be very difficult to segment different aspects of counter-insurgency strategy (i.e., kinetic and "hearts and minds").
- The negative views expressed about government-implemented CFW and FFW projects suggests that putting money through the government in and of itself does not create legitimacy. Again, the focus should be on quality and accountability.
- The contribution made to stabilization by the PRA suggests that locally rooted initiatives outside of the formal framework may sometimes be more effective than "outside" interventions by development, government, and military actors.

- As a recurrent complaint was that “others got more,” it is important to find a way to build a consensus on what is a fair allocation of aid and other resources.
- Aid in insecure areas becomes just another resource to fight over. An alternative avenue worth exploring is using aid to reinforce already existing stability in the context of good governance. If stability and development are, indeed, mutually reinforcing, then an incentive system that rewards stability and adherence to good governance with more aid is what is needed. This would reverse the current incentive system, which rewards insecurity.

1. Introduction



Photo: Author

Shop in Maimana

With increasing insecurity and a resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan, development has increasingly been seen as a means to stabilize the country. The assumptions that development aid can win “hearts and minds,” help increase the legitimacy of the Afghan government, and reduce the levels of violence have become part and parcel of the international effort in Afghanistan. The Afghan government, Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), and many development agencies have all increasingly incorporated “stabilization” as an objective of their programming. However, little evidence exists so far that such programming has indeed been successful at achieving stabilization or security objectives. As part of a comparative study by the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University that looks into this assumed causal relation between development aid and

stabilization in Pakistan, the Horn of Africa, and Afghanistan, this case study on Faryab Province therefore seeks to question some of the assumptions by looking at evidence from the field. Faryab is one of five provincial case studies that make up the overall Afghanistan aid and security study. The other four are Balkh, Helmand, Paktia, and Uruzgan.

Faryab is an interesting case study for a number of reasons. Firstly, Faryab is relatively secure as compared to the southern and eastern parts of Afghanistan where projects with stated stabilization objectives are implemented. However, pockets of insecurity exist where the Taliban have increased their presence. Secondly, it is one of the two provinces in Afghanistan with an Uzbek majority, as well as

sizeable Tajik and Pashtun minorities. There is a legacy of factional fighting which to a significant extent runs along ethnic lines, and these ethnic and political differences remain the main cause for underlying tensions between ethnic groups. Moreover, since *tanzim* (political party) affiliations largely run along ethnic lines, this causes recurring political instability.

Thirdly, the Norwegian-led PRT in Maimana—as opposed to other PRTs—uses a model in which development projects are not directly implemented by the PRT.¹ Instead, development aid to Faryab is channeled through the central government, World Bank, United Nations, and international NGOs. The involvement of the U.S. in this province has been relatively limited so far, especially compared to the more well-known provinces in the south and east where it is engaged on a much larger scale.² The application of the “stabilization model” and use of development aid to this end have therefore been markedly different in Faryab as compared with other areas of Afghanistan.

The Faryab Province case study also includes neighboring Ghormach District, located in Badghis, but temporarily administered from Faryab through a presidential decree. This district has been included because Taliban infiltration of Faryab has come through Ghormach, a Pashtun-dominated area largely left out of development aid. This district has been the center of attention of both the Norwegian PRT (which funded a large Emergency Recovery Program [ERP] there with explicit stabilization objectives), as well as the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). Ghormach was selected as one of the “focus” districts in the north for UNAMA’s “Integrated Approach”³ which also has stabilization as its goal. This case study will therefore include a mini case study that explores the extent to which the political and development outreach to Ghormach has reduced the sense of marginalization among Pashtun communities in the district and whether this has led to any observable impact on stability.



Photo: Author

NSP road project in Almar District

¹ Royal Norwegian Embassy: http://www.norway.org.af/News_and_events/prt/faryab1/.

² It should be noted that since the time of field research in spring 2009, the U.S. involvement in the province has dramatically increased, with higher troop numbers and substantial aid flows.

³ The “Integrated Approach” (IA), which synchronizes civil and military activities, was formalized in November 2008 with the formation of the Integrated Approach Working Group. This brought together the Afghan government, UNAMA, ISAF, and key donors. The working group identified fifty-one “critical districts” in which to apply IA. More generically, the Integrated Approach has been referred to as “whole of government” or “3D” (defense, development, and diplomacy).

2. Research Methodology



Photo: Author

ANA soldiers in Maimana

Faryab is one of five provincial case studies that make up the overall Afghanistan aid and security study. The other four are Balkh, Helmand, 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 Faryab and Balkh in northern Afghanistan were included in the study to provide a counterpoint to the less-secure provinces of Paktia, Helmand, and Uruzgan in southeastern and southern Afghanistan.

In January 2009, the principal investigator made an initial field visit to Faryab. The international consultant researcher and two Afghan research assistants carried out the bulk of the in-depth field research between April and June 2009. Although the case study concerns the entire province of Faryab, due to security and accessibility issues, the field research focused on five districts: Ghormach, Qaisar, Pashtun Kot, Khwoja Sabz Posh, and Shirin Tagab. Ghormach and Qaisar districts are both classified as more insecure, and were selected as critical or “swing districts” in the “Integrated

Approach.”⁴ Ghormach especially has seen an enormous increase in outreach and attention from both military and non-military actors in both political and developmental terms, and therefore constitutes an interesting case in itself. Other more-secure areas selected were Khwoja Sabz Posh District, Shirin Tagab District, and Qata Kala in Pashtun Kot District. Because the international community and the Afghan government focused most of their stabilization and development efforts on the southern part of the province, the greater Andkhoy area in Northern Faryab (Khani Charbagh, Qaramqol, Andkhoy, and Dawlatabad Districts) was not visited during this research. An additional effort was made, however, to identify key informants knowledgeable about these remaining districts in order to complete the provincial picture. In total, the research team interviewed 139 people including PRT staff, both military and civilian; development practitioners; United Nations (UN) personnel; government officials; political leaders; tribal and community elders; and other community level respondents. Prior to the field research, secondary sources⁵ were consulted in order to identify projects that had been implemented and to analyze existing data.

Any research in Afghanistan or other conflict areas requires caution because of the potential for respondent bias. This is particularly the case for research that looks at the types of sensitive issues raised in this study. To mitigate these potential biases, the methodology included repeat visits to allow follow-up to and triangulation of responses, flexible interview guides that encouraged spontaneous responses within specific themes, and the fielding of teams with extensive Faryab Province experience. In addition, the consultant researcher lived and worked in the province for fifteen months prior to the research, and one of the research assistants was recruited from Maimana. Their experience working for development agencies in various districts in Faryab provided an in-depth general understanding of the situation in the province as well as the opportunity to follow up on specific issues and questions.

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

After an analysis of the historical and sociopolitical background needed to understand the findings in their appropriate context, subsequent sections of this report will present findings on the perceptions of drivers of insecurity and of aid projects and actors. The paper then discusses development initiatives and their impact on stability, including the ERP and a mini case study on Ghormach, a district that has been an important focus for the international community in terms of stabilization. The paper ends with a summary of conclusions, along with policy implications.



School construction in Khwoja Namusa, Pashtun Kot

Photo: Author

⁴ See previous footnote

⁵ Sources that were consulted include the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Afghanistan Country Stability Picture, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) project listings, and donor consultant reports.

3. Contextual Analysis



Photo: Author

Hills of Faryab

3.1 Provincial background⁶

Faryab Province is located in northern Afghanistan, bordered by Jawzjan and Sar-i Pul Provinces to the east, Ghor Province to the south, Badghis Province to the southwest, and the nation of Turkmenistan to the north. The provincial center Maimana is approximately 339 miles west of the major northern city of Mazar-e Sharif on the national ring road.

Covering an area of approximately 12,475 square miles, Faryab displays considerable diversity in terms of topography. This ranges from semi-desert in the north and northwest through undulating plains and small, loessial hills in the central areas that feature a number of riverine systems (including the Maimana River running south-north, off of which numerous irrigation systems have been developed) to areas of flat and well-watered land around the provincial center Maimana and then to high mountains with deep valley systems in the south of the province, much of which are snow-bound and cut off during the winter (especially Kohistan and parts of Belcheragh and Gurziwan). Roughly two-thirds of the province is classified as mountainous or semi mountainous.

Like Afghanistan in general, Faryab's economy is based on agriculture, the majority of which is subsistence-oriented. Although parts of the province are well irrigated, the percentage of irrigated land is small, and tends to play a supplementary role. Communities largely depend on rain-fed cereal cultivation, much of it on the slopes of the small undulating hills, which is subject to weather variations and has been unproductive over recent years due to poor rainfall. Consistent with the overall economy, agriculture and animal husbandry are the most important sources of income, although off-farm work, trade and provision of services are common sources of income, reported by 31 and 25 percent of households respectively.⁷

Wheat is a significant crop in Faryab, with the highest total acreage of any province in Afghanistan. However, because 81 percent of Faryab's wheat-growing area is rain fed, its productivity is much lower than that of irrigated land, and Faryab ranks ninth in terms of wheat output. In fact, even the yield on irrigated wheat land in Faryab is below the national average. Other significant grain crops are barley (with the highest output of any province) and maize. Horticulture is very

⁶ This section draws heavily on material prepared by Mervyn Patterson.

⁷ Central Statistics Organization, *National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment* (2007–08).

limited, with some grape production (the seventh-most-significant output among provinces) and a very small amount of apple production.⁸ Other significant field crops include potatoes and flax. Industrial commodities produced in Faryab include cotton, sesame, tobacco, and herbs, although all in small quantities.⁹

Although the national ring road bisects the province, until very recently it was unpaved, contributing to Faryab's status as an economic backwater. Faryab has essentially no industry. At one point, it was a significant producer of karakul skins (a type of sheep), but due to years of conflict and drought, combined with changes in international consumer preferences, production is now minimal. Faryab has a small handicraft sector consisting of rugs, carpets, jewelry, shawls, and silk, with some trade consisting mainly of carpets, dried fruits, and leather.

The population of the province is reported by the government's Central Statistics Organization to be 900,000,¹⁰ making it the eighth-most-populated province. Eighty-eight percent of the population is classified as rural, with Maimana, Dawlatabad, and Andkhoy containing the 12 percent classified as "urban." But given the overall rural nature of Faryab, and the fact that "urban" in this context refers to any district with a municipality, regardless of population size, "urban" is definitely a relative term. The population by ethnicity is 51–57 percent Uzbek, 21–34 percent Tajik, 14 percent Pashtun, and 4 percent Turkmen.¹¹ It also has a number of *kuchis* (nomads), approximately 98,000 persons during the winter season, the time of year when they are typically resident. Of these, 85 percent are partially migratory and the remaining 15 percent are settled. During the summer season, approximately 230 *kuchi* households migrate to Faryab from Balkh.



Photo: Author

NSP irrigation project in Now Abad, Qaisar

Faryab's Uzbek majority is widely distributed throughout the province. All districts have an Uzbek majority, apart from Kohistan in the south (which is predominantly Tajik) and Dawlatabad in the north (which has equal numbers of Uzbeks, Pashtuns, and Turkmens). Sizeable Pashtun populations are found in Dawlatabad (approximately one third) and Almar (approximately one third) as well as in Khwoja Sabz Posh, Shirin Tagab, and the part of Qaisar that borders Ghormach. The southern districts of Belcheragh and Gurziwan both have populations that are at least one-third Tajik. The Maimana area has a small, but politically significant, population of Arabs,¹² who speak either Dari or Uzbek as their mother tongue. The Aimaq, another minority group found in Maimana, live primarily in Kohi Khana;

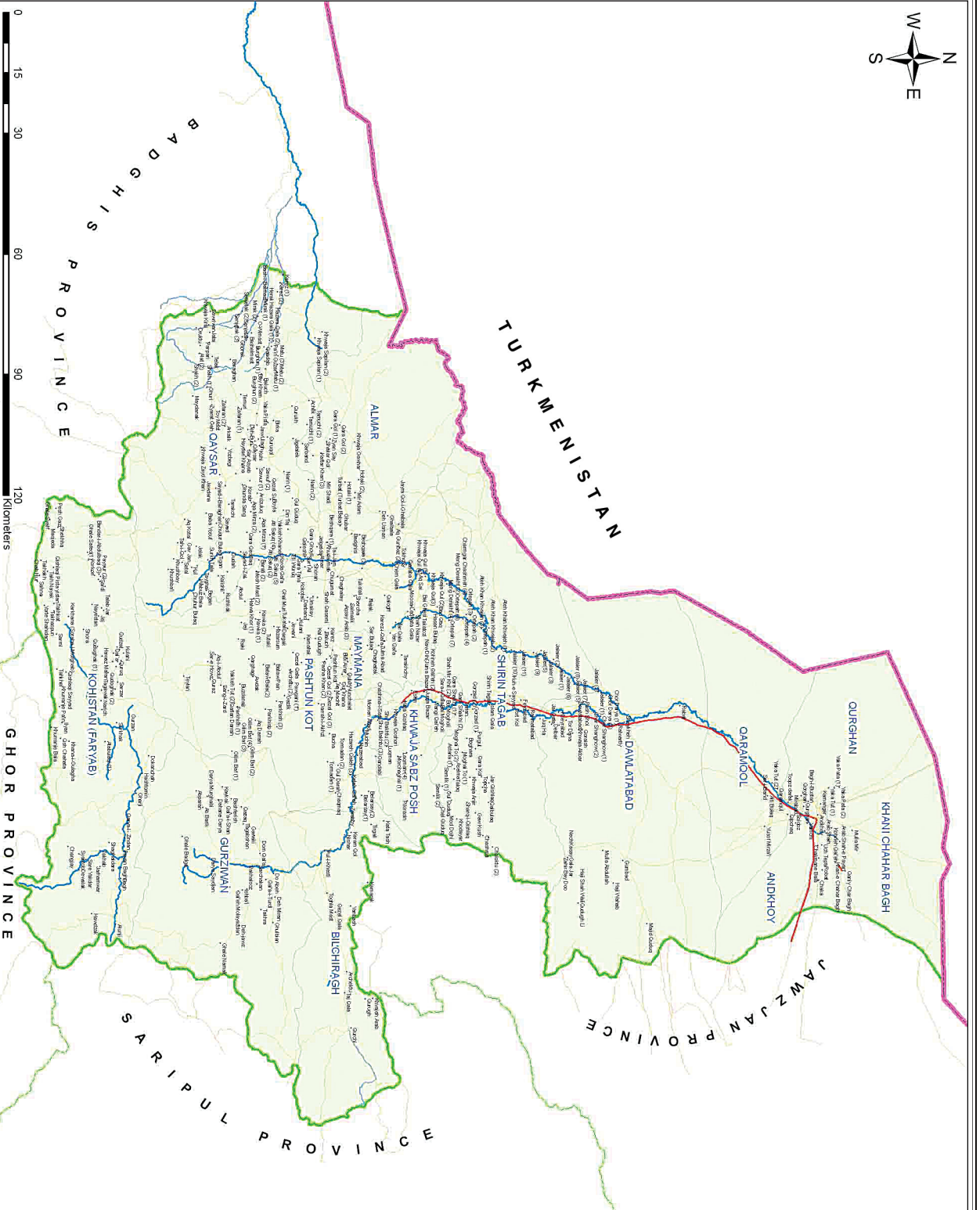
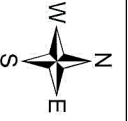
⁸ Central Statistics Organization, *Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2008/9*.

⁹ National Area-Based Development Programme (NABDP), *Faryab Provincial Profile* (Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development in Afghanistan).

¹⁰ Central Statistics Organization, "Estimated Population of Afghanistan: 2009/10" (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, May 2009). Afghanistan has never had a complete census, and statistics, especially those relating to population, are wildly discrepant depending on sources.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

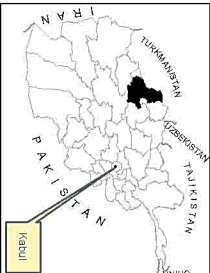
¹² "Arab" refers to groups of Afghans who claim descent from the Arabs who brought Islam to Afghanistan starting in the seventh century. Over the centuries they have been assimilated and speak Dari or, in parts of the north, Uzbeki. They do not speak Arabic.



FARJAB PROVINCE & SETTLEMENTS ADMINISTRATIVE MAP

Legend

- SETTLEMENTS
- ROADS
 - MAIN
 - - - SECONDARY
 - ▬ TRACK
- RIVERS
 - MAIN
 - ~ STREAM
- COUNTRY BOUNDARY
- DISTRICT BOUNDARY
- FARJAB PROVINCE
- PROVINCE BOUNDARY



Note: Source: AGCHO & AIMS Standardization 34 Provinces, 400 Districts Geographic Coordinates: Decimal degrees Datum: WGS 84

Date: 01-July-2010

Aimaqs are locally known as Kohis (literally “of the mountain”), and are part of the Firuz Kohi Aimaq group primarily found in Ghor and Badghis. It should be noted that, as is the case throughout Afghanistan, members of each ethnic group tend to settle together. As a result, while the land corresponding to an administrative district may contain a majority of one ethnic group, within that district other ethnic groups may be concentrated in pockets, forming an ethnic majority within those pockets.

Faryab has a Provincial Development Committee, formed in 2005, under the leadership of the Ministry of Economy’s provincial representative. According to UNAMA, meetings take place regularly. There are also District Development Assemblies (DDAs) in thirteen districts, each with its own district development plan (DDP) prepared as part of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), although it is not clear how active the DDA or relevant the DDP is.

The overall literacy rate in Faryab is reported to be 27 percent, just below the national figure of 28 percent. The male literacy rate of 31 percent is below the national figure of 38 percent, while the female rate of 22 percent is a bit above the national figure of 19 percent. Approximately one third of children between the ages of six and thirteen are enrolled in school, and access to education is “problematic”; roughly one-half of primary school students travel less than three miles to attend school, while roughly one-third travel more than six miles. At the high school level, nearly three-quarters of students travel more than six miles.¹³ Higher education institutions in Faryab include the Higher Education Institute and an agricultural vocational high school, both of which are in Maimana.

According to the Ministry of Public Health’s “balanced scorecard,” which assesses delivery of the “basic package of health services”¹⁴ on an annual basis, Faryab has steadily improved its performance between 2004, when it ranked thirtieth out of thirty-three assessed provinces, and 2008, when it ranked sixth out of twenty-nine assessed provinces, scoring above the national average.¹⁵ As elsewhere in Afghanistan, medical facilities are concentrated in cities (i.e., Maimana), and the rural population travels long distances to receive health care or medication.

Administratively, Faryab contains fourteen districts (*woleswalis*) and three municipalities. It is classified as a Level 2 province.¹⁶ Jawzjan Province to the east, General Abdul Rashid Dostum’s home province, has “operationally” taken over four northern districts that historically belonged to Faryab (Khani Chahar Bagh, Andkhoy, Qaramqol, and Dawlatabad). This arrangement has been justified on the basis of geography (i.e., proximity to Jawzjan’s center, Shiberghan), but the importance of the carpet trade in Andkhoy and the customs post at the Turkmenistan border at Aqina almost certainly influenced the decision. Similarly, the district of Ghormach, which officially lies in Badghis Province, has been temporarily transferred to Faryab.

3.2 Historical and political overview of the period 1978–1992

Between 1978 and 1992, Faryab Province, with its Uzbek majority, saw much of the same conflict between the opposition *mujahidin* and the Kabul government as occurred elsewhere in the country. Like most provincial centers, Maimana had a well-educated population among which leftist parties (principally the Parcham wing of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and Guruh-i

¹³ National Area-Based Development Programme, *Faryab Provincial Profile*.

¹⁴ The standardized package of primary health services, which is to be made available to all citizens, and which includes definitions and staffing standards for the five levels of facilities.

¹⁵ Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health and Indian Institute of Health Management Research, *Afghanistan Health Sector Balanced Scorecard 2008*. The five provinces of Farah, Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, and Zabul were not assessed due to security conditions.

¹⁶ Afghanistan’s provinces (and districts) are categorized from Grade 1 (highest) to Grade 3 (lowest) based largely on population, but also with consideration of other political factors. A province’s (or district’s) grade will determine the numbers and rank of staff.

Kar—literally “workers’ group”—a quasi-Uzbek nationalist group) had strong followings. Also as with most other provinces, many people in the rural areas supported the *mujahidin* opposition, at least in the early years of the war. In spite of being remote from Pakistan, the main support and rear base for the *jihad*, *mujahidin* activity was widespread, and the three main Sunni parties (Harakat-i Inqilab, Jamiat-i Islami, and Hizb-i Islami—under Gulbuddin Hekmatyar) were well represented.¹⁷ By the mid-1980s, however, internecine conflict within the *mujahidin* became, as was the case elsewhere, pronounced, and Faryab experienced the same endless tactical shifting of alliances among commanders and political leaders. As a result, a number of major commanders realigned with the government, the most significant being Rasul Pahlawan, a former Harakat-i Inqilab commander from Faizabad whose network had been decimated by rival Jamiat.

Using government support, Pahlawan eventually, after much bloodshed, emerged as the strongest provincial power at the time of the fall of the Najibullah government in 1992. He and his network of commanders, many of whom were family members, constituted one of the main power blocs within Jumbish-i Milli Islami Afghanistan (National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan)—the political party and movement established in 1992 under General Abdul Rashid Dostum, and considered largely an Uzbek movement. Rasul Pahlawan and his network systematically eliminated all actual or potential opposition within the province and, like many other commanders, appropriated vast amounts of public and private property in the process. Jamiat was defeated in 1992, some members retreating to the mountains of the south and others leaving the province altogether.

Tensions between Dostum and Rasul Pahlawan mounted in the mid-1990s. Rasul Pahlawan, who was on the leadership council of Jumbish

and a key player in making party policy, had assiduously expanded his influence, using his former *mujahidin* networks, well beyond the boundaries of Faryab. While his military strength was an asset in the conflict against Jamiat and the Taliban, his constantly increasing strength and independence clearly posed a threat to the existing leadership. He was interfering in a wide range of matters, undermining the authority of Dostum by appointing officials, clashing with the Jawzjani bloc, and independently supporting or aligning with commanders in other areas, including Ghaffar Pahlawan in Sar-i Pul. He was assassinated in June 1996, generally assumed under the orders of Dostum.

The following year Pahlawan’s brother, General Abdul Malik, at that stage the director of foreign affairs within Jumbish,¹⁸ attempted to overthrow Dostum through an alliance with the Taliban. Malik’s forces arrested all pro-Dostum commanders on the frontline in Badghis and then permitted the Taliban to cross the frontline unopposed. The joint Malik-Taliban force moved on Mazar-e Sharif, where Malik faced widespread popular anger for having opened up the area to the Taliban. The alliance quickly collapsed as the Taliban attempted to double-cross Malik, and Mazar civilians and anti-Malik commanders revolted. Taliban forces in Faryab were attacked, and the frontline returned to Badghis. Malik continued to control parts of Faryab until November 1998 when Dostum forced him out. Perhaps sensing the way the tide was running, most of the Faryabi commanders aligned with Dostum, including Hashim Habibi who was appointed Faryab divisional commander. The Taliban reached Qaisar in January 1998—massacring civilians—and finally took Maimana and subsequently the rest of the north in August 1998. Many of the Faryabi commanders, who had taken to the hills, aligned with the Taliban, with varying degrees of willingness, in order to survive. The most prominent was Hashim Habibi.

¹⁷ 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).

¹⁸ The political parties had a whole range of functions, including “foreign affairs.”

The *mawqawmat* (as the period of resistance against the Taliban is commonly referred to in Afghanistan) saw a limited level of guerrilla activity in Faryab. This period coincided, in part, with a severe drought and a collapse in rainfed agriculture. It was also characterized by widespread oppression of the local population, including the torching of villages and deliberate displacement of civilian populations by the Taliban. The most prominent resistance commander, and overall front commander, was Nabi Shirzad (Nabi “Chappa”), an Uzbek from Ghunda Sang, who was based in Kohistan. He and others¹⁹ were undermined, as local forces either realigned with the Taliban and opposed them (including Hashim Habibi), or limited their access.²⁰

As the Taliban collapsed in the face of the U.S.-led invasion in October 2001, key commander Hashim Habibi defected to the opposition, linking up with Nabi Chappa and establishing a frontline close to Maimana. Maimana subsequently fell quietly, with most Taliban filtering back to Badghis. This was followed, however, by a cycle of revenge violence against Pashtun communities, elements of which had supported the Taliban, and their displacement to Pakistan and the south of the country. Most Faryabi Pashtuns quickly re-established links with Jumbish, Jamiat, or other parties, and many commanders retained arms.

3.3 Historical and political overview of the period after 2001

The 2001–04 period was characterized by intense factional conflict in much of the north, principally between the two major parties, Tajik-dominated Jamiat and Uzbek-dominated Jumbish. The attempt by Jamiat to re-establish itself as a force in Faryab was opposed by Jumbish, although the latter lacked the human and material resources formerly at its disposal. Jamiat, in contrast, at that stage had control of

the Ministries of Defense and Interior and the Directorate of National Security, all of which lent it support. Although inter-factional clashes were commonplace elsewhere in the north in 2002, Faryab remained stable, in spite of the fact that Hashim Habibi, who had been appointed as the Jumbish divisional commander in Faryab, had been a major player in the Jumbish-Jamiat conflict in the neighboring Kohistan District of Sar-i Pul. Habibi tried to block the expansion of Jamiat from there into southern Faryab and assert control over drug smuggling routes. With the formal establishment of a Faryab division by Jamiat at the end of 2002 and an increasing assertiveness on the part of Jamiat, the scene was set for conflict between the two. Jumbish was, however, constrained by the unwillingness of Hashim Habibi to fight, and concern existed about his allegiances. An initial clash occurred in April 2003 following a Jumbish attempt to assassinate General Farouq, the Jamiat divisional commander. Although a ceasefire was imposed and the situation stabilized, Jumbish subsequently proved successful in enticing a number of Jamiat commanders to join it, including Salam Pahlawan from Almar.

In October 2003, coinciding with a broader offensive against Jamiat in Balkh, Jumbish attacked Jamiat. Jamiat was quickly routed, retreating to the hills in the south. This marked the eclipse of Jamiat military power in Faryab and most senior commanders moved to Mazar, which being a Jamiat stronghold was a more hospitable place for them. Tension continued, however, focusing on the political leadership of the province. The governor, Qazi Enayatullah Enayat, was personally opposed to Jumbish, and had been given the task by Kabul of undermining its influence in the province. While affiliated with Jumbish, Hashim Habibi was aware of the need for strong patrons, and continued to gravitate towards both Marshall Fahim²¹ and Hamid

¹⁹ Others included Haji Khal Mirza (the son of Rais Ghaffar from Darra-i Shakh in Gurziwan) and Dr. Sadat from Kohistan.

²⁰ For instance, Qazi Haid, the Aimaq former-Hizb-i Islami commander in Kohistan, Sar-i Pul, blocked the development of an opposition front there. They were also opposed by indigenous Taliban (from the area itself), with Kohistan and Lawlash producing numbers of Quetta-educated Taliban, including Mawlavi Said Ghausuddin, from Lawlash, who served as the Taliban Minister of Haj and Religious Endowments.

²¹ Marshall Fahim was a military commander during the *jihad* and close confidante of Ahmad Shah Massoud. Post-2001, Fahim has served as Minister of Defense and twice as First Vice President, a position he currently holds.

Karzai and away from Jumbish. The twin factors of a hostile governor and a defecting divisional commander resulted in Jumbish withdrawing consent from the administration. Popular demonstrations against the governor in April 2004 resulted in the flight of Governor Enayat, Hashim Habibi, and a number of other local government officials, including much of the local police force, which had been staffed with Hashim Habibi's men.

In the 2004 presidential election, Dostum won 73 percent of the votes in Faryab, a result widely expected in a province with a 51–57 percent Uzbek population. (Younus Qanuni took second place with 13 percent, followed by Hamid Karzai with 10 percent.) The parliamentary elections in 2005 saw a broad range of *wakils* (representatives to the *wolesi jirga* or lower house of Parliament) elected, including Fatiullah, the main Qaisari commander and Rahmanogli, a Turkish-educated intellectual from a prominent local family then close to Dostum (though he distanced himself after being elected). The central government continued its attempt to undermine Jumbish influence, including buying off MPs and appointing Amir Latif, a Kunduz Uzbek ex-Hizb-i Islami commander, as provincial governor. The latter's tenure is generally viewed negatively, with corruption becoming endemic and the provincial administration becoming yet more detached from the population. Amir Latif's frequent and protracted absences from the province contributed to this dissatisfaction and to an increasing sense of alienation from the central government.

The role of the central government in destabilizing rather than stabilizing the situation continued to be displayed throughout 2007, when debate intensified about the replacement of Amir Latif. Former governor Qazi Enayat, who at that stage was in charge of the Senior Appointments Panel, instead of adopting a neutral position vis-à-vis local parties as the position would suggest, lobbied hard for his own re-appointment, in spite of his failure in

Faryab and subsequently in Badghis. This and his continued association with anti-Jumbish elements—which themselves had little popular base in the province—continued to unsettle the situation.

In 2006–07, a number of the Faryab *wakils*, including Rahmanogli, who had formerly been extremely close to Dostum, realigned with elements around the president. This was not ideological; rather it represented an attempt, ultimately unavailing in any serious sense, to secure positions and patronage.²² Although all the Faryab *wakils* and senators finally agreed on a mutually acceptable candidate—Hashim Zare, the scion of one of the province's leading Arab families and someone who was close to the president—he was ultimately not appointed. Instead, the position was finally given to Abdul Haq Shafaq, who had been governor in Samangan in November 2007 when Qazi Enayat was appointed to replace him there.

3.4 Current situation

Between 2004 and 2007, Faryab was relatively secure, which was conducive to development and reconstruction activities. Nevertheless, security steadily deteriorated from mid-2007 onwards and more rapidly in the build-up towards the 2009 presidential elections, coinciding with a major military operation in Ghormach District, Operation Tofan, a joint NATO-Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) operation launched in May 2009. Recently, insurgency movements and attacks on ANSF, particularly in Almar and Qaisar, have significantly increased.

Some of the recent clashes, however, may not be political or Taliban-linked. The frequent incidents along the Afghan-Turkmen border, involving attacks on the Afghan Border Police (ABP), are clearly related to drug smuggling or to rivalries between local commanders. From 2006 onwards, the Taliban consolidated their activities in Faryab among both Pashtun and non-Pashtun populations. In some areas, Qaisar and Almar, this was a direct spillover of the

²² This was a reflection of the government's lack of a considered strategy to build a popular support base in the province and its preferred approach, traditional in nature, of making alliances with members of the province's various political elites.



Photo: Author

NGO convoy traveling on the national ring road in Qaisar

Taliban's destabilization of Badghis with the infiltration of insurgents or the establishment of local groups in contiguous areas. Ambushes and attacks on Afghan National Police (ANP) posts have taken place in Qaisar, particularly in the Qaisar-Ghormach border area, but also closer to the center with, for example, an attack staged on a police post along the ring road in Almar just ten kilometers from Maimana city in the summer of 2008. Other clashes may have been a manifestation of indigenous ideological currents within the local *ulama* mirroring processes elsewhere in the country. These activities followed the normal trajectory seen in the rest of the country: politicization, mobilization, intimidation, and attacks on public infrastructure such as schools, followed by attacks, including using improvised explosive devices (IEDs), on ANP and ISAF and on reconstruction activities.

Insurgent activities and incidents (mostly involving IEDs) have also increased along the national ring road in the districts of Khwoja Sabz Posh, Shirin Tagab, Dawlatabad, and Pashtun Kot (Khwoja Namusa), particularly since Operation Tofan started in Ghormach in May 2009. These incidents are said to decrease pressure on Ghormach by keeping the ANSF and international forces engaged in other parts of the province. Another explanation is linked to the apparent increase in Uzbeks and Turkmens among those arrested. A number of government officials and influential leaders in Faryab attribute this to the influence of the

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), founded by Tohir Yildash (killed in August 2009 by a US drone attack in Pakistan's tribal areas), and his associate and former Taliban commander at Hairatan, Hafiz Noorullah, amongst Uzbek and Turkmen populations. Originally founded to overthrow the government of President Islam Karimov and establish an Islamic state in Uzbekistan, the group allied itself with the Taliban. It was granted permission to set up a training camp in northern Afghanistan during the Taliban regime. Although little evidence exists of any real presence or influence of the IMU, the increased mention of IMU's name and influence is striking. Branding themselves as IMU-related may be part of a strategy of anti-government groups to gain acceptance from populations that have experienced too much inter-ethnic violence to join forces with the predominantly Pashtun Taliban. It is also possible that some people have come under the influence of mullahs that had IMU associations during the Taliban period.

Other areas, such as Qaisar, Belcheragh, Gurziwan, and the eastern part of Pashtun Kot, still suffer under the continued presence of armed commanders, although the situation has improved over the last year in Pashtun Kot and Belcheragh due to joint pressure from the ANA, ISAF, UNAMA, and a body of influential local leaders called the Peace and Reconciliation Association (PRA).²³ In Gurziwan, however, problems with local commanders remain, and efforts to disarm them have been mostly ineffective. Local

²³ See Section 6 for a discussion of the PRA.

commanders, such as Gholam Nabi and Toofan, are still virtually in control of the area and appropriate livestock and land and impose illegal taxes.

Small gains have been achieved in terms of the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG)²⁴ project in the area of Pashtun Kot, Belcheragh, and Qorghan. However, security actors in Faryab agree that Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR)²⁵ and DIAG have done little to address problems with local commanders. As in the rest of Afghanistan, DIAG has failed to deal with abusive and armed commanders and has instead targeted marginal or former commanders that were identified as “low hanging fruit.” Districts such as Pashtun Kot, Belcheragh, Qaisar, and Gurziwan still suffer from the abusive behavior of local commanders. The only district that has been declared a “district of peace” so far is Andkhoy, achieved after five commanders were said to be no longer actively involved in any faction and retired. The “impotence” of DIAG in disbanding commanders who are an actual threat has led some Afghans to refer to the program as “DIAGRA,” as it only deals with old and retired commanders.

Finally, as is the case in many areas of the north, a perception persists in non-Pashtun areas that the south is being re-armed through *arbaki* and other “community defense

initiatives.” As the security situation deteriorates, partly caused by insurgent infiltration from Pashtun areas such as Bala Murghab (Badghis Province) and Ghormach, demands for weapons for self-defense have been voiced more frequently with the provincial administration. Despite local criticism of commanders, people in Faryab are increasingly turning to them for protection as the ANSF are seen as incapable of guaranteeing their security.

3.5 Key institutions

Development agencies

A number of international and national NGOs and UN agencies operate in Faryab, although competition between NGOs is comparably less than in other provinces in the north. UNAMA has twenty-seven listed NGOs in Faryab, of which thirteen are international and fourteen national. These NGOs work in a variety of sectors, such as health, education, agriculture, water and sanitation, small-scale infrastructure, women’s rights, vocational training, and micro-finance.

Two international and two national “facilitating partners” are implementing the most-extensive development program, the National Solidarity Program (NSP).²⁶ NSP covers all districts of Faryab except for Kohistan. After NGOs withdrew from Ghormach after the June 2004 attack on Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in which five staff were killed, the district did not

²⁴ “Recognizing the need to support and strengthen a government initiative to tackle the problems caused by numerous illegal armed groups in Afghanistan, the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) project aims to support the government in improving human security through disarmament and disbandment of illegal armed groups and reducing the level of armed violence in the community.” fr. Afghanistan New Beginnings Program, UNDP Afghanistan: http://www.undp.org.af/WhoWeAre/UNDPinAfghanistan/Projects/psl/prj_anbp.htm.

“DIAG also seeks to empower existing government programs for socio-economic development to enhance stability and the promotion of good governance, which is an essential part of the Security Sector Reforms in Afghanistan.” *ibid*.

²⁵ “As part of the Security Sector Reforms (SSR), ANBP aimed to support the Government of Afghanistan (GoA) in establishing and implementing a comprehensive, countrywide Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program of the Afghan Military Forces (AMF).” fr. Afghanistan New Beginnings Program, UNDP Afghanistan: http://www.undp.org.af/WhoWeAre/UNDPinAfghanistan/Projects/psl/prj_anbp.htm.

“The immediate objective of DDR was to encourage former AMF to drop their military allegiance and look forward to a civilian life of gainful employment in community solidarity. The DDR mandate ended in June 2006 with the last AMF members officially handing their weapons over to President Karzai in a ceremony held in Kabul.” *ibid*.

²⁶ 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 installations, community buildings) and in the process promote 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 are the “facilitating partners” interacting with communities.

have any real NGO presence until the summer of 2008.²⁷

Provincial administration

Governor Abdul Haq Shafaq, an ethnic Hazara and outsider (from Sar-i Pul) who gravitates towards the central government while balancing his relations with Jumbish, presently heads the provincial administration. Even though Faryabis have agitated against perceived anti-Jumbish outsiders (such as Qazi Enayat and Amir Latif) as provincial governors since 2002, Shafaq is generally appreciated by the population for his perceived impartiality. He is credited with bringing development projects to Faryab, facilitated by the good relationships he has cultivated with the Norwegians, who have invested heavily in the province. Shafaq left most of the previous provincial administration intact²⁸ with key positions occupied by Jumbishis or sympathizers.

The Norwegian PRT

Twenty-five PRTs have been established nationwide to enhance security, reconstruction, and the outreach of the Afghan government.^{29,30}

The first ISAF PRTs were established in 2003. The UK founded PRTs in Mazar-e Sharif and Maimana in 2004, while Norway took over the lead nation responsibilities in Maimana in September 2005, accompanied by Finnish and Latvian contingents. The PRT has two pillars: one military and one civilian. The two components are separated in terms of mandate and employees; however, close cooperation, multidisciplinary, and respect for each other's competencies are seen by the PRT as key to achieving their mandate. The task of the military component is, as part of the ISAF

operation, to promote a good security environment in Faryab province and to facilitate development and reconstruction. The civilian component consists of police liaison officers, prison officers, and civilian advisors, including a development and political advisor.

The role of the police liaison officers is to strengthen Afghan National Police (ANP) through training and mentoring and to visit districts to meet with chiefs of police and map out the situation regarding equipment and resources. The prison officers monitor the rule of law, including safety for prisoners, and try to ensure that human rights law is applied. The role of the civilian advisers is to ensure a good flow of information about local and national authorities' priorities; to monitor, collect information, and report on the development and political situations; and to facilitate development initiatives by building contacts and sharing information with all relevant actors.³¹

Since the time of field research (April–June 2009), the U.S. presence and funding in Faryab, which were previously rather limited compared with the Norwegians, have increased significantly. At the time of research, U.S. Special Forces were mentoring ANA and ANP while staying in their camp outside of Maimana.

This section focuses on the role of Norway since the Latvians no longer fund projects in the province and, at the time of the field research, the Icelandic contribution to development had not yet materialized (i.e., one Icelandic development advisor had been posted and a small amount of funds had been committed, but no projects had started). The U.S. involvement in the province from Afghan

²⁷ BRAC, the implementing partner for the Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS, an initiative of the Ministry of Public Health) in Ghormach, was the exception. However, this program was managed at a distance and provided limited clinic support.

²⁸ Even though provincial governors are technically not responsible for making appointments in their provinces, governors can use their position and contacts to install key people in their favor.

²⁹ Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) form bases staffed by international military and civilian personnel with the purpose of assisting the government to extend its authority and facilitating reconstruction at the provincial level. PRTs are each led by one nation, although with the participation of other nations. Due to the variation in local conditions and the philosophy and resources of the troop-contributing nations, each PRT establishes its own structure and mode of operation.

³⁰ William Maley, "Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan—How They Arrived and Where They Are Going," *NATO Review* (Autumn 2007). Retrieved from <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2007/issue3/english/art2.html>.

³¹ Royal Norwegian Embassy, "Norwegian led PRT in Faryab." Retrieved from http://www.norway.org.af/News_and_events/prt/faryab1/.

Regional Security Integration Command-North (ARSIC-North) can only be partially covered in this study because data were not available locally at the time of field research, and were not shared with the research team in Mazar-e Sharif when requested.

The main aim of the Norwegian PRT,³² is to support the Afghan government in its responsibility to ensure stability, security, and development. It intends to achieve this through strengthened “Afghanization,” and to turn northern Afghanistan into “an example of strengthened Afghan ownership of security and social and economic development”³³ possible because of the relatively stable security situation in the province. Whereas previously the Norwegian PRT had funding available for so-called Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) to “win hearts and minds” (often allocated from the inspector general of the Norwegian army, not the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), now the Norwegian PRT does not implement projects directly; instead, it adheres to a clear distinction between Norwegian civilian and military actors. It even plans to physically separate the civilian component from the military one, although this has not happened so far. This is referred to as the “Norwegian Model”:

The model of PRT Meymaneh [Maimana] could be called the “Norwegian Model in Faryab” where one of the guiding principles of the PRT Meymaneh is that it does not implement development projects of its own. Based on Afghan national development priorities, local needs and the recommendations of the PRT, all Norwegian development aid is channeled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Norwegian Embassy through the World Bank, United Nations and NGOs.³⁴

Most of Norway’s overall aid funding to Afghanistan goes to national programs such as the Education Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP), NSP, and the National Area-Based

Development Program (NABDP); a maximum of 20 percent of this can be allocated to Faryab (including national programs). Last year, however, this percentage was exceeded, when funding that had been allocated to the embassy in Kabul was used instead for a winter emergency recovery program to alleviate years of consecutive droughts and harsh winters. The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has signed multi-year development programs with three international NGOs. Finally, Norway has committed itself to base its efforts in Faryab on the “Integrated Approach” (IA).

The Integrated Approach is based on the belief that stability in Afghanistan cannot be achieved solely through military means, but needs a concomitant civilian effort. It is led by the Government of Afghanistan (GoA), and it aims to increase levels of coordination between the government, military, and civilian actors who support the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS). The IA aims to harmonize existing national programs and plan their sequential implementation in priority districts.

Two districts included in this field research, Ghormach and Qaisar, have been identified as critical (or swing or action) districts by the Integrated Approach Working Group, led by the Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG) and further consisting of UNAMA, ISAF, and key donors (Norway and Germany). Of these two districts, Ghormach has been fast-tracked to pilot the IA. None of the national programs have been implemented in Ghormach so far due to a lack of access caused by insecurity. Plans to bring the NSP to Ghormach have been prioritized over the last months, and the program was planned to start in 2010.³⁵

Progress implementing the IA seems to have stalled, however, despite the initially high visibility.

³² Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Justice and the Police, *A Strategy for Comprehensive Norwegian Civilian and Military Efforts in Faryab Province, Afghanistan* (Government of Norway, May 2009).

³³ Ibid, p. 4.

³⁴ Royal Norwegian Embassy, “Norwegian led PRT in Faryab.” Retrieved from http://www.norway.org.af/News_and_events/prt/faryab1/

³⁵ Ghormach and Kohistan (Faryab) are the only districts administered from Maimana that are not covered by the NSP.

4. Perceived Drivers Of Insecurity

Photo: Author



Families displaced by flood along ring road

According to a wide range of respondents, the drivers of insecurity in Faryab Province are varied, and include ethnicity, poverty and unemployment, factionalism, corruption and poor governance, conflict over scarce resources, ideology, and the existence of a “war economy” from which many actors benefit.

4.1 Ethnicity

The recent history of conflict in Faryab revolves around ethnicity.³⁶ Faryab is one of the most ethnically diverse provinces in Afghanistan, and one of only two with an Uzbek majority. Power is perceived as residing mostly with Jumbish supporters and sympathizers who are overwhelmingly Uzbek, a concentration of power achieved under Dostum.

During the Taliban regime, which had a very limited local support base in the province, the Uzbek and Tajik populations of Faryab were governed with a heavy hand. In turn, many Pashtuns were either forced out or voluntarily left Faryab after the fall of the Taliban. Their return from refugee camps around Kandahar, Herat, and Pakistan has caused ethnic tensions. In addition, Pashtun areas have been neglected since 2002 and they enjoy little representation in the local administration, causing frustration. In the words of one respondent, “a person that gets pinched over and over again will strike back at some point.”³⁷

The anti-Pashtun sentiment in Faryab often coincides with distrust towards the central government, which is perceived as dominated by

³⁶ See Section 3: Contextual Analysis.

³⁷ Interview with government employee, Maimana, April 19, 2009.

Pashtuns. Rumors abound about how key figures in the central government are involved in weapon distributions to Pashtun tribes in Faryab.

The most salient division according to respondents is between Pashtun and non-Pashtun communities. Non-Pashtun respondents in Faryab by-and-large describe the Taliban as an almost exclusively Pashtun movement and Pashtun pockets in the northwest as the origin of insecurity. Although the Taliban are not the only challenge to stability in the province, they have regained influence by drawing on previous contacts, based on tribal relations and modes of mobilization. Some Pashtun communities in Jalaier and western Qaisar seem to have agreed to allow movement and give shelter to the Taliban, but on the condition that violent activities are not carried out close to their settlements. Government security actors also mentioned an increased presence of Uzbeks and Turkmens among captured members of Armed Opposition Groups (AOGs) that they attributed to the augmented influence of former Taliban ally Tohir Yildash and his IMU.

As mentioned earlier, during the *mawqawmat* period as well as the early post-Taliban years, violence mostly revolved around ethnic divisions that, in general, coincided with *tanzim* lines. Though notable exceptions exist and allegiances are prone to change, in Faryab fault lines between the political parties largely follow ethnic divisions: Jumbish-i Milli is predominantly Uzbek, Jamiat-i Islami principally Tajik, and the Taliban predominantly Pashtun. Many respondents argued that because of the interwoven nature of *tanzim* affiliations and ethnicity, local conflicts easily escalate because they are simultaneously tied in to both ethnic and political networks.

Faryab's security is fairly good, especially in comparison with other provinces. There are Taliban in some areas, but their center is in Ghormach and Bala Murghab, which are Pashtun areas. This is because they have tribal relations with Pashtun communities living in Faryab. The strength of the Taliban is also related to Pashtun nationalism; they

*are afraid of losing power in the new Afghanistan and are therefore supporting the Taliban, or at least allowing them to move around in their areas as a means to weaken the other ethnic groups.*³⁸

Respondents often claimed that ethnicity has only recently become an issue; in the past it was of little importance and inter-ethnic conflict was either non-existent or significantly less than at present:

*Ethnicity has become a problem now, but it wasn't that much before the war. But these days melliyat [ethnicity] has become more important than mellat [nationality].*³⁹

Part of this may be attributed to nostalgia for a poorly remembered past, but ethnically based political mobilization and a bitter history of inter-ethnic violence have significantly exacerbated pre-existing ethnic antagonism.

4.2 Poverty and unemployment

The reason most often given by Afghan respondents for insecurity was poverty. The consensus was that the rank and file have joined the insurgency primarily because of economic necessity.

*Lack of jobs is the most important cause of insecurity. If young people don't get jobs and can't go to Iran [for work], what will they do?*⁴⁰

*Another reason for insecurity is poverty. There has been a harsh drought...many tried to go to Pakistan and Iran. They come into contact with other groups, often illegal groups, when they have to cross the border illegally. Those who can't go—how can they survive? Some are tempted by bandits or insurgents and given \$100–500 to plant an IED. They are not supporters of Taliban, but do it for the money.*⁴¹

While, as discussed below, ideology is considered an important driver of insecurity, poverty is said to play a role even here, in that poor families in rural areas where schools are not available have no other option than to send their boys to unregistered *madrassas* both within the province and in Pakistan, where they receive lodging and food, but also become radicalized.

³⁸ Interview with *maulawi* (religious leader), Maimana, June 9, 2009.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Interview with NGO staff member, Maimana, January 14, 2009.

⁴¹ Interview with UN employee, Maimana, January 14, 2009.

4.3 Factional politics

Factional politics was reported as another important driver of insecurity in Faryab, although factionalism is very much related to the ethnic divides described above.

In 2007, a study conducted by the Christian Michelsen Institute⁴² found that in Faryab respondents most frequently cited Abdul Rashid Dostum and the Jumbish-i Milli as the major threats to stability—despite the fact that Dostum and Jumbish are widely supported in the province. In recent years, however, the risk posed by potential inter-party conflict has faded considerably. After its military defeat in Faryab, Jamiat grudgingly accepted Jumbish's dominant position there, a move perhaps made more acceptable by the ascendancy of Mohammad Atta and Jamiat in Balkh Province. Jumbish's influence, however, seems to have diminished, which is generally attributed to a lack of resources and the absence of Dostum. The party seems to be transforming from a military to a political party, a move supported by its intellectual wing. Regardless, Jumbish will likely remain an influential movement amongst the Uzbeks in Afghanistan, especially in Faryab. The party enjoys strong support among the Uzbek population in the province, and despite having been challenged by rival parties (Azadi and Jamiat) and the central government, it has successfully consolidated itself as the main political party in Faryab and as the major vehicle for Uzbek nationalism. In addition, Uzbeks will be reluctant to put at risk their financial gains in the country, the political influence won in the new government, or their ability to control the flow of aid in Faryab. This picture is reflected in the words of one government employee:

There is less attention to some ethnic groups—mainly Pashtuns—and Jumbish is very powerful in the province. Jamiat also has some influence in

the province but is a lot weaker than Jumbish. Another area that receives less government attention is Kohistan, which used to be an Hizb-i Islami and Jamiat area, but is also very remote. The combination of ethnicity, party politics, and remoteness result in less government attention. Similar areas with Jumbish presence would receive more assistance.⁴³

As noted above, programs such as DDR and DIAG have not been successful in Faryab.⁴⁴ Individual commanders and militias linked to political parties are reported to still have weapons caches and to be recently rearming as a result (or under the excuse) of an increased Taliban threat. Although weapons are no longer openly carried, the mere existence of them poses a risk if inter-party conflict that is currently mainly expressed in the political arena escalates. In many areas, commanders continue to levy illegal taxes in the absence of state control and are involved in criminal activities in more remote areas. The inability of government and international forces to curb the power of local commanders emboldened some of them (such as Shamal and Khalifa Saleh in Kata Qala, Pashtun Kot, or Toofan in Gurziwan) in the first years after the Taliban. An illustration of the government's inability to control local commanders was provided by a government employee in Gurziwan:

If any organization or government wants to build a project they cannot implement it without these commanders' permission because they consider themselves the owners of Gurziwan District. Even the Gurziwan district governor cannot do anything without permission of these commanders because they are trying to kill the people that will not obey them.⁴⁵

Up to 2008, commanders were considered the main cause of instability in the province, and the incapacity of the government to rein in these commanders weakens its legitimacy in the eyes of the population. Most commanders are not ideologically motivated and have a history of

⁴² Petter Bauck, Arne Strand, Mohammad Hakim, and Arghawan Akbari, *Afghanistan: An Assessment of Conflict and Actors in Faryab Province to Establish a Basis for Increased Norwegian Civilian Involvement: How Can Future Norwegian Involvement Best Be Targeted and Organised?* (Bergen, Norway: Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2007).

⁴³ Interview with government employee, April 19, 2009.

⁴⁴ See Section 3.3 "Current Situation."

⁴⁵ Interview with village mullah, Gurziwan, June 22, 2009.



ANP officers in Sar-i Howz, Pashtun Kot

switching allegiance from one party to the other based on perceived opportunities. On the other hand, an increasingly potent insurgency and the weakness of the ANSF have made the government more dependent on former commanders to fend off anti-government elements. In Shirin Tagab and Dawlatabad, for example, the local population resisted giving *zakaat* and *uzhr* to the insurgents. When men identifying themselves as Taliban came to collect, people in Dawlatabad requested assistance from the district governor, who informed the ANP and the Taliban fled after the police arrived. However, the ANP needed the assistance of local commander Hashim Bay whose men eventually “arrested” the Taliban. The weapons provided by the police are still in the hands of Hashim Bay, and the government provided him with a Toyota pickup and salaries for his men in exchange for their support in fighting AOGs.

Even though the risk of open inter-party conflict has diminished considerably, tensions continue to exist between the different political parties, most notably between Jumbish and Azadi, although the latter’s influence has diminished significantly. In June 2009, General Malik (the political leader of Hizb-i Azadi) came to Faizabad to commemorate

the death anniversary of his brother, Rasul Pahlawan. Posters of Pahlawan and Dostum instantly sprang up all over the district center prior to his visit, creating a real risk of escalation of political tensions. Many conflicts between local commanders are partly caused by old grievances and partly by current struggles for power and access to resources. They often take place along party divisions.

4.4 Corruption and bad governance

The poor quality of governance, especially the activities of corrupt local officials, was reported as another significant driver of insecurity. Afghanistan’s historical experience with the extension of central authority has largely been negative. The central government or officials acting on its behalf has been associated with oppressive and extortive authority, such as tax collection, forced migration, and recruitment to ensure political and military control over territories and groups.⁴⁶ More recent experiences with “government” during the communist era and especially the *mujahidin* era were perceived as equally abusive. The current government is seen as largely composed of the same individuals who played a role in these regimes, which has led to a perception of impunity.

Respondents often pointed out that the reviving insurgency is not so much due to the strength and appeal of the Taliban, but to the lack of good governance. By and large, respondents agreed that the lack of governance and the extent of corruption have led to a widespread disillusionment and provided the insurgency with opportunities to gain a foothold in Faryab.

The provincial administration in Faryab is widely perceived as corrupt and dominated by factional politics, although the current governor is viewed relatively positively, as discussed below. Across the board, Afghans (as well as internationals) interviewed for this research, whether from rural or urban areas, working for NGOs, self-employed, or even for the government, criticize the level of corruption in the local administration and consider it one of the main reasons for anti-government sentiment and insecurity:

⁴⁶ Bauck, et al., *Afghanistan: An Assessment of Conflict and Actors*.

Government positions are sold in Kabul to rich people. For example, the position of mayor is a very important position because there is a lot of money in the municipality. In these seven years of Karzai's rule, the municipality was in the hands of about five or six different people. When the new mayor of Maimana was appointed, each of them started selling land to the people and after six months another person became the new mayor of Maimana and he again started selling the same land. Now, houses have more than two or three owners and there is daily fighting between people and the government won't take any action because they have created the problem to get rich themselves.⁴⁷

One common criticism of the provincial administration is that appointments are determined by nepotism and cronyism, or obtained and maintained by paying bribes. Factional networks play an important role in the appointments of Faryab provincial and district officials, and those working for the government who are not part of these networks feel marginalized and undermined in their daily work. Government officials, while stressing that they themselves are an exception to this rule, often remarked that *wasita* (relations or connections) takes precedence over capacities and skills, and officials are either recruited on the basis of their connections or factional affiliation or else have paid bribes. Mobilizing and lobbying to employ candidates who initially failed at the central-government level (stressing how essential they are for stability in their areas of origin) is another way in which appointments are said to be influenced. Some respondents even claimed that local commanders would willingly turn a blind eye to criminality and insurgency-related activities in “their” areas so as to regain government support to ensure “stability.”

In such a fragile environment, the appointment of government officials, especially the governor and deputy governor, but also the district governors, is part of the power struggle. Formally this responsibility lays with the Independent Directorate for Local Governance in Kabul, but in practice local powers, the various PRTs, and President Karzai have tried to influence appointments. As is the case in many provinces,

appointments in Faryab have been highly contested, as is illustrated by the opposition to the previous provincial governor, Qazi Enyatullah Enayat, and complaints about increased corruption during the time of another previous provincial governor, Amir Latif.

These appointments have played a particularly destabilizing role in Faryab, especially where Jumbish is concerned. Jumbish's relations with the central government hold potential for conflict. Jumbish did not support these particular previous provincial governors, and interpreted the appointments as undermining its position in the province.

As elsewhere in Afghanistan, the justice sector is considered one of the weakest and most corrupt in Faryab's local administration. As in other provinces, it lacks competent staff and accommodation, and employees receive low salaries. Criminal cases are frequently not reviewed within time limits set by the law, and are hindered by bribery and administrative corruption that is widespread in the judicial system. Respondents remarked that the prosecutor's office and courts take bribes before taking up cases and in exchange for beneficial court rulings. In addition, the release from custody of commanders who had (finally) been arrested or removed from their areas (such as was the case with commander Shamal) has fueled the perception of widespread impunity that has become much associated with the present government. As a result, the concept of democracy, which is seen to have been introduced post-2001, is often equated with lawlessness, expressed as *zoor ast, joor ast* (“might makes right”).

People were frustrated when local justice officials released prominent commanders, and their frustration is compounded by the amnesties issued by President Karzai, often after pressure from influential groups or individuals. During Ramadan 2007, for example, Karzai gave in to pressure from the local *ulama* and granted amnesty to five mullahs convicted of an IED attack in Maimana that killed one Finnish soldier and an Afghan civilian and wounded four Norwegian soldiers.

⁴⁷ Interview with community member, Maimana, June 15, 2009.

While release of prisoners during Ramazan is something of an Afghan tradition, some thought amnesty in this case was inappropriate, as the mullahs were said to have been implicated in the crime. Even though people in Faryab have no fond memories of the Taliban, some respondents favored the security and rule of law (though brutal) over the ineffectiveness and corruption of the current, local administration.

Many in the province feel, however, that the picture is not all grim. The legitimacy of the government is greatly influenced by the charisma and capacities of its top layer of bureaucrats. Since the appointment of the present provincial governor, Abdul Haq Shafaq, a Hazara Shiite from Sar-i Pul Province, perceptions have shifted. Shafaq is seen as a relatively impartial technocrat, gravitating towards the central government while simultaneously appeasing Jumbish. He is credited by Faryabis with bringing more aid to the province (facilitated to a large extent by Norwegian funding) as well as being relatively “clean” in terms of corruption. However, Afghans generally seem to have more trust in individuals than in institutions,⁴⁸ which was confirmed by a number of interviews:

*We are happy with the governor. He demands information on all budgets from all NGOs and pays attention to all groups, instead of just the Uzbeks and Jumbish. We now have a better government than two or three years ago so we should give them more authority.*⁴⁹

4.5 Conflict over scarce resources

According to a recent report by Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU)⁵⁰, the majority of the conflicts referred to village-level peace *shuras* set up by CPAU in several provinces were about land and water rights. In Faryab too, access to scarce resources such as grazing land and water for both drinking and irrigation purposes regularly causes local conflicts. Land ownership was traditionally registered with the authorities on the basis of taxes paid, but as a result of the war, many families abandoned the area leaving their land unattended

or in the care of neighbors and family. In some cases, commanders have appropriated land. With the return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in recent years, disputes over land rights have emerged,⁵¹ in addition to the outstanding land disputes remaining from the *mujahidin* era. Parties to many of the above disputes back their claims with bogus documents provided by successive generations of corrupt officials.

The anticipated return of IDPs and refugees is therefore likely to create tensions when they find their land and homes occupied. As a significant number of refugees and IDPs still remain outside the province, new conflicts may occur in the years to come when they return, especially in already insecure areas such as Jalaier and more ethnically mixed areas such as northern Almar and Qaisar. Six hundred Pashtun families from Faryab have signed up for repatriation and have been waiting in a refugee camp in Kandahar to return, originally scheduled for July 2009. Of these, 153 families will go to Ghormach, but the majority will return to Jalaier valley. Strains on already scarce resources have the potential to add to the tense relations between Uzbeks and Pashtuns in an already unstable area.

4.6 Ideology

Another factor sometimes mentioned in interviews was the role of ideology or religion in mobilizing fighters and legitimizing violence. Religious leaders occupy key positions in Afghanistan, hold a strong influence over the population, and shape local attitudes towards the government and the international community.

Groups of insurgents often include religious students from Pakistan or local unregistered *madrassas*. A major concern voiced during interviews with government and international staff is the reported influx of Pakistani-educated mullahs in Faryab (especially Kohistan and Andkhoy) who bring a new style of preaching and practicing Islam, but who can also become

⁴⁸ Arne Strand and Organisation for Sustainable Development and Research (OSDR), *Faryab Survey: Comparison of Findings from Maymane 2006 and 2009* (Bergen, Norway: Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2009), p. 4.

⁴⁹ Interview with Afghan aid worker, January 7, 2009.

⁵⁰ Christian Dennys and Idrees Zaman, *Trends in Local Afghan Conflicts* (Kabul: Cooperation for Peace and Unity, June 2009).

⁵¹ Bauck, et al., *Afghanistan: An Assessment of Conflict and Actors*, p. 16.

military leaders, as has happened in other parts of the country. As noted above, young Afghans are often sent to Pakistan to study in *madrassas* because they lack access to formal education at home and because of the material benefits that come to their families. However, religious education is also appreciated in its own right; even sons from families associated with the government frequently study the Quran in Pakistan. Mullahs in the province are said to be becoming more extreme in their sermons, and in some cases have given anti-government speeches claiming the present government is un-Islamic because it is corrupt, doesn't enforce *sharia*, and is a puppet regime of the West. Because Islam occupies an important position in Afghanistan, perceptions of the West (and in its wake, democracy and the free market) are consequently heavily influenced by *ulama*. Discussions about concepts such as democracy showed that perceptions are far from positive: respondents often associated democracy with drinking alcohol, sexual promiscuity, and a corrupt government without clear leadership, while being contradictory to Islam. The efforts of the international community to assist the fledgling democracy in Afghanistan are therefore viewed with suspicion, which is further fueled by religious sermons. A number of informants remarked that the government lacks a clear strategy to engage with the religious leadership.

4.7 War economy

Compared to other provinces, Faryab has less

poppy cultivation but the province still remains an important transit point for drug trafficking, especially Belcheragh, Gurziwan, and Kohistan Districts. Even though efforts have been made to discourage poppy cultivation, a number of villages close to the border with Ghormach are still cultivating. Farmers do not simply depend on opium as a cash crop; they rely on the access to credit, land, and water that is generally provided by buyers of opium. Even though poppy cultivation has declined, marijuana is widely grown in the province, and is generally seen as a more profitable activity in that particular ecological and political setting compared with poppy cultivation.⁵²

It was beyond the scope of this study to investigate exactly how poppy cultivation and drug trafficking benefited the insurgency, commanders, or individuals within the government. Drug trafficking, however, is having a significant impact on security. Some recent clashes are not necessarily political or Taliban-linked. The recent frequent incidents along the border involving attacks on the Afghan Border Police (ABP) are clearly related to drug smuggling and drug-related rivalries between local commanders. Narcotics play a larger role in Ghormach: both cultivation and trafficking is rife in the area, and those involved don't want any government presence or international troops that might jeopardize their business. Criminal elements have therefore joined forces with the insurgency because of their shared interest in keeping the central government out.



Maimana River at night

⁵² Cannabis grows well in most areas of Faryab, is less labor-intensive than opium, and is also less risky to cultivate, as there has been no crackdown on cultivation as has happened with opium.

5. Aid Projects And Aid Actors



Photo: Author

National ring road in Qaisar

5.1 Perceptions of aid projects

While respondents' expressed perceptions of aid projects understandably differed, some clear patterns and areas of agreement emerged among aid agencies, communities, and government officials, as well as between Afghan and international respondents. In general, expressed perceptions of aid and development projects were negative, that projects and organizations are performing poorly. The dominant expressed perceptions were that aid had been too little; that benefits had been distributed inequitably; that rampant corruption and misappropriation existed, particularly through sub-contracting; that aid projects had not been appropriate for the environment; and that the quality of projects suffered.

Not enough

Respondents often claimed that nothing, or far too little, had been done. Clearly, expectations have not been managed since 2002, and the expressed disconnect between what Afghans expected from international engagement with their country and what has been delivered on the ground was significant. Whereas the typical initial answer to questions on aid delivery was that "nothing had been done," during the interview it often transpired that some projects had indeed been implemented in the area. Perceptions on specific projects at the village level were that they are often too small to address the needs of the population. Indeed, most of the projects identified by the researchers (with the notable exception of infrastructure built under NSP) were small-scale, emergency-oriented projects, without

any sustainable outputs, and dominated by cash-for-work (CFW) projects such as canal cleaning and road rehabilitation.

These responses could have been influenced by strategic considerations, i.e., interviewees' hopes that underreporting the amount of development in their area would eventually result in additional assistance. Still, many respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the gap between promises made by the Afghan government and the international community and, in their eyes, the lack of tangible progress achieved in improving the standard of living. The majority of respondents also compared the (vast) amount of aid money that is entering the country with the small gains made so far, and saw this as a sign of corruption:

For the last seven or eight years we've been hearing announcements on national television and radio from donors and government representatives promising more aid and quoting large sums of money to be spent in Afghanistan, but how much of this has actually reached the people? Most of it is lost through corruption in the government. What is left is too little to really improve our lives.⁵³

The problem of satisfying the high expectations created by the international community and the Afghan government since 2001 is an important issue for aid agencies. As one NGO staff member commented, "we have built 1,400 wells and there are many other NGOs working here, but people still are not satisfied."⁵⁴

Regional disparities

Almost all Afghan respondents highlighted the distribution of aid as a problem. Respondents from Maimana felt Faryab was receiving less assistance than Mazar-e Sharif and Kabul, whereas respondents in rural areas stated their areas were less served than Maimana or other districts.

Frequently, respondents referred to the "peace penalty": the idea that projects are channeled to insecure areas with the explicit or implicit

assumption that a positive security impact can be achieved, which is disheartening for people in secure areas. The insecure south is (correctly) perceived as receiving much more aid than the relatively peaceful north, resulting in the feeling that more peaceful areas are being punished for their lack of security problems. Providing aid to insecure areas is described as inherently unjust and counter-productive—"rewarding them for causing problems," as multiple respondents put it. Communities in Qaisar living close to the less secure areas along the Ghormach-Qaisar border were especially vocal about this:

Why are Tez Nawa (Ghormach) and Khwoja Kandoo (Qaisar) receiving so much aid, with new clinics, schools, and wells, whereas our area has hardly received anything? Help needs to go to secure areas so that people gain trust in the government, but meanwhile we are left without assistance, which makes us feel more distant from the government.⁵⁵

Respondents from Faryab also pointed out the ethnic dimension of aid distribution, stating that more aid is being funneled to the insecure, Pashtun south of the country as compared with the more secure northern region. Similarly, Ghormach and bordering communities in Qaisar, Jalaier, and Dawlatabad are the main pockets of insecurity in the province, all of which are inhabited by Pashtuns, and all of which claim to receive much less assistance than other districts. The perception that aid distribution is imbalanced intertwines with perceptions on ethnicity, pitching Pashtuns (often equated with the Taliban) against non-Pashtuns, as one (Tajik) community member explained:

We are aware of the amount of aid going to Ghormach, which is just across the border, and wonder why Pashtun people in that area who cause problems and still cultivate poppy get more help than we do, while we don't cause any problems. If necessary we will either cause some small problems ourselves or just pack up our belongings and migrate to that area so that we can have our part of that assistance.⁵⁶

⁵³ Interview with community member in Khwoja Sabz Posh, June 9, 2009.

⁵⁴ Interview with NGO worker in Maimana, January 3, 2009.

⁵⁵ Interview with CDC member in Qaisar, April 11, 2009.

⁵⁶ Interview with CDC member in Shakh, April 8, 2009.

According to most non-Pashtun respondents, development assistance reaching insecure areas was often not primarily meant to address security problems. Instead, it was claimed that because the central government is dominated by Pashtuns, it allocates the bulk of aid to fellow Pashtuns. Regarding the provincial administration and the way it has distributed aid and emergency food, the picture is more mixed: the provincial governor is widely credited with having brought international funding to Faryab as a whole and is generally seen as impartial on ethnic issues. A number of Pashtun respondents, however, claimed that they have been left out on the basis of their ethnicity, especially in Jalaier⁵⁷ where indeed very little assistance has materialized over the years. Interestingly though, respondents from Ghormach, where significant projects have started since August 2008, complained that the provincial administration in Badghis deliberately marginalized their communities, but have a much more positive perception of the Faryab government (to which the district has been transferred temporarily). This indicates that the delivery of projects can indeed help to change perceptions, although it is unclear how long this impact lasts. Whether this has had a positive impact on stability in the district will be discussed in the Ghormach case study in section 6.

Lack of coordination has led to an ad hoc, non-systematic distribution of projects, contributing to perceptions of an unequal distribution of aid, although the NSP has, to an extent, consolidated the geographic distribution between NGOs, enabling coordination in allocating new projects. However, in Faryab one international NGO has been receiving far more funding than any other organization, which has led to more investments in its areas of intervention (Ghormach, Almar, Qaisar, and Kohistan) than anywhere else.

Corruption and subcontracting

Respondents said that an important reason why very little aid has been delivered to their areas is the vast corruption in the aid sector. Virtually no aid actor was seen as “clean,” whether donors,

government agencies, the UN, or NGOs. One of the respondents jokingly said that people have started calling NGOs “*In-Jib-O’s*” (*jib* being the Dari word for pocket), as they are perceived to spend more money on their comfortable offices and cars than on helping their supposed beneficiaries. However, an exception was made for NGOs that have been working in their villages for a number of years (especially NSP facilitating partners, or FPs, who have typically worked in their communities for a minimum of five years). They were viewed as helping the communities and were not seen as corrupt.

The “aid architecture” is seen by respondents as contributing to corruption. For instance, short-term contracts are often said to be awarded to “briefcase” NGOs (i.e., organizations created with the sole intention of obtaining donor funds and which therefore consist of little more than their documents) with no long-term commitment to the area. It was reported that contractors from Kabul typically lack local experience or knowledge but are nonetheless selected for projects in Faryab. This is contrary to the way business is traditionally conducted in Afghanistan, in which one rarely works with a stranger. Many of these companies have disappeared off the map after (or sometimes even before) the end of the project, and in cases where they have delivered sub-quality work, there is no way to find them.

Another way in which the aid system inadvertently promotes corruption is through its short-term, project-based focus. In a highly politicized context in which the distribution of aid is sensitive, aid agencies on the ground struggle to meet their project’s objectives within short time frames. As a result, there is often precious little time and flexibility to ensure proper community mobilization and selection of beneficiaries. When discussing corruption, respondents often focused on emergency distributions and CFW and food-for-work (FFW) projects. These typically are implemented within a couple of months and significant irregularities in beneficiary selection often occur, especially in CFW and FFW projects that run through the government.⁵⁸ Government

⁵⁷ Jalaier is a valley in Shirin Tagab and Dawlatabad districts inhabited largely by Pashtuns.

⁵⁸ Interviews with two international aid workers, one Provincial Council member, two government officials, Maimana, April 2009; focus groups with community members in Shirin Tagab, April 19, 2009.

officials somewhat legitimately claim that they lack resources to properly survey communities and therefore must rely on interlocutors to provide them with beneficiary lists.

Time and resource constraints on CFW, FFW, and other projects have led to a heavy reliance on “middle men” or intermediates, mostly village *arbabs* or *khans* but also local commanders. Anecdotal evidence abounds on incidents in which local commanders and village leaders either have appropriated part of the cash or food, or have put their own relatives, friends, and constituents on the beneficiary lists:

Projects are creating a lot of conflicts between people because commanders are choosing the projects and they are the beneficiaries, not the poor and vulnerable. Whenever commanders allow a project to be implemented in their area, they will identify the daily workers on the project and these daily workers are all relatives of the commanders. This causes a lot of conflicts between the poor people and relatives of commanders but when a commander hears about this he will come to the poor people and they have no other option then to say nothing again and obey him because they are afraid of commanders.⁵⁹

The increasing use of NSP Community Development Councils (CDCs) for project planning and implementation has mitigated this practice to some extent, although CDCs are not entirely free from corruption. Respondents regularly expressed their frustration with the lack of monitoring, control, and sanctions against corrupt practices.

Corruption is considered most rampant in the construction sector. Many respondents observed that the government and many NGOs often implement construction projects repeatedly using the same construction companies. The owners of these companies are often close to the government and Jumbish.

Another factor that is diminishing the delivery of aid according to common discourse is the practice of sub-contracting. The perception that aid project money has long been siphoned off before

it reaches its beneficiaries is pervasive and detrimental to the reputation of the aid sector as a whole. As one community member mentioned, “because of sub-contracting, a lot of money ends up in the pockets of a few individuals and the projects end up being of bad quality. All Afghans know this and are fed up with the inability of the government and international community to control this.”⁶⁰

Almost all foreign and Afghan aid workers interviewed for this study also felt that “emergency” projects and distributions by the government were used for political gains instead of to answer to humanitarian crises. While government officials and military actors thought that food distributions would help win the support of local populations for the government, aid professionals claimed that having yearly, almost standard, distributions of food packages renders communities aid-dependent instead of enabling them to improve their situation independently. In addition, these distributions are typically characterized by the corruption and misappropriation described above, which has often led to further frustration with a corrupt government. Respondents mentioned the World Food Programme’s CFW and FFW projects that go through the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) as examples of projects used by government officials to siphon off funds for themselves. Numerous reports that local powerbrokers appropriate food and redistribute it at the village level have surfaced over the last half year; this is one of the main complaints voiced by Afghans interviewed for this research. The following comment illustrates the type of grievances expressed by Afghans:

Beneficiary cards were distributed by the Provincial Council but this was with a great deal of corruption. For example, in Jamshidi and Sare Asia (Qaisar), which has one CDC, nine cards have been provided although thirty cards were promised. The same happened in Turkmanha, where for 300 families, sixty cards were promised and only ten cards received. Government officials have taken the food aid that was promised but not delivered for personal gain.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Interview with community member, Tagab Shan Gurziwan, June 22, 2009.

⁶⁰ Interview with influential elder, Kabul, April 11, 2009.

⁶¹ Interview with CDC member in Shakh, April 8, 2009.

The provincial administration has (selectively) started acting on a small number of corruption cases in the province. Some salient cases are the school-feeding assets from UNICEF that were appropriated and sold by the provincial head of education, who has been fired, and the 3,000 metric tons of food aid allocated for Kohistan that was misappropriated by the district governor, chief of police, head of RRD, and his deputy, who have been arrested.

But these examples are limited and the general perception of widespread corruption with impunity causes resentment with the government. “AOGs have been using these incidents in their propaganda in the province”⁶² is the consensus. This resonates well with local sentiments about a widely perceived corrupt government. In some cases, allegations of corruption were made but turned out to be insubstantial or part of a political agenda of slander to hurt rivals. Whereas in government discourse activities such as distributions are often touted as hearts-and-minds initiatives, they often achieve the exact opposite because of the corruption associated with them. One particular Dari expression was commonly used when referring to corruption in the Afghan government: “*Ab az sar-e cheshma saf basha, ta akher saf mebasha*” (“water that is clean from the source will be clean at the end”). The argument is that because of the presence of corruption in the higher echelons of the government, local officials will try to get their share as well. The majority of respondents perceived the local administration as thoroughly corrupt, despite more positive appraisals of the current provincial governor.

Wrong kind

Many respondents stated that the majority of aid projects were not addressing Afghanistan’s problems in a fundamental way: while any assistance is welcomed, many interventions are described as short-term, stopgap solutions, whereas any “real” investments in the country, such as factories, hydropower dams, and other major infrastructure projects are not being

implemented. In some cases, respondents compared the development interventions of the current foreign aid actors with that of the Soviets who are credited with building schools, roads and—most importantly—factories that employed large numbers of people. Some respondents complained that more money than ever is flowing to the country, but they have a hard time pointing to any projects that successfully address the population’s problems, with the positive exceptions of the ring road and installation of electrical power lines running from Turkmenistan through Maimana to Almar. In several interviews, the question was returned to the researcher:

*Why is it that with so much money for Afghanistan, all we see is small projects—building a well here and rehabilitating a road there? Why isn’t this money being spent on one big project from which we can see some results? What we need are larger projects with visible impacts, especially in water and agriculture.*⁶³

Respondents often claimed that Afghanistan has natural resources such as gas, coal, water, and uranium, but that no investments are being made in these sectors.⁶⁴ This leads to conspiracy theories that international actors are not interested in development, which is simply a smoke screen, but have ulterior motives for staying in Afghanistan. It is said that development projects consistently fail to address unemployment or improve living conditions as was expected after the fall of the Taliban. Afghans often cite this as indicating a lack of seriousness or desire from the international community and the government to tackle the problems of ordinary Afghans. Combined with perceptions of rampant corruption in the government as well as the aid sector, skepticism towards aid and aid actors is widespread.

Lack of quality

Most projects were appraised as poor in terms of performance and quality. With the exceptions of NSP, electricity provision, and the reconstruction of the ring road, respondents viewed most projects as too short-term, unsustainable, and low quality to address their problems for the long

⁶² Interview with influential elder, Maimana, April 14, 2009, and confirmed in numerous other interviews on the subject: government official, Maimana, April 4, 2009; Afghan senior aid worker, Maimana, April 17, 2009; PR T officials, Maimana, April 8 and June 5, 2009; two influential elders, Ghormach, June 7, 2009; one *mauwlawi*, Maimana, June 9, 2009; senior international aid worker, June 17, 2009.

⁶³ Interview with community member in Maimana, May 28, 2009.

⁶⁴ Since the fieldwork was done in 2009, the pace of activity relating to mining contracts has accelerated nationally, although it is not clear that this will change perceptions in Faryab.

term. Cash-for-work projects were specifically mentioned in this regard. Even though respondents agreed that some of these interventions assisted the most vulnerable to address their most immediate needs, many expressed chagrin that with the amount of money available for Afghanistan, it wasn't being invested in larger-scale projects that would sustainably improve their standards of living. Afghans, both community level respondents and aid professionals alike, expressed the inability to understand why, with more money than ever coming in to the country, large-scale projects that would have a lasting impact on people's livelihoods (such as dams) are not being done. Some even claimed that this is a conscious strategy of the "West" to keep Afghanistan dependent on foreign aid.

Another common complaint from Afghans about aid projects was the lack of monitoring, which they said leads to large amounts of money being spent, but which results in low-quality work. The perception is common that too much of the money meant for development is pocketed by contractors who increase their profit margins by providing sub-standard work with cheaper materials.

As noted above and discussed in detail in section 5.5 below, the NSP does not elicit such complaints. Respondents repeatedly referred to this program as being successful as well as less corrupt.

Other projects that were positively perceived were the ring road and electrical installation covering a significant part of Faryab, including Maimana. Such large "bricks and mortar" infrastructure projects are appreciated if durable and of good quality. In addition, they are said to bring important improvements in beneficiaries' quality of life. The ring road cut travel times between Mazar-e Sharif and Maimana from a full day to around four hours and has increased connections with the rest of the country. The local market has a greater variety of goods available for what respondents claim are lower prices, while Faryab can now more easily sell its products in Mazar and even Kabul. Electricity has helped local business to sell refrigerators that, in turn, are used to sell cold drinks. In Ghormach, the Emergency Recovery Program implemented by an international NGO was mentioned as a well-received intervention, which comes as less of a surprise, as it is the first intervention in the district since 2004 (besides FFW projects, which were heavily tainted by corruption) and at the time of research was in its initial stages.

5.2 Military aid projects

Evolution of the Norwegian PRT

Unlike other PRTs, the Norwegians do not have civil-military cooperation (CIMIC)⁶⁵ projects or a CIMIC advisor in the camp. Norwegian funding for development in



Photo: Author

Norwegian soldiers at the airport in Maimana

⁶⁵ Civil-Military Co-operation (CIMIC) is the coordination or joint planning done between military and civilian actors in support of the overall mission. CIMIC activities include creating support for military forces among the local population and providing assistance (e.g., expertise, information, security, and infrastructure) to the local population. While there are specific CIMIC personnel assigned to most PRTs and military bases, NATO believes that most military personnel perform some sort of CIMIC functions.

Afghanistan is largely channeled through the national programs (such as the NSP and the Education Quality Improvement Program, EQUIP) and assistance to Faryab goes mostly through international NGOs. This policy has resulted, for example, in contracting an international NGO to rehabilitate (or practically reconstruct) a prison in the province through sub-contracts to private contractors; the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) would not directly contract the work.

The Norwegian Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs agreed not to have any CIMIC activities in Faryab after a series of negative experiences in the period prior to June 2007. The culminating event that led to this agreement was the June 2007 visit by the deputy ministers of foreign affairs and defense to the hospital in Maimana, which had been refurbished by the PRT. This project had numerous problems that stemmed from the PRT's lack of understanding of the local context and lack of experience in implementing development projects.

Box 1: Giving champagne to a man who needs clean drinking water

The hospital project in Maimana by the Norwegian PRT shows how the best of intentions can, without solid local knowledge, lead to inappropriate and even negative outcomes, the equivalent of giving champagne to a man who needs clean drinking water.⁶⁶ The hospital was rehabilitated according to Norwegian standards, with electrical wiring and equipment that were too demanding for the fluctuating power supply in Maimana. An anesthesia machine was purchased, but provided with a manual written in Norwegian. The filter of this machine needed to be changed daily, but hadn't been replaced at all during the first year because the hospital staff was not able to read the manual. A morgue was installed in the hospital, but during follow-up visits, PRT staff noticed that it was not being used. One well-informed respondent noted that this was in part due to Islamic and Afghan traditions that require that the dead be buried as soon as possible. In addition to the high costs and incompatibility with the Afghan context, building the hospital to Norwegian standards created dependencies: the Norwegian equipment provided to the hospital still needs Norwegian spare parts, liquids, and technical skills not found in Afghanistan.⁶⁷

The hospital is still operational and Norwegian development assistance to Faryab is now more in tune with local needs and executed by either the government or NGOs with experience in the region. Civilian personnel involve themselves in the projects, pointing out needed improvements, but leave the actual implementation to their partners.

Because of these problematic experiences, the Norwegian PRT has shifted away from CIMIC, and the Norwegian government is now delivering aid to Faryab through national programs as well as through international NGOs that typically get multiyear contracts for long-term programs. However, the public is relatively aware that the Norwegian government supports development efforts in the province, and reported perceptions

of the Norwegian PRT are generally positive. Even though disseminating information on these activities is difficult in a rural context, Faryabis are informed by word of mouth, and some of them have access to government-run TV and radio channels. NGOs working in development also stress the roles of the Afghan government and Norwegian donor.

⁶⁶ Quote from an Afghan Government official, March 14, 2009.

⁶⁷ Interviews with PRT officials, April 20, 2009, and May 22, 2009.

ARSIC-North

Separate from the Norwegian and Latvian military presence in Faryab, the Afghanistan Regional Security Integration Command-North (ARSIC-North)⁶⁸ is in the province to train, advise, and mentor the ANA and ANP in functions ranging from daily mission planning and preparation, to safety, unit training, and moral and ethical training.⁶⁹ In addition, ARSIC's commander has access to funding from the U.S. Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) that is intended to win trust, promote civil infrastructure, and be used as a stabilization tool for the benefit of local populations.⁷⁰

In Faryab, most of the CERP projects are located in the Qaisar-Ghormach border area, which is widely recognized as having the most security concerns. Most of these projects involve the construction of roads but others involve schools (Shakh, Khwoja Kinti, and Naghara Khana), clinics, and wells (Naghara Khana). They are being implemented for stabilization purposes, under the assumption that employing local young men makes them less likely to join AOGs. The explicit assumption behind these projects is that in addition to improving access to services (schools and clinics) and economic development (roads), the hearts and minds of the local population will be won.⁷¹ (Roads have the added benefit of enabling access for the military into the area.)

CERP projects in Faryab, however, have reportedly suffered from a lack of coordination with local authorities, and it is unclear both to the PRT and to the provincial administration what ARSIC is doing. As one interviewee from the PRT describes it,

*Several delegations have come from Qaisar to complain about the lack of coordination and cooperation by the Americans. Unfortunately, because local populations cannot tell the difference between the PRT and ARSIC, the PRT is blamed for this which negatively affects our standing with the communities.*⁷²

An example of this lack of coordination between CERP- and PRT-funded projects is the clinic rehabilitated in Jare Siya. After Operation Tofan,⁷³ CERP funding was made available for Ghormach and, after discussions with the Norwegian MFA advisors, was provided to the local *shura* to rehabilitate the clinic. The main building was reconstructed, and a well and latrines were built. However, in the summer of 2009, funding for the same clinic was provided to the same *shura* by the Spanish PRT based in Qala-i Now (Badghis Province), effectively funding the project twice. The *shura* has been asked to clarify this issue, but at the time of writing, no final decision had been taken. This example highlights a common complaint made by Afghan respondents about the lack of control and transparency in development projects, especially those funded by military actors. Many respondents noted that the government is often not consulted in the selection of projects, and is overruled or has problems staffing new buildings because the needed new staff was not included in the government office's *tashkil*. This happened with the school building constructed in Naghara Khana which was requested by the elders, but wasn't in the Department of Education's plan, as schools already existed in a village nearby and therefore the Naghara Khana school had no teachers allocated to it (see Box 2).

More importantly, communities living along the road funded by the U.S. military between Qaisar district center and Shakh complain that the military is not monitoring progress; the contractor is widely believed to be siphoning off funds by delivering sub-standard work. Compounded by complaints that no local labor has been hired and that contracts are always awarded to those with connections, such infrastructure projects contribute to an uncomplimentary perception of international forces, as illustrated by the comments of a member of the Provincial Council:

⁶⁸ ARSIC-North has now been renamed U.S. Task Force North.

⁶⁹ Afghanistan Regional Security Integration Command: <http://www.cstc-a.com/mission/ARSIC.html>.

⁷⁰ The researcher had very limited access to officials responsible for implementing CERP funds, and who were unable to provide information on past projects.

⁷¹ Interview with ARSIC representative and special forces commander, January 14, 2009.

⁷² Interview with PRT official in Maimana, April 8, 2009.

⁷³ Operation Tofan ("storm") was a military operation that took place in Ghormach during May and June 2009 to push insurgents out of the area and improve security.

*The Americans didn't discuss the building of the Qaisar-Shakh road with the government or local people, which has resulted in a low-quality road, especially the culverts. Also, no local laborers were hired and the contractor has been accused of using low-quality materials to get a higher profit. This is an example of a project that has achieved the opposite of what international forces intended. Even though, in general, local people are happy with a road being constructed, the low quality and lack of local revenues has caused much criticism. But also, if international forces cannot control the quality of projects and sub-contracting, how can the Afghan government ever be expected to prevent corruption?*⁷⁴

Notwithstanding the contributions that projects from military actors can make, in some cases, the military's project proposals lay bare a lack of contextual understanding. One such example was a proposal by ARSIC to implement a kitchen garden project for women in Ghormach, a conservative district where working directly with women would take a considerable amount of time to build enough trust. Fortunately, the development agencies' advice (through the Norwegian PRT) to change the project was accepted. But well-intended projects can have adverse consequences and seriously impede the work of development agencies that, in this case, had only been able to start working with women

in the district after a year of community mobilization and relationship building.⁷⁵

Many respondents characterized the military's projects as lacking coordination with other development actors (and importantly the government). In some cases they were fraught with problems. Security has continued to deteriorate in the areas where most of these projects have been implemented (the border of Ghormach and Qaisar). In Faryab therefore, no evidence could be found of a positive contribution to stability through development projects implemented by the military.

5.3 Perceptions of international military forces

If a more-direct involvement of the military in development leads to more popularity among the population, stopping that involvement should cause a decline in popularity. A report from the Christian Michelsen Institute (CMI) indicates that in Maimana and its surroundings, trust in ISAF has decreased from 2006 when 28 percent of the population said that they had no trust in ISAF, to 2009 when 66 percent said that they had no trust. However, this study asked questions regarding the International Forces in general (not specifically the Norwegian presence) and in Faryab as a

Box 2: Naghara Khana School

Naghara school was intended as a plaster on the wound for the community after a debacle over a well project in their village. This deep well was constructed with CERP funds on a private plot just fifty meters away from a public hand pump installed by an international NGO, and the proximity to the public well was not appreciated locally due to fears that it might drain the water from the public well. On top of that, the Taliban tried to kidnap the contractor digging the well, but were confronted by villagers, who killed two Taliban (including the Taliban shadow governor for Faryab, Abdul Hamid) and forced the rest to flee. To prevent repercussions, the government arranged to set up police posts in the area and distributed food to the community as a reward for standing up against the Taliban, but also to encourage other communities in the border area with Ghormach to do the same. The police, however, are having a hard time maintaining that post and the incident attracted the attention of the Taliban, which has made Naghara Khana a more dangerous place. The person who killed the two Taliban is no longer living in his village out of fear of repercussions.

⁷⁴ Interview with Provincial Council member in Maimana, April 19, 2009.

⁷⁵ Interview with international aid worker, Maimana, June 17, 2009; interview with PRT officials, Maimana, May 22, 2009.

whole (not specifying the Norwegians' reputation in particular).⁷⁶ There is an appreciation for development aid reaching the province, although this is not always attributed to the Norwegian PRT.⁷⁷ During the research on the present study, there was no indication that the lack of CIMIC activities has decreased the Norwegian PRT's popularity. The majority of respondents aware of the Norwegian presence in Faryab perceived the PRT positively.

In interviews for the present study, Faryabis pointed to the Norwegians' positive interactions with communities, the lack of civilian casualties in the province, and the amount of investment the Norwegians have made (schools and food- and non-food distributions were most frequently mentioned) as reasons for their positive image. This positive perception of the Norwegians seems to differ markedly from perceptions of most other PRTs in the country. As one local parliamentarian stated,

*We are happy with the Norwegian PRT, although they cannot guarantee security in the whole province because they don't know the area. But they do provide a lot of aid. Most wakils in parliament complain about the PRTs in their area, but not the wakils from Faryab as there is good cooperation from the side of the Norwegians and the aid they provide is substantial and much needed.*⁷⁸

Investments through national programs and NGOs in the province by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs seem to reflect positively on the PRT as a whole. However, perceptions of the Norwegian PRT can rapidly shift in a more negative direction by incidents caused by international troops in Afghanistan as illustrated by the comments of one of the PC members in Maimana:

We accept that the resources available cannot address all needs at once, but there are other things more important for the standing of the international community than wells and clinics. The behavior of western forces in Afghanistan is much more relevant: no one wants house searches or civilian casualties by western forces in Afghanistan. If something can be done to change the behavior of these forces in

*Afghanistan this will result in much more acceptance of them. The same is true for the kidnappings and beheadings by Al Qaeda and the Taliban, they will result in a bad reputation with the people.*⁷⁹

Respondents who reported a more negative view of ISAF as a whole specifically spoke poorly of the British and Americans. Many respondents stated that these two countries are in Afghanistan for ulterior motives, either to access Afghanistan's natural resources, or because of its geo-strategic importance.

5.4 National Solidarity Program (NSP)

As noted above, the NSP elicited far fewer of the negative comments made about other aid projects. Respondents were especially positive about a key feature of the NSP, the process of community consultation, which is said to address the needs prioritized by communities rather than those of external actors. Because the Community Development Councils (CDCs) implement the projects and are involved in financial management and procurement, the NSP is considered more transparent than any other project implemented in Faryab. As one CDC member noted, "NSP has had a good impact because the priorities of the people are taken into account and we know what happens to our money."⁸⁰

CDC members interviewed also appreciated the skills gained through NSP and the links they now have with the government, or at least the RRD department. Respondents from areas not covered by NSP often remarked that they wanted it in their communities as well. In some CDCs though, former commanders controlled the NSP either directly, from within the CDC, or from outside. Other communities felt that their CDCs were much more representative than those that existed before.

International civilian aid workers and senior Afghan aid workers alike appreciated the NSP's ability to either have former abusive powerbrokers excluded or have significant control over their capacity to misuse development

⁷⁶ Strand and OSDR, *Faryab Survey: Comparison of Findings*.

⁷⁷ Correspondence with Arne Strand.

⁷⁸ Interview with a Faryabi member of parliament, Kabul, April 11, 2009.

⁷⁹ Interview with Provincial Council member in Maimana, April 18, 2009.

⁸⁰ Interview with CDC members, Qaisar, April 11, 2009.

aid coming to their areas. Many perceived the benefits from the program to be distributed in a just and balanced way. Relative to their population, each community has the same entitlements and the program is seen as transparent. Even though respondents reported misuse of block grants by a number of CDC members together with individuals working for FPs or the government, this is not seen as inherent to the program itself. CDCs are commonly seen as bringing significant improvements to community leadership and representation, although reports of power abuse were also conveyed by respondents, for example, of CDC members using their position as community representative with the government or distributing emergency aid to their family and supporters. However, a consensus exists that CDCs are much less able and less likely to be corrupt as compared to other individual leaders such as commanders and *arbab*s.

It is extremely difficult to generalize about the impact of the NSP on stability and security in Faryab. The NSP is intended to create linkages between sub-national government and communities, improving relationships and understanding of the government. Because CDCs were elected, and empowered through small infrastructure projects, many of the respondents assumed that the power of local commanders will be undermined. In instances where these commanders have managed to be elected to the CDCs (either by force, persuasion, or genuine choice), they are believed to be kept in check through pride of position and occupied through the procedures and increased interaction with the government. CDCs, however, vary greatly. In some cases, NSP has led to significant positive changes in communities, or helped curb the influence of commanders. In other cases, NSP has exacerbated local conflicts over land, water, potential project locations, and beneficiaries, or dragged on almost indefinitely because no consensus existed on which projects to prioritize.

According to a study by CMI in 2007,⁸¹ traditional mechanisms have resisted change as, in

many villages, traditionally influential persons were the ones elected to the CDC. Only the second round of elections—currently under way in many NSP villages—will reveal if their influence has been reduced, or if access to external funding and training through the NSP has enhanced their standing within their communities.⁸²

Some respondents remarked that NSP “brought corruption even to the community level”:

*NSP is a good program on paper but the problem is that while before corruption was in the government departments, it has now come down to the village level with CDC members taking shares and bribes. A significant number of CDC members are former commanders that got elected because the population is still afraid of them. At night, there is no control of the government, which is why they got elected.*⁸³

In some cases, the influx of financial resources and other opportunities for extortion and misappropriation have created conflicts. FP staff is often said to be part of set-ups in which community block grants are siphoned off with fake paperwork, unsavory deals are made with contractors, or contracts are “facilitated” to friends.

Delays in the disbursement of community block grants to be spent on small-scale projects have caused some destabilization in Faryab in the past. For example, when expected block grants didn’t come through, several communities thought that particular NGOs had stolen the money; their staff members were called liars and stones were thrown at them. The NGOs didn’t help matters by putting the blame on the government, which undermined the NGOs’ position in the villages. When in 2005 the funds started flowing again, these problems faded away.

While indications are unclear whether the NSP has actually increased stability, and the picture on either the consolidation or transformation of local power dynamics is mixed, the NSP is the primary development program receiving a positive assessment by Afghans in Faryab. As such, lessons can be learned from its methodology and implementation.

⁸¹ Bauck, et al., *Afghanistan: An Assessment of Conflict and Actors*.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Interview with Afghan UN employee, April 18, 2009.

6. Local Stabilization Initiatives: Peace And Reconciliation Association

Photo: Author



Village in Pashtun Kot

One initiative that has had a positive impact on stability in the province is the Peace and Reconciliation Association (PRA). It is particularly noteworthy as it offers a relative “success story” and a number of insights that are relevant in understanding how stability could be achieved in these specific contexts. As will be elaborated upon below, the PRA played a key role in largely political processes that increased stability in certain areas of Faryab, with a small or often even no role for aid.

On the International Day of Peace,⁸⁴ September 21, 2007, a ceremony at the provincial governor’s office established this voluntary organization to prevent and mediate conflicts. Members selected to work for the PRA constituted a wide array of high-profile and influential individuals from the Provincial Council (PC), main political parties (Jumbish and Jamiat), and the *ulama* (both Sunni and Shia). They included former government officials, intellectuals, elders, and a “former” commander. UNAMA represents the international community as an observing member of the PRA.

⁸⁴ Established by UN resolution in 1981, International Day of Peace is celebrated annually on September 21 for the purpose of “commemorating and strengthening the ideals of peace both within and among all nations and peoples.”

Box 3: Goals of the Peace and Reconciliation Association (PRA)

The PRA had four goals⁸⁵:

1. Disarmament and disbandment of armed groups. The PRA was first and foremost set up to assist the government in establishing rule of law, specifically by dealing with the issue of commanders and illegal armed groups (IAGs) and thereby strengthening the government's ability to execute the largely ineffective DIAG program. The PRA encourages commanders and IAGs to disband and hand in their weapons and ammunition. It also works to end commanders' illegal taxation of the local population in the form of *uzhr* and *zakaat*.
2. De-escalating and solving conflict. The PRA sees a role for itself in de-escalating potential conflict and upheaval between political parties and ethnic groups as well as preventing illegal demonstrations.
3. Drug eradication. The PRA campaigns to eradicate poppy cultivation and drug trafficking (as well as the weapons trade).
4. Awareness raising and propaganda. The PRA raises awareness on basic rights and freedoms (human rights), criticizing those elements and actions that pose an obstacle to peace and stability and providing a counterweight to the propaganda of anti-government groups.

The PRA has been most successful at addressing the issues of commanders and IAGs. Factional conflicts and the behavior of individual commanders pose the most imminent threats to security in Faryab.⁸⁶ Commanders' involvement in illegal taxation, extortion, robberies, and drug trafficking, as well as armed clashes between commanders over these sources of revenue, undermine stability and are a burden for the population. In the words of one PRA member, "the PRA is especially effective in problems with commanders because of the *tanzim* influence, but also because commanders are divided and often isolated. The PRA is united and has government and PRT support."⁸⁷

In Kata Qala, an area in Pashtun Kot District, commander Shamal was taxing the local population, forcing them to work for him, and using arbitrary detention and torture in his private prisons, as one community member explained:

Shamal collected 10 percent of people's income and forced people to work for him to construct houses and

*bring water. He also had his own unofficial court and took money from both sides; the one that gave the most money was privileged in the decision. When one person in the area killed someone else, instead of going to the government who would put the killer in prison, Shamal decided that the person's daughter or sister should be given to him in turn for protection. But not even as an official wife, dishonoring the family, but what can they do?*⁸⁸

Meanwhile, Shamal (linked to Jumbish-i Milli) was in conflict with another commander, Khalifa Saleh (Hizb-i Azadi), over control of the Kata Qala valley, leading to armed clashes from August 2006 onwards. Reportedly, around 300 men took part in these fights that left fourteen dead (including four persons not involved in the fighting) and an unidentified number of people wounded while hundreds fled the area to the provincial center. According to respondents from the area, the few police in the area lacked the resources to arrest the commanders and agreed to a "protocol" with the two commanders not to

⁸⁵ Interview with PRA members, April 14, 2009; April 18, 2009; June 9, 2009; and June 10, 2009.

⁸⁶ See Section 4 for a discussion on perceptions of insecurity.

⁸⁷ Interview with PRA member, June 6, 2009.

⁸⁸ Interview with community member in Kata Qala, May 26, 2009.

intervene in exchange for being left alone. An arrest warrant was eventually issued for Shamal, but attempts to arrest him were fruitless. He escaped the scene, returning when the police had left the area.

In October 2008, ANSF and ISAF felt forced to intervene, but the PRA suggested trying informal reconciliation through dialogue first. Meetings were organized with both commanders and discussions held with local communities. After joint pressure from the PRA, ANSF, and ISAF, Shamal and Khalifa Saleh surrendered, were put in some sort of very liberal detention under the “control” of the government in Maimana, and were prohibited from going to Kata Qala. Efforts were made to gather up weapons, although only a token sixty-eight weapons have been collected.

Since the (at least temporary) end of armed conflict in Kata Qala, with these commanders barred from the area, residents have become more at ease. A police checkpoint was installed for a couple of months to guarantee security, but also to convince the population that the government took security seriously. In addition, emergency food rations have been distributed and a school (named Solh, “peace” in Dari) was built to demonstrate that with improved security, more development projects can be implemented. As an additional benefit of increased security, NSP started implementation in the area. The PRA’s intervention, backed by the ANSF, had significantly improved security and increased trust in the government in Kata Qala for a period of about two years.⁸⁹

Similar gains have been made in Belcheragh and Gurziwan, where the PRA has played an important role in convincing local (but low-level) commanders to hand in their weapons to the government. Over 100 weapons and an undetermined amount of ammunition have been collected through DIAG in these districts. In addition, the PRA facilitated the return of Hashim Habibi’s sympathizers to Gurziwan, after mediating in a conflict between supporters of

commander Majeed Khan, whose father had been killed by Hashim Habibi. As one PRA member described it,

We argued that jorm [revenge] in Islam is against the individual culprit, and could therefore only be taken on Hashim Habibi personally. This calmed down the situation and made it safe enough for Habibi’s supporters to return. We also stayed a couple of days to convince those involved and make sure that promises were kept. This conflict had both an ethnic as well as a tanzim dimension; we argued that both groups are Muslims and that Islam preaches unity amongst Muslims, the real enemy are the Taliban.⁹⁰

In June 2009, the leader of Hizb-i Azadi, General Malik, came to Shirin Tagab to commemorate Rasul Pahlawan in a religious ceremony. As Malik and Hizb-i Azadi enjoy little popular support in the province, except for a pocket of constituents in Shirin Tagab, this event upset people, especially the community of Kohi Sayed, whose family members had been killed by Rasul Pahlawan and who had already been organizing a demonstration. Meanwhile Faizabad (the venue) was full of posters of Dostum and Rasul Pahlawan. Cognizant of the risk of escalation, the provincial governor requested the PRA to go to Faizabad prior to the event and appeal to representatives of both parties to calm fears. In the end, the ceremony went on without any incidents, which can be attributed to the preventative talks held by the PRA.



Photo: Author

Secondary road just outside of Maimana

⁸⁹ In recent months, both Shamal and Khalifa Saleh have returned to the area and fighting has recommenced since November 20, 2010, after a brother of Shamal was killed, allegedly by Khalifa Saleh.

⁹⁰ Interview with PRA member, Maimana, June 9, 2009.

In addition, the PRA has also played a role in solving a number of smaller problems between communities mostly concerning access to pasture land.

6.1 Approach and effectiveness of the PRA

The examples above shed light on some of the success stories from the PRA. From these, certain characteristics of its approach can be understood and reasons for its success can be distilled.

To begin with, as a voluntary organization outside the state structure (though working closely with government), the PRA is an example of civil-society involvement in stabilization.⁹¹ The argument has often been made that Afghanistan's tribal and community structures have eroded over the years,⁹² which in turn has significantly reduced their capacity to resolve conflicts. The PRA is composed of influential individuals from a range of backgrounds who can make use of political (*tanzim*) affiliations, ethnic and *qawm*⁹³ influences, and membership of the *ulama*. Although some members have government affiliations, the PRA as a whole is not perceived to act in favor of one particular faction. Most, if not all, factions are included in the PRA, rendering it much more representative of the political scene in Faryab than is the government. These different sections of Faryab's civil society come together in the PRA, filling the gap between the government and local *shuras* composed of community elders, constituting a civil society alternative for conflict resolution.

Historical power struggles and animosities between different ethnic groups remain a major factor of instability in Faryab province; the diverse representation of ethnic groups (Uzbek, Tajik, Pashtun, and Arab members) with the PRA contributes to its relative success. With key

leaders and individuals from almost all major ethnic groups united in an apparently cohesive group working towards common goals of peace and stability, the PRA can credibly appeal to different ethnic groups.

The government of Afghanistan in general and certain individuals in Faryab's local administration in particular are often perceived to be part of the conflict rather than neutral arbitrators. Factional politics are played out within the provincial administration and disarmament and arrests have been used to settle old scores, marginalize rivals, and redefine the balance of power. Government intervention is therefore viewed with skepticism. The PRA functions as an impartial mediator between commanders and communities, but also as an intermediary between the local administration and the population. The inclusion of senior figures from both Jumbish and Jamiat seems to have had a significant positive impact on its perceived impartiality. It has the added benefit of being removed from the corrupt reputation of the local government, specifically the courts, and it can solve problems more rapidly as it is not hampered by cumbersome bureaucratic procedures.

Locally rooted civil society organizations such as the PRA understand how to use culturally appropriate modes of communication to reach workable agreements. The key difference with Western legal code, though, is that there are no winners and losers in such a settlement. The main aim is to reach a workable agreement, not dogmatic adherence to a specific set of rules. Settlements brokered by the PRA have so far resulted in better solutions acceptable to all parties in the conflict. The inclusion of important members of the Faryab *ulama* adds to the (religious) legitimacy of the association in a society that attaches much importance to religion

⁹¹ As it is beyond the scope of this study to provide an elaborate discussion of the concept of civil society, the definition proposed by Anheier and Carlson of the Centre for Civil Society at the London School of Economics will be used: "Civil society is the sphere of institutions, organisations and individuals located among the family, the state and the market, in which people associate voluntarily to advance common interests."

Helmut K. Anheier, "How to Measure Civil Society" (London School of Economics). Retrieved from <http://fathom.lse.ac.uk/features/122552/>.

⁹² Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002). Gilles Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending: Afghanistan, 1979 to the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). Translated from French by John King.

⁹³ *Qawm*, derived from Arabic, roughly translates as "tribe" or "solidarity group."



Photo: Author

Maimana

and facilitates the use of an Islamic discourse that can work as a unifying factor. The PRA also utilizes discourse to convince parties in conflict to lay down their arms by emphasizing the prospects of increased development as a reward for increased security. With superior rhetorical skills (highly valued in Afghan culture), members of the PRA demonstrate that dialogue for reconciliation can be successful in the Afghan context.

In all its activities, the PRA aims to enhance the local administration's legitimacy and outreach, not undermine it. The association thus focuses on solving problems within its realm of responsibility and leaves smaller problems to be solved by local *shuras* and elders. Moreover, the PRA only commences its activities when requested to by the government. In the field, government bodies such as the ANP assist the PRA with security, food, and accommodation. This approach can therefore be typified as reactive rather than proactive, focusing on immediate problem-solving and conflict resolution rather than conflict prevention.⁹⁴

Results have been achieved in solving inter-community conflict and tackling issues with local commanders and illegal arms and ammunition; little evidence exists, however, that PRA activities have decreased drug cultivation and

trafficking, which was explicit in its terms of reference. The counter-narcotics minister in 2008 and UNODC in 2009 have declared Faryab "poppy-free." But isolating the PRA's activities from other influencing factors (such as stricter enforcement of the law, market price fluctuations, climatological factors leading to bad harvests, etc.) is difficult and would require additional research.

While a significant part of the PRA's success is based on the status and influence embodied in its individual members, this can be a liability at the same time. Different political agendas are present within the PRA and whereas members get along on a personal level with a great deal of apparent mutual respect, external developments in Faryab's volatile socio-political context can put severe strains on their working relationships. This is especially risky since the political scene in Faryab has a limited number of players, but loyalties and allegiances are dynamic. An example of how external developments may impede PRA's ability to work was the leadership crisis in Faryab's PC. This clash between two members, Faroukh Shah Jenab and Sayed Salahudin, seriously affected the PRA for nine months, as the head of the PC is simultaneously the head of the PRA. However, in the end, the other members were able to solve the conflict between the two factions, and Jenab was reinstated as the head of the PC and PRA.

⁹⁴ Exceptions exist, such as the previously mentioned Faizabad incident.

The association seems to have the right group of people to fulfill its mandate, but its composition also poses limits on what it can achieve. The PRA has been particularly effective in solving problems with commanders—which can largely be attributed to *tanzim* influence (prominent Jumbishis and Jamiatis are members),⁹⁵ but less effective in curbing the influence of and infiltration by the Taliban in areas such as Qaisar, Northern Almar, Jalaier, and Khwoja Namusa. The PRA has only one Pashtun member, an intellectual from Afghan Kot (district center of Pashtun Kot, attached to Maimana), who is widely respected, but not seen as representing Pashtuns as a whole. This marginal representation arguably limits the PRA's ability to have an impact in predominantly Pashtun areas. Much to its credit, though, the PRA has invited tribal leaders from Pashtun areas to Maimana to enhance their relationship with the government and has delivered speeches at public gatherings and Friday prayers in Qaisar to counter Taliban and anti-government propaganda.

The security situation has steadily deteriorated over the last several years in Qaisar, and in the spring of 2007, key elders from the area gathered for a meeting with government representatives in which the government urged them to take responsibility for security in their area and the PRA convinced communities to refuse to pay *uzhr* and *zakaat* to the Taliban. Initially, communities indeed refused to pay, but without government support to guarantee security, they saw no other choice than to comply with the demands of the Taliban in face of increased intimidation.

Achieved stability can also be fragile if government follow-up is lacking. In Kata Qala, for example, although Khalifa Saleh no longer had any influence, interviews with respondents from and experts on the area have indicated that Shamal's constituents were still active there. Continued ANP presence and government attention is needed to safeguard the security gains made by the settlement negotiated by the PRA.

The PRA would perhaps not have been as successful in Kata Qala were it not for the threat of ANSF and ISAF intervention. Balancing how the PRA relates to government is tricky; as argued above, one of the reasons why it is trusted by the local population and has the clout to negotiate with spoilers is its perceived impartiality. However, this can be lost as soon as the PRA is too closely associated with the government's agenda. Too much distance from the government on the other hand, can make the local administration appear weak in the eyes of the population.

For civil society initiatives to be successful, however, the government needs to show a corresponding commitment. The government and international community must provide political space to organizations. But without a concomitant effort from the government (especially to provide the necessary security), civil society initiatives such as those initiated by the PRA in Qaisar cannot be effective and as a result may actually undermine the government and erode its legitimacy. In addition, the relationship between the PRA and the provincial governor (supported by a number of parliamentarians in Kabul) has at times been problematic, with the governor fearing that this body of influential Faryabis would undermine his own authority in the province. A clear sign of this was a letter he sent to the PRA indicating that their services were no longer needed, after which he called on them again to help de-escalate the situation in Faizabad because of the commemoration of Rasul Pahlawan, as described above.⁹⁶

The PRA has contributed significantly to stability in the province by influencing the political processes surrounding stabilization. With an elaborate contextual understanding and composition of key individuals with access to the most relevant networks in the province, the PRA has been able to address some of the root causes of instability with tailored solutions. The fact that their successes were mainly in the political sphere is a valuable insight on how stability in these particular contexts can be achieved.

⁹⁵ One could argue that the PRA lacks Hizb-i Azadi representation, though this party is a spin-off of Jumbish.

⁹⁶ Interview with Afghan aid workers, January 14, 2009; April 7, 2009; and April 9, 2009.

7. Ghormach District Case Study

Photo: Author



The bridge over the Maimana River

Ghormach is included as a mini case study in this research because it has been identified as one of the “focus” or “swing” districts in the UNAMA-led Integrated Approach described above. In addition, the Norwegian government has invested a large amount of money (approximately \$4.5 million at the time of research) in aid activities in the district under the rationale that increased aid will lead to increased stability.

Because of security restrictions in the field, only a limited number of interviews could be held with respondents from Ghormach who were able to travel to Maimana and Qaisar. This section therefore relies significantly on the experiences of development and political actors in Maimana who

have been involved in outreach to this district since November 2007 (date of the joint needs assessment by UNAMA and other actors). Extensive literature research was done to supplement these interviews and to provide a solid contextual analysis to portray the complexity of the district and the interventions that have taken place there.

7.1 Background⁹⁷

Ghormach District is situated in the northeastern corner of Badghis Province,⁹⁸ bordering Turkmenistan to the north, the Faryab districts of Almar to the east and Qaisar to the south, and the Badghis district of Bala Murghab on its southern

⁹⁷ This section draws heavily on material prepared by Mervyn Patterson.

⁹⁸ Ghormach District has been administratively attached to Faryab Province but as this transfer is officially only temporary, Ghormach is referred to here as part of Badghis Province.

and western flanks. It is a peripheral district in many senses. It has poor infrastructure and topography of endless undulating hills that hinder access in any direction, is distant from the provincial center, has a history of very limited government services, and has a marginal economic base of rain-fed-cereal cultivation and animal husbandry, with sections of the population being short-range transhumant pastoralists.

Adjoining Bala Murghab District will also be discussed, as it is similar to Ghormach in terms of its population profile, history of settlement, and recent political history. The population of Ghormach is almost exclusively Pashtun and it forms, along with Bala Murghab, a distinct enclave within an otherwise largely non-Pashtun area. Within the district, small populations of Turkmen, Uzbeks, and Aimaqs exist but are numerically insignificant. These Pashtuns descended from those who settled—or who were forcibly settled—in the region in the late 1800s as a result of state policy during Amir Abdur Rahman Khan's reign to populate sensitive northern frontier areas with people from the south who identified with the central state and to turn disaffected tribes in potentially hostile areas into supporters of the government. This policy had the additional benefit of removing troublesome groups from the south.

The Ghormach Pashtun community has three main tribal groupings: the Achikzai, Zamandzai, and Tokhi, the latter being subdivided into Lamahr, Nurkhail, and Piruzzai. Each tribe occupies relatively distinct areas, with little mixed settlement of the core tribes.⁹⁹ Very small numbers of minority tribes (Alizai, Sin, Tunzai, and Musazai) are scattered throughout. The district's population is estimated at 52,000 people distributed through eleven *mantiqas*¹⁰⁰ and 101 villages¹⁰¹ although immunization figures would suggest a higher figure.

7.2 Political overview

Before 2001

Badghis Province, Ghormach and Bala Murghab Districts in particular, experienced conflict during all phases of the war. They experienced the normal pattern of *mujahidin* activity during the 1979–92 *jihad*, with all Sunni *mujahidin* parties represented in the area. The strongest of these were Jamiat, Hizb-i Islami (Hekmatyar) and Harakat-i Inqilab-i Islami, though the latter was gradually eclipsed as occurred elsewhere during the war. The peripheral location of Badghis, and the length of logistics lines from Pakistan for the *mujahidin* and from Herat for the government, did not significantly alter the pattern of the war, with the towns and roads remaining under government control and the hinterland falling to the *mujahidin*. Organizationally, the province fell within the sphere of the *mujahidin* fronts based in Herat Province—most notably the Jamiat front of Ismail Khan. The Najibullah government fell in 1992, and by 1994 the province became the front-line between Jamiat under Ismail Khan and Jumbish under Dostum in what was simultaneously a local, regional, and national-level conflict. Both parties had local support. The conflict raged until, and actually facilitated, the fall of Herat to the Taliban in 1995. The Taliban moved unopposed northeast into Badghis the following year after it had been occupied by Jumbish.

At that stage many of the local Pashtun commanders, including those from displaced communities from Faryab, aligned themselves with the Taliban. Ghormach and Bala Murghab remained the frontline, though this time between the Taliban and Jumbish. Again, each side had its local commanders. The conflict was, however, gaining an ethnic complexion—Pashtun Taliban against non-Pashtun, predominantly Uzbek Jumbish, in spite of Badghis Pashtuns in the ranks of the latter (e.g., Maulawi Tank). As Jumbish advanced, it displaced Pashtuns westward. In

⁹⁹ The Achikzai inhabit Qala-i-Wali, Torjar, Langari, Khaton, and Shadikam; the Zamandzai inhabit the areas in the center and north of the district, including Petaw; the Tokhi-Nurkhail inhabit areas south and east of the *woleswali* center, Teznawa village, and towards Shakh in Faryab; the Tokhi-Lamahr inhabit areas east of the *woleswali* center; and the Tokhi-Piruzzai inhabit areas further east towards Qaisar (Ghallim Bolagh).

¹⁰⁰ Literally 'area', *mantiqa* refers to a spatial unit below the district level but above the village level that a local population identifies with. *Mantiqas* are often clusters of villages along a shared water resource or sharing a Friday mosque.

¹⁰¹ Central Statistics Office and UNFPA. *A Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile* (2007). The caveats mentioned earlier about population statistics in Afghanistan apply.

1997, the basis of the conflict broadened as Jamiat, including Ismail Khan himself who was until then in exile in Iran, formally joined it. The previous military stalemate did not, however, change significantly. Preceding their first entry into Mazar in May 1997, the Taliban were permitted to move from Badghis into the north proper, though the battle lines returned as the alliance between the Taliban and Malik, the coup leader, collapsed. Heavy fighting in early 1998 saw the Taliban reach Qaisar—the scene of widespread killing of civilians—and, in August 1998, reach Maimana, the first domino to fall in the collapse of the north.

The Taliban period of rule in the north (1998–2001) witnessed a deepening of the ethnic dimension of the conflict and widespread violence against the non-Pashtun population in southern Badghis. While the uplands of southern Badghis held out against the Taliban, conflict was limited. Ghormach remained stable during this period, and Badghis Taliban were relatively prominent within the Taliban military and civilian administration throughout the north from then until 2001.

Instability after 2001

With the fall of the Taliban, the two provinces saw Jamiat commanders reasserting themselves, the most prominent being the Naibzades, Aimaqs from Qala-i Now. Many of the former Taliban commanders returned home, although some senior ones left the country for Pakistan. Until 2006, the situation was superficially stable, though this belied reality. A moderate level of abuse against communities perceived as formerly pro-Taliban, a general perception of their exclusion on ethnic grounds, and the absence of the state created the conditions for reactivating anti-government activity. In general, the weak government security apparatus created a permissive environment. As the weaknesses of the state became increasingly apparent, reports of open Taliban activity started to emerge from northern Badghis and from among the Pashtun communities of southwestern Faryab. During

2006, Badghis Taliban, most notably Maulawi Abdur Rahman Haqqani, recommenced political activities.

Maulawi Abdur Rahman Haqqani, an Alizai Pashtun from Ghormach, was at that juncture the province's most prominent Taliban figure. During the Taliban period, he served as the governor of Ghor Province, and earned a positive reputation locally. He left for Pakistan as the Taliban fell, and reemerged as a commander in Kandahar leading a mixed group of Ghor and Badghis Taliban in 2006. After the Kandahar conflict of summer 2006 he returned to Ghormach, where he was subsequently given formal responsibility for Badghis and Ghor, and was given the task by the Quetta Shura¹⁰² to reactivate the Badghis front.¹⁰³ By late 2006, he and Mullah Bahaii had invited ex-Taliban commanders to rejoin them. They intimidated government officials, which led to a collapse of morale, the desertion of posts, and the further attenuation of the limited government presence in the area. By the end of 2006 all non-local government staff had fled.

The subsequent expansion of Taliban activity followed a predictable trajectory. In early 2007, they commenced *chiriki* or guerrilla activities, including attacks on the police and supporters of the local administration. At this stage nothing deterred their expansion and they were essentially unopposed; the district was inaccessible in practical terms to the PRT and the ANA based in Qala-i Now. In June 2007, they launched, under the leadership of Maulawi Abdur Rahman, coordinated attacks on Ghormach and Bala Murghab district centers, thereby displaying an increased organizational capacity and willingness to undertake significant operations. The summer and fall saw a further increase in conflict, with another attack on Bala Murghab center in September, IED attacks on the ANP, and attacks on the Chinese company working on the Qaisar-Ghormach stretch of the ring road.

¹⁰² Located in its namesake capital of Balochistan (Pakistan), the Quetta Shura is said to be the highest-level Taliban council, boasting the top leadership of the movement, and headed by Mullah Mohammad Omar.

¹⁰³ The group that re-formed around him included Mawlawi Adam Khan (Achikzai from Boqan, Ghormach), Mawlawi Rahmatullah (Ghormach), Mullah Bahaii (Amonzai-Alizai, Murghab), Mullah Badarr (Alizai, Sang-I Otish), and Mullah Said Ali Shah Agha (Ghormach).



Part of Maimana, aerial view

By the fall of 2007, ISAF was compelled to act in response to the increasing Taliban activities in Faryab, which was an obvious spillover from Badghis. The impetus for action emanated from the Norwegian PRT in Maimana and the German Regional Command North based in Mazar, not the Spanish PRT based in Qala-i Now or its command based in Regional Command West, Herat. Their concern mirrored that of many Faryabis and many other communities in Badghis who viewed the unchecked ascendance of the Taliban with justifiable concern. For example, the Daudi Aimaqs from Jawand who had come under attack petitioned for arms for self-defense. While an ISAF-ANA operation (Harakat-i Jolo) conducted in October-November 2007 was presented as a tactical success, it was generally viewed as a strategic failure: the majority of the Taliban had opted not to fight and relocated to higher ground. ISAF and ANA forces were in the field for only a short period, leaving the Taliban largely unaffected and able to return once they withdrew. They failed to meet one of the objectives of the operation—to generate the space for reconstruction activity—as the security situation remained unstable. Repeat operations have been necessary—in May 2008 (Operation Karez) and October 2008—and the level of

Taliban activity has both increased and become increasingly brazen in nature, further testifying to the operation's lack of impact. It was, however, not simply a failure of ISAF's counterinsurgency strategy. Repeating a pattern commonly seen through other parts of the country, the government left out several critical components: it did not take advantage of the opportunity to deploy acceptable local security forces, perform political outreach, or revitalize the Ghormach administration.

ISAF operations paralleled ANP's defensive deployment from Faryab and Mazar, both within western Faryab and into Ghormach, with the approval of the minister of the interior. As Faryab did not have a *kita muntazira* or "standby unit," a temporary force was formed by taking five policemen from each district under Akbar Batosh, the district chief of police from Qaramqul, Andkhoy. These were deployed to Ghormach. ANP personnel from the 01 Kita Muntazira, then based in Mazar under Khair Muhammad Chirik from Kalafghan, were also deployed to protect the Qaisar-Ghormach road construction project. As both units were predominantly Uzbek, this aggravated the situation bilaterally; they drew criticism on ethnic grounds as the area had a history of Uzbek-Pashtun conflict and they were reportedly heavy-handed. And, as they came under attack by the Taliban, and lost personnel, anti-Pashtun sentiments started to harden in Faryab. By summer 2008, the Ministry of the Interior approved the recruitment of an eighty-man force within Ghormach¹⁰⁴ to be appended to the 01Kita Muntazira and given the responsibility for local route security within Ghormach.

In spite of attention being drawn to the area, throughout much of 2007 the situation highlighted the need for political engagement and outreach. In spite of military operations (arguably due in some part to the failure of previous military operations), the position of the Taliban continued to strengthen in 2008. They were by this stage in control of sizeable uncontested areas (much of the hinterland of Bala Murghab and Ghormach) and continued to attack security forces.

¹⁰⁴ It was established under a former Jamiat Taliban, Police Commander Sayed Gul, an Achikzai from Qala-i Wali.

In 2008, however, internal divisions surfaced within the Taliban. These were not ideological but personal, focusing on power and authority at the provincial level. The rising power was Maulawi Dastigir, a Nurzai and a Quetta-Madrassa-educated Talib from Murghab. While well respected as a commander, he had excessive aspirations of leadership. Maulawi Abdur Rahman Haqqani, who had high-level political responsibilities as well as operational ones, had spent some of 2007 in Pakistan, and his absence clearly encouraged others to assert themselves. With increasing conflict, opportunities arose for others to prove themselves and assert claims to positions based on their military role and performance. By the fall, Maulawi Dastigir started to act autonomously and spoke to the media in November 2007. A clear split crystallized between him and Maulawi Abdur Rahman Haqqani, the shadow governor, and his deputy Maulawi Jamaluddin, also a Nurzai from Buzboy, Murghab. When Maulawi Dastigir was arrested in Herat in March the following year, suspicions were strong that Maulawi Abdur Rahman Haqqani had betrayed him.

Other internal tensions surfaced, generally precipitated by resource issues. As with the Taliban elsewhere, the allocation of both internal and external resources is invariably divisive. Those commanders who fight the most and those who claim the most men under arms rarely receive commensurate support. Maulawi Abdur Rahman himself was injured—five others were killed—in an internal clash with Mullah Ahmad Wardak in April 2008. Mullah Wardak, an Achikzai from Jar-i Siah, collected *zakaat* in the name of the Taliban from the area he controlled, and refused to hand the *zakaat* over to Maulawi Abdur Rahman. Mullah Wardak was arrested, and subsequently released. He realigned with the government in August 2008 and is currently living in Maimana. Maulawi Abdur Rahman was sent to Pakistan for treatment but has since returned to Ghormach. Other inter-group clashes—often fatal—have been commonplace and have arisen from conflict over the division of spoils from attacks. Estimates are that over forty ANP and ANA vehicles are in the hands of the

Taliban now, and disputes have often occurred over their allocation.

During the summer of 2008, with Maulawi Abdur Rahman Haqqani in Pakistan receiving medical treatment and Maulawi Dastigir in jail, the former's deputy, Maulawi Jamaluddin, along with Maulawi Amiruddin (Zamandzai from Qala-i Wali) assumed control. Conflict intensified into the fall—with frequent ambushes in Ghormach—as did the use of air power in support of ISAF and ANA (in Qala-i Qali in October and Jar-i Siah and Khwaja Langeri in November, with the latter strike reportedly having killed a number of civilians, including two sons of Amir Tawakal, a PC member).

In what has been suggested was an ill-conceived attempt to divide the Taliban, the government released Maulawi Dastigir from jail in September. This came after the district's elders¹⁰⁵ resolutely lobbied the president. Plausibly, his release was less a tactic and more a case of President Karzai trying to broaden his support. The elders of Bala Murghab stood as guarantors for his behavior, and agreed to ensure that no attacks would happen on the road and to prevent Taliban attacks on government personnel and the security forces. Maulawi Dastigir reverted to type almost immediately, however, and gave an interview in which he excoriated Karzai and thanked the Taliban for paying the necessary bribes to facilitate his release.

The effect of his release on relations with the local Taliban is unclear, although credible reports say that he was appointed, by Bala Murghab Taliban, as the provincial head—the shadow *wali* (provincial governor)—with Maulawi Jamaluddin as his deputy. Reportedly, the Quetta Shura endorsed the appointment, although whether Maulawi Abdur Rahman Haqqani endorsed or opposed this move, and the effects it had on internal rifts within the Badghis Taliban, is not clear.

The strength of the Taliban reached its peak towards the end of 2008. Ambushes on national and international security forces became frequent

¹⁰⁵ Maulawi Dastigir's uncle is one of the most prominent elders in the district.

in Ghormach and Bala Murghab and IEDs were widely used. The ANP incurred many casualties that, as most were local Aimaqs and Tajiks, further accentuated ethnic hostility. The road construction project was attacked and three road engineers were kidnapped—and one murdered—by Maulawi Amiruddin in November 2008. At the same time, Maulawi Dastigir and Maulawi Rahmatullah ambushed an ANA/ANP convoy traveling from Qala-i Now to the Bala Murghab area. It killed thirteen ANA, wounded eleven, and left sixteen unaccounted for. This provoked a significant reaction; ISAF and the ANA went on the offensive and inflicted heavy losses of the Taliban, including Maulawi Dastigir who was killed in an air strike in February 2009. However, the Bala Murghab elders who had stood as guarantors for Maulawi Dastigir were never held accountable.

While the Taliban obviously suffered losses they retain control over large areas. They have now reverted to small-group operations and have control of territory relatively close to the district center.

7.3 Drivers of insecurity

Social fragmentation

Similar to Faryab Province as described above, one of the most important drivers of insecurity in Ghormach District is the high degree of social fragmentation along tribal, political, and factional lines. Ghormach is characterized by pronounced inter- and intra-tribal splits, many of which have political dimensions. While commonalities can be found, in terms of a generalized alienation from the central government (something that is not necessarily ethno-specific) and a generalized sense of grievance and mistrust among the Pashtun dominant population vis-à-vis the Tajik and Aimaq population, the unity of political orientation and action that these have generated is relatively superficial. Internal splits run deep and affect both the pro-government camp and the pro-Taliban one. The main macro-level split is between the Zamandzai and Achikzai. This split recently manifested itself in the pro-government camp, in which Qari Dawlat (Tokhi-Nurkhail)—

with the active support of MP Haji Mullah Abdullah (Achikzai) who was responsible for organizing lobbying in Kabul—opposed Abdullah Jan (Zamandzai) who was occupying the position of *woleswal* (district governor). This split in the pro-government camp continues until today. Internal tribal unity is limited, and tribal identity does not act as a determinant of political orientation—all tribes have supporters with the Taliban and with the government. Intra-tribal splits abound—within Achikzai along former *tanzim* lines (Jamiat, Hizb-i Islami, Harakat Inqilab), within Lamahr along personality lines (resulting in a number of recent assassinations), and within the Tokhi-Nurkhail along personal and *tanzim* lines.

Most networks, both pro- and anti-government, are involved in criminal activity, principally drug smuggling. As elsewhere in the country, within this fragmented structure, with its array of political players of more-or-less equal stature, the influence of any one player is highly restricted. While the political situation might appear simpler than in other places (e.g., Bala Murghab) because there are only three large tribal groups rather than numerous small ones, this belies the reality, as the relations between these tribes are troubled and there are numerous personal conflicts between the various local strongmen.

The tribal system provides an element of stability and resilience in times of turmoil or when state authority has disappeared.¹⁰⁶ To the Pashtuns it means relative safety, legal security, and social orientation in an otherwise chaotic and anarchic world. Glatzer has also argued that, whereas tribal divisions are structurally stable, because of the egalitarian nature of the tribal system, its leadership is not. Tribal leaders need to continuously convince constituents of their legitimacy through redistributing external resources, providing security, and lavishing hospitality, rendering the authority of this leadership extremely volatile to change. It is also widely believed that insurgents can more easily infiltrate and establish themselves in areas lacking tribal unity.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Berndt Glatzer, *The Pashtun Tribal System*, in *Concepts of Tribal Society*, eds. G. Pfeffer and D.K. Behera, *Contemporary Society: Tribal Studies*, Vol. 5. (New Delhi: Concept Publishers, 2002), Chapter 10, pp. 265–282.

¹⁰⁷ Glatzer, *The Pashtun Tribal System*.

However, traditional tribal leadership in Ghormach, as throughout much of the country, has eroded significantly. The egalitarian nature of the tribal system also leads to competition over authority and leadership, which can have negative impacts on local stability. As noted by a UN official,

*Elders can do a great deal in solving local conflicts and containing the Taliban if tribal, family, and community relations exist, but because of constant competition for influence they often aggravate problems to serve their own political agendas.*¹⁰⁸

Military operations

Another destabilizing factor in Ghormach is the military operations that purportedly try to achieve long-term stability. These operations generally conjure up a counter reaction. Operation Harakate Jolo (October and November 2007) led to a vacuum that was filled by the Ghormach Shura, but the subsequent military operation, Karez (May 2008), took place during the *shura*'s "watch" and delayed development activities by two months, resulting in local resentment when the promised aid didn't materialize. Both operations were termed as successes by ISAF and ANSF, but voices on the ground claim lasting results haven't materialized. Typically, insurgents took to higher ground and waited out military operations, only to return afterwards. The last operation, Tofan (May 2009) has been perceived as more successful because police posts were subsequently established along the ring road safeguarding the gains made during the operations (although the achievements were limited to the areas around the district center and ring road trajectory). The military had agreed after the first two operations to refrain from making further military pushes in Ghormach unless the ANP was able to establish permanent posts and hold the area. However, this was only accomplished through a last-minute arrangement for temporary (not yet permanent) police posts.

During Operation Tofan, Faryab saw more incidents in Almar, Qaisar, and along its own stretch of the ring road in Dawlatabad, Khwoja Sabz Posh, and Shirin Tagab. This coincided with the run up to the presidential election, which was perceived nationwide as a prime reason for the increase in violent incidents but was also seen as

an attempt by the insurgency to divert attention from Ghormach by engaging security forces on multiple fronts. The insurgency's efforts to destabilize the north have had serious consequences for Ghormach as, being the "gateway to the north," it is being used as both a refuge and a staging area for other attacks throughout the northwestern region.

The increase in Taliban activity has had an impact on reconstruction activity, as all NGOs operational in Ghormach have withdrawn on the grounds of actual or predicted deterioration. These include Coordination of Afghan Relief (COAR), Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR), World Vision, Ockenden International, and Alisei; BRAC also withdrew but now operates remotely from Qala-i Now. BRAC originally wanted to implement the NSP in Bala Murghab and Ghormach but revised its plans in light of the deteriorating security. (Ockenden International previously established thirty-five community development committees in Bala Murghab but then withdrew after an attack on its office.) Government presence in Ghormach since 2001 has been limited mostly to the district center and surroundings, while factional, tribal, and inter-personal conflicts have undermined the stability and effectiveness of the district administration. In addition, the Taliban intimidates and targets government officials, further hampering the functioning of the administration. Examples of such incidents are the kidnapping of the district-police logistics officer in July 2007 and of the district governor (*woleswal*) in August the same year. A number of government officials left their posts (and sometimes the district) as a result of this intimidation.

Because of Ghormach's strategic importance as the "gateway to the north" and the spillover effects being felt in Faryab, ISAF and ANSF took action through operation Harakate Jolo in November 2007. Realizing that military means alone could not solve the district's problems, the provincial office of UNAMA initiated an outreach program inspired by the Zadran Arc Stabilization Initiative (ZASI) in Paktia. One key element of this engagement was the establishment of a tribal *shura*.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with UN official, Maimana, January 14, 2010.

7.4 Political and developmental engagement with Ghormach

The Ghormach Shura was established in October 2007 following the first ISAF and ANSF operation. Its aim was to be a forum for interaction between the population of Ghormach and both the government of Afghanistan and the international community; the latter two had belatedly started to show interest in the area. At that stage, no representative body existed in the area to mediate between political and development actors. The existing *woleswal*—and to some degree the institution of the *woleswal*—had been widely discredited. Under the *shura*'s auspices, attempts were made to engage with local Taliban to prevent conflict. In addition, the Ghormach Shura intended to facilitate tribal unity and discourage the Taliban from making use of inter- and intra-tribal splits to their own advantage. The *shura* was multi-tribal, with the three tribes in the district equally represented (twenty-two representatives for each of the three tribes) and with all three represented in the *shura*'s leadership; at the outset Abdullah Jan (a Zamandzai) was elected as the *shura*'s head, with Baran Khan (a Tokhi) and Abdullah Khan (an Achikzai) elected as deputies. The *shura*, by structure, thus aimed to harmonize internal political relationships among the groups in the district, as well as to facilitate humanitarian and development activities and to undertake political outreach.

An important aspect in UNAMA's discussions with the Ghormach Shura was the "deal" made in which the *shura* would provide security in exchange for humanitarian and development aid. The rationale was that a legitimate *shura* would be able to convince local populations that aid could only be delivered if the security of aid workers is ensured. Through tribal and family relations and the personal charisma of Ghormach Shura members, combined with support from the population for development initiatives, it was believed that local insurgents and criminal elements could be influenced to leave aid workers

alone. According to a respondent heavily involved in the process,¹⁰⁹ the Taliban agreed that aid agencies could come in "with paper and pencils" (i.e., not with guns). On the other hand, by facilitating aid and successfully negotiating with insurgents, the *shura* would increase its legitimacy.

In order to understand and formulate the humanitarian and development needs, a joint assessment mission¹¹⁰ was organized in November and December 2007. With the assessment report in hand, UNAMA started lobbying for funding for Ghormach District with the result that the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs contributed approximately \$4.5 million for an Emergency Recovery Program (ERP). The ERP was implemented by an international and a national NGO managing the program from Faryab. It focuses on four sectors: construction of new and rehabilitation of existing shelters, construction of water infrastructure and hygiene education, basic CFW projects focusing on road rehabilitation and canal cleaning, and agricultural projects.

Over time, the program's focus shifted from emergency to more development-oriented activities. Involved individuals reported that the flexibility of the donor has enabled the implementing organizations to continuously adapt the various components to local needs as well as help bridge the gap between the end of the ERP and the expected launch of the NSP in Ghormach.

The ERP's impact on stability

Little evidence exists that the ERP has had a stabilizing effect. Respondents from agencies on the ground have pointed to their ability to work in the district as an indication of the security benefits of the program. However, access to certain areas negotiated with local communities and powerbrokers—especially during conflict—has a long tradition in Afghanistan and doesn't necessarily suggest improved security. The ERP has seen an extensive period of social mobilization by interacting with local *shuras* and other

¹⁰⁹ Interview with UN official, January 14, 2010.

¹¹⁰ The team consisted of twelve individuals from eight UN, NGO, and government agencies. It identified Ghormach's needs in the following sectors: water and sanitation, food and livelihoods, health, shelter and infrastructure, education and governance (politics), and protection.

representatives before starting any activities. In many cases, however, the influence of a community and its elders stops at the outside perimeter of their village, and not all communities are organized sufficiently to provide security. Incidents in connection with the ERP have happened, such as a rocket attack on one of the machines of a contractor and kidnapping of workers (later released).

One salient example of how aid can have the opposite effect of that intended, is the installation of a bridge in Bala Murghab (Box 4).

Respondents agreed that during the beginning phase of outreach to Ghormach, security improved gradually but significantly. They attributed this to the successful establishment of a representative tribal *shura*, which filled the power vacuum created by the military operation. Aid played a role in this dynamic as it provided a rationale and legitimization for the three major tribes to get together and work towards a unifying tribal *shura*. It also became part of a “deal”: security for development. Little evidence exists that this deal actually worked, or could have worked, as a combination of factors (discussed below) led to a deterioration of security. However, the prospect of aid provided an impetus and the district government as well as the district *shura* participated in regular meetings with

development actors in Maimana and would often visit the provincial administration while they were in town. In terms of relationship building, the promised aid did provide a topic of recurrent discussion and assured tribal elders in Ghormach that there was something in it for them if they sided with the government.

Two issues, competition over leadership and internal divisions, had a significant detrimental effect on the functioning of the Ghormach *Shura*. Initially, the *shura* had considerable momentum and local legitimacy, but it was losing these because it was split by a struggle for leadership.

The district had no *woleswal* (district governor) from February 2007 until August 2008 when the *shura*'s head, Abdullah Jan, was appointed as acting *woleswal*. This was when the *shura*'s momentum markedly slowed. After his appointment, Abdullah Jan started to ignore the *shura* instead of taking its counsel and soliciting its support.

Momentum was further lost by a political split in the district—between Abdullah Jan and Qari Dawlat (a former Taliban squad leader). In November 2008, Qari Dawlat replaced Abdullah Jan as *woleswal*, something that had been strongly opposed locally.¹¹³ This was destabilizing as Abdullah Jan had the support of another heavyweight, Sayyid Gul, a local commander.

Box 4: Bridge at Bala Murghab

The imminent completion of a costly forty-five-meter bridge project in Bala Murghab may have been one of the reasons why Maulawi Dastigir¹¹¹ was released from prison under a guarantee from Bala Murghab elders that he would change his ways. The government hoped that releasing Maulawi Dastigir would provide a counterweight to the Haqqani network in Badghis,¹¹² but the release was also part of a deal with local elders that they would protect the bridge site and the ring road over which components of the bridge would be transported on their way through Ghormach. However, insurgents intercepted the convoy and absconded with the bridge components. They then transported them to the bridge site. Despite efforts by the government and ISAF to spin the story, stating that the bridge's transportation was facilitated by “local elders,” this resulted in a propaganda victory for the Taliban.

¹¹¹ Matthew C. DuPée, Program for Culture and Conflict Studies, “Badghis Province: Examining the Taliban’s Northwestern Campaign,” *The Culture and Conflict Review* 2, no. 5 (December 2008).

¹¹² Rahman Haqqani, not to be confused with Jalaluddin Haqqani or his son Sirajuddin Haqqani. After the death of his father, Sirajuddin took over the lead of their network, which closely cooperates with the Taliban in Eastern Afghanistan and across the border in Waziristan, Pakistan.

¹¹³ The replacement of Abdullah Jan followed a meeting with the president in Kabul of a delegation from Ghormach including Wolesi Jirga member Haji Abdullah, Qari Dawlat (then head of Badghis Provincial Council), and Amir Tawakal (also Provincial Council).



Qaisar bazaar

Allegations have been made that Abdullah Jan and Sayyid Gul had both been manipulating ISAF air strikes to settle scores with local opponents, which led to the death of two sons of Amir Tawakal. Meanwhile, Abdullah Jan's replacement as district governor was not put into effect until January 2009, in part because the provincial governor was opposed to Qari Dawlat because he was ex-Taliban. To compensate Abdullah Jan, the governor reappointed him as head of the *shura*,

though this was opposed by many members who at that stage wanted the head of the *shura* to be elected instead of appointed. The appointment of Qari Dawlat and the reappointment of Abdullah Jan have increased friction within the *shura*, which has negatively affected its ability to function. Abdullah Jan has also been barred from standing in the Badghis Provincial Council elections, allegedly because Qari Dawlat's network continues campaigning against him.

Before this, however, the *shura* functioned relatively well, and facilitated the realignment of a small number of Taliban commanders who joined the government during the summer of 2008.

Another challenge to the functioning of the *shura* is its perceived independence. As has been argued above with regard to the PRA, initiatives based within civil society need their independence from the government to remain credible. Especially in the case of a tribal *shura* in an insurgency-dominated environment, the ability to claim “neutrality” enables contact with both sides and a mediatory role. In interviews, *shura* members consistently stressed this neutrality:

*The district shura was created because of security problems in the district and had a positive impact on security during the first year. The shura can have contact with both the government and the Taliban and solve problems between the qawms. But this is only possible because we don't take sides. We're representing the people of Ghormach, not the government or the Taliban.*¹¹⁴

Because the government had a role in the recent re-establishment of the Ghormach Shura in July 2009, it risks being perceived as a “puppet” of the government and members have been accused by Abdullah Jan supporters as being self-appointed and not truly representing their people. However, Abdullah Jan has increasingly been marginalized and has no formal role in either the government or the Ghormach Shura. In addition he was barred from the Provincial Council elections because of alleged links to illegal armed groups, although he was subsequently cleared by the IEC (Independent Election Commission).

There are signs, though, that the engagement with Ghormach has led to a positive change in perceptions towards aid in general and outsiders such as aid actors and the government in particular.¹¹⁵ Besides accepting outside actors in the district to implement projects (albeit almost exclusively with local staff), an increased interest in education is one indication of such change. Whereas in 2007 even home-based education

seemed out of the question, communities have increasingly been asking for schools, for both boys and girls. Another indication of this shift in perception towards education is the popularity of an adult literacy program run by UNICEF that enrolled double the number of expected students.¹¹⁶

An important added benefit of the ERP is the increased interaction with the government. Representatives from Ghormach now regularly visit Maimana for meetings with the provincial governor and the provincial line departments and UNAMA, as well as the international and national NGOs working in their area. Previously, access to Badghis Province's center, Qala-i Now, was problematic, although mostly for government officials, not for people in Ghormach. More importantly, respondents from Ghormach often cited the lack of response from the provincial administration in Qala-i Now as the major reason delegations tended to lobby in Kabul directly rather than in the provincial center. Even though the districts of Ghormach and Bala Murghab have Pashtun majorities, and form a significant minority in Badghis, since 2002 Tajiks who have been purposefully marginalizing the Pashtun population of the province have dominated the provincial administration. While there is still a general sense of frustration with the present government, and complaints about the tardiness of the provincial administration in Maimana circulate, interviews indicated a markedly more positive perception of the Faryab provincial administration as compared to Badghis. Strikingly, a number of respondents immediately added their appreciation of the Faryab provincial governor, signifying the importance of the reputation of key state officials and personal interaction.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Ghormach tribal elder, June 7, 2009.

¹¹⁵ Interviews with national aid worker, April 17, 2009, and Ghormach tribal leaders, June 6, 2009. Because of security restrictions, interviews with respondents from Ghormach are limited to its elite and as such may not fully represent the population.

¹¹⁶ Interview with international aid worker, June 17, 2009.

8. Conclusions



Photo: Author

Buzkashi, Maimana

Aid projects are an integral part of the stabilization strategies of various actors operating in Faryab Province. The two main bilateral actors, the Norwegians (the PRT until June 2007 and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs afterwards) and ARSIC-North (now Task Force North), have both used aid money to promote stabilization objectives. Underlying assumptions are that aid leads to more positive attitudes toward international actors; bolsters the legitimacy of the government, if provided through it; and leads to better security.

Evidence collected in Faryab raises questions about the above assumptions.

8.1 Attitudes towards international actors

Attitudes towards aid actors in general are markedly negative. Perceptions of non-delivery of much-needed assistance and of rampant corruption in the aid sector have led to increased frustration with the government, aid agencies, and the international community's effort in Afghanistan. Respondents pointed to unequal distribution of aid projects (both regionally and nationally), corruption, misappropriation, and the practice of multiple sub-contracting. The latter is often claimed to be the main reason that sub-quality work is delivered, as money is siphoned off with each successive contract.

The issues Afghans have with aid delivery in their country is not so much with the aid sector itself as with the corruption and nepotism that it symbolizes and in some cases even fuels.

Projects were described as short-term, emergency focused, quick fixes that lack the necessary inputs and sustained commitment to make a lasting impact on people's lives. Respondents often asked rhetorically, "Why not build factories, dams, or other large infrastructure projects?" The perception that the international community is not taking Afghanistan's development seriously, combined with the sheer amounts of money which is said to be spent in their country, leads many respondents to conclude that the system is designed for Westerners to enrich themselves and that aid actors must have ulterior (political) motives.

Many respondents lacked a full understanding of the commonalities among and differences between aid actors and most referred to the sector as a homogenous entity. Respondents who enjoyed direct interactions with aid actors did, however, draw a more nuanced picture. Such respondents' positive attitudes towards the PRT and the Norwegian engagement is an interesting example, as this has been achieved without the PRT resorting to direct implementation. National and international respondents alike attributed this positive attitude mainly to the culturally sensitive approach of the Norwegian military and to the level of assistance. National respondents, however, were mostly unaware of programs funded by the Norwegians. This indicates that the Norwegian approach is well adjusted to the local context, but that its effectiveness is being hampered by Faryabis' lack of awareness about the particulars of the Norwegians' engagement. On the other hand, it is important to note that the main point of criticism from Faryabis was that the international troops have failed to stop the deterioration of security in the province, which Faryabis considered to be their primary responsibility.

The above suggests that aid has the potential to improve attitudes towards international actors, when it is (1) provided in a manner consistent with standards of transparency and fairness and (2) the population is aware of its source. In the face

of worsening security, however, more positive attitudes in themselves are not sufficient.

8.2 Government legitimacy

Aid is also assumed to have an impact on stability by increasing the legitimacy of the government. Channeling aid through the government does not, however, seem to have contributed to increased levels of legitimacy for the provincial administration. Indeed, respondents directed most complaints on misappropriation of aid at government officials, local powerbrokers, and elites. Respondents frequently mentioned *wasita* (patronage networks, connections), said to play a far more important role in appointments and recruitment of government staff than merit. Government officials are accused of being more occupied with obtaining personal gains or expanding networks of patronage than in genuinely helping the population. Therefore, the reputation and legitimacy of the government have suffered significantly from the flaws associated with the political economy that results from development activities.

The research suggests that the legitimacy of the government is much more influenced by the negative reputation and capacities of its top layer of bureaucrats than by the number of aid projects. This is currently partly offset by the (generally) good reputation of the present Faryab provincial governor, Abdul Haq Shafaq. Almost all community respondents indicated a favorable attitude towards him, and he is said to be trying to root out corruption and eager to serve all sections of the population. This is seen as something of a break with the past, as political appointments have played a key role in perpetuating instability within the province. In general, Afghans are said to have more trust in individuals than in institutions, which is confirmed by community level interviews for this research.

8.3 Better security

On the assumption that aid projects contribute to stabilization in the short term, one can be short: in this case study on Faryab, no supporting evidence can be found that this assumption is true for any of the development projects that intended to achieve this aim in the province.

Indeed, allocating aid money to insecure areas for stabilization purposes is said to create perverse incentives. Insecurity pays off in the larger sense that insecure areas receive more aid than secure ones. This benefits local powerbrokers who have an interest in the status quo (conflict) and who profit from the aid flows to their area through misappropriation and corruption. Also, respondents living in secure areas feel punished or at least not rewarded for maintaining security. The extent to which this resentment influences behavior is unclear, but the current use of aid money is widely characterized as discriminatory. This discrimination has an important ethnic dimension that fuels divisions between different ethnic groups. This perceived injustice in the distribution of aid, coupled with corruption throughout the system has decreased trust in both the Afghan government and the international community.

8.4 Poverty and security

The assumption that poverty and unemployment are root causes of insecurity is a key argument for the security benefits of aid. By providing employment and increased economic opportunities, aid is said to contribute to stabilization. Little evidence exists, however, to support such a direct relationship. One obvious problem with this assumption is that poverty and unemployment are a condition experienced by many Afghans all over the country, whereas only a fraction of them turn to violence. When comparing the level of poverty with security incidents across areas, no clear correlation can be drawn between poverty and instability that would suggest that poverty is the “root cause” of instability. Also, with the data available, it is difficult to disaggregate the influence of economic malaise from other considerations that influence an individual’s decision to engage in violent resistance against the state, such as political grievances, exclusion, economic and social benefits of being part of a movement, ethnic or tribal considerations, and identity.

Some may have joined the insurgency for material benefits or have carried out small tasks for anti-government groups out of a combination of financial need and fear. Anti-government propaganda, however, concentrates on issues such

as the presence of foreign troops, the Afghan government as a puppet regime of the Americans, the corruption and abusive nature of the central government, and the assault on Afghan culture and religion. These grievances are mostly concerned with politics and identity, which development is ill equipped to address. Poverty and material motives do play a contributing role, but they are two factors of many, and most other factors are political ones.

8.5 Short-term versus long-term impact

Whereas some conclusions can be drawn on the effects of aid on stabilization in the short term, any conclusions on the long-term effects based on the findings from Faryab would be premature, as it is simply too early to tell. Moreover, too many other factors confound the picture to be able to isolate the effects of aid projects. It is therefore extremely hard to make a firm statement on whether or not aid is having security benefits. Attitudes and mindsets don’t change overnight; judging whether the Emergency Recovery Program in Ghormach has changed mindsets, or whether other long-term projects initiated by the international NGOs in Faryab have done the same, can only be done later, if at all.

One benefit in the short term, however, is that the mere prospect of aid can provide an opportunity to engage with communities and local leadership through discussions on their development needs. The Ghormach Emergency Recovery Program, for example, provided a platform for dialogue between tribal leaders and actors such as UNAMA, the PRT, and the provincial administration. Without the promise of aid, this dialogue would have been difficult to achieve. The prospect of increased development as a reward for improving security has also been used by the PRA, although the impact of this promise is hard to discern. Of course, promised aid will need to be delivered (and without the flaws of other development projects) in order to maintain the legitimacy of the engagement and the local leadership that is taking part in dialogue. Evidence that it was the promise of aid itself that led to stability in these areas is nonexistent. The only demonstrable effect that aid had was that it legitimized an interaction.

The findings suggest that communities need to trust that there will be prolonged cooperation and focus on their needs, rather than finding that aid is being used to achieve outsiders' political goals. Tangible benefits and continuity of the intervention are key aspects here. Field observations suggest that although general perceptions of aid are mostly negative, NGOs that have been working with communities for a longer period (most notably through the NSP) are perceived much more positively than aid actors in general. Such long-term interventions connect communities with other local actors while the activities and discourse used are locally acceptable. This all facilitates the trust necessary to successfully implement development projects. To achieve this trust, one key is long-term engagement with communities—which many of the current donor-funded programs do not permit, and for which the military in particular is not very well positioned because of language and cultural barriers as well as frequent rotations and security restrictions.

At least in the short-term, the contribution to stabilization made by the PRA and possibly the Ghormach Shura took place without a direct role for the Afghan government or the international community. These are locally rooted initiatives (although the Ghormach Shura was externally stimulated by UNAMA), with key roles for indigenous civil society that, to succeed, rely more on conflict resolution and politics than on aid. Indigenous organizations such as these possess an elaborate contextual understanding and are perceived as less partial than either the government or international actors. Even though some members have government affiliations, the PRA as a whole is not perceived to act in favor of one particular faction. Different factions are included in the PRA, rendering it much more representative of the political scene in Faryab than is the government. This enables it to address instability with solutions rooted in Afghan tradition while being culturally and religiously appropriate. These virtues mirror the weaknesses of military actors' stabilization strategies: constraints (e.g., security protocols) in interacting with the local population, lack of durable engagement with key players and communities, and a focus on military and development solutions for instability whereas the main factors leading to instability are political.

8.6 Final conclusions

While the evidence is inconclusive about the impact of aid on local stability in the short run, and the indications are indeterminate for the long run, it is clear that development and stability are interrelated. Security is an enabling factor for development: projects are therefore implemented more effectively in secure environments and can improve the reputations of aid actors.

The research findings clearly point to the importance of the political environment in creating stability as well as instability. Many of the grievances in Faryab (and Afghanistan more generally) are political, and the two main examples of initiatives that have had positive impacts on local stability in Faryab have done so largely through political means.

The role of individuals cannot be underestimated. On the one hand, the respect, reputation, and personal ties (ethnic, *tanzim*, and *qawmi* or tribe) of certain individuals can be called into play. On the other hand, competition for leadership and shifting allegiances can be markedly destabilizing, as illustrated by the struggle for leadership in the Ghormach Shura. Appointing provincial governors on a political basis also has the potential to destabilize. The opposite holds true as well, as can be seen from the appointment of the current governor, who has increased the government's legitimacy in Faryab.

One definite conclusion of this case study is that short-term programming of aid that funnels too much money into insecure areas with limited oversight does not contribute to stability. While approaches such as those used by the NSP, which focus on long-term, sustainable, participatory programs that address the needs of the population, may have no direct, immediate effect on stability, they do result in better development (good enough in its own right) and better perceptions of aid among Afghans. Such approaches combine visible, tangible improvements with building the capacity for local governance. Although not without faults, these approaches positively contribute to a more equal distribution of aid benefits, transparency, oversight, and accountability. Finally, a need exists for increased

monitoring and the establishment of accountability mechanisms to ensure that aid is delivered without delegitimizing aid actors by fuelling corruption and misuse of aid for political agendas.

An alternative avenue worth exploring is using aid to contribute to already existing stability in

the context of good governance. If stability and development are, indeed, mutually reinforcing, this alternative system would include incentives (more aid) for stability and adherence to good governance, reversing the current incentive system that rewards insecurity. Aid in insecure areas, as this study shows, becomes just another resource to fight over.



Photo: Author

Maimana hills

Annex A. Research Methodology

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.¹¹⁷ 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.¹¹⁸ 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.”¹¹⁹ 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.”¹²⁰ 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

¹¹⁷ 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).

¹¹⁸ 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.

¹¹⁹ U.S. Department of the Army, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*; FM 3-24.2; p. ix; April 2009.

¹²⁰ Department of the Army, *Stability Operations*, FM 3-07 (October 2008), p. vi.

indigenous population to facilitate defeating the insurgents.”¹²¹

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.¹²²

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.¹²³

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.¹²⁴

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.¹²⁵ 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.”¹²⁶ 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-

¹²¹ 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.

¹²² Department of the Army, *Stability Operations*, p. vi.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, Glossary-10.

¹²⁴ Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24/MCWP (2006), p. A-5.

¹²⁵ 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.

¹²⁶ 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 exception¹²⁷), 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

¹²⁷ 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 and interviews with key informants (e.g., PRT staff, Afghan government officials), and of quantitative data taken from polling data drawn from communities and provided by the PRT. See *Aid and Stabilization in Afghanistan: Helmand Province Case Study*, Stuart Gordon, Feinstein International Center, Tufts University; anticipated February 2011.

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 1

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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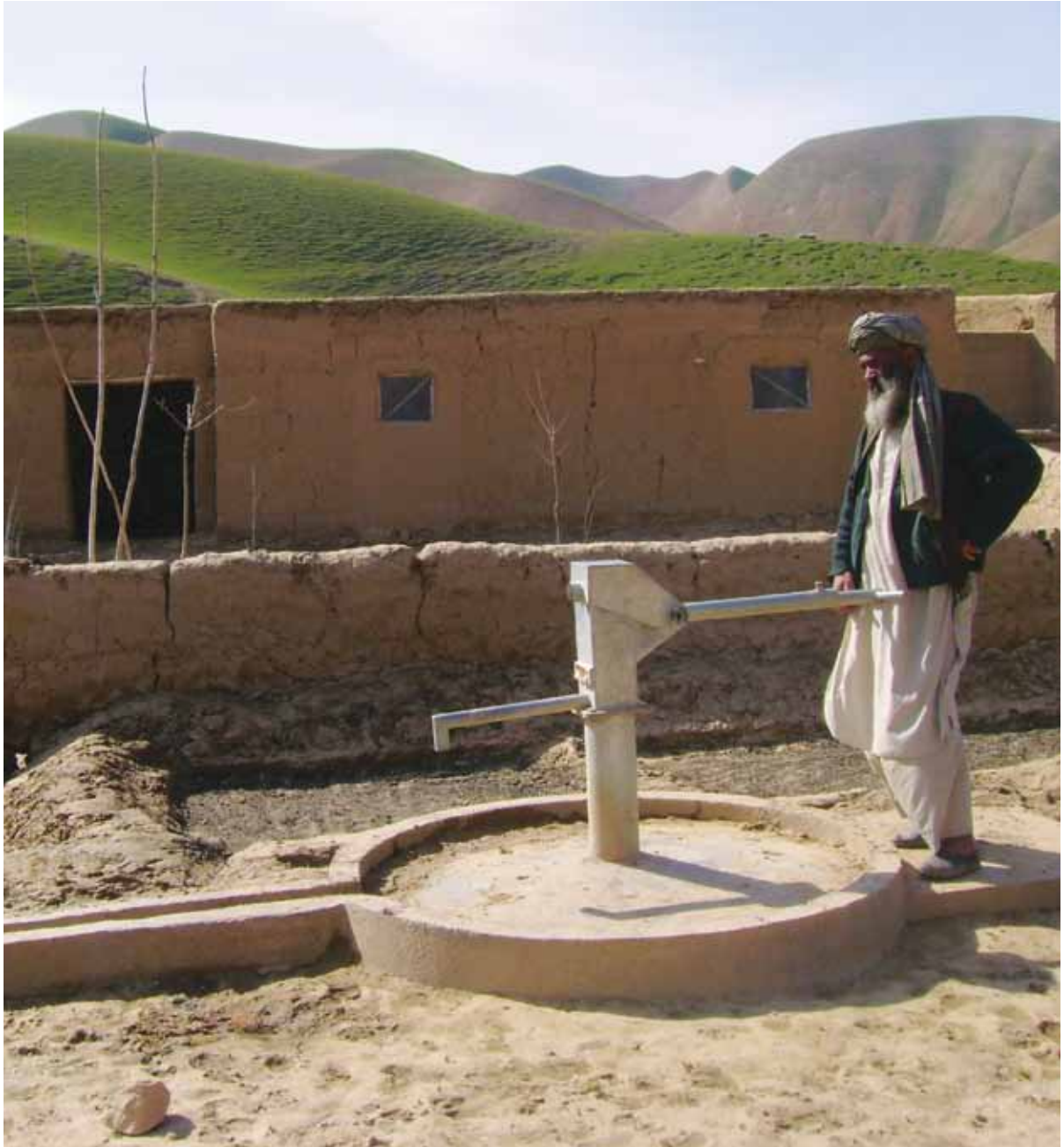


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